

IT IS A NECESSITY OF OUR EARNEST TIMES TO FIND AGAIN THE PATH LEADING TO THE SPIRIT

GA 203

Also known as *The Present Crisis in Man's Development and The Science of the Spirit, Education, and the Practical Life*. From: *Lectures on Spiritual Essence and Its Working*. Lecture 13 of 18 from the volume: *Man's Responsibility for World Evolution through His Spiritual Connection with the Planet Earth and with the Stars Above*.

Rudolf Steiner lectures in The Hague, Netherlands

27 February 1921, The Hague

Translator Unknown

The times in which we live are so earnest that at present it is not in any way appropriate to think of personal matters. Allow me, first of all, to express briefly my heartfelt thanks to your esteemed president for her kind words and then to pass on to what I believe I must tell you, for it is a long time since we saw one another in Holland.

The times in which we live and its conditions are much more earnest than most people of the present are consciously aware of.

Here we can speak of these conditions of our times from those standpoints which result from a long study of the spiritual science of Anthroposophy. We know that we live in an epoch whose characteristic peculiarity began to be evident in the 15th century. It was then that it slowly began to develop its peculiarities. Those who are initiated into the spiritual conditions of human evolution and can therefore have an insight into this course of development, know that the second half of the 19th century indicates a specially low point of human evolution in the modern and particularly in European culture. This low point may be characterised as the rise of a particular inthrust of egoism in all branches of civilised humanity, an egoism of a kind that was never there before. This wave of a special course of development then sent its ramifications into the 20th century, and now these ramifications undoubtedly continue to hold mankind under their spell.

In saying that a wave of egoism came over the whole modern civilisation, I do not speak trivially of what one generally defines as egoism, but I speak of egoism in a

special sense, into which we shall penetrate a little in the course of this morning's considerations, and in a way that will be evident to those who are initiated in the true mysteries of more recent human evolution.

We already know the members constituting human nature. We know that the soul-members of human nature have been engaged for a long time in a special process of transformation, in a special course of development. We know that when we go back to very ancient times of human evolution we have to do with a particular forming of man's etheric body, during a very old time of development in India; a particular forming of the astral body then began, and a certain intermediate course of development took place during that epoch of European development which began about the year 747 in the south of Europe and which closed in the first thirty years of the 15th century. That time was the beginning of that epoch of human evolution in which we are still living. In the year 747 before the Mystery of Golgotha, began that phase of human evolution in which the so-called intellectual and understanding soul (Verstandes und Gemütsseele) unfolded. Everything that humanity still prizes to-day as Greek culture; developed through the fact that at that very time the intellectual or understanding soul was in an ascending line of development. However, while the wonderful Greek culture was unfolding, that which we call intellectual or understanding soul was in an ascending line of development. It had not yet reached its climax. For such points are always in a certain way times of probation for the evolution of humanity. For the sake of their development, the Greeks had to pass through what one might call the youthful freshness of the intellectual or understanding soul. The Greek culture, so much admired by posterity, came into being out of this youthful freshness of an intellect that was not yet permeated by egoism, out of this youthful freshness of the human understanding. Of the characteristics pertaining to the intellectual soul, the Latin and Roman culture then took over something that was in a descending line of development and decadent. Those who have a deeper comprehension for that which lived in Roman culture know: There the intellect already reaches its culmination; there the intellect rises to a high point. On that account the Romans developed such abstract ideas; on that account the Romans developed something that did not as yet exist in the whole ancient East, that did not even exist, in the sense known in Europe, in the Greek culture: The Romans developed the ideas of jurisprudence, the juridical concepts. To-day we consider the world very superficially and we translate our thoughts on "Jus", on jurisprudence, which, in reality are the outcome only of the Roman intellectual soul, into something which we assume to have already existed in the ancient East, for instance in Hammurabi, and so forth. But that is not the case. The Decalogue, the Ten Commandments as well as the contents of other documents of that time, were, after all, something quite different from that which constitutes our modern juridical concepts. These are something abstract, something that is no longer so close to the human soul. Everything that thus

constitutes the development of the intellectual soul reached its climax during a period in the civilisation of Europe which has really been studied very little from an external historical standpoint, although it is extraordinarily important and significant for those who wish to study human evolution in the meaning of spiritual science.

That striking year to which we can draw attention as being specially significant for European development is the year 333 after the Mystery of Golgotha. The year 333 after the Mystery of Golgotha is the middle of the fourth post-Atlantean epoch. It is that point of *time* when a fluctuating knowledge of the universe lived in Europe simultaneously with a fluctuating knowledge of humanity. These had nothing of the penetrating character of the knowledge of the universe that the Greeks still possessed and no proper comprehension of man's inner world. We find instead that man sways either towards the longing for an extensive knowledge of the universe, or towards the longing for self-knowledge, knowledge of his own self. The human soul of the European peoples indeed passed through a great deal during the fourth post-Atlantean epoch. Roman life was then entering into its decay; it bequeathed to European humanity nothing but its language; it left behind its more or less fundamental material of culture. The life of humanity thus entered the second half of the fourth post-Atlantean epoch, lasting up to the 15th century, when our present epoch began.

From the preceding epoch, in which most of us in some way passed through one or more earthly lives, we brought over — partly through physical heredity, but particularly through the fact that we ourselves formerly were those incarnated souls — into the fifth post-Atlantean epoch the inheritance of the fourth post-Atlantean epoch, and we took over this inheritance. This inheritance of the fourth post-Atlantean epoch lives in everything that constitutes our present civilisation.

We worked the intellect, the thinking, into our consciousness soul. That means a great deal. At the beginning of the fifth epoch, the consciousness soul enabling man to really permeate, really grasp his ego, first took hold of his thinking, his life of representations and his intellect. Humanity thus became intelligent and clever, but clever within the consciousness soul; within the evolution of humanity, this implies the finest possible elaboration of EGOISM.

We should not only rebuke this epoch of egoism, we should not only fall upon it with criticism, but in spite of the fact that it brings with it so many temptations and leads man into great soul-dangers and even into external danger, we should recognise this age of egoism as the one in which ego-consciousness comes to the fore with special incisiveness.

Man can thus take into himself a real feeling of freedom. This feeling of freedom is something that none of us possessed in our previous incarnations, in the earlier epochs of human evolution. We had to pass through egoism, that presents so many temptations, in order to reach that longing for freedom which is the

prerogative of modern humanity. One of the most important things in Anthroposophy is the knowledge that we had to take in something in order to climb over an important stage in human evolution: the stage leading to the DEVELOPMENT OF FREEDOM. For this very reason we should be aware that this crossing over is connected, with many temptations, with many dangers of humanity, both soul-spiritually and bodily. A knowledge going in the direction of Anthroposophy must enable us to take in fully the feeling of freedom, but at the same time to ennoble it, to permeate it again with a spiritual knowledge of the universe, which — in spite of the now existing mature ego-feeling, mature ego-consciousness — induces mankind to solve tasks that are not only egoistic tasks, but tasks pertaining to the whole evolution of humanity, indeed to the evolution of the whole earth, to the evolution of the whole universe. In this connection we are now facing a great turning point in the whole civilisation of more recent times. The time of probation has indeed come! Great tasks confront mankind. But the recognition of these tasks is extremely difficult and is rendered still more difficult through the fact that we have just passed through the age of the great egoism.
