

Dear friends in the Mid-Atlantic Region of the Anthroposophical Society,

As you can imagine, it has been challenging to plan an annual gathering this year, but we have decided that at least a few of us (maximum 20) will gather in the Threefold Auditorium in Spring Valley on **Saturday, Nov. 21, from 10 am to 5:30 or 6 pm**. We are sharing the plan for the day with you all in this letter so those who cannot come will be able to meet in your local area on that day or take up elements of the theme in your regular study groups and Branches. In this way, despite the limitations on travel and larger gatherings, whoever can meet with even one or two other people can further their skills in **The Art of Conversation**, which is our theme.

We will take as our over-arching inspiration the fourth panel of the Foundation Stone Meditation, specifically the lines: *Day-radiant light Shone forth in human souls*. This panel will sound at the beginning and end of our gathering.

We learn something about this light in Rudolf Steiner's book *Theosophy* in Chapter 3 at the end of the section on the Soul World:

"...A still higher level is occupied by the soul formations whose sympathy is not confined to the domain of their own lives. ...the force of sympathy no longer has any a counteractive antipathy to overcome. Only through these higher forms of soul substance can the many different soul formations unite into a common soul world. As long as any antipathy is involved, a soul formation strives toward other things for the sake of its own life, in order to strengthen and enrich itself through -the other. When antipathy is silent, the other is received as revelation, as information. In soul space, this higher form of soul substance plays a role similar to that of light in physical space. It causes one soul formation to absorb the being and essence of others for their own sake, or, as we might also put it, lets itself be shone upon by them. Soul beings first awaken to true soul life by drawing from these higher regions. Their subdued life in the darkness opens up to the outside and starts to shine and radiate out into soul space.... In the upper regions a free outraying and outpouring is the rule. (It is quite justified to characterize the essence of this region as 'raying out,' since the sympathy developed here works in such a way that this expression derived from the working of light can surely be used as its symbol.) "

And in *Knowledge of Higher Worlds* Rudolf Steiner speaks about conversation:

"Every word spoken without having been thoroughly purged in thought is a stone thrown in the way of esoteric training. ... If anything is said to which we must reply, we must be careful to consider the speaker's opinion, feeling, and even his prejudices, rather than what we ourselves have to say at the moment on the subject under discussion. ... a refined quality of tact is indicated ... We must learn to judge what importance it may have for the other person if we oppose the latter's opinion. This does not mean we must withhold our opinion. There can be no question of that. But we must listen to the speaker as carefully and attentively as we possibly can and let our reply derive its form from what we have just heard. ... The importance lies not in the difference of our opinions but in his discovering through his own effort what is right if I contribute something toward it.

We hope to do some movement and/or singing, and then go 'round for a very brief personal check-in. Following this, Franz Eilers will give a presentation on the theme. For those who cannot come to Spring Valley, we are attaching a very fine essay by David Anderson.

Then Franz will lead us in a conversational exercise in concentration on one topic, similar to the one we did last year. But this year we will add the element of review afterward, so we can learn to observe not only the content but the form and quality of our speaking and listening.

After lunch, we will tell about the anthroposophical life in our different places during the past year, both the challenges and helpful innovations. And then we will enter into another conversation, sensitized by our morning work. For this one, we are asking each participant to prepare by reading the ninth Michael Letter by Rudolf Steiner, "The World-Thoughts in the Working of Michael and in the Working of Ahriman." However, we will not study the letter but have a free conversation, stimulated by the question, how did I connect with the content of the Letter? Again, after the conversation is over, we will review it to see what we can learn from what went well and what didn't go so well.

We hope that one or two eurythmists will be able to share their art with us in the afternoon.

If you would like to come to Spring Valley on November 21, please contact Sherry Wildfeuer (610-935-0302 or swildfeuer@gmail.com). Because of the restrictions on the number of attendees in the space, we will only be able to welcome the first 20 people. We certainly wish it could be otherwise.

Nevertheless, we hope that through all of our engagement with this theme we can make steps in attentive listening to what each one says, and in careful speaking, not to convince and overpower our listeners but to gently offer the insights that come to us. May this benefit our activity together in the Anthroposophical Society and in each of our lives in society at large as we strive to become part of a living, collaborative effort to invite the Spirit of Truth to be present in and through us.

From the Coordinating Group,

Franz Eilers, Sheena Ifkovitch, Eileen King, Melissa Lyons, Joyce Reilly, Gino Ver Eecke, and Sherry Wildfeuer