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Curative Eurythmy

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The Beginnings of Curative Eurythmy

Curative eurythmy grew organically from the art of eurythmy itself. During one of the earliest lessons given by Rudolf Steiner, Marie von Sivers, made an interesting observation. Following the first attempt to perform the word 'Halleluyah' in eurythmy, she suddenly spoke out, "That must be very healing to do!" Rudolf Steiner smiled and replied, "Yes, did you think we only want to dance, we also want to heal!" Some nine years later, two eurythmists, one of whom was married to a medical doctor, were invited by Dr. Steiner to attend a lecture series concerning natural science. At one point during these lectures, he drew a geometric form on the chalk board and spoke about healing as an application of cosmic, rhythmical laws. The eurythmists recognized the curve of Cassini as a form often used in eurythmy and a question arose within them. Could there be a therapeutic application of the art of eurythmy? Up to that time eurythmy had been developed as a performing art as a pedagogical subject. It had been introduced to the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart, Germany. As the eurythmists pondered their question, they began to realize that all the basic eurythmy exercises contained therapeutic elements. This fired their enthusiasm and at last, they approached Dr. Steiner. He listened to their thoughts and then asked how many eurythmists were interested in this line of work. They told him they were only two. He smiled and said he would give a series of lectures in which the basic principles of a "healing eurythmy" would be given. They would coincide with a course for medical doctors to be given in the spring of 1921. These lectures and the practical work which followed became the foundation for curative eurythmy, now in its sixty-sixth year as a practical therapy.

The Education of the Curative Eurythmist

During the years following the inauguration of curative eurythmy, many doctors taught exercises to their patients. Few eurythmists were trained in the new therapy. The demand became so great that courses were begun which taught curative eurythmy to those without artistic eurythmy training. However, it became apparent that the full application of eurythmy as a therapy, required a mastery of the art in its original form. New training courses were founded in which students were required to have completed a training in artistic eurythmy.

The basic artistic eurythmy training was carefully tailored by Rudolf Steiner. It is a training for the whole person, an awakening of the artistic in a broad sense. In the April 30th, 19 conference, held in Stuttgart, Rudolf Steiner set forth a curriculum for the first eurythmy school. It was to include speech and music eurythmy, studies in all aspects of poetry, readings in classical literature, aesthetics and an overview of all art forms. A thorough course in music theory as well as singing was also indicated. Geometry, basic anatomy and physiology, with an emphasis upon the musical-sculptural relationships within the human form was to be included. Speech formation, recitation, an introduction to Waldorf pedagogy and pedagogic eurythmy and studies in anthropology and anthroposophy completed the requirements. Finally, every graduate was to be able to improvise on the piano!

Curative eurythmy training is built upon the foundations of the four year basic eurythmy schooling. Comprehensive courses in physiology, anatomy and pathology are given as a foundation for understanding and practicing curative eurythmy exercises. The principles of anthroposophical medicine are taught in connection with learning Rudolf Steiner's indications for curative eurythmy. Additional courses in internal medicine, pediatrics, curative education, psychiatry, neurology, dentistry, ophthalmology and other specialties are taught in light of an anthroposophical understanding of man. Trainings in Europe last about two years. Two practical apprenticeships, one lasting 8 weeks, the second lasting about a year are required. Diplomas are issued by the Vorstand at the Goetheanum, in Dornach Switzerland.

Eurythmy and Curative Eurythmy in the Waldorf Schools

Waldorf Education is in itself a remedy for many of the ills which accompany the time in which we live. An intensification of the powers of intellect and a corresponding weakening of the 'will', characterize our age. This imbalance leads to knowledge void of inner conviction and creative applications. Abstract thinking replaces practical thinking. Waldorf Education seeks to help its students become practical human beings, capable of making meaningful contributions to the world. The art of eurythmy, in its three forms makes a significant contribution in this direction.

It is important for Waldorf students to see eurythmy as a performing art. The imaginative presentation, rooted in the creative laws of speech and music help to restore the experiences of sight and sound. Simulated voices, synthetic music, abbreviations and codes, all of these are defied by the art of eurythmy. Speech artistically formed, is heard and unamplified. When the movement and sound merge into one impression, the souls of the audience are lifted onto another plane of consciousness. A truly imaginative experience takes place, one which is carried as an impression back into school life.

Class eurythmy has much to lend to education. In its essence, it is a social training, a true working together. It strengthens life, social life, in a genuine sense for it teaches the art of creating human communities. It also cultivates a living relationship to the essential elements of music and language. Still nothing can be learned or accomplished without the interest and cooperation of ones classmates. Class eurythmy is an important activity, a stage for learning to live and work with others.

Curative eurythmy is a metamorphosed eurythmy, it supports the individual within the school community. Most of the exercises designed by Rudolf Steiner are directed to developmental difficulties which children can experience during the school years. They were designed to help children overcome specific problems which interfered with their education. Students from different grades were grouped together and brought into the gymnasium. The curative eurythmist went around the hall, instructing one group at a time. The students then practiced the given exercise and returned to their classrooms. Only more severe difficulties, often of a medical nature, were treated on a one to one basis. As years passed and the demands of educating changed, it became necessary to treat almost all children individually, or in very small groups. The larger schools in Europe employ three or four full-time curative eurythmists. Curative eurythmy has become an integral part of Waldorf Education. It supports the physical, emotional and academic growth of the child.

Curative Eurythmy in Light of Anthroposophy

Curative eurythmy can affect the way the four fold human being (consisting of the ego organization, the astral body, the etheric or life body, and the physical or mineral body) acts within the three physiological systems. These are the nerve sense system, the rhythmical system and the metabolic limb systems. These three greater organ systems are the centers at which the soul takes hold of the body, and the body and the soul produces consciousness: The principles which enables eurythmy to heal, rests upon the revelation concerning these systems given by Rudolf Steiner. He pointed out that it is an error to assume that all activities connected with consciousness emanate from the nervous system, as is commonly believed. The thinking has its center in the brain and the nerves which serve it. The feelings and emotions, however, are rooted in the rhythmical system which includes the heart and lungs. The will or ability to act on every level of human existence has its center in the processes of digestion and in all metabolic functions. These functions are most directly related to the limbs.

The physical body, which during waking hours obeys the laws of the physical world, is lifted onto another plane when eurythmy takes hold of it. The otherwise mechanical movements determined by space, weight and structure, no longer limit the movements of the body. Rudolf Steiner described this 'magical' process as follows: "When a person does eurythmy the physical body glides into the movements of the etheric body." When a eurythmy gesture is done, the visible physical body obeys the laws of an invisible body or organization. All eurythmy movements originate in life processes or the etheric body, the anabolic processes of man. These processes are in greatest equilibrium with catabolic forces within the rhythmical system. By way of the rhythmical system the other two systems can be enlivened. Thus eurythmy means 'harmonious rhythm'. Rudolf Steiner described how man is really only healthy in his rhythmical system and thus all true healing must be found there. (This is the way in which eurythmy works.) Rudolf Steiner described how eurythmy contains the inherent movement which hold sway during the time when a person sleeps. Because the person remains awake while doing curative eurythmy, the effect, which is an up-building renewing force, is even stronger than in sleep.

Curative Eurythmy in Light of Anthroposophy continued

The movements of the body are condensed in the acts of speech and song. When these activities are held back and their movements given over to the limbs, we have eurythmy. The astral and the ego are of course active but the dynamic movements are characteristic of the etheric body. A kind of reflex action takes place when curative eurythmy is carried out. The action of the limbs works directly upon the breath and blood, altering and harmonizing its function. Through repetition of single or groups of sound gestures, the ill organism can be guided to renewed harmony. The message which the body receives reaches the nerve sense and the limb metabolic systems. Therefore, one needs to understand which gestures specifically affect which organs in order to be of any help. The consonants affect most strongly the processes of digestion. They have a relationship to the elemental world of warmth, fluid, gas and mineral. The vowel gestures work directly upon the breath and from there can reach the nervous system and brain. They stimulate organic egoism or self-consciousness. The consonants stimulate interaction with the world. The complete nature of the human organism, the totality to which its systems belong, lends the therapeutic effects^{of} curative eurythmy to the whole person. Therefore, it is not surprising that positive changes in the psyche, in attitude and emotions accompany the results of the curative eurythmy exercises, even those done for physical illnesses.

This ability to reach into the body and bring about harmony where disharmony had developed characterizes curative eurythmy and explains its application in many fields of therapy. Several factors play a dynamic role in positive results. Firstly, the will to heal oneself must be present. With children, this will must be stimulated by the therapist. Enthusiasm, humor and at the same time the greatest sincerity must enter as a mood into every session. Because the etheric body of the child is engaged in growth, the effects of the work can show themselves very quickly. The adult, by comparison, must learn how to engage these anabolic forces which are otherwise consumed by adult life, especially the demand which abstract thinking makes upon the life body. The adult must learn an art of healing. The whole key lies within the origins of curative eurythmy, that is, the art of eurythmy itself. If curative eurythmy falls out of the artistic sphere and becomes a physical task, no results can be expected. It is not the form of exercise but a practical application of knowledge, made available to the person in need of therapy.