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**ABOUT A POSSIBLE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE SO-CALLED
“CORONA VIRUS“ AND THE FORMATION OF IDEAS:
An Attempt at an Anthroposophical Contemplation**

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About the possible Connection between the so-called „Corona Virus“ and the Formation of Ideas

An Attempt at an Anthroposophical Contemplation

Our life, which is concentrated on doing things visibly outside, is withdrawing; Schools, universities, public institutions, cinemas, theaters, swimming pools, etc., are closing; people are to stay at home, and suddenly I can no longer feel the feverish flickering that otherwise runs through the city every day (and usually also at night) to the same extent. Suddenly, restless action seems to give way to a calm that can be felt, almost like a veil sinking down onto the city ...

Yet could not precisely this unexpected calm, this "being stopped in the middle of life", this ever expanding "nothing", also make one afraid. Added to this, there are the government's strict, isolating measures, but also the type of media coverage that keeps the fear of illness welling up more and more.

During this time, it will be particularly important for many to find out more about the effects of viruses, the protection against them, etc.; for others, to the contrary, it will be their principal (certainly very justified) interest to become aware of and describe the (power) political causes and consequences of what is happening. I do not want to say anything against these activities, but here I suggest a different way of dealing with the special time now gained. I think that we can find an activity that is directly related to the events and could even take hold of and change them, for now more than ever, the inner attitude (not the doing things visibly on the outside!) with which one encounters the events taking place in the world, will interweave into the course of things; and I believe that this attitude can even help to avert the impending danger of a "pandemic of fear" that would be far worse and more destructive than the wave of diseases we can observe today.

On May 5, 1914, Rudolf Steiner gave a lecture in Basel¹ in which he went into germs and bacilli – “viruses” had not yet been discovered. If one observes today's events surrounding the so-called “corona viruses”, it becomes clear that the process of “infection” is the same as that described by Rudolf Steiner.

Rudolf Steiner explained:

„As is well known, there is a fear in our time that can be compared quite justifiably with the medieval fear of ghosts or specters. This is today's fear of germs or bacilli. The two states of fear are objectively the same. They are also completely the same in so far as each of the two ages, the Middle Ages and the Modern Age, behave as befits them. The Middle Ages had a certain belief in the spiritual world, and it quite naturally was afraid of spiritual beings. Modern times lost that belief in the spiritual world, so it believes in what is material and is afraid of material beings, even if they are ever so small. Objectively speaking, the one difference that could at most be found in this similarity is that the ghosts are, at least to some extent,

¹ In: GA 154, p.45-47. My emphasis – I.D.

proper beings compared to the tiny germs that can, I would say, by no means really make a commotion with their being such that one could really be seriously afraid of them as with a proper ghost. ...

Now it is a matter of fact, and this is the essential thing that should be emphasized today, that germs can only become dangerous when they are nurtured. One should not nurture germs! Certainly, the materialists will also agree with us if we make the demand that germs should not be nurtured, but if we go ahead and speak from the point of view of a true spiritual science about what nurtures them the most, then they will no longer go along with us, these materialists. Germs are most intensely nurtured when people take nothing other than materialistic attitudes into their state of sleep. There is no better means for this nurturing, than going into sleep with only materialistic ideas and then working back from there, from the spiritual world, from one's I and astral body, onto the organs of the physical body that are not part of the blood and nervous system. There is no better means to foster germs than to sleep with a materialistic attitude. Actually, there is still at least one means that is just as good as this: that is, to live at the focus of an epidemic or endemic disease and to absorb nothing else than the symptoms all around you in that you are filled solely and completely with the feeling of fear in the face of the disease. That is certainly just as good! If you cannot place anything before yourself other than fear in the face of the diseases that are playing out all around you at the focus of an epidemic and then go into sleep at night with the thought of fear, then you are creating in your soul the unconscious afterimages, the imaginations that are permeated by fear; and this is a good means of fostering and of nurturing germs. If you can just moderate this fear a little bit by means of working with active love, for example, where during the carrying out of care for the sick you can somewhat forget that you could also be infected, then you also definitely dampen down the nurturing forces for the germs.

...and truly, more than by any means now being brought forward by materialistic science against everything called germs, one could work much more, indescribably more effectively for the future of humanity if one imparts ideas to people by means of which they are brought away from materialism and can be inspired to work from the spirit with active love. More and more in the course of this {20th} century, the knowledge must be spread around of how the spiritual world is absolutely not indifferent to our physical life, how it has an all-pervading significance for the physical world, because in fact from falling asleep to waking up we are within the spiritual world and remain active from there for the physical body. Even if this does not immediately reveal itself, it is nonetheless the case."²

According to Rudolf Steiner, it is the attitude of the soul lived out during the day and the images and ideas unconsciously taken in with it – more precisely: the "materialistic

²Ibid. My emphasis – I.D.

attitude" and the "*fear of this disease*" – which lead to the fact that "germs" (*and also viruses*) can be "*nurtured*" by us at night and therefore can become dangerous.

"*Unconscious afterimages, imaginations that are permeated with fear*" can lead to a kind of "*imitation or copying*". This happens because the "*unconscious afterimages*" of the dreaded disease are imprinted on the body during sleep. Then, however, there takes place what is generally considered "*infection or contagion*" today.³

Rudolf Steiner speaks of the danger that these afterimages can spread particularly strongly in certain geographic centers. Today too, we are confronted with just such epidemic centers; at first it was mainly the area around Wuhan in China, then northern Italy, parts of Spain, etc. Determined by the local place, strong fear-generating events have led to the fact that such an infectious pandemic could break out more strongly in certain places than in others.

This is why it seems extremely important to me not to "fill up" oneself with the pictures of illness that are continuously propagated by the media (this includes the image of the alleged "virus": the spherical, pointed presentation, which can always be seen and is thus embedded deep in the unconscious of people). Instead, a counteracting process can be set in motion when one struggles with the picture of the human being in Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy. Only this picture of the human being can counteract today's fear-pandemic spreading around plague-like, whose most important idea consists in the fact that infection takes place via the transmission of droplets, and the other person could be responsible for my illness and maybe even my death.⁴

³ In a meeting with practicing doctors on April 22, 1924, Rudolf Steiner said: "*It can be said that the risk of infection is extremely high in the case of smallpox. Only one should not be so thoughtless as to think right away of physical contact in the transmitting of it, rather even with smallpox the emotional factors are particularly strong. This could be proved in that if you were able to lock yourself away in the right manner, you could protect yourself very well. I am able to speak about this because once when I was twenty-two years old - I need not mention the circumstances - I taught a student whose mother lay right next door with black smallpox, only separated by a folding screen from the room where I was teaching. I didn't do anything about that, I continued the lessons the whole time until the mother got well again. But I was very glad to do that, especially to see how one can protect oneself if one absolutely takes the smallpox, including those who suffer from black smallpox, quite objectively just like another object, such as a stone or a shrub, towards which one has no further feelings of fear or any other emotional feeling, but takes it as an objective fact. Indeed, a high risk of infection is to be met with here. This is why the emotional factor can also play a major role with infection. I have never been afraid to expose myself to any kind of infection, and have never actually been infected, never suffered from an infectious illness. I was thus able to determine that simply the awareness, the strong awareness of the existence of a disease by the astral body can be the cause of the disease. The strong awareness of a disease by the astral body can be the cause of the disease.*" GA 314, S. 286.

⁴ Rudolf Steiner has repeatedly referred to the connection between the prevailing materialistic picture of the human being and the spreading anti-social impulses. Today, in view of the "Corona crisis", we can experience this connection more directly and painfully "on our own body" than ever before. Today the other is considered the greatest enemy – that person must be responsible for my sickness or even my death, for they, "the other one", would – directly – be able to transmit to me the "viruses" crouching in them. This is the general view, which means that anti-social behavior is now being called forth on a large scale. Old people are to be isolated even more than they already are; every meeting is generally prevented; the children, who have already forgotten how to have a healthy relationship with nature, have forgotten how to play outside their four walls and are to stay at home - preferably in front of the television - etc. In addition, this anti-social behavior, in which fear,

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In order to overcome the “*materialistic attitude*”, which according to Rudolf Steiner is responsible for the fact that germs can be “*nurtured*”, it is not enough to draw attention to specific contents of the thoughts of Rudolf Steiner's writings and lectures and to deal with them in such a way one usually deals with thought content (today also called "information"). How little such an unfortunately widespread use of Rudolf Steiner's work has contributed to overcoming the materialistic view of the world and of human beings can be seen precisely today; the answers that Anthroposophists find to the pressing questions posed by the “Corona crisis” often differ only slightly in nature from those prevailing in the mass media.

It is far from sufficient to acquire certain contents of thought that have been taken from Rudolf Steiner's work, for even more than this content it is a question of the "how" with which this content is moved. So long as the ideas that are formed on the basis of Rudolf Steiner's work are easily “available”, so long as they - like all other ideas - are allowed to be inserted clearly defined and statically in the ordinary world of imagination, so long one is not dealing with such ideas that make up Rudolf Steiner's work. The ideas corresponding to this work have the peculiarity that they only exist as long as the thinker tries to form them, so that they dissolve as soon as this force struggling to form them diminishes, and so they therefore have to be formed again and again, so that in the end the thinker can never really “place something in front of him or herself”.

In order to continue to participate in the world process associated with Anthroposophy, the main thing today is to achieve a new "how" in dealing with Rudolf Steiner's work.

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The connection that Rudolf Steiner establishes between the formation of ideas in the unconscious on the one hand and a possible illness via “germs” or “viruses” on the other, completely contradicts the prevailing way of thinking today. This way of thinking is based on the assumption that – taking place purely physically – there is an "infection" from person to person. What if the real protection against such a disease, however, was not primarily to wash your hands regularly, disinfect them, and avoid meeting people, but instead to maintain another type of hygiene: that of trying to awaken to the way you form ideas?

The extent to which the formation of ideas is unknown to the present-day person, since this takes place in a state similar to deep sleep or at best dream consciousness, can only be measured when one has begun to overcome sleep. Then it can also be intuited that this unconsciousness, which forms the basis of our ideas, must always lead to ideas that are untrue since they do not correspond to reality. Every looking back into our own life will confirm this:

depression, yes, hatred, etc. can spread better than on any other "breeding ground" - that this anti-social behavior is now considered something "social", one thinks that this exclusion and demarcation is synonymous with "consideration" of others. Any understanding of the actual causes that lead to the disease is thus eliminated. - More than ever, therefore, those who feel connected to Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy are called upon to see through the materialistic picture of the human being created by natural science and to struggle to overcome it.

⁵ From this side, too, peoples' view is often not drawn to the essentially different picture of the human being that is fundamental to the entire assessment of the current situation.

How often have we found out that what we at first thought we recognized, turned out to be wrong in the course of further development, just as ideas we had formed of our future, in the face of the future that then came about, only appeared like empty castles in the air; for that reality, i.e. what works in our life and shapes it as fate, is unknown to us.

An awakening to how ideas are formed can therefore become a central need for the soul. The written works of Rudolf Steiner are instructions for such an awakening, yet the transcripts of Rudolf Steiner's lectures can also become an area of practice. This, of course, only if one's eye is not directed solely to a specific individual idea content, rather to the process by which Rudolf Steiner developed that content.

In order to recognize the way in which Rudolf Steiner tries to make people conscious of the formation of ideas, it is not only necessary to consider the relationships between the thoughts and images he depicts. Again and again, the relationship between Rudolf Steiner's thoughts and our ideas, i.e. to the world of ideas of ordinary consciousness that these thoughts and images encounter, has to be taken into consideration. The beginning of the lecture, from which the above quotation was taken, may serve as an example here.

This lecture was introduced with a question:

"What meaning can spiritual science have for us as human souls, what meaning can Anthroposophical life have?"

Rudolf Steiner thus expresses the need of the soul that led his listeners to him and in the next step extends the question as follows: *Why should we deal with a world during our lifetime that we will in any case enter after death?* – That a knowledge of the world of the dead is of the greatest importance for life: the answering of this question has to do with the entire lecture.

His further procedure is interesting. Rudolf Steiner repeatedly explains that, based on logical thinking and at the same time drawing attention to an area that is not accessible to everyday consciousness and is experienced by it as a dark, empty "nothing", the concept of sleep may be developed from the relationship between life and death. This is done in three steps:

Even from simple *"logical thinking"* can be seen, says Rudolf Steiner, that (1) in view of their sleep experience, people *"only spend part of the time between birth and death in the physical world"* – and in fact that part of the time when they are awake. (2) Because on the one hand *"people are as little informed about their sleep life as about their life after death"*, the immediate proximity between sleep and death can be understood. (3) On the other hand, there is also a difference between the two, for one cannot *"deny"* ones *"continuing to live on in sleep"*. – In view of these three steps in thought, the riddle of human existence as such is opened up; the attentive listener (and reader) of the lecture can become aware of their continuing state of sleep, even when awake. The secret of the everyday experienced sleep, to which one is not capable of awakening, of which though one can become aware, becomes experienceable. The great secret that human beings can become aware of their unconsciousness has thus been revealed; the listener (and reader) is, as it were, "attuned" to the following explanations.

Since the lecture was held before members of the Anthroposophical Society, Rudolf Steiner could now build on the previous knowledge of his listeners, according to which a different relationship between the various bodies occurs in sleep than in the waking state: In sleep – in contrast to the waking state – one is with the I and astral body "*outside of the physical and etheric body*". But this is "*only half the truth*". – At this point, Rudolf Steiner leaves the realm of imagination he has given us; how he does this is exemplified by the comparison now brought forward. It consists of the following: According to Rudolf Steiner, the assumption that the astral body and the I are outside of the physical and etheric body during sleep, is the same "*as if one said: At night the sun is outside the earth*"; and he goes on to explain: "*Isn't it true, that solely for those who live in Europe, the sun is indeed outside of their earth during the night time.*"

The listener (and reader) who is thinking along with him will notice that an assumption is made here that he cannot share. This assumption consists in the fact that the relationship between sun and earth is so thought of by Rudolf Steiner that, with the rhythm between day and night, this relationship would not in some way change the fact that during the day the sun (which for our experience is always outside the earth) shines on the earth, but at night does not. No, Rudolf Steiner talks about a change between the sun's being without or being within in relation to the earth.

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There are very specific thought images with the help of which Rudolf Steiner would like to bring the supersensible presented by him into a connection with our world of ideas developed on the basis of the sensible world. These thought images always have such a character that the side of the connection known to us, belonging here to our realm of experience – here the relationship between the sun and earth imagined by us – does not correspond to our usual idea. In a certain sense, one can speak of a kind of necessary "shifting" of our usual life of ideas, which is being called on here. Noticing this "shifting" suggested by Rudolf Steiner is the first step on the way to freeing these thought images from their stiffness, in which the ideas of our ordinary consciousness always remain.

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On the basis of this movable, though not completely understandable thought picture, Rudolf Steiner develops a picture-like idea of the realistic relationship of the various bodies to one another in the state of sleep. It is interesting to see how he hooks onto the already given comparison of the relationship between earth and sun during day and night, and moves and expands it. He explains:

„Really outside of, one should say, completely outside of our physical and etheric body are we with our I and astral body only after death. Strictly speaking, during sleep we are with our I and astral body outside of our blood and nervous system. But if the sun of our being, our I and astral body, goes down {sunset} for our blood and nervous system, which irradiates them during the day, they rise up {sunrise} for the other half of the human being, for the organs that are not of the blood and nervous system. During sleep, human beings are intimately connected with those organs. Really, just as our sun that shines for us during the day, when it sets for us, rises for other earthly dwellers, so it is with the I and astral body. When they set for our blood

and nervous system, they rise for the other organs and are then more energetically connected to them.”⁶

So with this is drawn the picture of thought on the basis of which Rudolf Steiner makes those statements about the effect of germs that I quoted at the beginning; the fear-riddled images of illness are imprinted at night via the astral body in the "other organs", i.e. into that "*which does not, as it were, originate from the blood and nerves themselves*".

The reader should read Rudolf Steiner's entire lecture, for I think that the work on this lecture, what we want to understand today – namely the real causes of an infection – can be experienced through the way in which Rudolf Steiner develops the ideas in this lecture. If one takes these inner, never closed-off thoughts into sleep, one will be able to experience how the fear of infection is transformed and an ever stronger sense of reality can replace the shining appearances surrounding us.

⁶ Lecture of May 5, 1914, loc. cit.