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A Philosophy of Singing

## Tom Schilling Vocalway Newsletter Issues

Ninth Edition - October 12, 2000

There is a very interesting book called “Tales of the Dervishes.” In it are some of the “Teaching Stories of the Sufi Masters over the Past Thousand Years.” These stories were used by the Sufi masters to increase perception and knowledge and provide a better understanding of man and the world. Among them was the following tale called “The Chariot.” Again, it is interesting how truths concerning one subject are true for all the others. The art of singing ultimately must lead us to the higher consciousness talked about in this wonderful tale. Here is the tale of “The Chariot.”

“There are three sciences in the study of man. The first is the Science of ordinary knowledge; the second is the Science of unusual Inner states, often call ecstasy. The third, which is the important one, is the Science of True Reality: of what lies beyond these two. Only the real inner knowledge carries with it the knowledge of the Science of True Reality. The other two are the reflections, in their own form, of the third. They are almost useless without it.

Picture a charioteer. He is seated in a vehicle, propelled by a horse, guided by himself. Intellect is “the vehicle”, the outward form within which we state where we think we are and what we have to do. The vehicle enables the horse and man to operate. This is what we call *tashkil*, outward shape or formulation. The horse, which is the motive power, is the energy which is called “a state of emotion” or other force. This is needed to propel the chariot. The man, in our illustration, is that which perceives, in a manner superior to the others, the purpose and possibilities of the situation, and who makes it possible for the chariot to move towards and to gain its objective.

One of the three, on its own, will be able to fulfil functions, true enough. But the combined function which we call the movement of the chariot cannot take place unless all three are connected in the Right Way.

Only the “man”, the real Self, knows the relationship of the three elements, and their need of one another.

Among the Sufis, the Great Work is the knowledge of combining the three elements. Too many men, too unsuitable a horse, too light or too heavy a chariot—and the result will not take place.

### The Chariot

This fragment is recorded in a dervish notebook in Persian, and various forms of the story are found in Sufi

schools as far apart as Damascus and Delhi.”

From “Tales of the Dervishes” Idries Shah An Arcana Book ISBN 0-14-09358-8

The voice {chariot} will also not move unless these elements are connected in the Right Way. The voice is only the instrument being played on by our energy {the horse}, directed by our intuitive mind. So even the most beautiful chariot in the world—golden and jewel-encrusted as it may be—will not be able to move fluently if the other two elements are not connected. How many beautiful voices do we have in the world? More than we have ever had. And yet we are told there are no more. This is because they have not been connected in the Right Way. You should not use your voice to sing, but act as a chariot to be drawn by your energy. The result will be singing. Singing is actually *talking on air*, so the muscles used are big ones, not the small ones. The vocal mechanism must remain uninvolved—the face included—until the inner mechanism, the throat, has learned to stay open by the movement of air being drawn away from the cords. This passage of air allows the diaphragm {the horse}, to remain in motion. Otherwise the chariot stops—the throat closes. Our intuitive mind must become aware when this happens. This is the purpose of our study.

The horse [our emotions] is an unruly critter. In our hectic lives, we have learned to hold the horse in tight rein. The diaphragm being the horse, we tend to hold the small muscles around and outside of it—the stomach muscles—tightly, thinking this is how we stay in control. What we are actually doing is reining in the horse, and he is not allowed to move freely. The diaphragm should be connected to the voice, but not held in any way. In this analogy, when the diaphragm is being held, the result is pushing. The diaphragm is not able to draw the carriage along in a connected way. We “become” emotional. When the diaphragm is allowed its total freedom it can connect to the chariot in the Right Way. In the Western World we are taught “stomach in, chest out.” Look at the statues of the Buddhas and observe their stomachs. One need not be fat, or have a protruding stomach to sing, but the stomach muscles should not be held in any way. This does not mean that the stomach muscles are not being used, it just means they are not rigid. There are many books now being written about the “soft belly.” Flabby is not what is inferred. Flexible and resilient is the key.

The function of the diaphragm in the body is actually our emotional connection, not a physical one. The diaphragm is free in a belly laugh. It is also used in crying and yelling correctly. Children do this naturally. If we have inhibited this movement in our “growing up,” we have to regain this freedom of movement in our solar plexis. Therein lies much tension and pent-up emotions. “Never trust a man whose belly does not shake when he laughs.” Old quotation. Therefore, our energy must be connected and always flowing down through the body without obstruction. This gives the horse free rein to draw the chariot on its journey.

Sometimes a singer will be urged to lose weight drastically and become his/her “ideal” weight. When this happens, the voice can change and the singer will feel he has lost it with the dropping of this weight. Usually what happens is that the singer is now so proud of his/her weight loss that the new clothes he/she must buy will be bought with the idea of showing off the new physique, especially the waist line. What suffers? The poor diaphragm. It is now being held in by the stomach muscles to show off this new figure. Now there is no room for the deep breath. The singer blames it on the weight loss, puts back the 100 pounds that were lost, throws the new clothes away, and returns to the old body type. This allows the stomach to be free again, and the voice returns. Therefore the erroneous assumption is made that if you lose weight you will lose your voice. The diaphragm is the diaphragm. It is no bigger or smaller than the body it has always been contained in. Just because the outer shell is less fleshy or more fleshy has nothing to do with the inner mechanism. The singer begins to feel connected again.

The charioteer must be able to “feel” this connection. He learns how much rein to give the horse to allow its freedom. It is this balance between not holding the horse back, and yet not letting him run away with the chariot that we are concerned with. If more speed is desired, the horse is urged to go faster. If the driver forces the horse to go faster with his whip, the chariot suffers by being pulled along too quickly, thus making for a very bumpy ride. Therefore, in singing, if the diaphragm is forced to do the work, the stomach muscles immediately tighten to protect it, and the throat suffers for it. This produces a very uneven production of sound. When the correct delicate balance is learned, the muscles in the body all coordinate to allow the air to travel freely and evenly down the windpipe. This causes the cords to vibrate and the throat to open. Only the passage of air through the windpipe can close the cords and allow the throat to open. There is no other way to open the throat. The energy of the passage of air does the work.

The variable most singers have trouble with is the size of the chariot. We are all given our own chariot. Our responsibility is to allow it to move freely and take us on our musical journey. If we are urged to consciously “open the throat,” then we are manipulating muscles to create a sound. The danger is that the voice will now be too big, and the air will not be sufficient to handle it. If the chariot gets too heavy, the horse will have difficulty pulling it along. Nature gave us the correct vocal equation. The voice is the right size for our diaphragm. It is only when we upset this balance with our conscious mind—the ego—that we run into trouble. Singing darkly does not mean one is singing heavily. Therefore, if we try to make the voice larger than it truly is, it gets too dark. If we make it smaller than it truly is, we have upset the balance that nature gave us. Now we are creating a sound, rather than going inside and finding our own authentic voice. The authentic voice is both light and dark—chiaroscuro—and the task is finding the balance of these two elements.

The throat itself is very small indeed. If the tongue and surrounding muscles are lowered to get the feeling of an open throat it is a wrong decision. The tongue must be elevated in back to allow entrance to the throat and the windpipe wherein lies the cords—protected by the tongue and all its neighboring muscles in front, and the spinal column in back. The throat is a truly hidden instrument. Therefore, instead of taking the time it takes to discover this hidden treasure, we are instructed to form an artificial opening and call it the throat. If the frontal muscles are pushed down to try to create an opening, the result is a chariot that is too big for the horse to handle. Our ego likes the conscious control it can have over this act, but blinds us to the true opening. Encouraging someone to have a larger chariot than Nature gave us is tampering with the truth by using our intellect only. In the case of the Chariot, the vehicle is a given size. In the case of the voice, it too is a given size, and any attempt to override this natural phenomenon impedes the process to finding our organic sound.

The charioteer, therefore, must learn how to coordinate the chariot and the horse to ensure a smooth ride. The goal is to not wear out the horse or damage the chariot on the journey. If this is accomplished, the charioteer has done his best and there are many years of travel ahead of him. When the chariot has been abused and the horse mistreated, these years are now fewer in number. How many singers have done this very thing and have paid for it with vocal fatigue and vocal damage. In our present “throw away” society there is always another chariot and another horse available, but not so when it comes to our own voice. You can’t get a replacement for your voice—but as a singer, they can get a replacement for you. Therefore, it is important that you get the real Self to tap into the Science of True Reality.

The Science of True Reality is a different dimension. We can fake being there by taking drugs, by addictions, and by many forms of outward enjoyment. We think we are there, and yet something is missing. What is missing is connection to this True Reality. We lie to ourselves, and others lie to us, keeping us from seeking out

this new dimension.

“For every human being bears a higher man within himself besides what we may call the work-a-day man. This higher man remains hidden until he is awakened. And each human being can himself alone awaken this higher being within himself. As long as this higher being is not awakened, the higher faculties slumbering in every human being, and leading to supersensible knowledge, will remain concealed. The student must resolve to persevere in the strict and earnest observation of the rule here given, so long as he does not feel within himself the fruits of this inner tranquility. To all who thus persevere the day will come when spiritual light will envelop them, and a new world will be revealed to an organ of sight of whose presence within them they were never aware.”

#### Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and its Attainment—Rudolph Steiner

Who would have thought that even a charioteer could be connected to this Science of True Reality? As singers, combining these three elements is our Great Work. As human beings, that is our goal as well. Everything we do in life begins to revolve around this reality. We then strive to open our eyes to this new world available to us, and we enter a new dimension—this feeling of inner tranquility. “Ordinary knowledge and unusual inner states are almost useless without it.” Striving toward this goal is the reason we were put on this planet. It is never too early or too late to open ourselves up to this Science of True Reality and get connected to this supersensible knowledge. Let the Work begin!