

The Mystery of the Earth

by Ita Wegman (1929)

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THE EARTH is the setting for human evolution. This has not always been the case, however, since humanity's ultimate origins lie in spirit and soul, for which the human body is only a vessel. The evolution of this vessel is the history both of the human race on earth, and of our earthly surroundings. If our evolution had been limited to the physical vessel, we would be looking at the evolution of an animal. The vessel is made human by the human spirit and soul. But what connects spirit and soul to the bodily human element? Because no earthly substance would have been able to effect this connection, a heavenly substance had to insert itself into the earth so the soul-spirit could dwell in the body.

The substances we find on earth have been excreted by life processes in the earthly environment. We see this quite clearly in the case of calcium, which was excreted by the animal life of primeval seas. Most substances we now habitually think of as inorganic reveal themselves to spiritual research as having emerged from life processes in the earthly environment. In primeval times, this life was a unity that differentiated into individual organisms only during the second geological epoch.

Some substances, however, such as the metals, came about in a different way. They are the influences of planets that radiate into the earth from the cosmos. Iron occupies a unique position among the metals, because instead of simply radiating in, it was left behind as a substance in the gaseous state at a time when the Earth and Mars orbits intersected. The substance thus introduced into earthly evolution enables spirit and soul, the cosmic element in human beings, to connect to the earthly element. Just as a magnet attracts iron, iron attracts the element of spirit and soul. Iron is a significant component of the warm blood that houses the spirit and soul element, the human "I", on the bodily level. Thus we see iron as guiding the cosmic element down into the earthly element. The entire first half of the Earth epoch of evolution, therefore, stands under the sign of iron. But in the course of earthly existence, once human beings have

awakened to the full power of the “I” pervading the bodily vessel from the inside out, they begin to turn back to the cosmos.

The meaning of the Earth epoch of evolution lies in this turning back to the cosmos, which human beings could not possibly accomplish through their own strength. Humanity would never have been able to bring about this complete reversal of the direction of earthly evolution. At the midpoint of the earth’s and humanity’s evolution, therefore, a cosmic impulse had to insert itself into the course of evolution. This happened through the descent to earth of a cosmic being, the exalted Sun Being himself, the Christ, who united himself with everything earthly through his death on the cross, thus transforming the earth in its inmost nature. The seed thus planted supplies the goal and direction for the events of all subsequent epochs. Until then, human beings had been controlled by the forces working in the stream of heredity and in the blood, but from that point onward the individual element became the deciding factor. Christ became the spirit of humanity as a whole; but at the same time, he also guides each individual so that humanity’s common goal can emerge from the progress of developing individuals.

The human “I”, the most individual aspect of each human being, has the unique quality of not wanting to remain self-contained. Instead, it wants to immerse itself in the being of the Other. What we know as lower selfishness or egotism is totally foreign to the “I”. Since the Mystery of Golgotha, therefore, everything that truly connects people is based on individual impulses, and thus on freedom. In the process of understanding our fellow human beings and submitting to their individual thoughts, in the moments when we receive the contents of their consciousness, we extinguish the contents of our own consciousness. Truly listening to another person is an act of extreme selflessness. When two people come together in freedom, recognizing each other in spirit, the old traditional symbol of the Mercury staff becomes a perceptible reality in spirit. A portion of each person’s I-organization leaves the body, submerges in the other person, and then returns to its own body. These two interpenetrating I-activities, which are associated with two souls, are the two snakes that twine upward around the staff of the spirit of truth. Thus Mercury leads human beings to freedom. In the new community, free individuals find each other in the spirit of truth, and the perception of truth becomes love. This is why Rudolf Steiner said in his book *The Threshold of the Spiritual World* that love is experiencing the Other in one’s own soul.

This is how individuals meet through Christ. It is Christ who allows one human "I" to awaken to another, and individuals unrelated by blood to become brothers and sisters. The ancient Mysteries foresaw this transition from a community of blood relationships to a community of freedom, and called the two halves of earthly evolution Mars and Mercury, respectively.

Where these things were known, Mercury was recognized as the "dissolver" who released people from their old ties and led them to freedom and to new, consciously willed connections. Thus everything soluble was called "mercurial". In the human body, this dissolving element is realized in the circulation of fluids, which initiation science also associates with the forces of Mercury. A person's temperament depends on the character of the flow of fluid in the body. If the rhythm of these flows is in harmony with the rhythm of the blood, the person's temperament is 'sanguine', named after the blood, *sanguis*. If the flow of fluid lags behind the rhythm of the blood, its movement becomes viscous and mucilaginous, and the associated temperament is called "phlegmatic". Then again, if the flow of fluid is more rapid, as is normally the case with bile, the associated temperament is called "choleric". "Melancholic" describes a temperament characterized not by movement of enlivened fluids (fluid "circulation" almost no longer applies here), but by the sluggishness of the substances themselves, which causes fluids to back up or stagnate.

Our evolutionary goal as human beings is to balance all four temperaments harmoniously within ourselves, which happens when body, soul, and spirit are in balance. Each one of us is meant to develop a free soul that holds the balance between the sense-perceptible and spirituality. If the bodily element predominates, the person is melancholic. If the fire of the spirit prevails, the noble aspects of the choleric temperament are revealed. The soul element can appear in one of two nuances: The spirit endows it with sanguine mobility, the body endows it with phlegmatic sluggishness. All of these combinations (how the upper relates to the lower, the dominant to the dominated, the spiritual to the sensory) were once seen as expressions of Mercury, the being of many forms. People sensed that Mercury mediated the interpenetration of individual and divine existence and expressed this particular aspect of Mercury in the symbol of two interpenetrating triangles that form a harmonious six-pointed star. "Destiny" is the name we customarily give to the divine existence that pervades human beings. When we bring body, soul, and spirit into harmony, we make

our peace with destiny; we have learned to accept and love it. Individuals who can do so are ready to face destiny's challenges.

In the Mysteries of antiquity, it was Mercury who guided human souls over the threshold into the spiritual world. In the Christian era, Mercury not only leads us to the wisdom of the suprasensory, but also guides our conscious connection to new threads of destiny, so we learn to release the old and allow the new that brings healing to arise out of acts of love. The human organization in all its members is shaped in accordance with destiny, woven out of the deeds of previous earthly lives. Bringing about healing requires conscious new deeds directed from one person to another. Thus Mercury can contribute insight and impulses to act. Mercury facilitates the awakening of one human "I" on another so that, thus awakened, it may work into the future through healing activity. Mercury, therefore, is the great teacher of reincarnation and karma, enabling individuals and groups of individuals to understand each other consciously so they can work toward their common goal.

Belief in reincarnation and karma is not new; in the East it was kept alive, but in the West it was forgotten for hundreds of years before it reappeared in Christianized form in the nineteenth century. Now the concepts of reincarnation and karma include not only repeated earthly lives and human destinies, but also the connections of individuals to each other and to the earth. The Christianizing of these teachings consists in recognizing that the earth's destiny is included in human destinies. Buddhist teachings still turned away from the earth, but Christian teachings must turn toward it. The human beings living on earth today must now feel increasingly responsible for the destiny of planet Earth itself.

Through our modern transportation and information systems, humanity has begun to encompass the earth as a whole. Outwardly, in fact, we have essentially taken full possession of it. The consequence for humanity is unprecedented: a destined connection to the earth as a whole. We must become increasingly conscious of this big picture.

In antiquity, human beings were required to assume only very limited responsibility, while guidance of the world was left to the gods. By the eighteenth century, humanity believed it necessary to assume responsibility at least for the social realm; while nature, although no longer seen as divine, was still held to be governed by laws independent of human beings. In recent times, however, technology has allowed

us to control and dominate the forces of nature. As a result, we have become responsible for certain aspects of nature, and we shall soon see how this responsibility unfolds.

Formerly, with isolated exceptions, natural processes were clearly separated from historical events. Increasingly, they are now merging. The glorious Renaissance city of Venice stands in the sea on pilings cut from forests that once covered the mountains of Dalmatia. Deforestation of this area triggered climatic changes that have since intensified. This is one small example of the larger instances we can expect to see in the future.

This new relationship to nature also applies to the human constitution itself. Educators and physicians confront a bit of the natural world in each person's heredity; and increasingly, their task is to reshape it. If humanity neglects this task, we will soon confront natural phenomena that we ourselves have caused without realizing that we are doing so. We will find no explanations for the phenomena that emerge. Nature, formerly governed by eternal laws, will seem to devolve into chaos. We stand at the very beginning of this global situation. Nature is becoming a mirror of chaotic human behavior, as is evident in catastrophes and anomalies; we perceive them in nature's mirror without recognizing them as our own reflection.

The natural sciences seek to exclude the human subject from their concepts of the natural world. Until these concepts are adapted to include connections to human beings, they will be useless for understanding the transformations that are now occurring. Our image of nature must be expanded to include human beings. A philosophy that does so is called "anthroposophy" with good reason. Recognizing that nature in all its aspects has only been waiting for the human being, so to speak, is an insight that does not leave the human heart cold, but kindles enthusiasm for action. We must allow our actions to infuse all aspects of life with the results of the transformations we have each been able to effect through our moral struggles with those small portions of nature that are our bodies.

As a motif of nature, the human body is the result of the first half of the Earth epoch in evolution. In this respect, we are the crown of creation. Now we must transform ourselves and allow our deeds to flow into the earth as the result of what we have transformed in ourselves. The second half of Earth evolution lies dormant in human beings, and we must awaken it. Then the divine element that has abandoned

cosmic form to become human will find the way back to the cosmos through human deeds. When these deeds are performed out of the right impulse, the mercurial element of healing is at work.

Thus the divine element has relinquished its exclusive claim to power and glory, and has shifted responsibility for the entire universe to human beings so we can become free. We humans can take initiative, but our actions would remain weak if we acted alone. But we can be certain that if we enliven our thinking, apply our freedom, and allow a new element to emerge within us, the divine world will stand by us and provide the powerful help needed to complete what we have initiated out of right insight and freedom.

The signs of the times speak to us in unambiguous language. The natural world is changing, and it poses serious questions to us: Do we want to transform our thinking? Do we choose to recognize that the cosmic challenge that appears to us in chaos and suffering need not mean destruction, but rather the spiritualization of humanity?

This, then, is where we stand in the course of human and earthly evolution. In reality, humanity's evolution *is* Earth evolution. This new thinking has already approached us; we must simply seize hold of it with courage, and implement it conscientiously in all areas of life. What we do now must pave the way for this new thinking.