

Eurythmy: Meditation in Movement

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If you are a musician and you are asked to play, you pick up your instrument and you start to perform. What about the idea that one's own body is an instrument and that life's circumstances provide the music?

Or in words expressed by Novalis, a German poet of the Romantics: "There is only one temple in the world, and that is the human body. Nothing is more sacred than this high form." Going back to the image of the instrument we might say that our bony structures serve as the frame for this most remarkable instrument, and the nerves provide the strings on which life's mysteries are played.

The human body on the other hand can also be experienced as a trap if we feel pain or if we realize its limitations. How can we break through this wall that hinders us to go beyond the mere physical reality of the material world? We are often tempted to use drugs to break the walls of our own limitations, but only for a short time. What happens if the trip is over and we are faced once again with our own self?

In our time of the 21st century the understanding that there is something more than what the eye beholds is more and more spoken about. Meditation workshops, yoga classes and other forms of self development are offered everywhere in Western society.

What role does Anthroposophy play in this expanding awareness and how does eurythmy contribute to this? I am asked almost daily to explain what eurythmy is about. I have many different answers depending on who is standing in front of me. I might say: "Eurythmy is a meditation in movement", or "speech and music made visible". Many listeners let it go at that, but those who want to know more might say: "show me something."

Rather than demonstrating at first I might say: "lift your arm up above your head." This seems fairly easy, anybody can do that. Now I say: "Try to do the same movement and experience as you move your arm up, that there is the same arm movement going down as an invisible counter stream." So now when we lift our arm we try to pay attention to this space underneath the arm. We might notice that by doing this simple exercise our otherwise heavy arm can become almost weightless without using our physical muscles. Have you ever wondered how a conductor can lift his/ her arms for over two hours without feeling tired? Where is the buoyancy coming from? What is the secret? The secret is the life forces or etheric forces. The same forces which open the buds and blossoms in spring and are involved in all growing and becoming. Eurythmy works with these very same forces.

HOW DID EURYTHMY COME ABOUT?

In a lecture given in Wales in 1923 Rudolf Steiner sums it up in the following way: "Eurythmy within the anthroposophical movement has come about like a gift of destiny." Because, much earlier, in 1912 he was asked the following question: "Would it be possible through certain rhythmic movements via the etheric body (the body which is the seat of all rhythms as well as health and illness) to work into the physical body in a healing, strengthening and regulating way?" Rudolf Steiner didn't only enthusiastically affirm this question; he immediately offered to give instructions. And so from this one question asked at the right moment, it became possible to bring into being the new art form of eurythmy ("eu"- well or good, "rhythmos" – rhythm, movement). I have lived and worked with eurythmy for a long time and have come to know the great power and strength which can break walls spiritually. If eurythmy sounds interesting to you, here are some exercises you could try:

Fix a sheet of paper to the floor and sit in a chair in front of it. Put a pencil or crayon between your big toe and second toe of each foot. The first thing to do is to place both feet at the top of the page on the midline of the paper and draw two parallel lines towards the bottom of the page. This movement can be done repeatedly until you feel that the lines become stronger.

The next step is to draw a circle by starting at the top of the paper and draw both halves simultaneously bringing the feet together again at the bottom of the page. The important thing is to work with both feet at the same time, always mirroring the forms on the midline. A fun thing to do next is to write the alphabet in this way, keeping in mind that the right half is as we know the letters but the left is mirrored.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF WRITING WITH OUR FEET?

First of all we change our habits. We usually write with our hands, and now our consciousness has to reach down to our toes. Our hands are the expression of our soul. The feet on the other hand connect us to the earth: they carry us through life. We are mostly unaware of the work of our feet. The drawing with our feet helps to

penetrate our own instrument to the most removed parts of our physical body, the toes. The next exercise involves the picture of the six figures below; called the six figures of Agrippa von Nettesheim (This meditation should be done silently. The capitalized words “I THINK SPEECH” etc, should be said inwardly.)

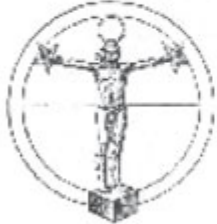
ORIENTATION IN SPACE: physical level



1st position:

Feet are together, arms horizontally stretched out to both sides.

I THINK SPEECH



2nd position:

The feet move apart slightly either in a single jump or stepping with the right foot. Arms move to the level of the larynx.

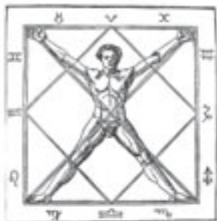
I SPEAK



3rd position:

The feet move further apart with a jump or stepping now with the left foot. The arms move to the level of the heart, i.e. the line connecting the hands touch the tip of the heart.

I HAVE SPOKEN



4th position:

The feet are the farthest apart, again either in jumping or stepping with the right foot. The hands are equally far extended forming a direct line with the feet.

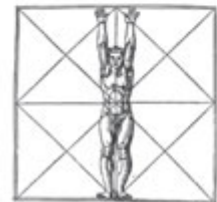
I SEEK MYSELF IN THE SPIRIT



5th position:

The feet come closer together approximately as the feet were in the 3rd position - this time stepping with the left foot or again jumping at once. The arms move to the top level of the head.

I FEEL MYSELF WITHIN MYSELF



6th position:

The feet are together again, this time using the right foot in stepping, or jumping. Arms are brought parallel up above the head.

I AM ON THE WAY TO THE SPIRIT (TO MYSELF)

METAMORPHOSIS: etheric level

When you become comfortable with these six positions, a next step could be to look at the metamorphosis from one position into the other and to pay attention to the stream/counter stream of the etheric. Compare the positions that are of the 1st, 4th and 6th form compared to the 2nd, 3rd and 5th. How different they are from

each other! In the first three we have the metamorphosis of the cross (from the horizontal to the diagonal to the vertical). And it is in the 4th position where we most easily perceive the invisible stream of the arms made visible within the movement of the legs. In the second three we mark important places within our body: larynx, heart, top of the head. The forms related to the cross are within a square, the others within a circle.



SOUL: astral level

In the words of Rudolf Steiner on July 12th 1924: “If one teaches eurythmy to adults, and one starts with this exercise, they will be able to easily find their way into the eurythmical element. And furthermore when the gestures in this exercise are made one after the other, they belong to the soul harmonizing, healing eurythmical gestures. Especially if people are so inwardly fragmented, that it manifests itself in metabolic illnesses, this exercise will be of great help in all cases.”

Within this exercise we can find the three soul forces: Thinking expressed in the words of the meditation, feeling shown through the movements of our arms/hands and willing made manifest through the stepping of our feet.

The importance of this 6 step exercise can be understood when you realize that the “I” is working through each step at successive levels of awareness: physical (1st position), etheric (2nd), the astral (3rd), spirit self (4th), life spirit (5th) and spirit man (6th). If you practice these two basic exercises, you may have some interesting experiences of becoming conscious of your instrument, the temple of the human body, and to gain a different experience of your position in space.

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Ruth Tschannen works with members of the Cascadia Society in North Vancouver, is involved in activities at the local Rudolf Steiner Centre and has been a student of Anthroposophy all her life. We will continue this topic in the next issue and focus on local activities.