The Human Heart
by
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We have often explained how the development of man takes place during the first periods of life, and it is many years since I first indicated how the child behaves to a great extent as an imitative being during the period up to the change of teeth. More or less instinctively and intensively he experiences all that is going on in his environment. Later on it is only in the sense organs that the processes of the outer world are thus intensively experienced, although we are not conscious of this fact. In our eyes, for example, we have a process imitating in a certain sense what is going on in the outer world, reproducing it just as the camera reproduces whatever is there in front of the lens. The human being becomes aware of what is thus imitatively reproduced in his eyes, and thus he gains information about the external world. It is the same with the other senses. But this restriction of the imitative principle to the periphery of the human organism occurs only at a later stage in life.

In early childhood, until the change of teeth, the whole body partakes in this imitative process, though to a lesser extent. At this stage the whole body is in a certain respect related to the outer world as the senses are during the rest of human life. The child is still in the main an imitative being. He follows the way in which outer things work in upon him and he imitates them internally. Hence it is very important to let nothing happen in the young child’s environment, not even in the forming of our thoughts and feelings, which the child cannot rightly absorb and make his own.

With the change of teeth it begins to be possible for the child to behave no longer like a sense organ but to assimilate something in the nature of ideas. The child begins to take as his guideline what we say to him. Previously he has taken as his guideline all that we did in his environment; now he begins to grasp what we say. Authority thus becomes the decisive factor between the change of teeth and puberty. The child will quite naturally follow and be guided by what is said to him. Language
itself he will of course learn by imitation, but that which is expressed and communicated through language. This can become a determining factor for the child only after the change of teeth. And a true power of judgment, when the child or adolescent begins to make his own faculty of judgment felt, comes only at the time of puberty. Not until then can the child begin to form real judgments of his own.

So far I have been describing quite simply, from an external viewpoint, how a child grows into the world. These facts can be observed by anyone with an unbiased sense of truth. But they are connected with highly significant inner processes, and it is of these that I want to speak today.

I have often pointed out how the human etheric body lives in intimate union with the physical body until the change of teeth begins. Therefore, as I have also said, we can describe the change of teeth as marking the essential birth of the etheric body. Likewise we can refer the birth of the astral body to the time of puberty. However, that again is only an external account. Today we will try to arrive at a rather more inward characterization of these processes.

Let us consider man in the spiritual world, long before he develops the tendency to descend into physical embodiment. We see him there as a being of soul and spirit in a world of soul and spirit. So were we, all of us, before we descended to unite with what was prepared for us, as physical body, in the maternal organism. With this physical body we then united, to undergo our period of earthly existence between birth and death. Long before this, as I said, we were beings of soul and spirit. What we were, and what we experienced there, is very different from what we experience between birth and death here on earth. Hence it is hard to describe the experiences between death and a new birth; they are so utterly different from earthly conditions. Man models his ideas on his earthly experiences, and it is to these ideas that we must always have recourse for our descriptions. Today, however, we will not dwell so much on the character of man within the world of soul and spirit; we will rather envisage him, to begin with, on his descent, when he approaches the earth to imbue himself with a new physical body.
Before he approaches his physical body—or rather the germ, the embryo of it—man draws into himself the forces of the etheric universe. Here on earth we live in the physical world, in the world characterized by all that we see with the senses and understand with earthly intellect. But there is nothing in this world that is not permeated by the etheric world. And before man gets the inclination to unite through the embryo with the physical world, he draws to himself the forces of the etheric world and, in so doing, he forms his own etheric body. But to say that man clothes himself with his etheric body is to say very little. We must enter a little more closely into the nature and constitution of this body.

The etheric body, as it forms and develops itself in the human being, is a universe in itself, a universe, one might say, in picture form. At its circumference it manifests something in the nature of stars and in its lower portion something that appears more or less as an image of the earth. It even has in it a kind of image of the sun nature and the moon nature.

This is of great significance. On our descent into the earthly world, when we draw to ourselves the forces of the universal ether, we actually take with us in our etheric body a kind of image of the cosmos. If we could extract the etheric body of a man at the moment when he is uniting with the physical, we should have a sphere far more beautiful than has ever been wrought by mechanical means, a sphere complete with stars and zodiac and sun and moon.

These configurations of the etheric body remain during the embryonic time, while the human being coalesces more and more with his physical body. They begin to fade away a little, but they remain. Indeed they remain right on into the seventh year, which is until the change of teeth. In the etheric body of the little child this cosmic sphere is still quite recognizable. But with the seventh year, with the change of teeth these forms that we behold in the etheric body begin to ray out, in a manner of speaking. Previously they were more star-like; now they begin to be like rays. The stars dissolve away in the human ether body; but as they do so they become rays, rays with a tendency to come together inwardly.
All this goes on gradually throughout the period of life between the change of teeth and puberty. At puberty the process is so far advanced that these rays, having grown together here in the center, form as it were a distinct structure, a distinct etheric structure of their own. The stars have faded out, while the structure which has gathered in the center becomes especially living. And in the midst of this central etheric structure, at the time of puberty, the physical heart, with its blood vessels, is suspended.

So we have this strange phenomenon of the star-ether-body drawing inwards. As etheric body it is, of course, undifferentiated at the periphery of the organism. Very little can be distinguished in there. On the other hand, during the time from the change of teeth until puberty, it is intensely radiant, raying from without inwards. Then it gathers itself together, and there, clearly suspended within it, is the physical heart.

You must not suppose that until then man has no etheric heart. Certain he has one, but he obtains it differently from the way in which he acquires the etheric heart that will now be his. For the gathered radiance that arises at the time of puberty becomes the true etheric heart of man. The etheric heart he has before this time is one that he received as a heritage through the inherent forces of the embryo. When a man gets his etheric body, and with it makes his way into the physical organism, a kind of etheric heart, a substitute etheric heart so to speak, is drawn together by the forces of the physical body. He keeps this etheric heart during his childhood years, but then it gradually decays. (This may not be a very beautiful expression, by our usual standards, but it meets the case exactly.) The first etheric heart slowly decays, and in its stead, as it were constantly replacing that which falls out in the etheric process of decay, there comes the new, the real, etheric heart. This etheric heart is a concentration of the whole cosmic sphere we brought with us as an ether form, a faithful image of the cosmos, when we proceeded through conception and birth into this earthly life.

Thus we can trace, throughout the time from birth or conception until puberty, a distinct change in the whole etheric form that the human being bears within him. One may describe
it by saying: not until puberty does the human being possess his own etheric heart, which is the etheric heart formed out of his own etheric body, and not supplied provisionally by external forces.

All the etheric forces that are working in man until puberty tend to endow him with this fresh etheric heart. It is, in the etheric sphere, a process comparable to the change of teeth. For, as you know, until the change of teeth we have our inherited teeth; these are cast out, and their place is taken by the second teeth - those that are truly our own. So, likewise, the etheric heart we have until puberty is cast out, and we now receive our own. That is the point - we receive our own etheric heart.

But now there is another process running parallel with this. When we observe man just after his entry into the physical world, i.e., as a very young child, we find a multitude of single organs distinguishable in his astral body. Man, as I have said, builds for himself an etheric heart, which is an image of the outer universe. In his astral body, however, he brings with him an image of the experiences he has undergone, between his last death and his present birth. Much, very much, can be seen in this astral body of a little child, great secrets are inscribed there. Much can be seen there of what the human being has experienced between his last death and his present birth. Moreover, the astral body is highly differentiated, individualized.

And now, this is the peculiar thing: during the very time when the aforesaid process is taking place in the etheric body, this highly differentiated astral body becomes more and more undifferentiated. Originally it is an entity of which we can say it comes from another world, from a world which is not there in the physical, or even the etheric universe. By the time of puberty, all that is living in this astral body as a multitude of single forms and structures slips into the physical organs, primarily into those organs which are situated (to speak approximately) above the diaphragm. Marvelous structures, radiantly present in the astral body in the first days of life, slip by degrees into the brain formation and saturate the organs of the senses. Then, other structures slip into the breathing organism; others again into the heart, and through the heart into
the arteries. They do not come directly into the stomach; it is only through the arteries that they eventually spread into the abdominal organs. Thus we see the whole astral body, which man brings with him through birth into this physical existence - we see it diving down gradually into the organs. It slides into the organs. This way of putting it is quite true to reality, though naturally it sounds strange to the habitual ideas of today. By the time we have grown to adult life, our organs have imprisoned in them the several forms and structures of our astral body.

Precisely herein lies the key to a more intimate knowledge of the human organs; they cannot be truly understood unless we also understand the astral which man brings with him. We must know in the first place that every single organ bears within it, in a sense, an astral inheritance, even as the etheric heart is, to begin with, an inheritance. Moreover, we must know that this inherited astral becomes permeated gradually, through and through, with that which man brings with him as his own astral body, which dives down bit by bit into the physical and etheric organs.

The heart is an exception in a certain sense. Here, too, an astral part dives down; but in the heart not only the astral process but the etheric also is concentrated. Therefore, the heart is the uniquely important organ which it is for man.

The astral body becomes more and more indefinite, for it sends into the physical organs the concrete forms which it brings with it from another life. It sends them down into the physical organs, so that they are imprisoned there; and thereby the astral body itself becomes more or less like a cloud of mist. But - and this is the interesting thing - while from this side the astral body turns into a cloud of mist, new differentiations come into it from another side; first slowly, then with full regularity and increasingly from the age of puberty onwards.

When the baby is kicking with its little legs, you notice very little of this in the astral body. True, the effects are there, but the differentiations which the astral body has brought with it are far more intense. Gradually these forms disappear; they slide into the physical organs. The astral body more and more becomes a cloud of mist. When the child kicks and fidgets, all
manner of effects come up into the astral body from these childish movements, but they impinge on what they find there, they are cast back and disappear again. It is as though you made an impression on an elastic ball: the ball recovers its shape immediately. All this, however, changes proportion as the child learns to speak and develops ideas which are retained in memory. We then see how his movements - intelligent movements, now walking about, moving the arms, and so on - are increasingly retained in the astral body.

Yes, indeed, untold things can be inscribed in this astral body. When you are forty-five years old, almost all your movements are inscribed in traces there and many other things too, as we shall see. The astral body can absorb very much of all that has taken place since you learned to speak and think and since its own configuration was dissolved. Into this undifferentiated entity all that we do now is inscribed - the movements of our arms and legs, and not only these, but all that we accomplish through our arms and legs. For instance, when we hold a pen in writing, all that we thus accomplish in the outer world is there inscribed. When we chop wood, or if we give someone a box on the ears, all is inscribed into the astral body. Even when we do not do something ourselves but give instructions to a person and he does it, this, too, is inscribed, through the relation of the content of our words to what the person does. In short, the whole of man’s activity which finds expression in the outer world is written into the astral body; thus the astral body becomes configured in manifold ways through all our human actions.

This process, as I said, begins when the child learns to speak, learns to embody thoughts in speech. It does not apply to ideas which the child receives but cannot remember afterwards. It begins from the time to which he can remember back, with ordinary consciousness, in later life.

And now the strange thing is that all that is thus inscribed in the astral body has a tendency to meet inwardly, just as the radiations of the ether body meet in the etheric heart. All that our human deeds are, this also comes together within. Moreover, this has a kind of outer causation. Simply as human beings on earth, we are bound to enter into many forms of activity. This
activity expresses itself, as I said just now, throughout the astral body. But there is a perpetual resistance. The influences that are exerted on the human organism cannot always go right up, as it were. There is always a certain resistance; they are driven down again. All that we do, in connection with our physical organs, tends to stream upward to the head, but the human organization prevents it from reaching there. Hence these influences collect together and form a kind of astral center.

This, once again, is clearly developed at the time of puberty. At the same place where the etheric heart, our own etheric heart has formed itself, we now have an astral structure too, which gathers together all our actions. And so from puberty a central organ is created wherein all our doing, all our human activity, is centered. It is so indeed: in the very region where man has his heart, all his activity is centralized – centralized, in this case, neither physically nor etherically, but astrally. And the important thing is that in the time when puberty occurs (naturally, the astral events coincide only approximately with the physical) man’s own etheric heart is so far formed that it can receive these forces that develop out of our activity in the outer world. Thus we can truly say (and in so saying we mark a real event in the human inner being): from puberty onwards man’s whole activity becomes inserted, via the astral body, in his etheric heart – and in that which has grown out of the pictures of the stars, out of the images of the cosmos.

This is a phenomenon of untold importance. For, my dear friends, we have here a joining together with the cosmos of what man does in this world. In the heart, as far as the etheric universe is concerned, you have a cosmos gathered up into a center; while at the same time, as far as the astral is concerned, you have a gathering together of all that man does in the world. This is the point where the cosmos, the cosmic process, is joined to the karma of man.

This intimate correspondence of the astral body with the etheric body is to be found nowhere in the human organism except in the region of the heart. But there, in truth, it is. Man has brought with him through birth an image of the universe in his etheric body, and the entire universe, which is there within
him as an essence, receives all that he does and permeates itself with it. By this constant coming together, this mutual permeation, the opportunity is given throughout human life for human actions to be instilled into the essence of the images of the cosmos.

Then when man passes through the gate of death, this ethereal-astral structure - wherein the heart is floating, so to speak - contains all that man takes with him into his further life of soul and spirit, when he has laid aside the physical and the etheric forms. Now, as he expands ever more widely in the spirit, he can hand over his entire karma to the cosmos, for the substance of the whole cosmos is contained within him; it is drawn together in his heart, in the etheric body of his heart. It came from the cosmos and changed into this etheric entity, then it was gathered up as an essence in the heart, and now it tends to return into the cosmos once more. The human being expands into the cosmos. He is received into the world of souls. He undergoes what I described in my book, *Theosophy*, as the passage through the world of souls and then through spirit land.

In truth it is so. When we consider the human organization in its becoming, we can say to ourselves: in the region of the heart there takes place a union of the cosmos with the earthly realm, and in this way the cosmos, with its cosmic configuration, is taken into our etheric body. There it makes ready to receive all our actions, all that we do in life. Then we go outward again, together with everything that has formed itself within us through this intimate permeation of the cosmic ethereal with our own human actions. So do we enter again into a new cosmic existence, having passed through the gate of death.

Thus we have now described in a quite concrete form how the human being lives his way into his physical body, and how he is able to draw himself out of it again, because his deeds have given him the force to hold together what he had first formed within him as an essence out of the cosmos.

The physical body, as you know, is formed within the physical and earthly world by the forces of heredity that is the forces of the embryo. What man brings with him from the
spiritual world, having first drawn together his etheric body, comes into union with this. But we must now go further. In the astral, that wonderful entity he has brought with him, there lives the ego, which, having passed through many earthly lives, has a long evolution behind it. This ego lives in a certain connection of sympathy with all the complex forms that are present in the astral body. (By using the word “sympathy” in this connection, I am once more describing something absolutely real.) Then, when these astral forms slide into the organs of the physical, as explained above, the ego retains this sympathy and extends the same inner sympathy to the organs themselves. The ego spreads out increasingly into the organs and takes possession of them. From earliest childhood, indeed, the ego is in a certain relation to the organs. But at that time the inherited condition, of which I spoke, is still prevailing; therefore the relation of the organs to the ego is a more external one.

When, later on, the ego slips with its astral body into the organs of the physical, this is what happens: whereas, in the little child, the ego was present only outwardly along the paths of the blood, it now unites with the blood circulation more and more inwardly, intensively, until at puberty once more it has entered there in the fullest sense. And while you have an astral formation around the etheric and the physical heart, the ego takes a different path. It slides into the organs of the lung, and with the blood vessels that pass from the lung to the heart, approaches nearer and nearer to the heart. More and more closely united with the blood circulation, it follows the paths of the blood. By way of the forces that run along the courses of the blood, the ego enters into that which has been formed from the union of the etheric and the astral heart, wherein an etheric from the cosmos grows together with an astral from ourselves.

As I said, this astral body comes by degrees to contain an immeasurable amount, for all our actions are written in it. And that is not all. Inasmuch as the ego has a relation of sympathy to all that the astral body does, our intentions, our ideas also are inscribed there — the intentions and ideas, I mean, out of which we perform our actions. Here, then, you have a complete linking up of karma with the laws of the whole cosmos.
Of all that thus goes on within the human being, people today know “heartily little” (herzlich wenig); and we can repeat the words with emphasis, for all these things, of which people today are ignorant, relate to the human heart. They know what goes on here in the physical world, and they consider it in relation to moral laws. The real fact is that all that happens in the moral life and all that happens physically in the world are brought together precisely in the human heart. These two, the moral and the physical, which run so independently and yet side by side for modern consciousness today, are found in real union when we learn to understand all the configurations of the human heart.

Naturally, all that takes place in the heart is far more hidden than the event which happens openly with the change of teeth. We have our inherited teeth; then we form teeth again out of our own organism. The former fall away, the latter remain. The former have an inherent tendency to go under; nor could they ever keep themselves intact, even if they did not fall out. The permanent teeth, on the other hand, are destroyed chiefly by extraneous conditions including, of course those of the organism itself. Likewise, at puberty in an invisible way our etheric heart is given over to disintegration and we now acquire a kind of permanent ether heart.

Only this permanent ether heart is fully adapted to receive into itself our activities. Therefore it makes a great difference whether a human being dies before puberty or after. When he dies before puberty, he has only the tendency for what he has done on earth to be karmically inherited later on. Even when children die before puberty, this or that can certainly be incorporated in their karma, but it is always rather vague and fleeting. The forming of karma, properly speaking, begins only at the moment when the astral heart takes hold of the etheric heart and they join together. This, indeed, is the real organism for the forming of karma. For, at death, what is gathered up and concentrated there in the human being becomes increasingly cosmic. And in our next earthly life it is incorporated in the human being once again out of the cosmos. Everything we do, accordingly, concerns not ourselves alone. Incorporated within
us is something that comes from the cosmos and retains the tendency after our death to give over our deeds to the cosmos once more. For it is from the cosmos that the karmic laws work themselves out, fashioning our karma. So we bear back again into the beginning of our next earthly life the effects of what the cosmos makes of our deeds.