

Preparing For the Sixth Epoch

An Inspired Lecture by Rudolf Steiner

June 15, 1915

A Preface by Rev. Lloyd Strom

It has been said that success in life is a matter of recognizing the *'trends of life,'* and then living our lives in ways that benefit from those trends. Unfortunately, most people become *'set in their ways,'* and find themselves resisting the ever changing trends that occur in their lives. With this thought in mind, let us explore what is perhaps the greatest and most universal trend that is occurring in everybody's life, which is the evolution of Humanity.

Perhaps one of the greatest assets to assist us in this exploration is the teachings of the great German spiritual philosopher Rudolph Steiner. With his uncanny ability to *'see through time,'* he set forth in his written teachings an exhaustive record of the cosmic evolution that has brought Humanity to its current evolutionary state on earth at this time. Additionally, he was also able to foretell what was to occur in the near future. Given that many of his prophecies have already come to pass, we should at least give some credence to what he has to say about the next stage of Human evolution, which he refers to in the following lecture as the *'Sixth Epoch.'*

In the Words of Rudolf Steiner

We have come here today for the opening of this group that wishes to dedicate itself to the spiritual life of the present and future in the way that is customary in our Movement. On such an occasion it is always good to remember why we associate in groups and to ask ourselves why we found working groups and cultivate in them the spiritual treasure to which we dedicate our forces.

If this question is to be answered truly, we must realize that we make a distinction, even if only in thought, between the work we do in a group like this and our other work in the world. Those who are unwilling to enter deeply into more intimate truths connected with the spiritual progress of humanity, might ask if we could not cultivate Spiritual Science without forming ourselves into groups, but simply by finding lecturers and providing opportunities for people who may not know each other to come together and have access to the spiritual treasure of which we speak. We could, of course, proceed in this way. But as long as it is at all possible to establish, in the wider and narrower senses, associations of human beings who are known to one another and who come together in friendship and cooperation within these working groups, we will continue to found them in full consciousness of the attitude of soul that is part and parcel of Spiritual Science. It is not without meaning that among us there are human beings who want to cultivate the more intimate side of spiritual knowledge and who sincerely intend to work together in true friendship and harmony. Not only are relationships and interactions affected by the fact that we can speak quite differently among ourselves, knowing that we are speaking to Souls consciously associated with us — not only is this so, but something else is also to be remembered. The establishment of individual groups is connected with the whole conception that we hold of our Movement if we understand its innermost nature. We must all be conscious that our Movement is significant not only for the existence known to the senses and for the existence that is grasped by the outward turned mind of man, but that through this Movement our Souls are seeking a real and genuine link with the spiritual worlds.

Again and again, in full consciousness, we should say to ourselves that by the cultivation of Spiritual Science we transfer our Souls as it were into spheres that are peopled not only by beings of earth but also by the beings of the higher hierarchies, the beings of the invisible worlds. We must realize that our work is of significance for these invisible worlds, that we are actually within these worlds. In the spiritual world, the work performed by those who know one another within such groups is quite different from work carried on outside such a group and dispersed about the world. The work carried out in kindred harmony within our groups has quite a different significance for the spiritual world than other work we may undertake. To understand this fully we must remind ourselves of truths we have studied in many aspects during recent years.

Earth evolution in the post-Atlantean age was sustained in the beginning by the culture of the ancient Indian period of civilization. This was followed by the ancient Persian Epoch — the designation is only more or less appropriate but we need not go into that now. Then came the ancient Egyptian period of culture, then the Greco-Roman, and finally our current Fifth Epoch. Each of these Epochs has, on the one side, to cultivate a particular form of culture and of spiritual life primarily concerned with the external and visible world. But each Epoch must at the same time prepare, bear within it in a preparatory stage, what is to come in the ensuing period of culture.

Within the womb, as it were, of the ancient Indian Epoch, that of ancient Persia was prepared; within the ancient Persian culture, that of the Egyptian Epoch was prepared, and so on. Our current Fifth Epoch must prepare for the coming Sixth Epoch of culture. Our task in Spiritual Science is not

only to acquire spiritual treasure for ourselves, for the eternal life of the Soul, but to prepare what will constitute the content, the specific external work of the Sixth Epoch of culture. Thus it has been in each of these post-Atlantean Epochs.

The centers of the mysteries were the places in which the form of external life belonging to the next Epoch of culture was prepared. The mysteries were associations of human beings among whom other things were cultivated than those cultivated in the outer world. The ancient Indian Epoch was concerned with the cultivation of the human Etheric Body, the ancient Persian Epoch with the cultivation of the Astral Body, the Egyptian with that of the sentient Soul, the Greco-Latin with that of the intellectual or mental Soul.

Our own Fifth Epoch, throughout its duration, will develop and unfold the consciousness or spiritual Soul. But what will give to external culture in the Sixth Epoch its content and character, must be prepared in advance. Many characteristics of the Sixth Epoch of culture will be entirely different from those of our current age. Three characteristic traits can be mentioned, of which we must realize that they should be carried in our hearts for the Sixth Epoch of culture and that it is our task to prepare them for this Sixth Epoch.

The Three Characteristics

I. Compassion

There is lacking in human society nowadays a quality that, in the Sixth Epoch, will be a characteristic of those individuals who reach the goal of that Epoch, and have not fallen short of it. It is a quality that will not, of course, be found among those who in the Sixth Epoch have still remained at the stage of savages or barbarians. One of the most

significant characteristics of humans living on the earth at the peak of culture in the Sixth Epoch, will be a certain moral quality. Little of this quality is perceptible in modern humanity. A person today must be delicately organized for their Soul to feel pain when they see other human beings in the world in less happy circumstances than their own. It is true that more delicately organized natures feel pain at the suffering that is so widespread in the world, but this can only be said of the people who are particularly sensitive. In the Sixth Epoch, the most highly cultured will not only feel pain such as is caused today by the sight of poverty, suffering and misery in the world, but such individuals will experience the suffering of another human being as their own suffering. If they see a hungry person they will feel the hunger right down into the physical, so acutely indeed that the hunger of the other person will be unendurable to them.

The moral characteristic indicated here is that, unlike conditions in our current Fifth Epoch, in the Sixth Epoch the well-being of the individual will depend entirely upon the well-being of the whole. Just as nowadays the well-being of a single human limb depends upon the health of the whole body, and when the whole body is not healthy the single limb is not up to doing its work, so in the Sixth Epoch a common consciousness will lay hold of the then civilized humanity and in a far higher degree than a limb feels the health of the whole body, the individual will feel the suffering, the need, the poverty or the wealth of the whole. This is the first pre-eminently moral trait that will characterize the cultured humanity of the Sixth Epoch.

2. Independent Thought

A second fundamental characteristic will be that everything we call the fruits of belief today will depend to a far, far higher degree

than is the case today, upon the single individuality. Spiritual Science expresses this by saying that in every sphere of religion in the Sixth Epoch, complete freedom of thought and a longing for it will so lay hold of individuals that what a person chooses to believe, whatever religious convictions they hold, will rest wholly within the power of their own individuality. Collective beliefs that exist in so many forms today among the various communities will no longer influence those who constitute the civilized portion of humanity in the Sixth Epoch of culture. Everyone will feel that complete freedom of thought in the domain of religion is a fundamental right of the human being.

3. Spiritual Science

The third characteristic will be that individuals in the Sixth Epoch will only be considered to have real knowledge when they recognize the spiritual, when they know that the spiritual pervades the world and that human Souls must unite with the spiritual. What is known as science today with its materialistic trend will certainly not be honored by the name of science in the Sixth Epoch. It will be regarded as antiquated superstition, able to pass muster only among those who have remained behind at the stage of the superseded Fifth Epoch. Today we regard it as superstition when, let us say, a savage holds the view that no limb ought to be separated from their body at death because this would make it impossible for them to enter the spiritual world as a whole person. Such a person still connects the idea of immortality with pure materialism, with the belief that an impress of their whole form must pass into the spiritual world. They think materialistically, yet they believe in immortality. We know today from Spiritual Science that the spiritual has to be separated from the body and that only the spiritual passes into the

super-sensible world, and we regard materialistic beliefs in immortality as superstition. Similarly, in the Sixth Epoch all materialistic beliefs including science, too, will be regarded as antiquated superstition. Men as a matter of course will accept as science only such forms of knowledge as are based upon the spiritual studies that contribute to the development of Spiritual Science.

The whole purpose of Spiritual Science is to prepare in this sense for the Sixth Epoch of culture. We try to cultivate Spiritual Science in order to overcome materialism, to prepare the kind of science that must exist in the Sixth Epoch. We establish communities of human beings within which there must be no dogmatic beliefs or any tendency to accept teaching simply because it emanates from one person or another. We establish communities of human beings in which everything, without exception, must be built upon our Soul's free assent to the teachings. Herein we prepare what Spiritual Science calls freedom of thought. By coming together in friendly associations for the purpose of cultivating Spiritual Science, we prepare the future culture, the civilization of the Sixth Epoch.

Previous Epochs

But we must look still more deeply into the course of human evolution if we are fully to understand the real tasks of our associations and groups. In the First Epoch there were also communities that were connected with the mysteries, whereby human beings cultivated what subsequently prevailed in the Second Epoch. In the associations peculiar to the ancient Indian First Epoch, humans were concerned with the cultivation of the Astral Body, which was to be the specific outer task of the Second Epoch. It would lead us much too far astray to describe what, in contrast to the external culture of

the time, was developed in these associations peculiar to ancient India in order to prepare for the ancient Persian Second Epoch. But this may be said that when those beings of the ancient Indian Epoch came together in order to prepare what was necessary for the Second Epoch, they felt: *"We have not yet attained, or have within us, what we shall have when our Souls are incarnated in the next Epoch. It still hovers above us."* In truth it was so.

In the First Epoch of culture, what was to descend from the heavens to the earth in the Second Epoch still hovered over the Souls of Human Beings. The work achieved on earth by those in intimate assemblies connected with the mysteries was of such a nature that forces flowed upwards to the spirits of the higher hierarchies, enabling them to nourish and cultivate what was to stream down into the Souls of human beings as substance and content of the Astral Body in the Second, ancient Persian Epoch. The forces that descended at a later stage of maturity into the Souls incarnated in the bodies of ancient Persian civilizations were like little children in the First Epoch. Forces streaming upwards from the work of human beings below in preparation for the next Epoch were received and nurtured by the spiritual world above. So it must be in every Epoch of culture.

In our current Fifth Epoch it is the consciousness or spiritual aspect of our Souls that has developed in us through our ordinary civilization and culture. Beginning with the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, science and materialistic consciousness have laid hold of human beings. This will gradually become more widespread, until by the end of the Fifth Epoch its development will have been completed. In the Sixth Epoch, however, it is the true Spiritual Self that must

be developed within the Souls of men, just as now the consciousness Soul is being developed. The nature of the Spirit Self is that it must pre-suppose the existence in human Souls of the three characteristics of which I have previously spoken: social life in which compassion and freedom of thought, along with Spiritual Science prevails. These three characteristics are essential in a community of human beings within which the Spirit Self is to develop as the consciousness Soul develops in the Souls of the current Fifth Epoch.

Co-Creative Groups

We may therefore picture to ourselves that by uniting with compassionate friendship in groups working co-creatively, something hovers invisibly over our work, something that is like the child of the forces of the Spirit Self — the Spirit Self that is nurtured by the beings of the higher hierarchies in order that it may stream down into our Souls when they are again on earth in the Sixth Epoch of civilization. In our groups we work co-creatively so that our efforts stream upward toward those forces that are being prepared for the Spirit Self.

So you see, it is only through the wisdom of Spiritual Science itself that we can understand what we are really doing in respect of our connection with the spiritual worlds when we come together to work in these compassionate co-creative groups. The thought that we do this work not only for the sake of our own egos, but in order that it may stream upward into the spiritual worlds, the thought that this work is connected with the spiritual worlds, this is the true consecration of a working co-creation group. To cherish such a thought is to permeate ourselves with the consciousness of the consecration that is the foundation of a co-creative working group within our Movement.

It is therefore of great importance to grasp this fact in its true spiritual sense. We find ourselves together working in co-creative groups, which besides cultivating Spiritual Science, are based on freedom of thought. They will have nothing to do with dogma or coercion of belief, and their work should be of the nature of cooperation among kindred Souls. What matters most of all is to become conscious of the true meaning of the idea of community, saying to ourselves: *“Apart from the fact that as modern Souls we belong to the Fifth Epoch of culture and develop as individuals, raising individual life more and more out of community life, we must in turn become conscious of a higher form of community, founded in the freedom of Love among kindred Souls, as a breath of magic that we breathe in our working co-creative groups.”*

New Communities

The deep significance of West European culture lies in the fact that the quest of the current Fifth Epoch is the consciousness Soul. The task of West European culture, and particularly of Central European culture, is that human beings shall develop an individual culture, individual consciousness. This is the task of the present age. Compare this Epoch of ours with that of Greece and Rome. The Greek Epoch exhibits in a particularly striking form, especially among the civilized Greeks, a consciousness of living within a group soul. A person who was born and lived in Athens felt themselves to be first and foremost an *Athenian*. This community between city and what belonged to the city meant something different to the individual than what community between human beings means today. In our time the individual strives to grow out of and beyond the community, and this is right in the Fifth Epoch. In Rome, the human being

was first and foremost a Roman citizen, nothing else.

But in our current Fifth Epoch we strive above all else to be a person in our innermost being, an individual and nothing else. It is a painful experience in our day to see people fighting against one another on the earth, but this, after all, is just a reaction to the perpetual striving of the Fifth Epoch for free development of the 'Universal Human.' Because the different countries and peoples shut themselves off today from one another in hostility, it is all the more necessary to develop, as resistance to this, the force that allows human beings to be human in the full sense, allowing the individual to grow out of and beyond every kind of community. But on the other hand the human being must, in full consciousness, make preparation for communities into which they will enter entirely of their own free will in the Sixth Epoch. There hovers before us as a high ideal, a form of community that will so encompass the Sixth Epoch of culture that civilized human beings will quite naturally meet each other as loving brothers and sisters.

"Christ in us, is Community all around us."



Editors Note

The original translated text of this Lecture has been heavily edited to make it more accessible to contemporary readers. Most specifically the language has been de-genderized in order to render it in a more inclusive form. Also, many run-on sentences and awkward phrases have been corrected to make the materials easier to read. Finally, a number of contemporary words and phrases have been inserted to make Steiner's teaching even more relevant to our modern culture.

Throughout the entire editing process every attempt has been made to preserve the original content, meaning and intent of Steiner's teaching. I trust that we have been successful in that effort.

For Further Study

This Lecture, as well as the following items are all available in the 'NovaTech Library' located at: www.GracefulWays.org

What is Religious Science?

What is Co-Creation?

True Globalism

The Babel Pit