

## The Community-Building Impulse of the Foundation Stone Meditation

By Dick van Romunde

A number of people connected with Rudolf Steiner's spiritual science and the anthroposophical stream attended a Christmas gathering in 1923 (the so-called Christmas Conference). Subsequently, these same people related the profound impressions the gathering made upon them. For them, it had been an experience that penetrated their whole being and gave their lives a new direction.

One of these people was Willem Zeylmans van Emmichoven. When he spoke about this enduring moment, he expressed his feelings in such a way that the audience could experience the event for themselves. He experienced this impulse as something given to all of humanity, not only to those who were present. The people who took up this impulse from the Christmas Conference experienced it as enduring and transferable. Werner Pache and Willem Zeylmans gave the impulse the characteristic name of *the continuing effect of the Christmas Conference*.

After fire destroyed the building of the first Goetheanum, Rudolf Steiner stated that the Essential Nature of the Being that came to expression in the building had been spiritualized. This Being would be able to give inward form and reality to the community of anthroposophists if enough of them could develop the strong will to connect themselves with this Being. During the Christmas Conference, Rudolf Steiner gave the meditative Foundation Stone verses to awaken this will. When you intensively apply this meditation, you will have the experience of being connected with this community Being; you will become increasingly a *representative* of this Being. Such an inner experience could take place during the Christmas Conference. Those who had this experience were able to pass it on to others. Passing this experience on was the essential goal of a succession of conferences in the nineteen fifties, where as many people as possible were given the opportunity to take up the impulse of *the continued effect of the Christmas Conference*.

The first of these conferences took place shortly after the Second World War in a circle of about 80 people. This gathering made a decisive impression on the many participants (of which I was one), because after a few days a mood was created allowing Willem Zeylmans to relate the content of the Foundation Stone meditation to the forms and colors of the first Goetheanum and to the community-building impulse radiating from the Being connected with it. I remember vividly how a reverential silence arose during the perception of the words. It seemed to me as if I was receiving a being filled with gratitude, and penetrated by the noblest love. The forms of the Goetheanum were thereby experienced as three streams of force that are also expressed in the words of the Foundation Stone meditation. Through this experience one felt lifted up in a spiritual community. After Willem Zeylmans had spoken, the silence lasted for some time; the content received created such an intimate atmosphere that it did not allow for a verbal exchange of thoughts. Some days later, during the closing of the conference, a German physician described the experience with the following words: "We have been aware of infectious diseases for some time, but only now do we experience that infectious health conditions also exist." From the applause his words received one could gather that the described experience was one we all had felt.

In connection with the situation and discussions in which we find ourselves now in and around the Anthroposophical Society, it seems important to me to characterize the impression I received at that time. I have the feeling that those impressions are beyond a personal experience and have a universal character. Based on my experience, I am of the opinion that all who have the longing to inwardly belong to a community based on the principles of Christian spiritual science can realize this with the help of the Foundation Stone. The meditation was given for this purpose. Perhaps those who recognize their own experience in mine, notwithstanding personal differences, can feel strengthened by this.

## **Contemplation of Feelings**

Feelings pour through us. We experience manifold sympathies and antipathies that influence our judgments. Once in a while these feelings are like a storm. They leave us unfree while bringing to consciousness the awareness that judgments arising from these feelings are not yet connected with the truth. Through this awareness, a longing awakens in us to metamorphose the feeling life so it can become truthful. The second part of the Foundation Stone meditation calls upon a radical contemplation to realize this metamorphosis: *Practice Spirit Meditating*. This meditative practice of contemplating the true origin of our feelings leads to the discovery of self-love that creeps into many of our sympathies, giving them a false or untrue color. A more or less hidden aversion to all that is foreign to us lives in our antipathies and leads us away from the truth. A strong longing to free the feeling life from both discolorations gives us the impulse to become aware and work through it with the help of contemplation. Outer as well as the more important inner self-control will thereby increase.

We slowly come to the insight that in our uncontrolled feelings a part of our soul life that is *dead* comes to expression. This unconscious and untruthful stream of feelings is manifested in the death that the soul enters through its connection with the body on earth. Through working with the second part of the Foundation Stone meditation, the soul connects more and more with an opposite and gentle stream of feeling that unites with the life of truth. This conscious, awakened stream of feeling guides the dead and wild part of the soul through a destructive death process and connects it more and more with a realm where love for humanity dominates. "And you will truly feel in human weaving of souls."

In this resurrection process that brings the soul to life, love awakens in the true sense of this often misused word: a Christian love rises above all sympathies and antipathies directed toward humanity and creation. It was described in Willem Zeylmans' presentation regarding this healing stream of feeling as a stream going from East to West: "Let from the East be enkindled what through the West takes on form." I experience here a horizontal stream from left to right through the arms. This cleansing stream guides the unconscious part of the soul through an inner death to resurrection. Nobody is excluded from the Love that is generated from this lifelong process in the human being that is expressed in the words of the Gospel: "Love your enemies" (Mathew 5:44). It is consequently the foundation of a long lasting community structure. The Being of this community embraces all human beings; the human being can only exclude himself from it.

## **True Will**

The deeds we accomplish in our life have their origin in our will life. This can be to a greater or lesser degree oriented toward serving other people or groups of people, serving the life of the earth, or pursuing one's own interests. In the communal life of earth and humanity, pursuing one's own interest is beneficial only when a good physical and spiritual constitution is thereby maintained and necessary for a valuable contribution to the whole of social life. In contrast, the community is deprived of deeds it really needs when the will life is oriented toward a need for admiration, ambition, excess of lust and other self-serving traits.

This part of the will life can better be called *wish life*. Social sacrifice consists of distancing oneself totally or partially from this *wish life* in order for the true will life to be oriented intensely toward unselfish service. The more sacrifice is increased, the stronger the will life will be over the *wish life*, and through it the conscious will approaches those unconscious decisions that made our higher self connect with our physical body and our destiny. Our deeds will become increasingly an expression of this original will. "And you will truly live in human cosmic being."

A perceptible manifestation of this will is the decision to find and undergo a spiritual scientific path of schooling. This impulse repeats every day and can be experienced during meditation. In the above

described treatment of the Foundation Stone meditation by Willem Zeylmans it was, as you might say, transferred to the audience. I experienced it as a strong, decisive force of will that was directed from the highest heights through the human being into the deepest depths. "Let from the heights ring forth what in the depths finds its echo."

The experience of true will coming from the higher self makes conscious the connection with the beings of Christ and the Father. This will can also be experienced when contemplating two gospel texts. The serving will of the Christ being speaks through the words, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Matthew 20:28). The connection of this will with the will of the Father comes to expression in the *prayer struggle* in the garden of Gethsemane: "Not my will but thy will be done" (Matthew 26:40). The inner experience of the stream from the heights to the depths connects us with all others who experience this stream in one way or the other. This sacrificial stream forms the indestructible foundation for humanity as community.

### **Experiential Thinking**

Spiritual life in our time is to a high degree still dominated by pure intellectual thinking, which excludes other ways of thinking. Thinking out of the intellect has become a very strong way of thinking in recent centuries, and has created impressive technologies together with a world view that has a mechanistic character similar to technology. This view says the world originated in a big bang and will end in a "heat" death. Intellectual thinking like this does not experience concepts as spiritual realities and so attributes no reality to them. Further, intellectual thinking is not in a position to penetrate into the spiritual world where concepts originate.

Consequently, this way of thinking can only offer limited access to those sense-perceptible realms that are penetrated with impulses no longer perceptible with our physical sense organs. Those are realms in which life unfolds and where feelings and thoughts manifest themselves. It is for this reason that intellectual thinking is not in a position to actually immerse itself in the plant, animal and human kingdoms. An increasing number of people have a strong longing for a thinking capacity that has the capability to penetrate these kingdoms and the spiritual world active in them. This experiential thinking is to be distinguished from intellectual thinking, which only accesses those realms where pure mechanical laws rule.

In his book *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* Rudolf Steiner characterizes intellectual thinking in its relation to experiential and therefore living thinking by comparing it to a corpse in relation to a living human being (Chapter 8, Appendix). In addition to the study of this book, the spiritual scientific path of schooling has as its goal the achievement of a living thinking that allows direct experience of the spiritual world reality. In the Foundation Stone meditation, one is made aware of an inward perception of a stream of thought. Through this stream formative life forces of the body are led into thinking. The liberating stream that brings thinking to life is perceived as one from the *depths* of the body to its *heights*. Under its influence the head receives an improved blood circulation. In daily life this can be experienced when forming strong living thoughts. These thoughts are not only clear, but also *ensouled*, and they are nourished by will forces. Real creative artists know this *warm-headedness*, as well. All people who have encountered this *warm head* are striving with the help of thoughts to experience the phenomena with heart and soul and to silence their intellectual judgments. The *secrets* hidden in the plant kingdom, in the sensing and moving animals, and in the human beings carrying soul and spirit, begin to open up to this growing living thinking.

The thinking stream oriented from the depths to the heights announces that in the future living thinking will give us the possibility to break through the boundaries of our present understanding. The picture that comes to mind from this is a thinking that frees itself from the solid boundaries of the skull: the grave of our current thinking opens up. Based on pure intellectual thinking, only logical and mathematical

thoughts can unite people; there lies the boundary of its community-building impulse. The living stream of thinking is characterized in the words of the Foundation Stone meditation: “Let from the depths be entreated what in the heights will be answered,” and is experienced as an upward stream, overcoming intellectual boundaries. The living stream of thinking leads to an all-encompassing community building process because it leads the human being to the spiritual foundations of creation to which it belongs itself, and because it gives us a certainty similar to the experience of intellectual thinking with its mathematical truths.

In the course of strengthening this living thinking, we connect more and more with the spiritual truth lying at the foundation of all kingdoms: “And you will truly think in human spirit-grounds.” Instead of a big bang birth and a heat death, which is represented by dead intellectual thinking trapped in technicalities as the beginning and the end of world evolution, experiential thinking unites us through a growing consciousness with the reality of the creative forces and the beings connected with them. The truth of the gospel text regarding this beginning and end becomes an experience: “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1) and “Heaven and earth will pass away but my words remain” (Mark 13:31). They point to a pure spiritual world from which all is created and to which all will return.

### **Lasting connections**

I have tried to indicate the impressions I received of the three streams connected with the Foundation Stone meditation as I received them from Willem Zeylmans. Since then my impressions have become stronger. I have experienced the *infectious health condition* spoken of by the German physician through an increased awareness of the three streams, which metamorphose and ennoble willing, feeling and thinking. As we know, this transformation needs much time: it stretches over many incarnations and leads the three soul forces from being bound to the personality to a supersensible connection with our eternal higher individuality. During these ongoing processes, the impression is reinforced that we are by this means lifted in a close and eternal community of individualities.

Willem Zeylmans, following Rudolf Steiner, emphasized that the community resting on spiritual scientific foundations can come about only when a number of people can adequately achieve metamorphosis from self-interest to selfless interest. Because the described streams create effective and lasting streams linking our individualities, I have the strong impression that the community Willem Zeylmans wanted to create exists in deed, and that it can withstand the social storms that are the consequence of the self-interest that continues to confront us.



**Dick van Romunde** was born October 20, 1916 in the Netherlands, studied electro-technical engineering at Delft University of Technology, worked as a Waldorf teacher in the Geert Groote School in Amsterdam for twenty-two years, and since 1971 works with the Goetheanistic Natural Science Foundation. He is the author of a number of articles and several books based on a phenomenological approach to natural science, including *About Formative Forces in the Plant World* and *Perceiving Plants: Experiencing Elemental Beings*.

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