

Goethean Conversation Workshop

Leading Questions

What is it that compels us to speak?

What is it that compels us to listen?

What if, when we speak, we were to start with “I am speaking because...”?

What if, when we listen, we would say “I am listening because...”?

What is Goethean Conversation and why is it called Goethean Conversation?

From the Nature Institute¹:

Goethe spent his long life pursuing a living science of the natural world. He spoke of “delicate empiricism,” a felicitous [well chosen or suited to the circumstances] way of expressing two fundamental features of our scientific inquiry: We work empirically by attending closely to phenomena as they appear in manifold ways in nature and through experiments. And we cultivate a particular way of interacting with the phenomena and our own way thinking: We want to enter into a dialogue through which — gently — understanding can arise; we don’t want to forcefully impose concepts, models, or theories on nature. To understand and portray the living nature of things entails both ridding ourselves of ingrained habits of thought and mobilizing new forces within ourselves.

A Goethean approach, as we develop it at The Nature Institute, is concerned with evolving the discipline of science to understand life in a way that is modeled after life itself. For this to occur we have to work to transform ourselves as human beings and begin forming, as Goethe put it, new organs of perception for the dynamic and living qualities of the world. This is no simple pathway, but an inspiring one, since it shows a way to re-integrate human knowing and doing into the wisdom of the world.

One can say that Goethean Conversation is:

1. “The processing of entering into dialog with each other without imposing concepts, models, or theories on each other” – or put another way, to be cognizant of our own sympathies and antipathies, our prejudices, and the imbalance in our own thinking / feeling / willing.
2. “Ridding ourselves of ingrained habits of thought” – for example, our innate reaction to what is being said.
3. “Mobilizing new forces within ourselves” – in the following exercises, much of the content of the exercise involves becoming perceptive to the spiritual world as well as the other people in the group.
4. “Transforming ourselves as human beings and forming new organs of perception” – with these exercises, developing an awareness of the spiritual world as participant in the conversation and deepening our sense perception of the people in the conversation.

Conversation enlivens the soul.

¹ <https://www.natureinstitute.org/whole-organism-biology>

Pre-Process

1. Make the following exercises your own. These are intended to guide rather than to be followed dogmatically.
2. People “think” in different ways – some people think in terms of logic, structure, and process. Some people think in terms of feeling and the innate “feels right”, “feels wrong” (as an example) character of something. Some people think in terms of willing – what is the action here, does this compel me in a forward or backwards direction? So in the exercises where I use the word “thought” or “thoughts”, feel free to replace those words with “feelings” or “willings” as suites your own individual character.
3. A review of the 12 senses² we can bring to bear on “perception”:
 - a. The first four senses, the lowest, are called physical senses, or senses of the will because they are used to perceive one's own body.³
 - i. Touch
 - ii. Life
 - iii. Self-Movement
 - iv. Balance
 - b. The middle four senses are the senses of feeling. Observations made with these senses arouse feelings. These senses are also reflected in our language: a tastefully furnished house, a sourpuss, hard to swallow, heart-warming, cold thought.⁴
 - i. Smell
 - ii. Taste
 - iii. Sight
 - c. The last four senses, the highest, focus particularly on the other. These are the spiritual or knowledge senses, and they are used in the observation of other people.⁵
 - i. Temperature/Warmth
 - ii. Hearing
 - iii. Language
 - iv. Concept
 - v. Ego

Equipment

1. Each person gets a small candle near them.
2. Each person has a notepad and pen/pencil to make notes of the process.

² <https://tomvangelder.antrovista.com/the-twelve-senses-123m50.html>

³ ibid

⁴ ibid

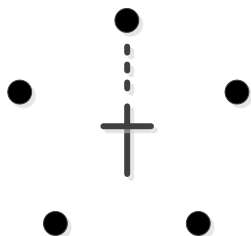
⁵ ibid

Process

Light a candle in the center of the circle.

The verse is read in parts, building each exercise. The verse is a translation from a poem Rudolf Steiner wrote to Ita Wegman on Dec 24th, 1924 (todo: verify date).

1. Awareness of What Comes from the Spiritual World



Verse:

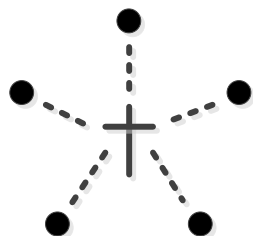
The human being is a bridge
Between the past
And future existence;

In contemplation of the verse, we begin with first bringing into our awareness The Christ - where two or more of you are gathered, I am present.

Exercise: Become aware of what are your own thoughts and what thoughts feel as though they are being received from the spiritual world. Inwardly and silently work on separating the two. It may help to review your thoughts as “what is old?” and “what is new and original?” With this awareness, wait until you feel an impulse to speak the thought(s) from spiritual world. Speak the word or thought - at most one sentence. In this exercise, there is no need to build on what others have spoken (that comes next) but instead this exercise is intended to begin to discern between your own thoughts and thought-impulses received from the spiritual world, what we might call intuitive thinking.

After a few rounds of this, what is your experience of this process?

2. Creating a Bridge between Point and Periphery



Verse:

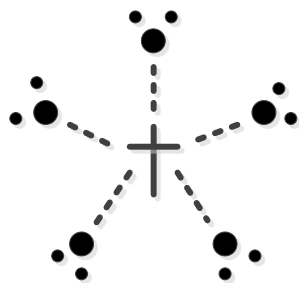
The human being is a bridge
 Between the past
 And future existence;
 The present is a moment;
 Moment as bridge.

Now bring into your imagination The Christ as being the bridge, in the center of the circle, bridging you to each person in the circle.

Exercise: In contemplation of the verse, repeating the previous exercise where we wait until we feel the impulse to speak what comes from the spiritual world, we now contemplate what was spoken and silently ask to be guided to the next thought-impulse that builds on what was spoken. As that building thought-impulse forms, we then speak it. What is spoken is a continual building of what has been previously spoken.

After a few rounds of this, what is your experience of this process?

3. Adding the "Group" Beings



Verse:

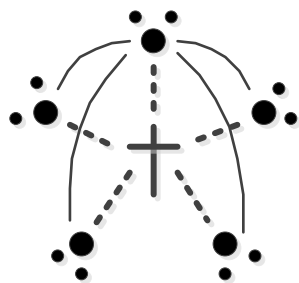
Spirit grown to soul
 In matter's husk
 Comes from the past;

Now add to the imagination of The Christ being as a bridge, the perception that, as Steiner said with regards to seeing the full human being, that the person who just spoke is a "group" - the person and Lucifer and Ahriman are standing on each side with Christ in the center maintaining the balance between Lucifer and Ahriman. If you wish, also add the person's angel.

Exercise: In contemplation of the verse, when a person speaks, using this "group" imagination, being to perceive the polarities that live in that person as manifested in Lucifer and Ahriman, and the balance that the person is striving to achieve. Ask the spiritual world for guidance on how to perceive these polarities and the striving to balance. As a thought-impulse is received that builds on what the person said, speak that perception. To avoid entering into a group therapy session, build only on what the last person said, rather than continuing to work with what the first person said. This can be challenging! To help mitigate this, we can also add a word or short sentence on our own relationship living in us with regards to the polarities and balance.

After a few rounds of this, what is your experience of this process?

4. Bring in the Physical Sense Perception



Verse:

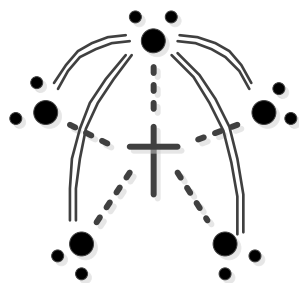
Spirit grown to soul
 In matter's husk
 Comes from the past;
 Soul growing to spirit
 As seed encased
 Journeys towards the future.

How do we, as "I"-beings, come into the conversation? We are both physical and spiritual beings, and it is both our physical and spiritual senses of the other person that are of great importance.

Exercise: In contemplation of the verse, as we continue to work with this "group being" imagination, begin to use your physical sense perceptions of how the other person is speaking - their tone of voice, their gestures, the body language. *Look* at the person speaking. Add this physical perception to the guiding question regarding the polarities we see the other person experiencing, and the balance we see the other person striving for. **How does this resonate it us?** As the building-thought-impulse from the spiritual world manifests with the engagement of our senses, but physical and spiritual, we speak. I can give no guidance on what to speak - is it something we perceive in the other? is it something we perceive in ourselves? is it something about the subject of the conversation (though we haven't gotten to conversation yet)? This is an organic speaking and cannot be "pre-guided."

After a few rounds of this, what is your experience of this process?

5. Sensing the Antipathy and Sympathy of What is Being Spoken



Verse:

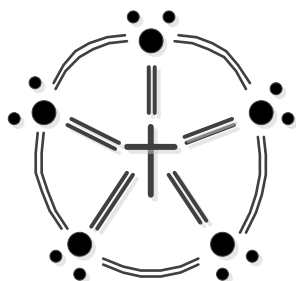
Grasp future things
Through past ones.
Hope for evolving things
Through was as evolved.

In contemplation of the verse, what is hidden in the physical and spiritual sense perception of what is being spoken? Here we shift from the physical and sense perception of the other person to also include the sense perception in us of *what is being spoken*. What is our sympathy and antipathy to what is being said? Where is The Christ balance in us? What is for the moment hidden, veiled, in our perception of the other person, the words spoken, and/or in ourselves?

Exercise: As the hidden-building-thought-impulse from the spiritual world manifests, speak a word or one sentence.

After a few rounds of this, what is your experience of this process?

6. The Art of Conversation: What is the Question that Needs to be Asked?



Verse:

So grasp existence
 In evolving growth;
 So grasp what will be
 in what exists.

The art of conversation. At this point, we apply the exercises above to the act of conversation. Remember that we strive to speak living thoughts (thoughts that enter us from the spiritual world), those that are manifested hidden-building-thought-impulses from our perception of the "group" that surrounds the speaker and the words spoken by the speaker.

Exercise: In contemplation of the verse, begin a conversation. The verse may be the starting point or it may be a guide to a topic as starting point. A conversation can include questions. In fact, questions are often the best way to keep the conversation moving and flowing. Ask the spiritual world "what is the question that needs to be asked?" while maintaining an imaginative perception of the "group" around the last speaker and the words spoken by the speaker. If possible, extend this imagination to include all that have spoken and all that has been said so far, so that the building process forms an arch where each spoken "stone" is added to the next, forming a bridge from many directions that meet at the apex in the center of the group (The Christ) as the conversation organically manifests.

After a few rounds of this, what is revealed that is new, compelling, introduces new thoughts, changes your perception, speaks to your soul, perhaps motivates you to action?

Conclusion

Read the full verse:

The human being is a bridge
Between the past
And future existence;
The present is a moment;
Moment as bridge.

Spirit grown to soul
In matter's husk
Comes from the past;
Soul growing to spirit
As seed encased
Journeys towards the future.

Grasp future things
Through past ones.
Hope for evolving things
Through what has evolved.

So grasp existence
In evolving growth;
So grasp what will be
in what exists.