

Dear friends and colleagues,

This letter is offered to help you learn more about the Anthroposophic Society, and what, within the society, is called the First Class. They are both important resources—not so much for learning the practical aspects of prescribing anthroposophic remedies, as for helping us develop our own meditative and spiritual life. As part of the larger national medical meetings there are sometimes workshops or meetings devoted specifically to this work. We hope this letter shares some useful information about them.

An essential core of the practice of anthroposophic medicine is the path of self-development. This is true because it is a necessary part of enlivening our thinking and embracing the interweaving relationship between spiritual process and physical substance. It comes through deepening our skills of observation: for patients, for the minerals, plants and animals used in the remedies; and for our own patterns and habits of thinking, feeling, and willing.

Some of this learning is really best-accomplished when we work together, such as text study, plant observation, clinical discussions and case work, where all are enriched if we practice them together. It is easy to see that there is a depth and vitality to those experiences which arises when we bring our energy and intention together, such that we can achieve something through the group activity that is perhaps not possible on our own. That is the joy and privilege we experience when we can come together in therapeutic community and enliven our study.

There are other aspects of self-development, however, which really only come through the development of an individual meditative path. Establishing a rhythmic meditative life nourishes our medical work. A great amount of Rudolf Steiner's teaching is devoted to the path of self-development so that one can safely and systematically develop deeper spiritual understanding and capacities for greater perception. Here are some suggested starting resources that can help you find your way along that path:

- Steiner repeatedly taught about six “essential” or “basic” exercises, which help us become more self-conscious and self-directed. They stand as foundational exercises for any kind of meditative work. They are described in Steiner's basic books—his written volumes which describe foundational aspects of spiritual science—including *How to Know Higher Worlds* and *An Outline of Esoteric Science*. Several descriptions of these exercises, from a variety of places, have also been compiled in the book ***Start Now! A Book of Soul and Spiritual Exercises***. Another gentle and wonderfully accessible way to begin working with these exercises is described in Michael Lipson's ***Stairway of Surprise: Six Steps to a Creative Life***. Lipson explores the meditations with many stories and experiences. This is a lovely book to work through with a colleague, friend, or in a small group, and compare experiences during the six months it takes to work through all the exercises.
- Rudolf Steiner also gave meditative indications that are specific to medical work. They are compiled in the volume *The Anthroposophical Medical Movement* in the section on **“The ‘breviary’ of the Medical Section—meditative verses and images as the esoteric core of the professional group.”** You can find this under “suggestion for more in-depth reading” at <https://paam.wildapricot.org/Medicine-as-a-journey>. Many of the meditations listed come out of Steiner's lectures about the importance of developing the inner life for physicians, which have been

published alternately under the title the *Course for Young Doctors* (Mercury Press) or more recently, *Understanding Healing: Meditative Reflections on Deepening Medicine through Spiritual Science* (Steinerbooks).

The “medical section” referred to above, is part of the School of Spiritual Science at the Goetheanum in Switzerland. The task of this school is to support and nourish the meditative and esoteric work within the anthroposophic society and its activities in the world. In fact, when Rudolf Steiner refounded the Anthroposophic Society during what is known as the “Christmas Conference” of 1923/1924 (which was immediately followed by the first meetings of the “Course for Young Doctors”), he described different levels of participation in anthroposophic work and the anthroposophic society. They can be characterized in the following way:

- those who have encountered anthroposophy and meet its activity in the world
- those who are members of the Anthroposophic Society
- those who have joined the first class of the School of Spiritual Science, within the General Anthroposophic Society.

The first group—those who have encountered anthroposophy and meet its activity in the world—is broad. It includes those send their children to a Waldorf school, eat biodynamic food or use a medicine or lotion from an anthroposophic pharmacy. This group also certainly includes anyone who is learning about or practicing anthroposophic medicine and it would also include their patients. It is wonderful for as many people as possible in the world to experience what we can call the “fruits” of anthroposophy, whether or not they even know what spiritual science is. That is the first and largest group.

A second group, which exists *within* the first group, and which Rudolf Steiner spoke about very specifically, is made up of those individuals who have joined the Anthroposophic Society (in the U.S., the Anthroposophic Society in America). This step involves formally applying to become a member. The criterion to do this, as indicated by Steiner, is that a person feels within him- or herself that it is good that anthroposophy exists in the world, or said differently, that you “acknowledge the value of Rudolf Steiner’s work in the world.” There is also the hope that one will support the work of the anthroposophic society through annual dues or donations, though membership is not contingent on one’s financial contribution. More information on membership can be found on the Anthroposophic Society’s website at www.Anthroposophy.org, and you can apply for membership online.

The third group, which lives within the circle of the general anthroposophic society, is made up of individuals who have joined as members of the First Class. The term “First Class” dates back to Steiner’s founding of the School for Spiritual Science, which works to foster the meditative and esoteric life within the society. Steiner intended for there to also be a “second class” and a “third class,” to be made up of selected individuals who would continue the esoteric work, but Steiner died before they were formed.

Groups of class members meet monthly to work with meditations and lessons Rudolf Steiner gave as the content of the First Class in 1924. These meetings are lead by a “class holder” who reads the lessons or who shares the content based on experience with the meditations. The content of the First Class lessons has now been openly published and can be read by anyone, but the conversations and meetings of class members are limited to those who have decided to take this additional step of membership.

The conditions for application to the first class are different than those to join the general society. They include:

- The affirmation that one is recognizing anthroposophy as one's meditative and spiritual path. This means that a person is willing to stand as a "representative" of anthroposophy in his or her daily life.

Other conditions include:

- membership within the general anthroposophic society for at least two years,
- and that one is committed to working with the meditations given through the first class in a sincere way. This includes making a special effort to develop a daily meditative practice and can include other changes like deciding to abstain from alcohol or drugs. The conversation with a class holder is an opportunity to explore what this might mean for each individual.

Application to the First Class therefore requires a conversation with a class holder, who then forwards on all applications to the Goetheanum. The process of the conversation and hand-written application to the First Class usually takes several months to half a year. More information can be found by speaking with the undersigned, or a Class Holder in your area, (who could be found by asking at the Anthroposophic Society in America), or via the Goetheanum website: <http://www.goetheanum.org/en/first-class/>.

This letter is not offered out of a spirit of expectation or solicitation, but simply to provide open information, as there are regularly questions about membership in the Anthroposophic Society and the First Class. There is no requirement that a person ever join either the Anthroposophic Society or the First Class—those are steps that must arise out of one's own initiative. It is wonderful to participate in anthroposophy and anthroposophic medicine in any way that feels comfortable and appropriate. This will be different for each individual person. But sometimes it is simply helpful to know that such a path exists.

Questions or comments about any of this is welcome, as we are all trying to find our own best steps on the path of inner development, in order to be helpful in the world.

With warm greetings,

Adam Blanning MD
PAAM Training Director
for the board of the Association for Anthroposophic
Medicine and Therapies in America (AAMTA.org)