

Freedom, trans. Michael Lipson (NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1995)

⁵ Rudolf Steiner, *How to Know Higher Worlds: A Modern Path of Initiation*, trans. Christopher Bamford, afterword Arthur Zajonc (NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1994)

⁶ For idolatry, see Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1957)

⁷ Plato, *Law*; Spinoza, *Ethics*.

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The Bell Ringing verse

Robert McDermott

A verse is spoken each morning in Waldorf classrooms all over the world. Students begin the day with recitation which creates harmony and community in the classroom and the repetition builds strength in students. Although the verse is not discussed in class, it is important that the teacher has a deep understanding of it. Verses can accompany activities in the home as well, and create an atmosphere of togetherness and reverence. A grace before meals, a poem, prayer or verse at bedtime can become a family ritual.

The following is Robert McDermott's meditation on the Bell Ringing verse by Rudolf Steiner. Robert was neither a Waldorf student nor teacher, but is the parent of a student who attended a Waldorf school. He offers his meditation on this verse in the hope that it might encourage others to work with it themselves.

The verse was written by Rudolf Steiner for an eight year old student identified as R.G. The translation printed here uses gender inclusive language. Another translation 'At the Ringing of the Bells,' is printed in Rudolf Steiner, *Truth-Wrought-Words and Other Verses*, trans. Arvia MacKay Ege (NY Anthroposophical Press, 1979) p.13

The Bell Ringing verse

To wonder at beauty	To peace in our feeling
Stand guard over truth	To light in our thinking.
Look up to the noble	And teaches us trust
Decide for the good	In the working of God,
This leads us truly	In all that there is,
To purpose in living,	In the width of the world,
To right in our doing,	In the depth of the soul.

To wonder at beauty

Aristotle explained that the love of wisdom begins in wonder; so does beauty. By wisdom and beauty we come to love the human, the Earth and the Spirit. Beauty is as deep as the soul and as wide as the world. John Keats wrote: 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever.' Beauty lives in the fairy tale, in the rhythms of words and music, in the play of colors, in the secrets of nature, in the loving of persons, in silence.

Stand guard over truth

In a world gone clever, truth needs protection. We don't consider truth very often, or very well. We consider what works, what will fly. Why do we need truth when we manage so well with seems, sort of, and virtual? Imitation passes for the original in thinking as well as in art. We guard countries, possessions and persons in jail. To guard truth involves knowing where the real, including one's real self, begins and leaves off. Which of my thoughts and actions spring from myself, and which have been supplied by image doctors? If I so resolve, I can stand guard over the truth of my being, and guard against a counterfeit self created stealthily by social convention and my own unwakefulness.

Look up to the noble

Where is the noble after the deceptions of the Vietnam War and Watergate, after the psychology of co-dependency, projection, and the profit motive? Now that we know so well the Wizard of Oz, and have seen behind the veil of the altar and the throne, whom can we and our children admire? Perhaps it is still not too late for children and adults to find the noble in the sacrifice of parents and teachers, and the persistent search of children for ideals in action. Even though the love of parents and teachers for children never makes the evening news, such love happens every day. Daily heroism should be sufficient but we seem to need as well the extraordinary exemplar. Fortunately, exemplars are available in every culture and for each stage of life.

Steiner recommended fairy tales for young children, followed by myths and legends, and then history and biography—each as suitable resources for noble and health-giving images. The Bhagavadgita says: 'A great soul is difficult to find.' Great souls and noble ideals are found only by seekers. Thousands were in the presence of Jesus but did not see Him because they weren't seeking. Jesus said: 'Seek and you shall find.' It takes trust, effort, and helpful adults for children to find the noble within, and beyond.

Decide for the good

Goodness requires action. Black Elk had a magnificent dream, and he knew that it wasn't fully real until he acted on it in the world. The good is at risk for lack of attention, conviction and determination. The motto of Hampshire College says: *non satis scire*—'To know is not enough.' The Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram said: 'No more words. Action.' Though action is also insufficient; it is free and spiritually-based choosing that makes the difference. Accidental and unconscious performance of the good is less than doing the good deliberately. Non-choosing may work out, but the good issues from choosing. Rudolf Steiner not only leaves his readers free to decide for themselves what right might be in each case, but he knew that one's own decision is the only way to achieve the right.

The act of choosing is an essential part of the good in all areas, including artistic work and interpersonal relationships. Not choosing is also a choice. The inner and outer are not joined automatically, or easily, but by an integration of thinking, feeling and willing which is active and spiritually free.

This leads us truly to purpose in living

Most of us have to create meanings by our individuality, relationships, and special activities. The opportunity to chose one's life-work is recent in human history. In the ancient past, family circumstances fixed one's life-work. In the present time, a person chooses a life-work from a confusing array of choices. This life-defining task can be as much a problem, and a crisis, as an opportunity. As Marx wisely said (we needn't discard his true insights along with his failures), in capitalist societies meanings and purposes are typically not to be found in one's job. This requires inner resources. When children complain of 'having nothing to do,' and when adults fall into addictive behaviors, such inner strengths are blocked or underdeveloped. Vocation was a useful word, for it pointed to the reality of a wiser self able to detect the rightful lure of one's destiny.

To right in our doing

We are led to the right by our relation to the good. Right is the part of good which is made manifest by moral choice. We are in a quandary concerning competing values and claims to justice (e.g., imprisonment, euthanasia, abortion) because the right is rooted in realities too deep for ordinary thinking. It took Plato a lifetime of meditative reflection to realize that justice is the individual and social harmony of truth, love and beauty within. The Good. Plato and Aristotle rightly understood that it is only possible to do what is right by a just relation to the whole.

In traditional cultures, the right was established by a dominant concept such as the Chinese *tao*, or the Indian *dharma*, both of which have a double meaning—teaching and way. The dominant thinkers of modern western culture teach that no one knows the true teaching or the true way. In this time of systemic alienation, we need help discerning and doing the right. If we seek, we will receive the help of the spiritual world manifested by higher beings, as well as by the spiritual striving of families, teachers and friends. The very American words of John F. Kennedy's inaugural address express a modern western understanding of the law of karma concerning right doing: 'We know that on earth God's work is truly our own.' Buddhist teachers recommend and exemplify *upaya*, skillful means, or right in our doing.

To peace in our feeling

At the birth of the Messiah, the angels offered glory to God and peace on earth. Peace, like happiness, cannot be attained directly, but follows from good will. Incredibly, people of good will abound in countries and communities living in pain and terror. We look with amazement at the depth of peace exhibited by Native Americans and African Americans in the United States; pro-democracy advocates in China, Burma and many countries in Latin America; Blacks in South Africa; hundreds of millions of peaceful women and children around the world who are victims of violence. It is from the communities of the suffering that the prophets of peace have come. Seamus Heaney, the Irish poet and Nobel Laureate, has told us that the suffering peoples are creating the most powerful and most honest literature in our time.

The Twentieth Century has witnessed 250 million deaths from wars, and has been blessed by peaceful persons of good will, including Mahatma Gandhi, Simone Weil, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day, Thich Nhat Han, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Tutu, Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Khy. A study of the lives and works of such individuals shows that peace issues from a commitment to beauty, truth, nobility and goodness. As Gandhi showed, peace never comes from violence or from weakness; it comes from truth-force, or courageous love.

To light in our thinking

The god Prometheus brought light to humanity in the double form of fire and knowledge. The Buddha brought enlightenment; His Holiness the Dalai Lama refers to the Bodhisatva vow as a 'flash of lightning in the dark of night.' Christ called Himself the Light of the World—and He came

into a dark world which did not comprehend Him. St. Augustine taught that salvation comes from knowledge by illumination. Many strive for bright ideas, and those who succeed are called brilliant. The ideas themselves live in the light, and the light is one with beauty, truth and goodness. Isolated ideas can appear bright at first but if they are not grounded in reality, in the Light of the World, they fade.

The relationship between light and thinking must be real, but also mysterious. Light and thinking are dying in our time; they share God's life and ours, but only if we are awake to their presence. This line could read, 'to life in our thinking,' or more exactly, 'to God's life in our free spiritual thinking,' or 'to Logos-thinking.' Thinking is alive, light and Logos-filled to the extent that it is awake, free and loving, to the extent that by our act of thinking we are relating to interiors, to the spiritual in whatever we know. While dead (and deadly) thinking is the opposite of love, light- and life-filled thinking issues from our love of the divine that inheres in the universe.

Spinoza's 'amor intellectualis' (love of God) is a profound double-entendre: to the extent that we love God it is by God's love of us. It is true that the love by which I love God is the love by which God's love turns back to Itself. It is the same with thinking: The Light by which I think is the Light by which God the Logos illumines all things that have come into the world. To think a truly bright idea is to jump from reality that I am to a reality I embrace, as spark to spark, and light to light. To think truly is to live and move and have one's being as one with the Light of the World.

And teaches us trust in the working of God

Media and education warn against trust. Higher education in the modern West is especially opposed to trust in God. Too many prophets have led hapless followers to absurdities and atrocities. Cemeteries are filled with trusting believers. Knaves and rogues abound, as do their victims. God seems to be no exception: many who trust in God's providence die of cancer and accidents as readily and as cruelly as rapists.

Trust in the working of God is not an isolated deed, but a hard won orientation and grounding. It is more like faith or confidence than belief: we believe that such-and-such is the case, but we trust, have confidence or faith in something or someone. Jesus taught trust: 'Consider the lilies of the field...' Emerson taught trust in one's own truth. This is difficult in a world of second-hand knowledge and quick solutions. Trust must be learned, and relearned. The report from Nietzsche at the end of the nineteenth century that 'God is dead' has been repeated by thinkers throughout the twentieth

century. Has God abandoned the modern western psyche, or is God dead only to those who are dead to God's presence? It is easier to trust that the divine is everywhere than that it is somewhere in particular. Wherever and however God is, God's presence shines with beauty, truth, goodness and love.

In all that there is

In complexity and extent, the all increases daily. The great task of the present and future is the deepening of relationships between individuals and groups, between one group and others, between the human and the rest of the cosmos, between thinking, feeling and willing, between spirit and matter. How can we make real in experience what we know by theory—that there are no loose ends? To experience the all, we need to meet ugliness, falsehood and evil as well as beauty, truth and goodness. Rudolf Steiner reminds us of a legend in which Jesus' followers expressed disgust at the sight and smell of a decaying dog, but Jesus countered by admiring the dog's teeth. Antipathies distort reality and prevent deep relationships. Reality is a seamless garment which our biases and analyses rend in pieces. To know the All, we need to replace critical with sympathetic thinking. As analysis and argument divide, sympathy and imagination unite.

In the width of the world

From outer space the earth is a blue marble. Carl Sagan knows the cosmos by intellectual knowledge, Brian Swimme by affectionate knowledge. By her devotion to a cell's complexity and mystery, Barbara McClintock revealed the intimate relationship between the microscopic and the macrocosmic. Boundaries recently thought to be inviolate are now known to be arbitrary. How wide is the world? How wide is our view of the world? Consciousness is extended by the rush of cultural, scientific and technological innovations. The globalization of arts and business, travel and media, relentlessly expand, but do not necessarily deepen, our relation to the universe.

In the depth of the soul

Rudolf Steiner found ways by which we can attain knowledge of higher (or deeper) worlds, or spiritual realities, by relating the spiritual in the individual to the spiritual in the universe. The relationship between depth of the soul and the depth of the universe produces knowledge without diminishing mystery.

The depth of the soul actively receives health-giving feelings; images

and archetypes come from fairy tales, myths and the exercise of imagination. From the depth of the soul issue both words and silence. Words are often helpful but hardly adequate. Even the words of Rudolf Steiner, of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and of other spiritual teachers, are but pointers to a stillness in the depth of the soul and in the depths of the universe.

A bell ringing is a pointer to a community made possible by the sacrifice of parents and teachers, and of their parents and teachers; and the sacrifice of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, exemplar and embodiment of wisdom and compassion; and the sacrifices of Rudolf Steiner, a teacher of teachers whose spiritual research made possible the Waldorf insights into human development, learning and cultural renewal. Such sacrifices have created communities capable of receiving children in reverence, educating them in love, and sending them forth in freedom. It is for children that the bell rings.