

# Lecture One

DORNACH, MAY 27, 1923

TODAY I PROPOSE to carry further certain points made in recent lectures<sup>†</sup> concerning the evolution of humanity in the post-Atlantean age.<sup>†</sup>

Looking back, in survey, over the evolution of mankind, we see that the epochs described in anthroposophical spiritual science take their shape from the particular soul constitution of the human beings alive at any given time. This differs greatly from epoch to epoch. Today, however, there is little inclination to look beyond the human being's current makeup. Although civilization has developed in a way describable in outer documents, in general mankind is regarded as having always had the same soul constitution. This is not true. It has changed; and we know the dates at which it underwent a clear and marked transformation.

The last of these turning points has often been designated as the fifteenth century after Christ; the one preceding it occurred during the eighth pre-Christian century; and we might in this way go still further back. I have often emphasized how correct the art historian Herman Grimm<sup>†</sup> is when he points out that the full historical comprehension of the people of the present age reaches back no further than the Romans, at which time the ideas now prevalent settled into human souls. Or approximately the same ideas. They still operate, though at times in a detrimental way—for example, concepts of Roman law no longer in harmony with our society. The very manner in which the contemporary person takes part in social life shows a comprehension for something reaching back to the Roman period.

If, on the other hand, we describe the external historical events of ancient Greece like modern events, we do not penetrate into the real

soul nature of the Greeks. Herman Grimm is right in saying that, as usually described, the Greeks are mere shadows. Precisely because ordinary consciousness can no longer see what lived in those souls, it is unable to understand the Greeks' social structure.

Still more removed from our soul life is that of the human beings of the Egyptian-Chaldean period prior to the eighth century BC; more different still that in ancient Persia, and completely different that of the ancient Indian epoch following the great Atlantean catastrophe.<sup>†</sup>

When, with the help of spiritual science, we mark the stages in the changing constitution of the human being, it becomes clear that our way of feeling about the human being, our way of speaking of body, soul, and spirit, of the I in man, our sense of an inner connection between the human being and the earth planet, arose in the fourth post-Atlantean epoch. Gradually, in the course of time, life has become so earth-bound that human beings feel estranged from the cosmos, and see the stars and their movements, even the clouds, as lying outside our earthly dwelling place and, therefore, as relatively insignificant.

Prior to the Greco-Roman period, people's feelings and, indeed, their will-impulses were, if I may use the expression, elementary-cosmic. Man did not need a philosophy in order to feel himself a member of the whole universe, especially the visible universe. It was natural for him to feel himself not only a citizen of Earth but also a member of the cosmos, especially during the first epoch, that of ancient India. If we go back to the seventh or eighth millennium of the pre-Christian era, we find that the human being—I cannot say *spoke* but *felt*—that the human being felt quite differently than we do today about the I, the self. To be sure, the human beings of that ancient time did not express themselves as we do, because human speech did not have the same scope as today. But we must express things in our own language, and I shall put it thus: In ancient India, the human being did not speak of the I in our modern way; it was not, for him, a point comprising all his soul experiences. On the contrary, when he spoke of the I, it was to him self-evident that it had little to do with the earth and earthly events. In experiencing himself as an I, the human being did not feel that he belonged to the earth,

but rather that he was connected with the heaven of the fixed stars. This was what gave him the security of the I, gave him the sense that he even had an I at all. For it was not felt as a *human* I. Man was a human being only through the fact that here on Earth, he was clothed by a physical body. Through this physical body, which was seen as a kind of sheath for the I, he became a citizen of Earth. But the I was always regarded as something foreign to the earthly sphere. And if today we were to coin a name for the way the I was experienced, we would have to say: the human being felt not a human but a divine I.

He might have looked outward to the mountains, to the rocks; he might have looked at everything else on Earth and said of it all: This is, this exists. Yet, at the same time, he would have felt the following: If there were no other existence than that of the earth's plants, rivers, mountains, and rocks, no human being would have an I. For what guarantees existence to earthly things and beings could never guarantee it to the I.

Within himself man felt not a human but a divine I. The divine I was for him a drop from the ocean of divinity. And when he wanted to speak about the I (this is said with the previously-made reservations), he felt it as a creation of the fixed stars; for he felt the heaven of the fixed stars as the only thing that had such an existence. Only because the I has a similar existence to the heaven of the fixed stars is it able to say, "I am." If it were able to say "I am" merely according to the level of existence of stone or plant or mountain, the I would have no right to speak so. Only its starlike nature makes it possible for the I to say, "I am." Only because the existence possessed by the stars lives in the I is it possible for the I to say, "I am."

Again, the human beings of this primeval epoch saw how the rivers flowed and the trees were driven by the wind. But if we were to regard the human I that dwells in the physical body and has an impulse to move about on the earth hither and thither—if we were to regard this I as the active force in movement, as wind is the active force in moving trees, or as anything else of the earth is an active force, we would be wrong. The I is not this kind of outer cause of motion.

In ancient times, the teacher in the mysteries<sup>†</sup> spoke to his pupils somewhat like this: You see how the trees sway, how the river water

flows, how the ocean churns. But from neither the moving trees nor the flowing rivers nor the heaving ocean could the I learn to develop those impulses of motion which human beings display when they carry their bodies over the earth. This the I can never learn from any moving earthly thing. This the I can learn only because it is related to the planets, to starry motion. Only from Mars, Jupiter, Venus, and so forth, can the I learn motion. When the I of its own volition moves upon the earth, it achieves something made possible by its relation to the wheeling, planetary world of the stars.

Further, it would have seemed incomprehensible to a human being of this ancient epoch if somebody had said: Look how thoughts arise out of your brain! If we imagine ourselves with the soul constitution we once had (for we have all passed through lives in the ancient Indian epoch), and imagine by contrast the present-day soul constitution, the one which makes people assume that thoughts arise out of the brain, then what the modern person believes appears to the ancient human being as complete nonsense, utter nonsense, for the ancient human being knew well that thoughts can never spring from brain substance. He knew that it is the sun which calls forth thoughts, and the moon which stills them. It was to the reciprocal action of sun and moon that he ascribed his life of thoughts.

Thus in the first post-Atlantean epoch, the ancient Indian time, the divine I was seen as belonging to the heaven of the fixed stars, to the planetary movements, to the reciprocal action of sun and moon; and what came to the I from the earth was like a series of transient events that passed over the cosmic-divine I, whereas the essence of the I was of a thoroughly cosmic-divine nature.

In my *Outline of Esoteric Science*,<sup>†</sup> I call the second epoch the ancient Persian. By then, the perception of the cosmic I had grown less vivid; it was subdued. But the people of that age had an intense experience of the cycle of the seasons, a subject I have recently spoken of frequently here.<sup>†</sup> Pictorially speaking, the modern human being has become a kind of earthworm, just living from day to day. Indeed, he is not even that, for an earthworm comes out of his hole when it rains, while the human being just lives along. He experiences nothing special; at best, some abstract differences: in the rain we are

uncomfortable without an umbrella, we adjust ourselves to snow in winter and sunshine in summer, we go to the country, and so forth. So we do indeed live with the course of the year but in a dreadfully superficial way. We no longer live the course of the year with our whole humanness.

In the ancient Persian epoch, it was different. We experienced the year's course with our whole being. When the winter solstice arrived, we felt: Now the earth soul has united with the earth. The snow, which for contemporary human beings is nothing but frozen water, was at that time experienced as the garment the earth dons in order to shut itself off from the cosmos and develop an individually independent life within that cosmos, for the soul of the earth united itself inwardly with the earth during the autumnal months into the season we now call Christmas time. Human beings felt: Now, indeed, the earth soul is united with the earth. The human being had to turn his soul nature to what lives in the earth. He felt, in a certain sense, the earth soul united with the earth under the mantle of snow. In other words, the mantle of snow became transparent for his soul. Below it, he felt the elemental beings that bear the force of plant seeds through winter into spring. When spring then arrived, he experienced how the earth breathed out its soul, how it strove to open its soul to the cosmos; and with his feelings and sensations, he accompanied the earth in its opening to the cosmos. What he had developed during winter as an attachment, a soul attachment to the earth, he now began to lift up to the cosmos.

To be sure, man was no longer able to look up to the cosmos as he had during the immediately preceding epoch, when it was clear to him that if I look up to the cosmos, I see that which lends existence, movement, and thought to my I. But he looked up divinely to the cosmos and said: What in winter unites me with the earth summons me in spring to raise myself divinely into the cosmos. But though he no longer had so intensive a knowledge of his connection with the cosmos as formerly, he felt it in a certain way divinely. Just as the I in the ancient Indian time experienced itself as a cosmic being, so in the ancient Persian time, the astral element experienced itself as connected with the course of the year.

Thus, man lived with the changing seasons. When in winter his soul perceived the mantle of snow below, his mood turned serious; he withdrew into himself; he searched (as we express it today) his conscience. When spring returned, he again opened himself to the cosmos with a certain gaiety. At midsummer, the time we now associate with St. John's Day, he surrendered with rapture to the cosmos, not in the clear way of the ancient Indian time, but with the joy of having escaped from the body. Just as in winter he felt connected with the clever spirits of the earth, so in midsummer he felt connected with the joyous spirits dancing and jubilating in the cosmos, and flitting around the earth. I am simply describing what was felt.

Later, during what is today the period of August and especially September, the human soul felt it needed now to return to the earth with the forces garnered from the cosmos during its summer withdrawal. With their help, it could live more inwardly humanly during the winter season.

It is a fact that during those ancient times, the human being experienced the year's course with his whole being, considered its spiritual side as his own human concern. He also felt the importance of training himself, at certain points of the year, in this intensive experience of the seasons; and such training bred impulses for the seasonal festivals. Later on, people would experience them only traditionally, only outwardly. But certain aspects would linger on. For example, the festivals of the summer and winter solstices would keep traces, but merely traces, of ancient, mighty, and powerful experiences.

All this is connected with a revolution in the innermost consciousness of the human being. For ancient India, it was quite impossible to speak of a "people," a "folk." Today this seems paradoxical; we find it hard to imagine that the feeling for such a thing arose only gradually. To be sure, the conditions of the earth made it necessary, even in the ancient Indian epoch, for inhabitants of the same territory to have closer ties than those living apart. But the concept of a people, the feeling of belonging to a folk, did not exist during the ancient Indian epoch.

Something different prevailed. People had a very vivid feeling for the succession of generations. A boy felt himself the son of his

father, the grandson of his grandfather, the great-grandson of his great-grandfather. Of course, things were not dealt with the way we have to describe them with current concepts; but the latter are still appropriate. If we look into the mode of thought of that ancient time, we discover that within a family circle great emphasis was laid on an ability to enumerate one's forebears, grandfather, great-grandfather, great-great-grandfather, right down the line to very remote ancestors. One felt oneself standing within this succession of generations.

As a consequence, the sense of living in the present was little developed. To human beings of the ancient Indian time, an intimate connection with past generations (retained as a caricature in present-day aristocracy's emphasis on ancestry) seemed self-evident; they needed no family records. Indeed, human consciousness itself, instinctively clairvoyant, made connections with a person's ancestry by remembering not merely his own personal experiences but—almost as vividly—the experiences of his father and grandfather. Gradually these memories grew dim. But human consciousness would continue to experience them through the blood ties.

Thus, in ancient times, the capacity for feeling oneself within the generations played a significant role. Parallel to it, there arose—though slowly—the folk-concept, the sense of being part of a people. In ancient Persia, it was not yet very pronounced. When a living consciousness of life within the generations, of blood relationship coursing through the centuries, had gradually faded, consciousness focused, instead, on the contemporary folk relationship.

The folk-concept rose to its full significance in the third post-Atlantean, or Egypto-Chaldean, epoch. Though, during that epoch, awareness of the year's course was already somewhat deadened, there lived, right into the last millennium of the pre-Christian age, a vivid consciousness of the fact that thoughts permeate and govern the world.

In another connection,<sup>†</sup> I have already indicated the following: For a human being of that time the idea that thoughts arise in us and then extend over things outside would have seemed comparable to someone saying, after drinking a glass of water, that his tongue produced the water. He is at liberty to imagine that his tongue produced the water,

but in truth he draws the water from the entire water mass of the earth, which is a unity. It is possible, however, for an especially foolish person, unaware of the connection between the glass of water and the earth's water mass, to believe that the water arose from his tongue. The people of the Egypto-Chaldean epoch made no similar mistake. They knew that thoughts do not arise in the head, that thoughts live everywhere, that what the human being draws into the vessel of his head as thought comes from the thought-ocean of the world.

In that time, though the human being no longer experienced the visible cosmos in his divine I, nor the course of the year in his astral nature, he did experience cosmic thoughts, the Logos, in his etheric body. If a member of the Egypto-Chaldean epoch had spoken our language, he would not, like us, have referred to man's physical body as of prime importance. Rather, his feeling for the body was such that he saw it as the result of what lives as thought in the etheric body. For him, the human physical body was an image of human thought. He did not accord to it the importance we do today.

During this period, the folk-concept became more and more definite. And so the human being became more and more a citizen of Earth. The connection between the starry world and his I had, in his consciousness during this third post-Atlantean cultural period, dwindled greatly. Though astrology still calculated the connection, it was no longer seen in elemental consciousness. The course of the year, so important for the astral body, was no longer sensed in its immediacy. Yet the human being was still aware of a cosmic thought element. He had arrived at the point where he felt earthly gravity as his being. At the same time, he felt thoughts as something so alive that he did not yet believe that his being consisted only in earthly gravity.

During the Greco-Roman period, this experience of gravity developed more and more. Now the physical body became paramount. Everything has its deep significance at its proper time, and in all the manifestations of Greek culture, we see this full, fresh penetration into the physical body. We see this especially in Greek art. For the early Greeks, their bodies were something to rejoice over; the Greeks were like children with new clothes. They lived in their bodies with youthful exuberance.



In the course of the Greco-Roman period, and particularly in the Roman civilization, this fresh experience of the physical body gave way to something like that of a person in state livery who knows that wearing it gives him prestige. (Of course, the feeling was not expressed in words.) A Roman felt his physical body as the state livery bestowed upon him by the world order.

The Greek felt tremendous joy that he had been allotted such a body and, after birth, could put it on; and it is this feeling that gives to Greek art, to Greek tragedy, to the epics of Homer, in their human element, insofar as they are connected with the outer physical human appearance, their particular poetic fire. We have to look for the inner reasons for all psychological facts. Try to live into the joy that gushes forth from Homer's description of Hector or Achilles. Feel what immense importance he attaches to outer appearance.

With the Romans, this joy subsided. Everything became settled; people began to grasp things with ordinary consciousness. It was during the fourth post-Atlantean cultural epoch that the human being first became a citizen of Earth. The conception of I, astral body, and ether body of earlier times withdrew into indefiniteness. The Greeks still had a living feeling for the truth that thought lives in things. I have discussed this in my *Riddles of Philosophy*.<sup>†</sup> But the perception was gradually superseded by a belief that thought originates in man. In this fashion, the human being grew more and more into his physical body.

Today, we do not yet see that this situation began to change in the fifteenth century, at the start of the fifth post-Atlantean cultural epoch, that, since then, we have been gradually growing away from our bodies. We fancy that we feel as the Greeks felt about the human form, but actually our feeling for it is dull. We have no more than a shadowlike sensation of "quick-footed Achilles," and little understanding of how this expression roused Greeks to a direct and striking perception of the hero—so striking that he stood before them in his essential nature. Indeed, in all art, we have gradually lost the experience of the permeation of the physical body by the soul. Whereas in the last pre-Christian centuries, the Greek felt how cosmic thought was disappearing and how thought could be taken hold of only by

reflecting upon the human being, today there is complete uncertainty in regard to the nature of thought.

A Greek of the sixth pre-Christian century would have considered it exceedingly strange if somebody had asked him to solve the scientific problem of the connection of thought with the brain. He would not have seen it as a problem at all. He would have felt as we would feel if, when we picked up a watch, somebody demanded that we speculate philosophically about the connection between watch and hand. Say I investigate the flesh of my hand, then the glass and metal in my watch, then the relation between the flesh of my hand and the glass and metal in my watch, in order to obtain philosophical insight into the reason why my hand has picked up and holds the watch. Well, if I were to proceed thus, modern consciousness would consider my inquiries insane.

Just so, it would have appeared insane to Greek consciousness if anyone had attempted, on the basis of the nature of thought or the nature of the brain, to explain the self-evident fact that man's being uses his brain to lay hold of thoughts. For the Greek, this was a direct perception, just as, for us, it is a direct perception that the hand takes hold of the watch; we do not consider it necessary to establish a scientific relation between watch and muscle. In the course of time, problems arise according to the way things are perceived. For the Greek, what we call the connection between thinking and organism was as self-evident as the connection between a watch and the hand that seizes it. He did not speculate about what was obvious. He knew instinctively how to relate his thoughts to his human nature.

Now, if I were to ask, Well, there is only a hand, and the watch ought to fall down, so what is really holding it up? this, for the Greek, would have been as absurd as the question that is asked today: What is it that develops thoughts in the brain? For us, the latter has become a question because we do not know that we have already liberated our thoughts. We are already on the way to liberating thoughts from the human being, and we do not know what to do with thoughts because we no longer have the physical body; we are already on the way to growing away from it.

I should like to use another comparison. We have not only clothes

but pockets into which we can put things. This was the situation with the Greeks: their human bodies were something into which they could put thoughts, feelings, will impulses. Today, we are uncertain what to do with thoughts, feelings, and will impulses. It is as though, in spite of pockets, all our things fell to the ground, or as though, worried about what to do with them, we lugged them about in our hands. In other words, we are ignorant of the nature of our own organism, do not know what to do with our soul life in regard to this organism, contrive the strangest ideas with respect to psycho-parallelism, and so forth. For the Greek, this would be as though someone, not knowing that he had pockets, therefore did not realize that he could put things in these pockets, that they were there precisely for that purpose. I am saying all this to show how we have gradually become estranged from our physical bodies.

This fact is illustrated by the whole course of humanity's evolution. If we again turn our gaze to the ancient Indian time when the human being looked back through the succession of generations to a distant ancestor, we see that he felt no need to search for the gods anywhere but within the generations. Since, for the Hindu, man himself was divine, he remained within human evolution while looking for the divine in his forebears. Indeed, the field of his search was precisely mankind's evolution.

There followed the time which culminated in the Egypto-Chaldean culture, when the folk-concept rose to prominence and man beheld the divine in the various folk gods, in that which lived in blood relationships, not successively as before, but spatially side by side.

Then came the Greek period when the human being felt robbed of his divinity to a certain extent, when he became a citizen of Earth. Now, for the first time, there arose the necessity to seek the gods above the earth, to look up to the gods. By gazing at the stars, the ancients knew of the gods. But the Greek needed, in addition to the stars, the involvement of his personality in order to behold those gods; and this need kept increasing within mankind.

Today, humanity must more and more develop the faculty of disregarding the physical, disregarding the physical starry sky, disregarding the physical course of the year, disregarding the sensations that arise

when confronting objects. For human beings can no longer behold thoughts in matter. The human being must acquire the possibility of discovering the divine-spiritual as something special above and beyond the physical sense world before he can find it again within the sense world.

To emphasize this truth energetically is the task of anthroposophical spiritual science. Thus anthroposophical spiritual science grows out of the entire earthly evolution of humanity. We must always remember that anthroposophy is not something arbitrarily created and placed as a program into humanity's evolution but, rather, something suited to our epoch, something resulting from the inner necessities of humanity's long history.

The fact that materialism holds sway over our age is, really, only a lagging behind. The human being not only became a citizen of Earth in the Greek sense, but today he is already so estranged from his Earth citizenship that he no longer understands how to handle his soul-spiritual being in relation to his body. It is therefore one of the needs of our age that human beings behold within themselves spirit and soul without the physical. Side by side with this deep need, there exists materialism as an ahrimanic standing-still at something that was natural in the age of the Greeks and Romans, when one could still behold the spiritual in the physical, but is not natural today.

Having remained stationary, we can no longer see the spiritual in the physical; we consider only the physical as such. This is materialism. A current has entered human evolution that is, if I may use the expression, hostile to development. Humanity shuns the coining of new concepts; it prefers to continue on with the old. We must overcome this hostility toward development. When we instead become friends of development, then we will acquire a quite natural relationship to anthroposophical spiritual development and pass over from antiquated needs to the truly modern need of humanity—namely, to raise ourselves to the spiritual.

In today's lecture, I have tried to gain a viewpoint from which you can see how, for the present age in the evolution of humanity, anthroposophy constitutes a real necessity.