

7. The Questioning Stance of Soul

Extract from a lecture given in Berlin on 6 January 1914

The relationship between questions and answers can be resolved in a number of ways, for instance by a refusal to countenance the uncertainties of doubt, and pressing on instead to an answer at all costs; or, more uncomfortably, by choosing to seek patiently in the space that opens up between them, 'entertaining' doubts and allowing their resolution through a slow process of growth and increasing understanding. Here, in connection with Parzival's failure to ask the right question at the Grail castle, Steiner discusses the differences between a more materialistic or more spiritual stance of soul in relation to questions and answers. Rilke once wrote: 'Be patient towards all that is unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves . . . live the questions now. Perhaps you will gradually, without noticing it, live at last some distant day into the answers.'¹⁰ Materialism, suggests Steiner, is unwilling to pose the really fundamental questions because it thinks it has all the answers already.

In the first place we have to consider how Parzival, several centuries after the Mystery of Golgotha, marks an important step in the working of the Christ event in a human soul.

Parzival was the son of a knight-errant and the lady Herzeleide. The knight departed before Parzival was even born, leaving his mother to suffer pain and torment before he ever arrived on earth. She wanted to protect her son from everything connected with knightly virtues and from developing one's powers by being a knight. She brought him up in such a

way that he knew nothing of the outside world or of what it might offer. He grew up in isolation in the wilds of nature, knowing only what nature could teach. His mother wanted him to know nothing of what normally unfolds between knights and amongst other people. The story even relates that he knew nothing of the religious ideas current in the world. His mother told him only that God exists and underlies everything. He wished to serve God, but he knew no more than this: that he might serve God. Everything else was kept hidden from him. However, the urge to be a knight¹¹ was so powerful that one day he felt urged to leave his mother, and set forth into the world to seek his destiny. After many wanderings he came to the Grail castle. The best description of what happened there—in relation to what we can gather from the spiritual record of these events—is found in Chrétien de Troyes,¹² who was also a source for Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*.¹³ We learn that in his wanderings, Parzival one day arrived at a wooded region by a shore where two men were fishing. At his request they showed him the way to the castle of the Fisher King. On reaching the castle he entered and saw a weak, sick man lying on a couch. The man gave him a sword, that of his niece. Parzival also saw a squire enter with a lance from which blood was dripping onto the squire's hands. Then a maiden carrying a golden chalice entered, the light from which shone brighter than all other lights in the hall. A meal was served. Each time another course was served, the chalice was carried past Parzival into the next room, where the Fisher King's father was nourished by it.

To Parzival all this seemed a marvel; but earlier on in his wanderings, a knight had advised him not to ask many questions. He therefore did not ask about what he saw here,

though he intended to the following morning. Yet when he woke the next day, the castle was deserted. He called out but no one came. He thought the knights had gone hunting and wanted to follow them. In the castle yard he found his horse saddled and ready. He rode off but had to be quick to get over the drawbridge: his horse had to leap the gap when the drawbridge was pulled up as he rode over it. He saw no sign of the knights however.

Of course we know what this was about: Parzival had not asked the question he should have. The most wondrous thing appeared before him, but he asked nothing. He was repeatedly told that part of his mission was to ask about the wondrous things he encountered. When he did not ask, it slowly dawned on him that this failure had caused a kind of ill fate. Thus we see an individual brought up in isolation from the culture of the world, supposed to know nothing about it, who was meant to ask about the mysteries of the Grail when these came before him: but to ask in a virginal way, as a soul not affected or influenced by the culture of the day. Why was he to ask in this way? I have suggested on a number of occasions that the Christ impulse led to a deed that humanity was not immediately able to understand. On the one hand, therefore, the fact that the Christ had streamed into the aura of the earth has had an ongoing effect irrespective of what people might think or contend in all kinds of theological dogmas—it went on working regardless. And the western world took shape under the influence of this Christ impulse, which may be said to have worked on human souls at a profound level, behind the scenes of history. If this impulse had acted only insofar as people understood it and disputed about it, it would not have contributed much to human evolution. But at the

time of Parzival an important moment came when the Christ impulse had to be taken one step further.

Parzival was therefore not meant to learn of the sacrifice by Christ at Golgotha, nor what the Apostles, the Church fathers and others later taught in different theological streams. He was not meant to know how knights put themselves and their virtues at the service of Christ. He was meant only to be in touch with the Christ impulse deep down in his soul to the extent that this was possible at the time. His connection with this would have been clouded if he had learned doctrinal teachings about the Christ. The Christ impulse works less in what people do or say than in the soul's experience when it is given up wholly to this supersensible influence. That was to be the case with Parzival. Outward teachings always belong to the sense world. The Christ impulse works at a level beyond the senses and was intended to influence Parzival's soul at that level. The one and only thing he was meant to do was to ask his question in the place where the significance of the Christ impulse could be revealed, at the Grail castle. His question was to be invoked not by the reverence which the knights believed they owed Christ, nor by the reverence theologians believed they owed Christ, but simply by the fact that his soul was virginal, though in tune with the time in which he lived. He was to ask what the Grail might reveal, and indeed, what the Christ event might mean for humanity. He was meant to ask! Let us keep this in mind.

There was someone else in history who, in contrast, was *not* meant to ask. The story is well known. It was the undoing of the young man at Sais¹⁴ that he felt compelled to ask, doing what he was not meant to do, and wishing to see the image of Isis unveiled. This man was the equivalent of Par-

zival before the Mystery of Golgotha. Then, however, the young man was told: 'Take care lest your soul is unprepared when what lies behind the veil is revealed!' Parzival is 'the young man at Sais' after the Mystery of Golgotha. He was not to receive any special preparation but was to be guided to the Grail with his soul still virginal. He failed to do the most important thing, not asking or seeking to have the mystery unveiled to his soul. That is how times have changed in humanity's evolution. [...]

When Parzival rode away from the castle, having failed to ask about the mysteries of the Grail, a woman, a bride mourning her newly dead bridegroom lying across her knees, was among the first people he met. This is the image of the mother mourning her son, the very familiar *pietà* theme. It gives a hint of what Parzival would have learned if he had asked his question. He would have learned of the connection between Isis and her son Horus in its new form, the connection between the mother and the Son of Man. And he should have asked the question!

Here we see a profound indication of the progress made in the course of human evolution. Something that must not happen before the Mystery of Golgotha ought to happen after it, for humanity has meanwhile progressed: the soul of humanity has changed. [...] The fruit to be gained from the Parzival mystery, augmented by the image of the young man of Sais, is that we learn to ask questions in a way that accords with our times. Learning to ask questions is to follow the upward stream in human evolution.

After the Mystery of Golgotha we have essentially two streams in human evolution: one that holds to the Christ impulse and gradually takes us to the heights of spirit, and one that represents a continuation of the descent into

materialism. Today these two streams are muddled to the extent that our civilization is very largely tainted by the materialistic stream. We must therefore look without bias or prejudice at everything the science of the spirit can tell us of the Christ impulse and everything connected with it, so that we may realize that the soul needs inner, spiritual development to balance an external world that is inevitably becoming ever more materialistic. We must see from aspects such as those presented here that we have to learn to ask questions.

We must learn to ask questions in the spiritual stream. In the materialistic stream everything is designed to stop people asking questions. Let us consider the two side by side to get a clear picture of their nature. On the one hand we have people who are materialists—which does not mean they don't subscribe to various spiritual dogmas, theoretically acknowledging the world of spirit or paying lip-service to it. But that is not what matters. What matters is that our souls enter wholly into the spiritual stream. Those in the materialistic stream may be said to be people who do not ask questions, for they know it all already. It is a characteristic feature of materialism that such people know everything and do not wish to ask questions. Even the very young know everything today and do not ask questions. It is felt that people are free and their value as individuals enhanced if they can always form their own opinions. But the problem is: how does this personal opinion develop? We grow into being a part of the world. With the first words we hear as children we take something in. We continue to grow, absorbing more and more, not realizing how we absorb things. Our karma has made us who we are, and because of this we like some things more and others less. We grow up, forming our opinions, and reach, say, the age of 25—which many believe to be a

perfectly respectable age for forming one's own opinions. We feel our judgement to be mature, believing it is our own. Yet anyone who can see into souls knows that this judgement is based on nothing more than the external life in which we find ourselves, which has come into focus in our own soul. We may even find ourselves in inner conflict because our judgement suggests to us that we should take a particular path. Believing ourselves to be independent, we become all the more slavishly dependent on our own inner life. We form opinions but are completely unable to ask questions.

We only learn to ask questions when we can develop the inner poise and harmony that allows reverence and devotion to be retained towards sacred spheres of life; and when we can retain in ourselves an element that always seeks to remain independent even of our own judgement in relation to what approaches us from these spheres. We only learn to ask questions by developing a mood of expectancy that allows life to reveal something to us; by being able to wait; by feeling some hesitation in applying our own judgement, especially in relation to anything that should flow in a sacred way from the sacred spheres of existence; by not judging but asking questions, not only of people who may be able to reply, but above all of the world of spirit. We should look towards that world not with our formed opinions but with our questions: in a questioning mood and attitude.

Try to get a really clear understanding through meditation of the difference between meeting the spiritual aspects of life with opinions or meeting them with questions. You have to experience the radical difference between the two. This difference is connected with an aspect of our modern age that requires special attention. Our spiritual stream can only grow and develop if we learn to see the difference between ques-

tions and opinions. Of course we have to use our judgement in daily life; and I do not suggest for a moment that we should be wary of using it in all daily situations. No, it is in relation to the deeper secrets of the world that we must learn to develop an expectant, questioning mood. Our spiritual movement will progress through anything that acknowledges and cultivates that mood in a relatively large proportion of the human race. It will be inhibited by anything that counters the spiritual stream in the form of unconsidered opinions. If, at truly solemn moments in life, we try to reflect on what we can gain from a story such as that of Parzival, who was meant to ask questions when he went to the Grail castle, the story can become an example to us in our movement. And many other things will become clear in connection with this. [...]

Ancient clairvoyance had vanished by the fourth post-Atlantean epoch, which is when the Mystery of Golgotha took place. The human soul assumed a different organization which meant that the world of spirit must remain closed to it unless it developed the urge to ask questions. The powers harmful to the human soul in older times cannot touch it now if it enquires into the secret of the Grail. This secret concerns the element that has flowed into the earth's aura since the Mystery of Golgotha. What had not previously flowed into it, but then did and does, would remain forever unknown unless we ask. We must ask questions—which means that we must feel the urge to let an element already inherent in the soul truly develop. [...]

Since the Mystery of Golgotha, someone who begins to ask questions will be able to find the right way of doing so, and will also get the right feeling for the new Isis Mystery. What matters today, then, is to ask the right questions, and develop the right attitude to the spiritual world view that can now be

presented. Someone who merely wishes to judge can read any number of books and lectures without learning anything apart from mere words. Someone, on the other hand, who approaches in a questing mood, will learn far more than can be found in the words. He will find that these words bear fruit in the powers of growth that lie in his own soul. Anything the spirit teaches us must become real inner experience. That is the important thing. [...]

8. The Lapse into Matter

Extract from a lecture given in Dornach on 16 April 1921

When Steiner says here that 'we still are and should be seekers for the Holy Grail', he is suggesting that this quest is now even more essential than it was in the medieval period when the saga arose. It is easy to see how spiritual endeavours for apparently intangible goals can 'fall back' as it were into the search for merely physical realities. This is something we repeatedly encounter—just to take one example, in modern forms of education that often place value on quantifiable achievements at the expense of the unfolding of a child's still unknown (and therefore invisible and immeasurable) gifts and potential. Steiner's own examples here are the realms of astronomy and medicine, which materialistic outlooks have burdened with loss of transformative or healing perception.

Wolfram von Eschenbach ... was spared the dogmatism [that gripped Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries]. Those who raised this call for the Holy Grail meant to let it resound in the spirit of freedom dawning in dull souls. They did not wish to deprive the human being of his freedom nor impose anything on him. He was to be one who questioned. Out of the depths of his own soul he was to ask about the miracles of the Holy Grail. [...]

When the spiritual path of the servants of the Grail was superseded by the earthly path of the journey to the physical Jerusalem in the East—when, in other words, the quest for the Grail was replaced by crusades to an earthly Jerusalem [...] this was the translation into something materialistic of what the servants of the Holy Grail had intended to be spiritual.

This, too, was one of the paths materialism led to—leading to the physical not the spiritual Jerusalem. The spiritual Jerusalem was said to enshrine in Titurel's temple what remained of the Mystery of Golgotha as the Holy Grail. Legend held that Titurel had brought this Holy Grail down to the earth's sphere from the clouds where it hovered, borne up by angels during the age of Arabism and the prosaic narration of the events in Palestine. The age of materialism, however, did not start asking about the Holy Grail. Isolated individuals, who did not participate in the general wisdom of the age but dwelled in a kind of stupor, like Parzival, were the ones who set out to seek the Holy Grail. But they also did not understand how to ask the proper, relevant question. Thus the path of materialism which began in the first third of the fourteenth century, was preceded by that other path of materialism already expressed in the turn to the East, the eastward journey to the physical Jerusalem. Modern humanity experienced this tragedy, and human beings had to and still have to undergo it, to comprehend themselves inwardly and to become people who really ask questions. Modern humanity had to and still has to experience the tragedy that the light that once approached from the East was not recognized as spiritual light. Spiritual light was rejected, and instead people set out to find a physical location in the East. In the Middle Ages humanity began to seek the physical East after the spiritual East was rejected at the close of antiquity.

Such then was the situation in Europe; and our age today is still a part of it, for if we understand the true inner call resounding in human hearts we still are and should be seekers for the Holy Grail. The endeavours of humanity that started with the crusades still await their metamorphosis into spiritual endeavours. We have yet to arrive at an under-

standing of cosmic worlds that allows us to seek Christ there. As long as the cosmos is investigated only through external, physical astronomy, it naturally cannot be seen as the home of Christ. The Christ could not have descended to earth to incarnate in the human being Jesus of Nazareth from the cosmos of the modern astronomer, which he describes only by means of geometry, mathematics and mechanics. Nor can this incarnation be understood through knowledge of the physical nature of the human being derived by moving away from living people to the corpse dissected for research purposes—thus giving rise to views about the living human being based on the dead corpse.

In antiquity, people possessed an astronomy imbued with life, and medical knowledge was likewise imbued. Our quest must once again be for a living astronomy, a living medicine. Just as a living astronomy will reveal to us a heaven, a cosmos that is truly pervaded by spirituality, from which Christ could descend, so an enlivened medicine will show us the human being in a way that enables us to penetrate with insight and understanding to the mystery of the blood, to the organic inner sphere where the forces of the etheric body, the astral body and the I transform themselves into the physical blood. When true medical knowledge has grasped the mysteries of the blood, and spiritualized astronomy has understood the cosmic spheres, we shall understand how it was possible for the Christ to descend from cosmic spheres to the earth; how He could find on earth the human body that could receive Him with its blood. The mystery of the Grail must be sought in this way in all earnestness: by embarking on the path to the spiritual Jerusalem with all that we are as human beings, with powers of both head and heart. This really is the task of modern humanity.

It is strange how the essence of what ought to come into being weaves objectively through the world's fabric. If it is not perceived in the right way, it is experienced outwardly instead, becomes superficially materialized. The flocking of people to Jerusalem expresses yet another phase of materialism, indicating how something that ought to be understood spiritually by all modern humanity is interpreted only in a more materialistic way. The time must come when the mystery of the Grail will once again be understood in the right way. [...]

9. Piercing the Thicket

Extract from a lecture given in Dornach on 17 April 1921

The castle of the Holy Grail, or 'Mont Salvat' (mountain of healing or redemption) was said to be surrounded by impenetrable, impassable terrain—a metaphor perhaps for the lifelong quest to penetrate the thickets of a materialistic view of the world that mostly surrounds us today. Yet the necessary difficulty of the endeavour is also what enables us to develop the strength to accomplish it, a paradox that Steiner hints at here. One meaning of the name Parzival, as we have seen, is to 'pierce through the valley'—which might also be the valley of the shadow of death: to pierce through it very actively to a different kind of perception—a word which itself seems closely related to the hero of this saga.

[...] Only a few individuals could indicate that the impulse of Christianity was once couched in oriental wisdom, and that what contained this oriental view, the sacred vessel of the Grail, could be brought to Europe by means of divine spirits who hovered above the earth, bearing it. Only then, they said, was a hidden castle built for it, the Grail castle on Mont Salvat. It was also said that one could only approach the miracles of the Holy Grail by traversing inaccessible regions. These sages did not say that the impassable region surrounding the castle was 60 miles in breadth, but put it in a much more esoteric way. They said: 'Oh, these Europeans cannot reach the Holy Grail, for the path they must take to get there is as long as the path from birth to death. Only when human beings arrive at the portal of death, having trod the path impassable for

Europeans, extending from birth to death, will they arrive at the Grail castle on Mont Salvat.'

This was, basically, the esoteric secret conveyed to pupils. Since the time had not yet arrived when human beings could discern with clear perception how a world of spirit might once again be discovered, these pupils were told they could enter the sacred castle of the Grail only by way of occasional glimpses of light. In particular they were given strict injunctions that they had to *ask*, that the time had arrived in human evolution when those who do not ask—who do not develop their own inner being and do not seek the impulse of truth on their own but remain passive—cannot arrive at an experience of themselves. The I must be discovered through our physical organization. This self-discovering I must in turn raise itself up by its own power in order to behold itself where, even in early Greek culture, the self was still beheld: in supersensible worlds. The I must first raise itself to perception of itself as something supersensible. [...]

Human beings must learn to understand why an impassable region surrounds the castle of the Grail, why the path between birth and death is difficult terrain. When they understand why it is difficult, when they grasp that the I experiences itself through the physical organization, when they sense how impossible merely physical astronomy and medicine are, then they themselves will clear the paths and smooth the way. Then people will bring into this hitherto arduous terrain between birth and death what comes into being through their own inner efforts.

Out of the substance of soul and spirit, human beings have to fashion the tools with which to plough a way, the soul-way leading to the castle of the Grail, to the mystery of the Grail, to the mystery of bread and blood, to the fulfilment of the

words 'This do in remembrance of me'.¹⁵ This is, truly, done in remembrance of the mighty event of Golgotha, if the symbol of the bread—of what, in other words, develops from the earth through the synthesis of cosmic forces—is understood. It is done in full remembrance if we understand once again how to grasp the world through a spiritualized cosmology and astronomy, and if we learn to comprehend the human being in terms of his essence: the element where the spiritual directly enters him—the mystery of the blood. The path that leads to the Holy Grail must be found through inner work in human souls. This is the task of cognition and the social task. It is also one to which people are extremely antagonistic today.

Because people are embedded in western civilization's ego-accentuating culture and education they develop a longing, above all, to remain inwardly passive, and not to allow earthly existence to give them what could help their souls progress. Taking active hold of soul forces, inward experience in general—not necessarily esoteric development but inner experience in general—is something people in Europe do not much care for. They prefer to perpetuate what was natural in a preceding era, that is, ego development, potentially leading to the most blatant egotism, to the blindest raging of instincts when it outlives its proper time. This ego sense, extending beyond the time properly assigned to it, has firstly given rise to nationalistic sentiments and appears in national chauvinism. Such feelings engender minds who wish to keep the path to the Holy Grail impassable. But it is our obligation to do everything possible to invoke human activity in the areas both of knowledge and the social sphere. All the forces pervaded by hatred of inward soul activity emerge in opposition to such a call. People have,

after all, been conditioned for long enough to conclude that any efforts they make to free themselves from guilt must be heretical. They think they should cultivate a proper awareness of sin and guilt, that they should not advance through their own efforts but should be redeemed by Christ, in passivity.

We fail to understand Christ if we do not acknowledge Him as the cosmic power that unites with us completely when we work our way through to Him through questions and inner activity. Today, everywhere, we see powers that seek to obstruct the path of inner activity—religious creeds and theological doctrines, military power and science. I have been calling attention to this for a long time, and again and again have had to say that these powers of opposition will become increasingly vehement. One really cannot say at all that such opposition has reached its peak yet, not by a long way. It has a strong organizing power in focusing all the elements that, though destined to wane, can, in their very waning, obstruct for the time being all that supports upward-striving forces. The forces nurturing inner soul activity are weak today in comparison with the opposing elements. The powers are weak that try to inwardly acquire progressive forces. The world has assumed an ahrimanic character:¹⁶ for it was inevitable that the I, having encountered and comprehended itself in the physical sphere, is seized hold of by ahrimanic forces if it remains in the physical sphere and does not raise itself again, in due course, to a spiritual understanding of itself as spiritual being. We can see this process of usurpation by ahrimanic powers; we can observe it in a real tendency towards evil that is making itself felt today—little as sleepy souls are willing to admit this. [...]

If the human being is to come to anthroposophy through

his own judgement, he must become one who asks questions; he must convince himself through his innermost freedom of judgement. He may hear words of spiritual truth but convincing himself of it is something he has to do on his own. If he wishes to participate and be active in society and the community he must do so out of his innermost heart impulses. Those who most truly take up anthroposophical spiritual science must become people who ask questions. [...]

IV

NEW SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY: THE
GRAIL AS TRANSFORMED LARYNX