

The Pandemic and the “Pedagogical Law”

Helping each other in times of stress

by Jeff Tunkey

Our time on Earth may include a multitude of joys and pleasures, but the facts of life are that all sorts of individual struggles will be frequent, and then death is eventually a universal experience. The COVID pandemic has created a time when all are suffering together (some more, some less, but none unaffected). A global crisis thus unlike any other we’ve experienced is by nature especially disorienting. I guess you could say it’s “normal to think, say or do normally abnormal things under this type of pressure”. How can we help each other re-find our higher selves?

Rudolf Steiner’s “pedagogical law” – together with his description of the fourfold human being – offers a clear lens on the nature and facets of such shared disorientation, and on how we can help each other to better cope with the emotional aspects of this or any other dramatically changed life circumstances.

Feelings of stress and disorientation are the result of disruption of our “finer bodies” as described by Steiner. Our etheric body, also commonly known as our habit body or body of life forces, is under attack, with sleep problems, upsets to daily rhythms or diet, effects of increased screen time, etc. Our astral body, the body of motion and emotion, is pushed and pulled in many ways, including changes in exercise, reduced socialization, and all the pendulum swings of grieving as described by Maslow.¹ Our ego body, our “self-image”, may be presented with great changes and challenges every single day.

Faith, Love and Hope

In various venues near the end of 1911, Steiner delivered a two-lecture presentation entitled “Faith, Love and Hope: The Third Revelation.”² In the first of these, he makes a very meaningful and useful declaration about the anthroposophic terminology most often used to label the finer bodies.

“Today we will begin by first saying a few words about man’s inner being. You know that if we start from the actual centre of his being, from his ego, we come next to the sheath to which we give the more or less abstract name of astral body. Further out we find the so-called etheric body, and still further outside, the physical body.”

Steiner noted that many modern people and those in the scientific community now believe that:

¹ Maslow, Abraham H., *Toward a Psychology of Being*, Sublime Books, 2014

² Steiner, Rudolf, *Faith, Love, and Hope: The Third Revelation*, lecture on Dec. 2, 1911

“...the ages of faith are long past; they were fit for humankind in the stage of childhood but people have now progressed to knowledge. Today they must have knowledge of everything and should no longer merely believe.”

Somewhat later, Steiner rebutted this modern attitude:

“It is not for a person to decide whether to lay aside faith or not; faith is a question of life-giving forces in the soul. The important point is not whether we believe or not, but that the forces expressed in the word ‘faith’ are necessary to the soul. For the soul incapable of faith [will] become withered, dried-up as the desert.”

He subsequently stated that:

“If we do not possess forces such as are expressed in the word ‘faith’, something in us goes to waste; we wither as do the leaves in autumn.... By losing the forces of faith they would be incapacitated for finding their way about in life; their very existence would be undermined by fear, care, and anxiety. To put it briefly, it is through the forces of faith alone that we can receive the life which should well up to invigorate the soul. This is because, imperceptible at first for ordinary consciousness, there lies in the hidden depths of our being something in which our true ego is embedded. This something, which immediately makes itself felt if we fail to bring it fresh life, is the human sheath where the forces of faith are active. We may term it the faith-soul, or — as I prefer — the *faith-body*. It has hitherto been given the more abstract name of astral body. The most important forces of the astral body are those of faith, so the term astral body and the term faith-body are equally justified.

A second force that is also to be found in the hidden depths of a man’s being is the force expressed by the word ‘love’. Love is not only something linking men together; it is also needed by them as individuals. When a man is incapable of developing the force of love he, too, becomes dried-up and withered in his inner being. We have merely to picture to ourselves someone who is actually so great an egoist that he is unable to love. Even where the case is less extreme, it is sad to see people who find it difficult to love, who pass through an incarnation without the living warmth that love alone can generate — love for, at any rate, something on earth. Such persons are a distressing sight, as in their dull, prosaic way, they go through the world. For love is a living force that stimulates something deep in our being, keeping it awake and alive — an even deeper force than faith. And just as we are cradled in a body of faith, which from another aspect can be called the astral body, so are we cradled also in a *body of love*, or, as in Spiritual Science we called it, the etheric body, the body of life-forces. “

Steiner went on to state that it is impossible for any person to completely empty his being of the force of love; that one who is highly egotistical will still, for example, at least love money.

“This shriveling of the forces of love can also be called a shriveling of the forces belonging to the etheric body; for the etheric body is the same as the body of love. Thus at the very centre of a man’s being we have his essential kernel, the ego, surrounded by its sheaths; first the body of faith, and then round it the body of love.”

And finally he described a health-giving force for the physical body.

“If we go further, we come to another set of forces we all need in life, and if we do not, or cannot, have them at all — well, that is very distinctly to be seen in a man’s external nature. For the forces we need emphatically as life-giving forces are those of hope, of confidence in the future. As far as the physical world is concerned, people cannot take a single step in life without hope. They certainly make strange excuses, sometimes, if they are unwilling to acknowledge that human beings need to know something of what happens between death and rebirth. They say: “Why do we need to know that, when we don’t know what will happen to us here from one day to another? So why are we supposed to know what takes place between death and a new birth?” But do we actually know nothing about the following day? We may have no knowledge of what is important for the details of our super-sensible life, or, to speak more bluntly, whether or not we shall be physically alive. We do, however, know one thing — that if we are physically alive the next day there will be morning, midday, evening, just as there are today. If to-day as a carpenter I have made a table, it will still be there tomorrow; if I am a shoemaker, someone will be able to put on to-morrow what I have made to-day; and if I have sown seeds I know that next year they will come up. We know about the future just as much as we need to know. Life would be impossible in the physical world were not future events to be preceded by hope in this rhythmical way. Would anyone make a table to-day without being sure it would not be destroyed in the night; would anyone sow seeds if he had no idea what would become of them?

It is precisely in physical life that we need hope, for everything is upheld by hope and without it nothing can be done. The forces of hope are connected with our last sheath as human beings, with our physical body. What the forces of faith are for our astral body, and the love-forces for the etheric, the forces of hope are for the physical body. Thus a man who is unable to hope, a man always despondent about what he supposes the future may bring, will go through the world with this clearly visible in his physical appearance. Nothing makes for deep wrinkles, those deadening forces in the physical body, sooner than lack of hope.

The inmost kernel of our being may be said to be sheathed in our faith-body or astral body, in our body of love or etheric body, and in our *hope-body* or physical body; and we comprehend the true significance of our physical body only when we bear in mind that, in reality, it is not sustained by external physical forces of attraction and repulsion — that is a materialistic idea — but has in it what, according to our concepts, we know as forces of hope. Our physical body is built up by hope, not by forces of attraction and repulsion.”

He summarized as follows:

“Faith, love, hope, constitute three stages in the essential being of man; they are necessary for health and for life as a whole, for without them we cannot exist. Just as work cannot be done in a dark room until light is obtained, it is equally impossible for a human being to carry on in his fourfold nature if his three sheaths are not permeated, warmed through, and strengthened by faith, love, and hope. For faith, love, hope are the basic forces in our astral body, our etheric body, and our physical body. ... Are not these three wonderful words urged upon us in the Gospel revelation, these words of wisdom that ring through the ages — faith, love, hope? But little has

been understood of their whole connection with human life, so little that only in certain places has their right sequence been observed.”



In *The Human Soul*,³ Dr. Karl König presents in a very uplifting way that faith, love and hope each have a “noble companion” – noble, that is, if we use them to awaken to concerns and then put them to use as a guide for what’s needed. Our task, he says, is to transform shame into hope, anger into love, and fear into faith. Without a doubt, the pandemic can make each of these efforts insurmountable if we try to go it alone.

The Pedagogical Law

In his lecture series on curative education, Steiner provides a fundamental precept for all that we do, not only as teachers but really in any human interaction.⁴ He sets this out as follows:

“Any one member of the being of man is influenced by the next higher member (from whatever quarter it approaches) and only under such influence can that member develop satisfactorily. Thus, whatever is to be effective for the development of the physical body must be living in the etheric body—in an etheric body. Whatever is to be effective for the development of an etheric body must be living in an astral body. Whatever is to be effective for the development of an astral body must be living in an ego; and an ego can be influenced only by what is living in a spirit-self, but there we should be entering the field of esoteric instruction. ... The teacher’s etheric body (and this should follow quite naturally as a result of his training) must be able to influence the physical body of the child, and the teacher’s astral body the etheric body of the child. The ego of the teacher must be able to influence the astral body of the child.... And I will show you how...the teacher’s spirit-self— of which he himself is not yet in the least conscious — influences the child’s ego.”

Walter Holtzapfel⁵ paints this helpful picture:

The heat from the sun cannot directly change the shape of a stone, but it is able to warm the air, thereby stimulating the circulation of the water, which rises into the air and falls again as rain to feed a brook. The flowing water finally shapes the stone into a pebble.

³ König, Karl, *The Human Soul*, Floris Books, Edinburgh, Scotland, 2006

⁴ Steiner, Rudolf, *Education for Special Needs*, Rudolf Steiner Press, East Sussex, UK, 2015

⁵ Holtzapfel, Walter, *Children with a Difference*, Lanthorne Press, UK, 2008

How We Can Help Each Other (and Ourselves)

Holtzapfel also makes clear that the pedagogical law is meant for our dealings in general with our fellow humans, i.e., with all ages, and not just in teacher-student realms. Thus, especially in a time when stress is the common denominator, we can offer others at least a homeopathic dose of the needed responses as Holtzapfel describes them:

- To help alleviate *shame and hopelessness*: *humor and humour* are etheric forces that nourish the physical aspect. Humor points to a need to keep a light touch and a sense of humor with each other, to remember to cut each other (or ourselves) some slack. Humour refers to what's 'in the air', i.e., soothing smells, sights and sounds.
- To help alleviate *emotionality and anger*: *empathy*, a receptive, accepting and listening attitude; at the personal level, proactively giving oneself permission to take a break when emotions overwhelm.
- To help alleviate *fear, loss of faith* in a better future: *ego forces*, maintaining a balanced viewpoint, equanimity where possible, not taking it personally when another is having a rough patch.
- To help alleviate *a buffeted ego*, diminished self-esteem: *prayer*, or engaging what may be called The Word. In addition to his delineation of the physical, etheric, astral and ego bodies, Steiner described a fifth body, Spirit Self, that is in the process of becoming in our human evolution. Steiner offered many verses for those in need. (I don't have a citation but I believe he once advised that in faculty child studies one should attempt to "think away everything physical and look for the striving.") I would also suggest Phillipians 4:8 for help in contemplating the higher self.

Looking at our shared pandemic problems through the above lens can provide both diagnosis and inspiration. That is: stop, consider, give the gift of patience, take time to observe when interacting with another. Physically, is the appearance okay? Emotionally, seems in particular need of a listening ear? Is the Ego anchored in as good a balance as might be expected under the circumstances? From these, what might be done to bring levity or loveliness to the situation, to create space for real conversation, or to meditate at another moment on one's higher self?

The above is adapted, in part, from the author's book "Educating for Balance and Resilience"⁶

⁶ Tunkey, Jeff, *Educating for Balance and Resilience*, Bell Pond Press, 2020