

Don't Fall Asleep!

Personal reflections on working with Rudolf Steiner's lecture "What Does the Angel Do in Our Astral Body?" at an international Youth Section gathering.

From January 2 to 6, young people from Youth Section initiatives around the world came together in Dornach for an international Coworker Gathering. These were intense days - not only because of the diversity of cultural backgrounds and fields of work, but above all because of one text that accompanied us throughout the entire gathering: Rudolf Steiner's lecture "What Does the Angel Do in Our Astral Body?" (GA 182), given in October 1918.

What I would like to share here are primarily my personal perceptions of the inner work that took place, especially through engaging with this lecture in the various formats of the gathering and beyond.

I had already familiarized myself with the lecture in preparation. Yet it was only through working with it together, letting it work overnight and taking it up again in our morning discussion groups that its full impact unfolded for me. It became a deeply sobering, earnest, and emotionally stirring text, because it reveals a condition of the present that is difficult to evade.

In this lecture, Steiner speaks of angels working within the human astral body by forming images there - images that point toward the future of humanity. This angelic activity is directed toward concrete life and determines the course of human development in the age of the Consciousness Soul. And this, for me, is what makes the text so unsettling: it makes clear that we are living in a time in which these impulses must either be consciously taken up or simply slept through.

Steiner describes three qualities, three ideals, which the angels seek to imprint into the human astral body.

The first is absolute brotherhood: a condition in which it becomes impossible for me to remain inwardly calm or content as long as another human being is suffering - regardless of where in the world. Not as a moral demand, but as a lived reality of the soul.

The second quality is the recognition of the divine in the other person. Spiritual life is no longer to be bound to institutions, dogmas, or external forms, but is to take place in

immediate human encounter. Religious freedom not as a concept of tolerance, but as a real spiritual experience.

The third quality concerns thinking itself: the overcoming of the divide between thinking and spirit. Thinking is meant to become alive again, capable of spirit - capable not only of thinking about the spiritual, but of experiencing it.

These three ideals were strongly present in our shared work, and at the same time the question of their counter-images arose inevitably. For Steiner does not stop at describing the impulses of the angels. He issues an urgent warning about what happens when these impulses are not consciously taken up but sink into the unconscious, etheric realm.

Brotherhood can then turn into an instinctual, soulless form of sexuality. The recognition of the divine in the human being can be inverted, so that healthy and unhealthy are confused, and medical forces no longer serve healing but manipulation. And thinking can be replaced by machine and technological forces that take over capacities which the human being ought to develop inwardly.

It was hardly possible for me to read these images without thinking of our present world. And with this, a question arose that accompanied me throughout the entire gathering and surfaced again and again in the work of the discussion group:

What has happened over the last hundred years?

This lecture was given in 1918. More than a century later, we stand at a point where many of these counter-images are no longer mere possibilities but lived realities. This stirred in me not only reflection, but also anger - and a deep sense of responsibility.

In this context, the third keynote contribution of the gathering, given by Marco Bindelli, was particularly significant for me. He raised the question of the Luciferic and Ahrimanic influences of the 20th century, as described by Rudolf Steiner in his Michael Letters. While Lucifer tends to idealize the past and draw human beings back into earlier forms of consciousness, Ahriman works by anticipating future human capacities and making them technically available, without the need for them to be inwardly earned.

One thought from this lecture left a lasting impression on me: the invitation to a Michaelic act of the "I", in which one can ask of every technical innovation:

For which spiritual capacity do you actually stand?

What would the human being have to develop inwardly if you did not exist?

In this connection, Marco Bindelli also referred to the two Zurich lectures by Rudolf Steiner that directly follow “What Does the Angel Do in Our Astral Body?”, in particular the lecture “How Do I Find the Christ?” from October 16, 1918. While the first lecture describes the dangers posed by the counter-images with great sharpness, the second opens up another perspective: the question of the concrete path by which the human being can encounter the Christ impulse today.

Steiner describes two fundamentally different yet complementary paths: a path of knowledge and a path of will. The path of knowledge demands a radical reorientation of thinking. It requires that the human being learn to search, even in the seemingly incomprehensible or foreign other, for the justified core within. To put it bluntly, he says that one should even be willing to take the “most foolish brother” seriously, because perhaps it is precisely through him that something essential wishes to enter the world. Knowledge here is understood as an exercise in humility and alert attentiveness.

The second path, the path of will, touched me particularly deeply in the context of the Youth Section. It connects with the natural idealism with which young people enter the world. At the same time, Marco Bindelli made clear that this idealism is often not supported in modern education and society, but rather broken or devalued. Idealism cannot simply be preserved; it must be consciously and repeatedly re-won.

Especially in the Youth Section context, in working with young people from very different cultural backgrounds, it became clear to me how great the need is and at the same time the longing for spaces in which such questions may even be asked.

In leading the German-speaking discussion group - and later in continuing the work within the small circle of our German delegation - one central question crystallized for me:

How do we live with this knowledge?

For anyone who reads this lecture enters into a responsibility. And this responsibility cannot be fulfilled through activism or quick answers. It demands something far more difficult: wakefulness, mutual questioning, shared inquiry, and the capacity to endure uncertainty.

For me, this lecture has become a guiding companion - especially as I begin this year to actively take up responsibility within the Youth Section impulse in Germany. It accompanies me with the question of how we, as young people, can truly become contemporaries of our time: awake, responsible, and connected with one another.

Perhaps it is about becoming a wakeful community of destiny, seeking to perceive the work of the angels within our own astral bodies and to bring it into consciousness.

Whether it is already too late for this, I cannot say with certainty.

But after these days, I am convinced: it is still possible.

And it is urgent.

by Keivan Azimi