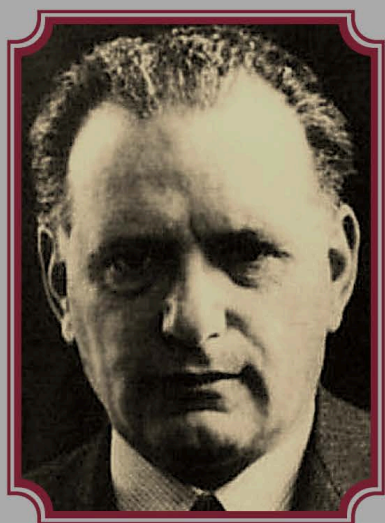
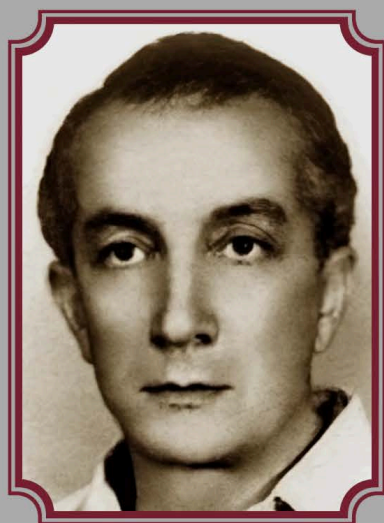


THE
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GIOVANNI
COLAZZA



MASSIMO
SCALIGERO

THE UR GROUP

Giovanni Colazza

Massimo Scaligero



TRADITION

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Giovanni Colazza

ON INITIATION

FOREWORD

“According to Olga de Grunewald, Giovanni Colazza was not only Rudolf Steiner’s most beloved disciple, but the most eminent figure after him”.¹

Giovanni Romano Colazza was born in Rome on August 9, 1877, into a family of the Roman upper middle class. Having studied the classics, he earned his degree in Medicine and Surgery in 1902 from the “La Sapienza” University of Rome. A man of science, from a young age he applied himself rigorously to esoteric disciplines, both Eastern and Western.

During one of his many trips to Europe, he met Marie von Sivers (1867–1948), who later became Mrs. Steiner, with whom he remained in close friendship throughout his life. It was Marie von Sivers herself who introduced Giovanni Colazza to Rudolf Steiner, who, according to the aforementioned testimony of Baroness de Grunewald, is said to have returned to Italy in 1911 following his previous visits in the years 1906–1910 expressly “to meet Dr. Colazza, because ‘he had been pointed out to him by the Spiritual World’”.³

Colazza quickly became a disciple of Dr. Steiner, who placed him at the helm of the Anthroposophical Movement in Italy following the founding of the Novalis Group in 1913. The Novalis Group in Rome was, moreover, the first

¹ M. Scaligero, *Dallo Yoga alla Rosacroce*, Rome 1972, p. 85. Scaligero considers this testimony “fundamental,” because de Grunewald was particularly close to both Dr. Steiner and Mrs. Steiner, her childhood friend.

² Memorable on those occasions were the lectures given in Rome, as a guest of Princess Erika del Drago, and in Palermo. See R. Steiner, *On the Road to Damascus*, Rome 1990, pp. 131, 168, nos. 1–2.

anthroposophical group in Italy.

In 1916–1917, as a field medical officer, he fought in the trenches during World War I. Upon returning to Rome, the prestige and renown of his medical expertise soon grew to such an extent that he became the physician for nearly all foreign embassies and legations, while remaining a doctor available to everyone, regardless of wealth or social status. The art of medicine found a happy expression in him, further enriched through contact with the most vibrant inspiration of Spiritual Science.

After the end of World War I, at least once a year, G. Colazza traveled to Dornach to visit Dr. Steiner, to whom he reported on himself and on the spiritual work at the Novalis Group he presided over, which was attended, among numerous notable figures, by Emmelina de Renzis, Colonna di Cesarò, Arturo Onofri, and others. In 1922, Colazza held a series of private meetings in Rome centered on R. Steiner’s “Esoteric Notebooks.”

Following Steiner’s death on March 30, 1925, the connection of “inner activity” with Mrs. Steiner intensified. “Messrs. Calvari, Father Trincherò, Baroness de Renzis and Grunewald, the poet Onofri, Count Colonna di Cesarò and Calabrini, Dr. Colazza, Engineer Gentilli, Spaini, Federici and others, gathered around her [Mrs. Steiner] a wreath of varied human hues, the intertwining of which, for many years, gave life to a succession of interests and continuous communion, centered on the work being carried out in Italy”⁴.

Between 1927 and 1930, G. Colazza joined the “UR Group”— by contributing to the magazine of the same name edited by J. Evola — which brought together Italy’s most

³ Scaligero, *op. cit.*, pp. 86–87. See also E. Pappacena, *Di alcuni cultori della Scienza dello Spirito*, Bari 1971, p. 188; also Nicómachus, “Ricordo di Giovanni Colazza,” *Graal*, 4, pp. 168 ff.

prestigious esotericists, united, despite their differing perspectives, by noble common goals.

His work as a lecturer and Guide was tireless. From 1943–1944 until his passing, he gathered around him those who would become the most ardent practitioners of Spiritual Science in Italy, preparing and inspiring them through the example of his high moral stature, as well as through his lectures on Steiner’s fundamental works. Among them we recall Mimma and Romolo Benvenuti, the very young Marianna and Amleto Scabellone, Fiorenza Berto, and Pio Filippani-Ronconi. From a letter by Giuseppe Federici addressed to Massimo Scaligero (1906–1980), dated Naples, February 27, 1948, we learn that Mrs. Steiner, having visited by Federici, had this to say about this group: “Our friend Giovanni Colazza has sent me messages of hope for Italy from Rome. I know that in recent years [during the war and the immediate postwar period], he never ceased his work of organizing gatherings, meetings, and visits: he tells me that there are young and very young people who are searching, who are determined, and this corresponds exactly to what the Doctor had already foreseen in his time”⁶.

Having always refused to write, his teaching was expressed through an inimitable art of speech and silence. Above all, his silence, a source of some unease for some, evoked the austere image of a “Zen master,” or other ineffable resonances.⁷ “His utmost reserve, his strict self-control, seemed to some to be severity, such as to inspire not only a ‘reverential fear,’ but actual

⁴ Oraq, “Marie Steiner. The Soul of Fidelity,” *Graal*, 25–26, 1989, p. 22.

⁵ On the substance and importance of the contributions to the journal *UR-KRUR* (see the photostatic reprint we published, 3 vols., Teramo-Rome 1980–82) by researchers oriented toward the scientific-spiritual approach, see Scaligero, *op. cit.*, pp. 81–82.

⁶ Federici’s beautiful letter is published in full in Oraq, *op. cit.*, pp. 35–36.

unease. To refute this misleading impression, it suffices to recall the joyful trust placed in him by children—whether under his care or long-term guests—who, in their spontaneous, candid, warm expansiveness, never felt hindered by his seriousness, which was imbued with understanding and ready helpfulness”⁷.

In 1951, he agreed with Massimo Scaligero, a prominent figure among his friends, to conduct for the first time in Italy the “first class of the Esoteric School” established by R. Steiner. This undertaking, admirably fulfilled, must be considered Giovanni Colazza’s final and concluding work.

He died on February 16, 1953, struck down by a heart attack, while practicing his medical profession. Hundreds of people, from all walks of life, bore witness at his funeral to the love and esteem he had inspired throughout his active life.

Just as Dr. Colazza, three days after Marie Steiner’s death (December 27, 1948), “gathered all his friends in his office on Corso d’Italia and delivered the supreme eulogy, which resounded like a hymn of gratitude and exaltation to the one who had been his beloved friend and inner guide for many years of his life [...]”⁸, in the moment of grief and disorientation that followed her passing, it fell to Massimo Scaligero to revive the friends and to affirm the continuity of a work that could not be interrupted. In this task, carried out entirely with absolute fidelity, Massimo Scaligero was assisted until the end (January 26, 1980) by that unknown figure to whom he himself alludes on pp. 72 and 87 of his **From Yoga to the Rosicrucians**, and to whom we ourselves are indebted for this essential biographical information, but above all for the ineffable memory of that

⁷ Nicómachus, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

⁸ Pappacena, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

⁹ Orazo, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

impulse which, between past and future, illuminates our tradition.

* * *

Regarding his contribution to the journal UR, M. Scaligero explained to us, in a personal conversation, that Dr. Colazza was not, in fact, the author of the articles signed with his pseudonym: he merely outlined the topics to the editor of the journal, who then took care of putting them into writing.¹⁰ This circumstance, highly indicative of the spiritual climate of the time and of the high sense of responsibility and selflessness of those researchers, has comforted us in the difficult decision to transcribe the series of fourteen lectures that G. Colazza delivered in Rome on a weekly basis from January 4 to April 12, 1943, as a commentary on Rudolf Steiner's book **Initiation.**¹¹ The resulting draft differs significantly in form from the typewritten in our possession, to which we nevertheless published by the Novalis Group of Rome, to whom we extend our heartfelt thanks.

In the journal *Graal*, 1–18, 1983–1987, we had already

¹⁰ See J. Evola, *Il cammino del cinabro*, Milan 1963, p. 90: “While there were some well-known figures among the contributors [to UR] who likewise accepted the rule of anonymity, there were also people who had never written before and whose teachings I myself had noted down, giving them an appropriate form, subject to their final approval of the text.” On Evola's regard for G. Colazza, *ibid.*, p. 29: “[...] I also had the opportunity to meet some figures of genuine merit, distinct from the theories on which they relied. I recall Decio Calvari, president of the Independent Theosophical League of Rome, Giovanni Colazza, who likewise directed an anthroposophical—that is, Steinerian—center in Rome, and the poet Arturo Onofri, who [...] had adhered to the same orientation.”

¹¹ See note on p. 15.

published, in installments, the individual lectures, which we now present again, in a further revised and corrected edition, in the form of a book organized into seven chapters—that is, two lectures per chapter—to which we have assigned titles, based on the criterion of a summary-image of the topics. We have thus witnessed, not without wonder, the birth of a work endowed with a life of its own: compact in size, yet possessing a powerful inner scope. We have added nothing that was not already there: we have merely arranged the spoken word according to the demands of the written page.

As the fortieth anniversary of Giovanni Colazza's death approaches, we believe there is no more fitting celebration than the publication of this book: it is not intended to violate the magical silence with which he cloaked his teaching, but to attest to its timeless continuity. Devotedly.

THE PUBLISHER

Rome 1992

VENERATION AND INNER CALM

Various reasons led me to undertake a study of Rudolf Steiner's book *The Initiation*. First of all, from our very first meeting, Steiner recommended it to me as the book to study, to delve into, and to always keep in mind as a guide. Furthermore, since the path of initiation is also the path of individual perfection, those who set out to seek with determination knowledge of the higher worlds, by studying this book and following its teachings, will be able to find the means and the impulses necessary for that perfection which we must all set as a duty for ourselves. Self-improvement is not a good or an improvement we seek for ourselves, but something that makes us better instruments for what we must accomplish in the world. As I have had occasion to recall on other occasions, we are here for a well-defined purpose; we have been brought here by our destiny to carry out a task, and we cannot perform it without also working on ourselves.

Human beings, as they are in daily life, are of little or nothing for the work in the spiritual world. Many may have even good qualities, but our personal qualities are of no importance to the spiritual world until we begin to work on them in order to bring them forward deliberately. What we carry forward with the momentum of the soul and the conscious impulse of the will is what serves the work of the spiritual worlds on Earth, a work to which we are called to collaborate. And what we do within ourselves is not for ourselves, but for our work.

I will follow the book more or less, but, of course, in nearly eighteen years of further activity, Rudolf Steiner has contributed much, especially on certain points; and what he has contributed serves as clarification and supplementation to this book. I will also add other teachings of his that are along the same lines, extremely useful for achieving real results.

Of course, I present these things in a personal way, but I want to make it clear that I am not adding anything of my own—that is, nothing that Steiner did not say; of this you can be certain; on this point I have always been uncompromising with myself and with others. At the same time, I must tell you that studying this subject has clarified many of my thoughts and that I will be able to share with you the results I have observed. I believe that everyone will find this study of interest, as it is not merely the presentation of a topic, but a genuine collaborative effort. In fact, as we work together and present these ideas, we will feel them taking effect within us and, to a certain extent, we will be able to realize them internally. At the same time, everyone will be able to sense the direction to follow and what their personal work should be. This presupposes a certain preparation in everyone. We must bear in mind that we live within our inner personality, which is merely a reflection of our Self. It is therefore necessary that during the study we aim, as far as possible, to bring ourselves to the center of our being, beyond what is representative of hereditary forces, of those proper to the current of the people. The influences of the environment and of the personality must be externalized so that we may represent, as far as possible, the conditions in which our higher Self operates.

It is very helpful, to this end, to distinguish within ourselves separately between thinking, feeling, and willing. If we do this, if we distinguish within ourselves the impulses of thinking, the impulses proper to feeling, and the impulses of willing, we come to realize our true individuality much sooner and more easily. In relation to our ego, thinking, feeling, and willing can be separated, because this is how they are organized within the human being. Thinking is located in the head, feeling in the thoracic region, and willing in the limbs and the digestive system, and within these there is a gradation of consciousness ranging from waking consciousness to dream consciousness, all the way to dreamless sleep.

The very way in which the three parts of the human figure relate to the skeleton gives us an inner sense of their difference. The organ of thinking is completely enclosed within the skeleton, while the chest does indeed enclose the organs but is partly open through the ribcage, and the skeletal system, as far as metabolism is concerned, merely supports the organs, whereas in the limbs the skeletal system is entirely internal: all of this gives us an inner image which, when brought into our consciousness, presents us with a subtle sense of the difference between thinking, feeling, and willing. Having reached this differentiation, we will also be able to distinguish the thoughts, feelings, and impulses that come from our lower personality from those that belong to our higher Self.

Our lower personality, which is never fully awake but half-dreaming in life, must be placed at the service of the spiritual within us. If we are immersed in it and believe ourselves to be it, we cannot do good work for the spirit. There is an anecdote that I have had occasion to mention on other occasions; that of an Indian guru to whom a youth had asked to be accepted as a disciple. The young man was intelligent and possessed of high moral qualities, and his name was, I believe, Ananda. After a trial period, the guru rejected him. When the other disciples asked him why he had refused him, he replied, "Because he had the illusion of being Ananda"; by this he meant that the young man was so immersed in the personality he had assumed in that life that it was a major obstacle to his spiritual perfection.

Certainly, this study was easier during Rudolf Steiner's lifetime; we, who were accustomed to seeing him periodically, had the assurance that we could bring our doubts, our needs, and our difficulties to him and be certain of finding satisfaction. The answer we received was always the right answer for us; in fact, the master of the spiritual order knows exactly what to give the disciple, because when facing him, he does not speak from himself, but speaks from the very soul of the disciple, identifying with him. He directly senses what the other can receive, what

they can understand, and what they truly need: beyond whatever their requests may be, he knows more surely what the disciple needs. Currently he is no longer on earth, and we must faithfully and scrupulously search among his words for those we can gather and apply to ourselves.

* * *

At the beginning of the book, Rudolf Steiner speaks of the path of veneration as an essential necessity for the way to knowledge of the spiritual worlds. This necessity can be misunderstood if it is confused with a demand for faith or a devotional state—I would almost say a state of inner “exaltation”—in which one receives with enthusiasm and blind fervor everything that a teacher’s instruction can offer, thereby filling the soul with these sentiments.

But this is not what is meant: a fundamental principle of which one must be certain is that the warmth of the soul is life itself for the soul. If we coldly read or study information about the spiritual worlds, we certainly fill our minds with information and learn much, yet the spiritual forces do not enter into us: the state of reverence and the warmth of the soul are the very activity of the soul itself, and coldness in the face of spiritual revelations is a closing off from them; it is as if the circulation of blood in a body were suspended. And those who fail to awaken a feeling of warmth and love toward what is told to them about the spiritual worlds close their souls to the teaching they would like to receive. Steiner says that this comes more easily to those who, in their early youth, revered a human being or had a powerful religious feeling, to those who truly felt their soul vibrate in the presence of another being or an ideal. However, we are also told that those who have been raised in a dry, uninspired way of life will have to create this feeling within themselves, and they can do so through the study of Spiritual Science.

This study reveals to us such marvelous relationships between ourselves and the cosmos, a harmony of forces such as to first arouse our admiration and then a sense of veneration and gratitude: all the divine grandeur we see outside of ourselves is also within us, because the forces of the spiritual Hierarchies are part of ourselves. This state of mind, when realized, awakens that warmth of the soul that is necessary to begin our work. In fact, the study of cosmic evolution, of the gradual formation of humanity through planetary evolutions—which to many seems dry—can instead succeed in awakening this sense of warmth, veneration, and gratitude. Alongside this attitude of veneration that awakens in the soul, we also have negative attitudes of criticism, blame, irritation, and anger toward people, events, or the actions of others.

Well, it cannot be denied that sometimes criticism is necessary and that such reactions may arise in people; nevertheless, we must also affirm that from a spiritual point of view, this amounts to closing oneself off. Anything that is criticism or blame has no value in the spiritual world—it is as if a machine, instead of moving forward, were moving backward. Even if a critical attitude may be more or less necessary, only what is positive—what looks for the best in everyone—only this is food for the soul, life of the soul, or can serve the soul's development; if we therefore wish to make serious progress, we must renounce this attitude, which, moreover, changes nothing, does not improve conditions in the external world, and paralyzes our inner forces. If, on the contrary, in our relationships with others, instead of focusing on their flaws, we were to consider their best qualities—for everyone has some—we would reinforce those qualities in them. For the elimination of negative qualities is not achieved by attacking them, but by promoting the strengthening of positive qualities, of the best side of everyone. Instead of useless criticism, we must encourage what is best: blame from a spiritual point of view is wasted energy and perhaps a step backward for us and for others.

Feelings are to the soul what breath is to the physical being, and we must not conceive of our feeling alongside thought as an activity that may or may not be present; feeling must always be present, so that the soul may receive its nourishment just as the circulation of blood brings sustenance to the body.

Another attitude to cultivate from the outset is that of recollection in the inner life, the development of the activities of the inner life. We live in the world receiving perceptions; our reaction to them may be superficial or merely cognitive, but we must instead accustom ourselves to feeling what these perceptions awaken within our inner self.

I have had occasion on other occasions to emphasize that when we have a perception, it is always accompanied by another, more subtle perception, which can be received directly by our soul, without our consciousness registering it. It may be helpful in this case, when the strength of the sensory aspect of the perception has diminished or only the memory remains, to recall those perceptions and search within our soul for the echo of what accompanied them. This work may be easier with the images of memory than at the moment when the physical perception acts with all its force upon our senses. The former diminishes in strength, while the latter retains all its fullness alongside the memory.

Now let us turn to our relationship with nature, a topic I have often discussed, most recently at the Christmas gathering. Steiner says that one can have profound impressions in the face of natural phenomena. One can have impressions that are true revelations of the mysteries of the universe; but one must be very careful not to succumb to habitual reactions and aesthetic preconceptions. One must create inner silence so that things may speak their own language. Steiner gives the example of someone who, while sailing across the ocean, experiences nothing within the soul, while others may “hear” the eternal language of the cosmic spirit and see the profound mysteries of creation. It is a profound experience one can have before the ocean, which is not merely a vast expanse

of water, but a great force capable of awakening deep echoes within the soul; yet even the simple plant, the flower, the flowing water, can give the soul the impression that alongside the physical world there is a spiritual world and that the physical world itself is the expression of a force from the spiritual world. In the face of natural phenomena, in the face of the things of the external world, we may feel a sense of enjoyment, and this is right and normal, but in this our attitude must be different from the common one: in enjoyment we must seek enlightenment and not merely a state of mind for its own sake.

Enjoyment is as much a lesson for humanity as pain, only it is more difficult to read into it; but if we place enjoyment before our consciousness, if in the face of it we withdraw into our open soul and look within, we find alongside the sensations of enjoyment a higher content that does not stem from the object's outward appearance, but from its innermost essence.

Even now we can see how useful it is for those who wish to cultivate the path of spiritual knowledge to prepare themselves through those five preliminary exercises² that create within the soul the forces by which the teachings received step by step can be taken up within our inner being. We shall thus see that what Steiner calls the preparatory qualities for Initiation are based on these five fundamental exercises. In any case, as we proceed in our study, we shall see how, step by step, we must exercise ourselves in the qualities corresponding to the stages of the path presented to us.

* * *

The second chapter of the book *Initiation* focuses on the preparatory period of our spiritual education: that of inner calm. Here we turn to some practical guidelines, to a method that can give us a deeper and more intense connection.

One of the rules is to set aside moments of inner calm and contemplation throughout the day: in these moments, abstracting ourselves as much as possible from all perception of the outer world, we look intensely within ourselves, we review and observe what we have taken in during the day as events, as contacts with the outside world, and we place this before us in a distinct manner. During the day, perceptions are so strong that they prevent a serene and impersonal observation, partly because they automatically awaken reactions within us. When, however, we approach them from an external perspective, as if observing another's experiences, then we detach ourselves from our own selves and place ourselves, as far as possible, in an impersonal perspective, beyond human passions and interests. This perspective could be compared to that of spiritual entities.

Let us consider for a moment what occurs during sleep, when the ego and the astral body separate: we review the events of the day from a cosmic perspective, from the perspective of the Hierarchies, and as we expand our soul into the spiritual worlds, we hold within us the judgment of the Hierarchies, the cosmic judgment regarding our actions and our experiences. As far as possible, in moments of contemplation our perspective should resemble that which the ego and the astral body receive during sleep on the spiritual plane. It is a detached contemplation that looks at the root of our actions, their inner causes, which, at first glance, seemed much freer than they actually were. In this contemplation, we observe all the interconnections with clarity and absolute impersonality. In this way, the ego is confronted with its own inner world as if facing an external world. Little by little, this becomes a source of strength for the soul: when we return to daily life, we always carry within us a longing for those moments of complete inner balance, of complete independence from the disturbances of the lower self.

Of course, this state cannot be attained in a single day. Our higher self is reflected in many aspects of consciousness, and when we think we have attained it, in retrospect, we still have

other layers to overcome. But with daily practice (at least five minutes), in complete calm and in the silence of the soul, we can penetrate ever more deeply through those layers that separate the lower self from the higher self. Then we also find ourselves in a position to better direct our lives and to be present with the best and highest side of ourselves in our activities and in the events we face.

From this attitude comes greater intensity in our feelings and also a greater sense of security, a kind of stable equilibrium that does not dry us up, but enriches us in feeling. However, in our daily activities, we must take care not to confuse the state of mind of meditation with that required for activity in the external world, which may demand a purely intellectual engagement, to be carried out simply with the intellect. Such an overlap would be detrimental to our activity and would disrupt the thought processes that take place in a purely intellectual realm; yet we must, over time, be able to bring the soul back to that point we have gradually identified, where we rediscover our true self.

This can be useful to us in moments when events in the outer world might dominate and drag our consciousness into states of irritation, impatience, or anger; we can then always step back and observe ourselves impartially, so that we may correct and bring reality back to the right point—as if bringing it into focus.

Even impatience, little by little, can be mastered in this way. Impatience is a drain on energy: Steiner suggests that those overcome by impatience should, while waiting, occupy their time with observations and direct their attention toward their surroundings. We must not, however, anticipate time—that is, artificially bridge intervals to find ourselves already in different circumstances: this would produce a distortion, and we must avoid that.

Little by little, we come to cultivate the inner self, which is able to master and instruct the outer self: we now speak to the outer self from our inner self. When we speak, we feel thoughts

arise spontaneously within us that are directed toward the lower self, not as if we were voluntarily choosing the subject, but as if we wanted to direct our energies toward one point or another to convince and dominate the outer self. We see thoughts arise of their own accord, as if surfacing, that go to the consciousness and illuminate its field. These are thoughts that at first are not clothed in words; they seem like moods. Then, little by little, we can see them more clearly and translate them into concepts.

We must embrace, as far as possible, the great cosmic patterns, to deepen our understanding of human nature, of the elements and forces that have shaped it, because knowing—having attained certain states of mind—enables these forces to manifest themselves. We must work from two directions: from the outside in and from the inside out; what we have known intellectually must meet what emerges in our consciousness through meditation. We must not strive to explain to ourselves what arises within us during meditation, but rather allow our thoughts to become clear of their own accord, to reveal themselves to us, and this occurs when we have intellectually prepared a form into which they can enter. Thus, the study of Spiritual Science meets the inner forces we have developed during meditation and becomes living reality.

In this way, the power of inner determination also arises. Little by little, we reunite with that eternal part of ourselves that reincarnates; we draw ever closer to this sacred inner mystery that is hidden from us. In this way, we strive to come ever closer to it and thus distinguish the impulses that are truly determined by impressions from the outer world and by our personal reactions.

Here the importance of our attitude toward karma becomes clear: reuniting with one's own I means facing one's own karma. Now, I am not saying that knowledge of karma is possible at this stage, but I am saying that we are aided by these states of mind: we must adopt the right attitude toward what karma presents as a condition of life. And if we lack a sense of justice in the face of our destiny, we will never be able to understand it. As R. Steiner

advises, when something happens, we must say: “This happens because there is a reason within me that causes it to happen and justifies it.” There is a karma determined by distant influences, which has, so to speak, “crystallized” in the transition between death and rebirth, in the spiritual world, and thus presents itself to us as a problem accompanied by its solution; that is to say, karma has resolved itself into certain conditions that have carried over into the physical realm.

But there is also the karma of external life conditions: the trials we must understand, the qualities we must develop, and which our own will in the spiritual world has set before us. If we do not understand karma, we may be struck by it again. But we can, in a certain way, prevent karma: we can place ourselves in a state of mind capable of overcoming karma itself. This is what we can do regarding karma, even if we cannot read within our own self. It is of great importance for spiritual development that a person be in a state of harmony and peace, that even in the face of their own faults they have patience and calm. It is useless to cultivate a sense of humiliation or unworthiness toward oneself: this is not the way out. A simple state of mind, such as repentance for one’s faults, serves little purpose: what is needed is the transformation of ourselves, and in this we must commit all our strength.

Observing the conditions necessary for the path of Initiation can already take us a long way; it can lead to a transformation of our being. Further on we find the path that encompasses the stages of *Preparation and Illumination*, the path toward Initiation. Naturally, during Steiner’s lifetime, it was possible to receive help from him to overcome certain obstacles: the exercises and methods by which the path to Initiation can be shortened. In the book *Initiation*, these special teachings are not found, because they can only be given personally, according to the essence, the degree of development, and the conditions in which the disciple finds himself. However, it is certain that, by following the book, one can progress continuously, drawing ever closer to higher consciousness.

When, during my first meeting with Steiner, I expressed my intention—following certain painful experiences at Annie Besant’s school—to resume my work on my own, he suggested that I study this book deeply because, even on my own, it would take me far along the path of spiritual development. And although I later changed my mind and turned to him for exercises and direct guidance, I could already see then how helpful the book was for those who applied themselves to it with dedication. Every time I have read it, I have always found something new in it.

The first step is Preparation; the next is Enlightenment. However, we must not think of them as separate stages to be traversed one after the other; there is a single path on which we can simultaneously carry out our preparation and attempt to fulfill the conditions of Enlightenment; but naturally there is a distinct stage of preparation, in which we must attempt to awaken our inner sensitivity and spiritual perception. This is the first step.

The general tone of preparation is that of a re-education on new foundations of the life of thought and feeling, and this can be achieved through special exercises. The apparent simplicity of the exercises should not be misleading; in reality, the matters are very serious: these exercises may seem extremely easy and simple, or even impossible. This is true if one looks at what needs to be done and at the results that Steiner describes as resulting from them. There seems to be an abyss in between, but in reality one must apply oneself with confidence and, above all, with tireless perseverance. An inner rebellion against the repetition of the exercises may arise. We are, in fact, too accustomed to receiving perceptions in succession, one after another, and we derive satisfaction from changing the object of our perceptions; otherwise, we become bored. Instead, in our case, we must get used to repetition, without allowing feelings of rebellion to arise; it is the self-preservation instinct of our lower consciousness that feels shaken to its core, having established a relationship with the

external world that it does not want to lose and struggles to maintain. We must make an effort; the path is not without setbacks, but we must have the perseverance to always start over.

First of all, we must renew our way of the external world; we must look around at nature and especially at what sprouts, blooms, and bears fruit, and at what withers, fades, and dies within it. These processes unfold simultaneously in the world: alongside what arises, there is what fades. Now we must direct our attention with clear consciousness toward this phenomenon; for example, we must look—but in the most complete way, grasping every detail—at a plant that is in full bloom or withering; observe it and gain a clear perception of it, so that when we close our eyes, we can hold its image before us. At the same time, we must surrender to the inner impression that arises within us during contemplation. At first it will be difficult to do this in the presence of the chosen object, since sensory perception is, so to speak, so “noisy” that it prevents us from feeling the impression arising within us. However, little by little, we can accustom ourselves to it and in the meantime practice on the memory or the image of the memory. Naturally, it is necessary that our inner self must be completely still; otherwise, if intellectual cognitions or feelings of attraction or repulsion arise, we become distracted and feel nothing more. Nature itself must speak, and then something can happen. And that is what happened to Goethe when he observed the image of *the Urpflanze* (primordial plant) arising within him. He had a way of contemplating nature that caused something to arise in his inner image.

We can do this consciously, because we already know what we might find: we know that what happens in the outer world and what exists in the spiritual realm have a correspondence within us and can awaken something. A new stream of thoughts and feelings can truly arise in the silence of the soul. In this way, the foundations are laid within us for the so-called organs of clairvoyance, which is not at all what is generally understood by

the term, but rather the ability to receive subtle impressions alongside the sensory contents that most human beings do not perceive. These are impressions completely different from what we might imagine: so much so that if we are not absolutely free of expectation, and if we assume what such impressions should be like, we prevent them from arising. Unfortunately, many who begin to have some experience often do not realize it because they expect something different. It is therefore advisable to be very strict with oneself and perhaps initially reject what is experienced, until one has attained such intensity as to have a clear perception and a corresponding sense of reality, just as with impressions from the external world.

When one begins to feel something during contemplation, one must not try to translate the experience into words; clarity must come from the object of contemplation itself: this must present itself so clearly that the idea is crystal-clear or distinct and without any effort on our part. For if we make an effort, then our brain intervenes, and reality turns into a shadow. In this way we also begin to feel that our thoughts have a form and a value that we had never been able to realize before. Through the mere teaching of these facts, we feel that our thoughts become forces like the forces of nature, so that our sense of responsibility in the face of them becomes immense.

I have mentioned on other occasions, in recent meetings, the importance of our thoughts as forces capable of flowing into the environment and altering it. It is evident from the teachings of Spiritual Science that a small number of people working in a spiritual sense is sufficient to permanently improve the atmosphere of a city. In fact, in the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, Jehovah said he would spare the city if there were at least ten righteous people. This means that there is a possibility of salvation for a community when there is a core group of people capable of thinking strongly in a spiritual direction.

What is at first merely a teaching becomes a reality after these exercises; a distorted thought, containing something destructive

within it, provokes in us a sense of pain just as strong as that caused by our own evil actions. And this is the transition from theory to reality. We can cultivate these thoughts, and the same can happen with our feelings!

We may then also observe a resurgence of creative imagination. The arrangement of our inner images can be composed in such a way as to create pictures that are true revelations to us; we can see thoughts arise that we did not know. In this way, creative imagination is not a dreamlike surrender to something that arises, but a vivid, conscious, and real relationship between thought and feeling, harmoniously connected on the spiritual plane.

PREPARATION AND ILLUMINATION

Another theme to which we must direct our attention during the period of preparation is the world of sounds. We must learn to distinguish what spiritually accompanies the sound; the noise of a machine, that of a falling stone, the sound of water, or that produced by a living being, must offer us the possibility of a specific qualitative distinction. The rushing of water, the rustling of leaves, for example, already contain something living within them, because something from the elemental world is at work there. In the rushing of water, in the rustling of leaves, in the blowing of the wind, there is more than can be detected in the noise of a machine.

Still referring to what we have already said, every perception has two aspects: one that affects the sensible, the other that awakens the supersensible; when listening to a sound, we must immerse ourselves in it and let it act within us. Once the sound has ceased, we must almost prolong its effect within us, though no longer through hearing; we must now listen without encountering any sensation, without imagining anything; wait and feel something arise within us, because, as I have had

occasion to say on other times, the manifestation of the supersensible cannot be sought as is the case with sensible things, but is something that must reach us, that must come! The Wise One, however, guards his attention as his most precious treasure^{3*} (Dhammapada II: 21, 26).

In the teachings of the Sufi Abdulhalik Gujduvani it is written: “Be present with every breath. Remember yourself and be present to yourself at every moment and in every situation; keep your mind on what you are doing.”

Thus, attention is one of the indispensable pillars of spiritual realization, for without it, it is in no way possible to derive benefit from what one does.

It may be possible to be distracted and, nevertheless, perform physical movements, but for mental activities, such as study or concentration, the situation is entirely different.

Attention not only makes consciousness present to itself but also allows for its expansion and greater acuity.

Thanks to the enhancement of awareness, it will be possible to direct one’s mental energy in a very specific direction, thus moving on to the next stage.

CONCENTRATION

Consciousness, gathered within itself, perceives its own substance in the sense of a potential, a force.

By focusing all its energies on a single point through volitional determination, it is able to exclude from itself every undesirable element or superfluous perception, transforming itself into a pure act of the spirit, which, concentrated within itself, can know its essential nature by excluding everything that is not part of itself and that is *other* in relation to itself.

In this state, Silence is attained, understood not as mere silence, but as the exclusion of whatever lies outside of co-consciousness, which, from that moment on, will choose for itself, in absolute purity, what should or should not be brought to the fore.

This is the threshold, the point of transition beyond which true meditation begins, even though the term “meditation” is generally very flexible and often includes the phases that precede it as well.

SILENCE

In an individual’s life, there are few moments of calm in which, if not the whole being, at least a part of it is not turned toward the external world and taken by it, absorbed, rendered unconscious of itself.

It is difficult, in ordinary life, to realize the extent to which self-awareness we abdicate self-consciousness, and the clear perception of oneself, in favor of activities of various kinds, always tending to externalize consciousness and to transmit impulses, sensations, and emotions to it.

In such a situation, it is very difficult for anyone to escape this game of deadly illusions, from which one is not freed even in moments of inactivity or rest.

The mind, clogged with kaleidoscopic images and impressions, follows the direction imposed upon it by a thousand external impulses, developing on its own images and fantasies associated with and capable of being associated with the activities and sensations with which it has been saturated and by which it has been engulfed, never stopping and never managing to escape this abyssal whirlpool.

Only a trauma, a call of the spirit, a dark sensation arising from a deeper, unknown, buried sensitivity, can create a pause, a void, a suspension of the whirlwind of thoughts and manifold feelings that usually overwhelm consciousness, rendering it enslaved, absorbed—not living and volitional, but lived by something else, conditioned, used.

If, by a twist of fate or by destiny, a rupture were to allow reality to be glimpsed for a moment, one would need to be able to halt and fix that vision. Only then might the possibility arise of a true understanding of what one is and what one does; it would be possible to realize the life of slumber in which one is immersed and carried away—possessed.

To return to being, to be able to *see*, one must expand the spaces.

The path to this is achieved by imposing silence on one's instinctive, bodily nature, by calming the impressions and emotions arising from and provoked by the outside world and echoing within the individual fabric.

It is necessary to isolate one's own sensitivity from within by observing thought, shaping it, solidifying it, fixing it, and, finally, suspending it.

If consciousness, enlivened and strengthened by the suspension of sensations and thought, in this inner silence knows how to turn to itself, penetrating within and knowing itself alone, the path to the spirit will be opened.

One will then know the Stone and the vertigo of the abyss; the path to the vision of reality will have been opened. By this is meant seeing—from within—the essence and thus reality of things; not looking—from the outside—at their appearance.

This is the fact, the path, the realization. A method, a technique for approaching it, can be developed.

Proceed by creating moments of calm and reflection in one's daily life. Get into the habit, in the evening, of objectively reconsidering the events of the day and one's own behavior within them. Judge oneself strictly, making no concessions, and increase throughout the day the moments of self-monitoring regarding one's inner state, the extent to which one is absorbed by activities, and the quality of consciousness.

Without haste, without wasting time, day by day, create a network of self-control and sensitivity. Make attention a vital necessity; correct, eradicate, and perfect.

By controlling thought, taming instincts and passions, making oneself immune to envy, jealousy, selfishness, and the soul's reactions to successes and failures, and immunizing oneself against the obsessions of the ego, one subdues one's own nature by bringing oneself to silence.

Silence is the gateway between worlds: the human and the divine. Within it lie the keys to true realization: to all realization.

Through it, everything can be known and every illusion dissolved.

In every path and tradition, for the mystic and the initiate, in the East as in the West, silence is the means to attain.

MEDITATION AND ITS EFFECTS

Meditation is the art of emptying oneself of the ego to become spirit.

If one's maturity and wisdom are not supported by constant meditative practice, slippages and declines in spiritual level will always be possible. If, on the other hand, the practice of meditation is not supported by adequate wisdom, it will bear no fruit and, in the worst case, may have negative effects to the point of falling into hallucinatory states such as those typical of

mediums and visionaries, along with the possible exacerbation of instincts and psychological deterioration characterized by instability and irritability.

Those who meditate rest within themselves and nourish themselves with a spiritual manna that increases strength and vitality.

The mind, becoming increasingly spiritualized, grows intuitive, and the ever-deeper penetration into the Self allows for a higher understanding of both the Doctrine and, consequently, of world, in a continuous process that becomes ever more rapid and unstoppable.

To the Eye of the Mind, ever more illuminated, connections, laws, and meanings appear that reveal the relationships of Man and the universe with the profound Reality that animates and sustains all.

Thus the need to reason, explain, and discuss things falls away, and in the serene silence of the sages, admiring wonder gives way to perfect knowledge.

The path to this, however, is not always easy and requires the firmest determination to press on against all the obstacles that will inevitably stand in the way.

One must learn to observe without rushing to pass judgment.

Along the way, one may perceive sounds, lights, and colors; at times, actual visions or apparitions may appear, but one must not dwell on them.

The practitioner must know only himself, and whatever may appear to him, he must both observe and ignore it.

With time, one will learn to attribute the proper value to everything, and by avoiding hasty conclusions, one will also have avoided many errors and unnecessary wastes of time.

These manifestations must be considered a sign of one's own activity and nothing else. If, after a vision and beyond any psychological suggestion, one feels tired, this means that such a manifestation is caused by the contents of the subconscious pouring out its contents, if not already by interference from larval entities. If, on the contrary, one feels fully energized and positively impressed, *it may* be a good sign.

In any case, since a sign along the way is certainly not the destination, one must let go of illusions and move on.

Whether with eyes closed or open, one may perceive patches of color, bluish dots, luminous sparks, small suns shining so brightly as to be blinding, black shadows, small flashes of lightning, two-dimensional faces and figures in dull colors, or three-dimensional figures in vivid, animated colors, in comparison with which the brightest colors of the physical world will appear dull. A whole series of sounds and, in some cases, voices may also make an appearance, but, even in this case, they should be considered a product of the circulation of energy, and it is not advisable to pay them too much attention.

In certain cases, the apparitions and similar phenomena may be so strong as to be perceptible even to other people present, but this, although it speaks in favor of their objectivity, does not speak in favor of their indisputable validity.

The true meaning of all this must be intuited and not rationally attributed.

It is worth recalling here that attention, fear, or euphoria will often have a galvanizing effect on such manifestations, and that detachment and impassivity are therefore advisable.

If what one seeks are oddities, one will find so many and such that one may lose oneself due to one's own naivety. Good and evil come from one's own mind; if negative causes are cultivated, devastating effects will be obtained. If, on the other hand, with wisdom and austere discipline, one seeks the self-knowledge in

inner stillness, the appearance or absence of these kaleidoscopic visions will not be a source of excessive problems.

Meditation is an activity of the spirit attained through proper posture, deep breathing, attention, concentration, and silence; all components that are directed and unified within it.

Meditation is the gateway through which man sets out on the path toward God.

Whoever sets out resolutely on this path, carrying the lamp of wisdom and the sword of discernment, will sooner or later reach the Goal, and no obstacle will be able to stop them.

After purifying and cleansing one's being of useless desires, illusory fantasies, presumption, aversion, and envy, one may set out without fear to the constant practice of spiritual exercises, confident that they will yield the best results.

If, in order to proceed, a traditional initiatory reconnection proves indispensable, this will undoubtedly be offered in due time to those who, with a righteous spirit, express the desire for it. This will concern, in any case, only those who can demonstrate that they possess the necessary qualifications to embark upon the highest and most complete spiritual realization.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

I. Posture

After ensuring that your physical and mental conditions are optimal (not hungry, not sleepy, etc.), loosen any tight clothing and stretch your neck, arms, and legs. Sit on a chair with a straight back or on a stool; your feet should be parallel and your hands resting on your thighs.

Clench your fists tightly and then relax your hands two or three times to release and ease any internal tension; then check that your back is straight without straining.

Imagine that your head is suspended from the ceiling by a string, so that your neck is not compressed and there is no tension in the back of your neck.

The chin is slightly tucked in, and the tongue should touch the roof of the mouth.

Make sure your whole body is relaxed and that you don't feel any discomfort; fix your gaze on the floor, about a meter away from you. Do not close your eyes, or you risk dozing off, and do not keep them too wide open, so as not to distract yourself.

Remain motionless in this position for five to ten minutes; your body will lose sensation while your consciousness gradually becomes more aware of its contents.

If you breathe silently, calmly, deeply, and naturally, this simple exercise of sitting motionless will gradually lead you to master your body and instincts, increase calmness and mental clarity, and also improve your health.

Over time, you will be able to extend the duration of these sessions as you wish; they may also precede doctrinal study to promote maximum results and assimilation.

If you are agitated, tired, or upset, even a single minute of this exercise can restore your balance.

Certain spiritual schools use this single practice as a means to attain Enlightenment.

II. Breathing

The best way to breathe is slowly and deeply, which is achieved through so-called abdominal breathing.

Once seated (see previous paragraph), bring your attention to your breath and, without forcing it, try to relax completely and make it slower and deeper, until it becomes light and imperceptible.

At this point, “listen” with mindfulness to the breath as it comes and goes, *without interfering* with it.

This exercise calms the mind and frees it from unnecessary thoughts. The spirit and consciousness begin their unification.

Initially, a few minutes of this practice will be sufficient; later, you can increase its duration as desired.

Before ending the exercise, you should gradually increase your breathing and the amount of air inhaled, move your head, and loosen and massage your arms and legs to help restore blood circulation.

Once your normal state is restored, you may stand up, but always calmly, to avoid sudden and harmful transitions from the body’s total relaxation to its normal state of activity.

Both sitting still and more complete form combined with deep breathing, lower blood pressure and heart rate, and it would be wrong and dangerous to stand up suddenly without first allowing these physiological activities to increase and normalize.

III. Attention

Attention is a prerequisite for the previous exercises, and you can learn to increase it by systematically practicing, in your spare moments, observing objects down to the smallest details, and then trying to recall every detail

The procedure is simple; take, for example, a coin and carefully observe both sides and the edge, then hide it from view and try to remember everything—from the color, to the numbers, to the images depicted, down to any dents, etc...

If you forget something, switch to a different object and repeat the exercise. You will thus get used to paying closer attention and begin to lay the groundwork for potential visualization exercises.

IV. Concentration

When attention focuses on a single point to the exclusion of all others, concentration occurs.

If, for example, you practice counting your breaths from one to ten, or from one to one hundred, you'll realize that it's not that easy to stay focused, and that you need *to concentrate* your entire mental presence on a single object completely if you want to avoid distractions.

Once you have developed the ability to concentrate, you can test it by reading a book without losing your train of thought even once, reading every word with total attention.

One must fully understand the importance of mental control, because distracted and undisciplined people are those who, if they approach esotericism, jump from branch to branch like monkeys, taking an interest today in the Rosicrucians, tomorrow in Buddhism or Kabbalah, and later in something else, without ever achieving inner stability or any true interest in anything.

Often, out of frustration, they seek flashy methods and hope for immediate results, or fantasize about masters capable of granting instant enlightenment, but they reach old age with nothing to show for it but wasted time and unfulfilled hopes.

It is better to build judiciously, laying brick upon brick until one's own edifice is complete, rather than hoping all one's life to encounter Merlin the Magician, who, even if he existed, would have better things to do than please the lazy and hopeful slackers who demand too much and disdain the small and even tedious daily work, achieving nothing.

V. Meditation

Alert and focused, sit as explained in the first paragraph; after a few minutes, observe your breath and bring yourself to the final state described in paragraph two.

Having forgotten the posture, forget the breath as well and focus on the sense of serenity, peace, and freedom.

Once this phase is also passed, focus on the heart as the source of life, light, and warmth; cultivate a sense of love for the spirit, then remain in this state, striving to achieve perfect *silence*.

These meditations may last from ten minutes to an hour; afterward, once the experience is complete, you should gradually reactivate the body by increasing respiratory activity.

In some cases, the spirit will determine the duration of these exercises; in others, a disturbance caused by external factors will force an interruption. In any case, it is advisable that everything be done progressively: first, by practicing for a few months to sit motionless and improve one's attention, then adding the breathing technique and concentration on the breath.

Once these various components are mastered, true meditation will become their harmonious synthesis and lead to genuine spiritual progress and real self-knowledge.

Many strange or even miraculous events may then occur, but one will no longer run the risk of getting lost or being deceived by murky psychic phenomena, for, having transcended the small "ego" with all its obsessions and pettiness, the true spiritual personality will emerge triumphant.

Meditation is the key to harmony between man and the divine; it is not a unique means or a technical method, but due to its relative simplicity and safety and the possibilities it offers, it is the most accessible "raft" for crossing from this shore to the other.

Other, more sophisticated techniques might be appropriate, but it is not prudent, in our opinion, to place techniques that

could prove more dangerous than useful indiscriminately in everyone's hands without any caution.

For a first approach, what has been indicated seems to us, moreover, more than sufficient.

CONCLUSION

The subject of this little book is so vast that it would be impossible to cover it exhaustively. We have nevertheless sought to provide the essential guidance for setting out on *the path to awakening*, and we hope that many will benefit from it.

In any case, it is our intention to supplement the teachings presented here with other writings, because we know that many beginners are insatiable consumers of information and, before they have even grasped the content of one book, are already moving on to the next.

We will therefore strive to publish enough material to satisfy even the most restless minds.

In any case, we advise you not to underestimate the significance of what we have presented and to apply yourself to the exercises day after day.

No book teaches everything or the whole truth; books guide, but they cannot do more than that.

What one seeks is already within oneself, and, as Socrates would say, all that is needed is a midwife capable of bringing it to light.

With a predominantly meat-based diet, these forces remain inactive, almost paralyzed, whereas a more vegetarian diet allows them to activate, to undergo that mysterious transformation that elevates the plant to the level above it. This transformation cannot take place with meat because the animal, in and of itself,

represents a level higher than the plant; those forces that remain inactive in the organism, because they are not utilized, become a source of disorder, whereas their action should manifest in a way that is favorable to our development.

There are also foods that are directly influenced by the earth and the cosmos: on some, solar forces act preferentially, on others, terrestrial forces. Mushrooms, for example, and legumes in general (plants with pods) are shielded from solar forces, while oranges and tomatoes are, on the contrary, imbued with them. We should therefore give preference to these solar foods, not because there is something in the others that paralyzes, but something that can delay, just as there is something in these that can help. For while it is right to keep our feet on the ground, it is equally right not to forget devotion to those forces that transcend the earth and complete our essence as human beings.

If one wishes to follow inner discipline, including in matters of physical care, it is natural—as well as beneficial—to place oneself in the best possible conditions.

THE TRIALS

It is worth noting that, at a certain point on the initiatory path, transformations may occur in the organism—a consequence of the inner exercises—which may but should not be interpreted as pathological anomalies.

In reality, all exercises result in greater mobility of the etheric body. In fact, in ancient times, and especially in India where the primary aim was to achieve the actual detachment of the etheric body, this result was attained through special breathing exercises. Today, for various reasons, these are not recommended; for our current organism, these abrupt “tearing” of the physical body from the etheric can cause serious damage, and any results that might arise would be entirely random, because they are obtained

without the necessary ability to control and interpret them, or to assess their true significance.

For these and other reasons, breathing practices are not recommended, whereas consistent practice of the exercises given by Rudolf Steiner produces a different transformation of the breath—one more suited to modern humans—which results, among other things, in greater lung capacity and reduced sensitivity to oxygen deprivation, as the effects of carbon dioxide become less harmful. Breathing acquires a new rhythm, spontaneously, without the need to focus on it intentionally—a practice that would entail physical introspection and thus further distract from true inner concentration.

The increased mobility of the etheric body causes the physical body, at a certain point, to feel foreign to us. This disidentification of the physical body from the etheric body produces certain specific effects. For example, one begins to perceive one's own skeletal system as a weight, a weight that evokes in us the memory of the process of bone hardening, the cause of old age and death. One must not shy away from this sensation of the internal skeleton—which can become noticeable, but is in no way alarming.

Another possible sensation is that of experiencing the muscles as if currents were flowing through them: one feels something flowing through the muscular system; certain volitional processes are accompanied by a kind of current that is movement within the etheric body.

Other experiences then concern the nervous system and blood circulation. The blood current allows us to experience ourselves within it, because within it lies our center: the ego. We now have the sensation that our consciousness extends within it. The nervous system, then, acquires a certain independence; the brain begins to differentiate: in a central region of it we feel ourselves at the center of our being, while in its periphery unfolds the memory in which the current representing time lives.

The nervous system begins to become independent of the blood current. In the ordinary person this does not occur: balance arises from the control exercised by certain nerves over circulation. This balance comes about in a very special way in the esoteric disciple: *the vagus and sympathetic* currents no longer have the same effect on circulation, and our sensitivity, previously active in the nervous system—is now aroused in the bloodstream.

Another phenomenon we may observe is the independence of individual internal organs within us; this may initially disturb us, but we must avoid allowing it to become a source of anxiety or uncertainty. The heart, for example, assumes the importance of a center of which we become conscious: it becomes an organ radiating subtle currents throughout the organism, like an internal solar system.

The other organs, too, can become conscious within us; we then have the sensation of carrying them within our organism as an internalized part of the external world.

Similar sensations are experienced with the sense organs: in summer, for example, we feel them separate from us, almost embedded in our organism. We experience how the eye was formed by light: we now have the sensation that light penetrates the organism, almost carving out a space for itself to shape its organ. Simultaneously, through the etheric region of the eye, we can have a sensation of the ether of light: when we gaze upon objects in the physical world, we feel we perceive something of the light-ether.

Steiner speaks of several other senses beyond the five normally known: while he excludes *touch*, which is not a sense but a “collision” with the external world, he alludes to other senses, remnants within us of the ancient organs of communication with the external world during the earlier lunar existence. In a certain way, through the exercises, we restore these senses to their spiritual origin. In fact, through *taste it is* possible to feel and remember, and if, through a further act of concentration, one

succeeds in erasing the gustatory experience after having evoked it, it is possible to have a sensation of the cosmic ether. Regarding *smell*, by recalling the odor and then freeing oneself from the memory, it is possible to arrive at a sensation of the vital ether. Regarding hearing, we can attain a sensation of the ear as an organ separate from us, introduced into us from the outside. The ear, in fact, currently constitutes the involution of an ancient organ from the lunar epoch, which was then designed for the perception of the harmony *of the spheres*, that is, of the movement and action of the Hierarchies.

Another sense is that of heat: in an environment that does not provide a precise sensation of heat or cold, it is possible to perceive one's own internal heat, and this sensation can take us back to very distant periods of our evolution, when heat constituted the fundamental basis of our being.

This new way in which memory functions is one of those changes that can be rather unpleasant. In fact, memory, in the usual sense of the term, suffers greatly during esoteric training. Ordinary memory, of the visual and auditory kind, is fundamentally cerebral: it is the brain, in fact, that brings the image to mind. This type of memory, due to the acquired mobility of the etheric body, is gradually lost and subsequently replaced by a different mnemonic faculty. As a result of the discipline, through the activity of the etheric body, it is possible to recover the "lost" memory. In fact, the etheric body—and not the brain—is the true reservoir of memory, where everything is recorded and stored. If, for example, one wishes to recall certain distant events, one will find that, starting from the present and moving backward, it is possible to clearly retrieve the desired events.

As for intellectual content, one must strive to bring a human interest to reading and study—that is, to accompany learning with a certain emotional life. Then, through the recollection of the moods experienced, it will be possible to recall the images:

memory is awakened in feeling. Ultimately, therefore, one can say that memory returns via a more direct and complete path, but through a less rapid and more difficult process of recollection.

* * *

In the chapter on Initiation, Steiner says little, because the subject is difficult to grasp. For those who lack the necessary maturity, it is not easy to grasp what pertains to true initiation.

Steiner, reconnecting with what took place in the ancient Mysteries, presents certain phases of Initiation by their ancient names: the trials of fire, water, and air. With the first *trial by fire*, one begins to look at the external world to sense its relationship, its intrinsic qualities generally hidden from the external senses; physical perceptions are set aside to bring to light those that lay veiled. The veil is “burned away.” This burning constitutes the trial by fire: entering into a direct relationship with the inner nature of things themselves. Many spontaneously experience this condition even before approaching the initiatory path. This experience requires inner purification and maximum impersonality: the lower personality must be completely silenced.

A further step consists in learning the so-called system of “occult writing.” It is very difficult to speak of it. At a certain point in inner evolution, one begins to sense the possibility of grasping emerging thoughts before they are expressed, before they take the form of concepts. They are then instantly recognized and can serve to attain certain states, or to clarify certain forms of knowledge for oneself.

Writing represents thoughts by means of signs. When reading a common text, one is obviously not aware of the individual letters that compose it, but one grasps directly the concepts formulated through them. The concepts are recognized within the consciousness. For example, one can think of a triangle by

observing its sides, representing it, so to speak, analytically, but one can then arrive at the concept through the synthetic knowledge of the relationships between the sides, the angles, etc., that is, through an act of pure abstraction that grasps the concept without lines and dimensions. Unlike normal writing, in occult writing every figure has a different movement; in fact, nothing in it is fixed, but everything is mobile. It forms within us, and we are able to read it because, at a certain point, it reveals its content to us.

This description gives only a rudimentary idea of occult writing. Drawing upon it, the soul acquires a sense of absolute certainty regarding the possibility of communicating with the spiritual worlds and with those who are our companions on the path. Words thus become merely a pretext, an escape for two beings following the same path: they will meet silently in that realm where thoughts arise from the identical content contemplated in the signs of occult writing.

Rudolf Steiner attaches great importance to this kind of experience, which, it is true, does not occur all that easily, but which, once experienced, evokes that particular sense of security upon which to base the strength to communicate to others the living content of Spiritual Science.

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In ancient times, these initiatory trials, in the rituals of occult brotherhoods, had a purely symbolic value (think of Mozart's *Magic Flute*), whereas now they have an entirely inner character.

The Water Passage is so named because, when one passes through it, one feels as if suspended, detached from the solid ground of the earth. Human actions are generally determined by external stimuli, by circumstances of the surrounding world that shape our conduct, forcing it into a series of adaptations

adjustments in accordance with external demands. Thus habits are formed that are the consequence of one's personal relationship with the external world: one is led to do one thing rather than another by the particular circumstances that gradually present themselves. At a certain point, however, all this ceases completely; one must then find within oneself the motive for action; one no longer seeks the impulse to act from an external stimulus, nor does one react on the basis of habit or past experience. The reaction to events will in fact be the fruit of newly acquired wisdom, a wisdom of a non-subjective nature, and therefore matured to the corresponding degree of personal morality.

With the trial by water, therefore, the determining motives are no longer those that come from external life, but those matured internally, both because one has opened oneself to the Higher Self and because, through the "occult writing," one has received a new direction in life. Although one continues as before in the fulfillment of the same duties, in the performance of the same functions required by the world, and remains, as before, integrated into human society, everything now moves within us as a result of an inner determination rooted in spiritual knowledge. One cannot allow oneself to be guided, with regard to events, by spontaneous subjective reactions, but rather by the knowledge one has been able to acquire. One need not fear that this new behavior, insofar as it is determined by a kind of inner consultation, will dry up the soul, hindering spontaneity and the harmony of feeling with action. For when one appeals to the higher nature, the true warmth of feeling is simultaneously developed. Much more so than is the case with spontaneous impulses, those that come from the higher Self are accompanied by the warmth of feelings. It could not be otherwise, because inner dryness hinders spiritual development. The development of the soul must take place in a kind of warm greenhouse: it must always be accompanied by the warmth of feelings, even when they are the instinctive urges to act have by then faded; even when, so to speak, one is as if lifted from the earth.

The state of mind established through the water test gradually leads to complete self-mastery. When we receive impressions from the external world, our higher self generally does not take part in the process; we have ready-made responses in our consciousness, in accordance with our habits and the education we have received, and we react without hesitation through them. There are circumstances, however, in which we must act differently, because our spiritual development is open to horizons far broader than the usual ones. In these cases, if we abandon ourselves to the common way of reacting, we find ourselves in contradiction—in painful contradiction with ourselves—and we have the sensation of losing our reality: we no longer feel in control of ourselves. For this reason, everything we experience must be brought back into the repository of our inner self, before the Higher Self, which is the part of us that can receive the right spiritual impulses, to then manifest them outwardly in actions. At this point, any infiltration of personal desires or goals, of external interests, completely disturbs our vision: it takes us back into the dreamlike realm of instincts, which is where most people normally live.

The self-mastery required in relation to the world is the same that will aid us in the face of spiritual experiences, which would otherwise remain veiled and confused.

In daily life—as has been said—we are continually aided by our instinctive impulses, by spontaneous reactions; indeed, our conduct will be all the more energetic the more it is determined by this kind of uncontrolled reaction, the result of our habitual mental disposition, of a habit of perceiving things in a certain way. By countering this natural disposition, one may obviously feel weakened at first, but if one persists further, one will truly be able to replace instinctive reactions with inner resolutions born of spiritual experience, we will have a response—perhaps seemingly less impetuous to the world's stimuli—but imbued with an element of power not even remotely comparable to the other. There will be a perfect correspondence between our inner vehicles: so that what passes through the physical body and the

astral body to reach the Self will return from the Self to the external world, in a reverse motion, along a straight line, and thus with a fullness of power unattainable under ordinary conditions, whereas reactions originate from that confused mist found between the astral body and the etheric body, which is a reflection—a mere reflection—of the higher Self.

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The next quality to be developed is what Rudolf Steiner calls *presence of mind*—the ability to respond to the demands of events not only with wisdom, but also with immediacy. The relationship between the external world and the higher self must become a direct path that no longer requires that elaborate inner work, which was undoubtedly useful during the preparatory period. The continuity of the exercises must have prepared an immediate path, free from the hindrance of detours that alter our decisions and trap them in the dreamlike realm of our being. Action and reaction must arise from and return to the Self in an immediate manner, so that there is readiness of decision and choice without hesitation.

At this point, therefore, we must have identified and placed the higher nature at the center of our being. This is what the *test of air* consists of: feeling completely lifted, not merely detached as in the test of water, from the ground of external influences. We are no longer simply *outside* the physical environment: we can now also move freely and entirely within the spiritual environment.

Readiness of decision must be active in both the moral and physical realms, so that in emergencies, in difficult or even dangerous circumstances, one can immediately realize what must be done. At a sudden noise, for example, one must not, like most people, startle or be frightened, but one must immediately

consider whether the noise conceals a request for action, for intervention. One must engage with the physical world as beings fully capable of acting from within.

Rudolf Steiner says that in ordinary life many people are, in a certain sense, already prepared for these initiatory trials, in that they are naturally endowed with the necessary soul qualities. We shall see this when examining the qualities that form the centers of spiritual vision; we shall see how there may be individuals who, instinctively, already possess some of the qualities necessary for initiation.

There is another “formality” along the initiatory path which, although also present in traditional paths, takes on an entirely different meaning here. It involves committing oneself, through an inner oath, not to betray the principles of occult teaching. In reality, this is not a true oath, but the responsible decision that each person makes before the higher world to give to everyone what is spiritually due to them, neither more nor less. For if one communicates a teaching to someone for whom they are not prepared, one assumes karmic responsibility for any consequences, for the misuse that might result. One must not keep a secret to appear mysterious, but only to avoid harming others. Instead, one must offer everything the other is capable of receiving; to this end, the qualities previously developed allow for that degree of human receptivity so that we may be precisely shown exactly what the other needs.

It is not, therefore, a true oath. Everything is entrusted to the responsibility of each individual; and the responsibility is great because, as has already been said, a very heavy burden may result from it karmically.

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At this point in the inner rite, the disciple receives the *drink of diroblio*. This moment of Initiation allows us to observe something important regarding memory. It is a rather common habit to constantly ruminate on one's past: to review the events of one's life, to dwell on them, and to re-enact them over and over again. And this is a subtle form of selfishness, of self-love, of attachment to the events of one's past. All of this is extremely harmful to occult development!

One should strive to achieve that type of memory proper to the Self in the period between death and rebirth, after the separation of the etheric body from the astral body. In other words, one must extract the quintessence from past experiences: transform the experiences themselves into impulses of knowledge, taking care not to bring into the present external events shrouded in the mood of the past. We know that everything from the past that is brought into the present is essentially Luciferic: it develops in us an openness to Luciferic forces.

In this regard, there is an image from Rudolf Steiner that, exceptionally, I have also found in the work of some modern psychologists. Just as one need not be conscious of individual bricks to be aware of a building, so inner memory must be the synthetic result of life. If we lose the immediate memory of external events (and we can lose it insofar as we bring our consciousness, through exercises, to a state of liberation from the images of past life), then we drink the cup of oblivion, and become capable of using the essence of the experiences of the present life, even before having passed through death and rebirth.

The drink of oblivion—so called symbolically—does not entail renouncing the experience acquired in life, which, on the contrary, must be kept as present as possible, but rather liberation from the images that past experiences carry with them, like a psychic imprint that prevents one from encountering new experiences with ever-new wisdom and a renewed impulse toward knowledge. The more one is able to forget, the more it will be

possible to renew oneself, to be different: to be the living result of what, day by day, is experienced in life.

The drink of forgetfulness prepares the *drink of memory*, whose inner effect manifests itself in the ability to remember spiritual truth at every moment, so as to carry it within oneself, as an attitude, in every moment and circumstance. At times, due to particular causes or demands, one may find oneself distracted from this commitment to the continuity of memory; one must then be fully aware of exactly how far one has strayed from the right path. What has been learned through occult education must become within us a treasure chest of knowledge, from which we can draw profitably whenever situations require it.

Self-mastery is achieved not by filling one's head with abstract notions, but through the intense work of knowledge. Only in this way will it be possible to summon, in every circumstance, the relevant knowledge and to perceive, at every moment, the complex of causes that determine certain external effects. It will be possible to order, in the right direction, the inner "forms" in the right direction so as to be able to respond to all the demands and emergencies that life ceaselessly presents.

Simultaneously with all this, the memory of the various states the soul has passed through in the past will develop intensely. It will be possible to observe and feel these states anew of years and years ago, prior to entering the occult discipline, even from periods of lesser consciousness. It will be possible to observe the state of mind of that time, following it through all the stages of its transformation, to finally compare it with the current one. The vivid memory of our inner life is much stronger than mechanical visual memory, yet it is not possible to represent it in words, to describe states of mind with appropriate expression. These states of mind are nevertheless present in our consciousness and can be compared with our current ones, thus measuring the length of the path traveled.

In this way, through initiation, one achieves self-transcendence: one reaches the inner center, the true Self, and lives and acts in the presence of spiritual reality, under the guidance of the higher worlds. At this point, human beings no longer belong to themselves! And while that is a very distant goal, understanding it can, even now, enable us to take the first steps toward it.

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Many other qualities must be cultivated along the path of Initiation, among which patience is of the utmost importance.

Patience is indispensable in the rhythmic repetition of exercises, in attention to detail, in the natural desire to reach a goal immediately; and, on the other hand, it is necessary in the face of shortcomings, failures, uncertainties, and the darkening of consciousness that occur.

Certain aversions that suddenly arise toward the discipline do not depend on some sudden inner change, but on the lack of the quality of patience. It is helpful, to this end, to lose track of time a little: to stop counting the days, months, and years that have passed without results in the discipline. In the face of the result, time must have no importance: the passing day must not be added to the others, because the memory would accumulate the full weight of past efforts, whereas what truly matters is the present effort. In this sense, it is not advisable to look back: what has been gained through the exercises cannot be recalled, because it is now part of us. What matters above all is to be always fully conscious of the states of mind we have experienced. The continuous presence of oneself to oneself is the best education in patience.

Impatience increases internal resistance; it is a true state of inner contraction that betrays agitation of the astral body, which,

to better fulfill its function, should instead be left in its stillness, in its balance.

In inner work, impatience instills in the disciple the anxiety of having to overcome something, the desire to move toward inner perception and simultaneously to feel oneself moving. And this is an attitude proper to the physical world which, when carried over into the spiritual realm, prevents authentic experience. The spiritual world, in fact, in order to reveal itself, requires of the disciple a state of openness and calm waiting—a passage, so to speak, into which it can enter. Rather than seeking the sensational, one must learn to recognize the importance of certain subtle inner movements—apparently simple and insignificant—that have an enormous influence on inner development. This inner disposition must gradually extend to one's entire life, so that, through the practice of patience, there are no situations—however turbulent and difficult—in which one cannot find a sense of calm and gentleness.

Impatience, in certain circumstances, can turn into anger. This must be absolutely avoided. For a time, anger served a purpose, but it no longer does. Yet in the world, consciously or not, people are so convinced of the necessity and legitimacy of anger that a gentle person is considered spineless, a weakling. Instead, it takes great strength not to become angry.

Even when one has personally overcome anger, the danger of “contagion” remains. Indeed, in some people, there is almost a tendency to join others in moments of anger, to tune into that same wavelength. One must gather all one's strength to prevent the formation of this vicious cycle, the accumulation of one form of anger upon another.

The forces that are wasted in anger, when converted into calm, become spiritual forces, the power of will. Irritation, anger, and impatience prevent the reception of the spiritual; the exercise of patience, by calming the instinctive upheavals of feeling, fosters constancy in discipline and in the commitment undertaken, and

above all prevents that particular form of discouragement that leads some to consider themselves incapable of practicing inner work. Those who reach such a conclusion cut themselves off from the path, for no one can know or measure their own capabilities before having long struggled and patiently followed the way.

MEEKNESS AND SILENCE

The inner path must gradually prepare within us the ability to act directly in life from the soul and spirit, so that hearing, seeing, and speaking become their active and conscious expression.

Returning to the topic of patience, it should be noted that the development of this quality must be considered from more than one perspective. It is not merely a matter of overcoming common impatience, but also that form of weariness which sometimes sets in regarding the exercises and inner practices suggested thus far, and which is often accompanied by discouragement due to a lack of results. In this regard, it is important to be aware that the Higher Powers, the forces of the spiritual world, are waiting to be welcomed, provided they find the conditions that allow for it: in essence, rather than moving toward them, one must know how to open oneself to them.

Personal commitment must therefore focus on a work of inner purification, so as to open a passage for the spiritual forces—which are, in truth, always ready, beyond the limits of consciousness, to connect with us. It is only the veils of the subjective personality, our reactions, and inner restlessness that prevent them from drawing near. Every effort to look and listen diverts our focus toward the physical senses and away from the spiritual ones: the work of occult education must be primarily aimed at removing obstacles rather than at achieving something. The right aspiration toward the spiritual worlds must be expressed in veneration and love, and must not impose a personal direction on our forces. Every effort must converge inward.

Patience must also be practiced in daily life, renouncing the sensitivity and irascibility that certain circumstances can sometimes provoke. Anger, perhaps useful on the lower levels to strengthen the astral body, becomes harmful for those now seeking knowledge of the spiritual worlds, because it causes a darkening, a disturbance of the soul that opposes the flow of spiritual forces. Reactions driven by angry impulses must be replaced by calm and serenity: only then will it be possible to receive the right guidance on how to behave in the most difficult situations.

A further task is to subdue passions and desires, even those directed toward the spirit. The force of desire, by entirely drawing one's experience toward a direction not deliberately chosen, prevents the reception of subtle spiritual "sensations." Desire is a force by which one should not be seized before having studied the direction to follow for a certain result. Only then can the force of desire be utilized to be guided by it in that direction. This particular force, however, can be legitimately used only when our discernment has confirmed the correctness of the chosen path. In essence, it is a matter of mastering with absolute self-control the feelings that arise spontaneously, not allowing these energies to push us toward directions that have not been freely determined.

To proceed further along this path, it is necessary to cultivate sincerity with oneself: to be able to look one's weaknesses squarely in the face and recognize them. For example, vanity is a very subtle but decidedly paralyzing feeling inner progress; it arises when one is satisfied with oneself. This satisfaction constitutes a real halt. What has been achieved, what has been attained, must not become a cause for personal satisfaction: it is merely a stepping stone from which to look ahead. Vanity—the tendency to hide or embellish what is less beautiful in us—takes on such subtle forms that it requires a tremendous capacity for introspective analysis and self-knowledge, so that nothing escapes our attention. Only through constant effort will it be possible to uncover all the weaknesses hidden in the recesses of the soul. The

satisfaction of having reached a goal must therefore not be a reason to stop, but must transform into the quiet certainty of moving in the right direction.

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Just as irritation and anger prevent us from perceiving the inner world of others—gathering like an inner cloud that blocks any possibility of communion with people and things—so too does fear have an equally paralyzing effect. Fear is overcome by courage, which, cultivated in the outer life, must then be carried over into the inner life. The strength of perseverance needed to continue on the path is an expression of that courage.

Another major obstacle to an authentic relationship with people and the world is prejudice. Prejudices of race, caste, etc., prevent one from seeing the soul of the other, whereas the goal is to attain the highest level of understanding and, through this, through what one receives of the other's inner life, to enrich one's own inner life. Everything discovered in another being helps one to see more clearly within oneself: the organs of clairvoyance develop thanks to this kind of exercise. It is therefore important, in human interactions, to take into account what is happening in the other person's soul, to speak to that soul always from its own point of view, transcending one's own, and silencing one's own personality. Everything that, in this way, one manages to express in interactions with others enriches the soul with a vast range of nuances, from the most humble to the most complex. This is extremely important: one cannot live solely within the narrow confines of one's own soul, but must experience within oneself all the manifold aspects of the human personality. In this way, true sensitivity is cultivated.

Rudolf Steiner advises gentleness in human relationships: never harshness. Many people love to fight against the faults of others, and treat others with the harshness they should—and

perhaps do—apply to themselves. This is utterly useless, because harshness erects an insurmountable barrier instead of establishing inner communication. I have known many people in Spiritual Science who made it almost a duty to discover and point out the faults of others; this invariably provoked a reaction or a depressive state. Whereas, by receiving what comes from the other with a sense of gentleness and kindness, one can easily lead the person beyond their limitations. In everyone there are qualities in proportion to their faults. It is precisely these that must be sought out and brought to the fore, by following the path of positivity and refraining from criticism. “Gentleness and silence,” says Rudolf Steiner.

Serious difficulties in discipline can arise from the environment in which one lives, from the particular circumstances imposed by the modern world. Almost always, in fact, one finds oneself caught up in an atmosphere of tension and struggle that often leads one to take sides in one direction or another, thus subjecting the astral body to constant pressures that end up constituting a real obstacle. An obstacle that, although surmountable, represents an additional difficulty from which, from time to time, it would be advisable to be able to escape by going, as R. Steiner, into the midst of the verdant plant world, up into the sunny mountains, in the quiet of nature, to gather one’s thoughts and finally look within and around oneself, to take stock of what has been accomplished and set new goals for the future: ultimately, to review the path taken, assess the results, and determine future tasks. The mere fact of living in a noisy environment, amidst people of a passionate or selfish disposition, creates great difficulties which, if it is impossible to get away, can be counterbalanced by reading sacred texts, such as the Gospels, especially the Gospel of John. These readings evoke an inner atmosphere quite different from the one experienced daily and which, in a certain sense, can compensate for the lack of periodic immersion in nature.

These periods of contemplation and stillness are very important, also because, at times, it is precisely the noise of the world that prevents one from realizing what has been prepared; in the stillness of nature, those results toward which one has long labored in vain may suddenly manifest. This means that, through the exercises, a certain inner maturity has been attained that only that heavy atmosphere had prevented from being realized.

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Through occult education, the disciple progressively purifies his instinctive life and hereditary endowment: in essence, he frees himself from the “spontaneous” reactions of his being, even the noblest ones, replacing them with discernment and will. Having freed oneself from these protective instincts, one must take care to firmly establish one’s direction in the spiritual and moral realm, because, in the absence of natural and automatic inhibitory brakes, the unleashing of passions could occur before the will is strong enough to exercise effective control. It is therefore of the utmost importance to examine oneself from time to time: to ask oneself whether one is truly worthy of that inner freedom one seeks to acquire, and whether one possesses the necessary strength for that freedom to work positively. Rudolf Steiner sets forth certain conditions as indispensable for those who follow the occult path.

The first condition is to promote the health of body and spirit. A body that is not perfectly healthy for reasons of destiny does not prevent occult training, but, in any case, one must always ensure that the physical body is as little of an obstacle as possible. It is difficult to establish inner harmony when the physical body demands attention due to some weakness. Physical health is connected to karma, and one must often ask whether something in the moral realm is weighing on the body, preventing the expected improvement. However, many of the qualities discussed

so far prevent that disorderly strain on the nervous system, which is one of the major causes of illness. By working on oneself in the soul realm, one can therefore improve physical health.

It may be that personal duties must be placed above health, or even above life itself. A living example of this was Rudolf Steiner himself, who, at a certain point, exhausted himself in the work he had to accomplish. Anyone who has read Marie Steiner's preface to the lecture series titled *The Karma of the Anthroposophical Society*, or other writings by Mrs. Steiner herself and by A. Steffen following Steiner's death, will understand how he voluntarily pushed himself to the limits of his strength and consciously exhausted himself to the point of sacrificing his life. Such a case is a very rare exception. Therefore, everyone must take care to preserve their health, so that the physical body is not an obstacle to spiritual work, but is, on the contrary, an instrument so efficient and harmonious that it can receive the new harmony of the soul.

For the health of the spirit, one must above all cultivate clarity of thought, discernment, and impressions received from the outside world. We must cultivate, through our sensibilities, a disposition toward true human and spiritual values. Particularly harmful are disordered, unrestrained thinking, daydreaming, and mental excitability. Many, for example, speak without first thinking, or think and speak simultaneously: this induces in them a profound sense of disorientation, which is extremely harmful. Before speaking, one must clearly formulate the thought to be expressed; even if not mentally clothed in words—and this is best—the concept must, in its vividness and intensity, be able to inspire the expression.

For a healthy imaginative life, one must exercise a certain critical sense regarding inner impressions and perceptions. An uncontrolled imagination leads not into the spiritual world, but into an artificially constructed astral world. This is the stumbling block for many: I have always observed that precisely those who,

with a certain ease, manage to achieve some results, then lose themselves in an artificial world due to a lack of critical thinking and maturity. We must remember that, when exploring the spiritual world, the images we first encounter are those we ourselves have formed, and that the true aspect of the spiritual world lies hidden behind them.

The second condition is that the disciple come to feel part of universal life, overcoming any sense of separation. The divine substance has been distributed among human beings so that they may form a single spiritual entity. For one does not carry with oneself only one's own karma, but also that of those who are close to us. This thought must inspire a sense of responsibility for everything that happens around us; one must strive to be what one would like others to be. This is the best way to lead others onto one's own path.

What has been said is closely connected to the third condition: the disciple must feel that thoughts and feelings are just as important to the world as one's own actions; from this derives the responsibility that each person has for their own environment. If the disciple takes care to think correctly about things and events, if they work on themselves concretely, the spiritual community to which they belong becomes a center of attraction for all the activities that revolve around it. The influence that can be exerted in this sense extends beyond the narrow circle of disciples and reaches out to the world. This point cannot be emphasized enough.

Steiner says that until the disciple can believe in the universal significance of his inner life, he is not yet ready to be a disciple of occultism. One must come to experience, to feel, that the movement of thought is just as concrete as actual action in the outer world—such as the movements, for example, that the hands perform when they grasp or carry out something tangible; while a practical gesture may involve a limited circle of people, within the temporal limits of its execution, thought endures and spreads, encompassing in its effects a multitude of beings. It is therefore of

the utmost importance that consciousness be prepared to receive this type of thought, so that it may penetrate it and exert its action, which has value for oneself and for others. From this perspective, one should consider the importance of individual action and that of groups as a community.

It is also necessary to act in accordance with the higher Self, and not in accordance with human outwardness, which is conditioned by elements foreign to true individuality, such as hereditary factors, race, etc. It is necessary that the physical body—a body borrowed and one that only partially fulfills the needs for which it was intended—must become a mirror of the inner self. The ability to harmonize the outer and the inner must shape one's relationships with others: this is essentially what the fourth condition consists of.

The fifth condition consists in training oneself to maintain a decision once made. The will suffers a severe weakening every time one fails to fulfill, even for justified reasons, the commitment made to oneself. Those suffering from abulia are dominated by the weight of their illness; the weakness of their will increases exponentially as they repeatedly go back on the decisions they have made, until they become prisoners of a veritable vicious circle. If, therefore, one could lead a psychasthenic to make decisions only when they can sustain them, this would constitute an element of treatment.

One must exercise great care in making a decision, examine it thoroughly with the aforementioned critical sense, and be absolutely certain that one will not have to change course later. When this happens, one must be aware that, even if it is wise as well as necessary to correct the error, this nonetheless entails a weakening of the will. Failing to follow one's will in a predetermined act is like falling into a void. Furthermore, there is no value in making decisions on the wave of a passionate impulse or an emotional outburst. Correct action always springs from will or from love: love imparts a momentum to our being that is equivalent to acting of one's own free will.

Gratitude for all that humanity possesses is the sixth condition to be matured. Along with gratitude and love for the spiritual world, which has given substance to the formation of our being, we must be grateful to all lower beings: to nature, to whose sacrifice human existence is indebted. Remember, in fact, that in the distant age of Saturn, everything was still “human,” and that only little by little, through a long evolution, did that external environment indispensable to humanity take shape—the fruit of the sacrifice of the beings left behind, recognizable today in the various kingdoms of nature. Let us therefore always remember the daily, silent offering of the gifts that nature bestows for the sustenance of the body. This sense—feeling can also be extended to human beings, to whom we owe so much, especially in view of the immense debt that mutually binds us to one another. Gratitude toward all beings fosters a unifying atmosphere of love, indispensable to the development of those very inner qualities that constitute the bridge to the spiritual worlds.

The seventh condition encompasses all the previous ones: it consists in viewing life—and acting within it—according to the direction outlined through the conditions already stated. Rudolf Steiner says, in this sense, that one must give a unified imprint to one’s life, that the aims of one’s actions be determined by the attitudes described. From these will arise an inner sense of purpose that will imbue life with devotion and warmth. Achieving, or at least cultivating, these conditions has no other purpose than to make the disciple a collaborator with the spiritual forces of the world. Many things must be abandoned, and many others acquired, in order to place oneself in the service of the Divine.

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Before discussing the effects that the exercises produce on the astral and etheric bodies, it is appropriate to consider how the

correct performance of the exercises is technically important for their success.

The utmost care must be taken to assume the correct body posture during meditation. The earth is traversed perpendicularly and horizontally by currents that, in a certain sense, can either aid or hinder meditation. The perpendicular currents facilitate it; therefore, the spine must be aligned vertically with respect to the Earth's surface. The supine position, which is the sleeping position, among other things, automatically induces the typical semi-dreamlike state that is incompatible with concentration and meditation.

Another point to observe is the following: when, during inner work, an idea has been received (often it is something new or at least a new aspect of something familiar), one must not believe that one can immediately make it one's own: once received and mentally grasped, the idea must slowly pass through us until it permeates us. Just as food, once it reaches the stomach, needs a little time to be assimilated and perform its nourishing function, so too do ideas—so that they do not remain confined to mere cerebral processes, staying in the abstract realm—need time to be assimilated in order to be permanently imprinted in the etheric body and the higher bodies.

The same attitude must be cultivated in those inner and outer movements which, unlike ideas, seemingly arise from within ourselves: in particular, in the exercise of the will, or “pure act,” to prevent what we have set out to do from remaining merely an intention or being carried out automatically, a minimum of preparation is required so that the current of the will may truly pass through us. And of course it is very easy to perform a gesture, but if the aim is to work on oneself, to change something in one's habits or points of view, one must prepare the gesture so as to then direct one's attention to the “force” flowing through the limbs and slowly rising to the surface, until the execution of what one had set out to do. Many people fail to achieve results in

this exercise because they do not pay due attention to the slow passage of forces through the body.

The exercises should not be performed merely mentally; they are processes that must permeate the entire organism: the content of meditation, for example, must be “felt” by the entire body as well as internally. Meditation initially originates in the brain, but little by little it must be able to permeate us entirely, so that the whole body is pervaded by the subject of the meditation itself. Then the exercise will prove truly fruitful, not remaining confined to the mental realm alone, where, after all, one idea has the same specific weight as any other. For the formation of the “astral centers” or “lotus flowers,” it is very important that the entire organism participate in the inner work so as to be transformed by it.

In the chapter titled “Some Effects of Initiation”, Rudolf Steiner said everything that could be said on the subject, which is indeed extremely delicate. There is a danger of doing more harm than good when dealing with the action of the subtle centers, so we will adhere as closely as possible to the outline provided by Steiner.

During the waking state, the physical body is permeated by the etheric and astral bodies; the etheric body follows the contours of the physical body, the astral body less so, being better organized in the upper part than in the lower. The etheric body is traversed by countless currents that move in a longitudinal or circular-radial direction. The longitudinal currents are directed toward the physical body; the circular currents concern the astral body and have a special relationship with those centers of it which, in Eastern terminology, are also called “lotus flowers.”

In discussing the astral body, we are led once again to speak of experiences of forms and colors which, it is worth recalling, actually reflect states of consciousness. The spiritual realm is a field of forces: the consciousness that penetrates it clothes these forces in forms and colors. Expansion into spiritual space occurs

with our entire being, something that also happens during sleep. While awake, the astral body remains spatially connected to the physical body, but when it opens to spiritual consciousness, it expands in proportion to the space it can perceive—that is, it becomes as large as its field of perception. In order to speak of the astral body in spatial terms, it is necessary therefore recall the relationship it has with the physical body: for it is within the physical body that the inner work takes place which, slowly but powerfully, opens the passage that allows consciousness to rise and expand from the ordinary to the spiritual level, while the meditator remains in the physical body.

Rudolf Steiner speaks of a “lotus flower” with two petals situated between the eyes; one with sixteen petals at the level of the larynx; one with twelve petals in the heart; and one with ten petals at the pit of the stomach. He also mentions others, such as the six-petaled one, situated in the center of the body, near the solar plexus, or the eight- and four-petaled ones, about which, however, little is said. Steiner, prudently, does not speak at length even of the two-petaled center, whose development, moreover, is related to that of the others: in fact, a misguided attempt to develop this center carries the danger of awakening forces belonging to primitive clairvoyance, which would obviously constitute a regression.

In the distant past, the “lotus flowers” were fully active (especially the one between the eyes, which, as a result of intellectual evolution, gradually faded away), and then they slowly ceased to function, losing the characteristic luminosity that revealed their vitality. Currently, only half of each of them is active; through inner work, the shadowed half awakens, and the entire *cakm* returns to illuminating and “move.” If the centers move while remaining in a state of obscurity, mediumship occurs.

The sixteen-, twelve-, and ten-petaled centers can be considered the principal ones, because they confer absolute mastery over the lower Self. Through the exercises, the “I” becomes master of the lower Self, establishing a perfect harmony

that manifests as the organism's immediate sensitivity: spiritual life becomes a natural function, so that the whole being is identified with it. Work on these centers, in addition to being fruitful for ourselves, allows us to radiate forces onto others, placing us in relationship with human beings. The first of the three centers in question connects us with the thoughts of others; the second, with feelings and moods; the third, with human possibilities, with the potential of the individual.

For the most part, what has been developed during the period of preparation and enlightenment is what is needed to develop the sixteen-petaled center, which is located in the larynx. This primarily involves working in the realm of ideas, while at the same time paying attention to morality in the use of words and to the quality and successful outcome of the resolutions made. The development of the petals requires the observance of eight conditions: the first concerns the way ideas are assimilated: the impressions received from the external world must be translated into ideas that are their faithful images. Ideas must represent objective reality, both sensible and spiritual, without being distorted by one's subjective nature. It is therefore necessary to monitor the processes of ideation, to combat daydreaming and the tendency to alter reality, so that ideas are a faithful mirror of external reality. The second condition concerns decisions: eliminating impulsiveness, that is, immediate and disordered reactions in one direction or another. Do not act under the influence of passion or uncontrolled impulses. Many reactions are determined by ingrained habits rather than by thoughtful reflection in accordance with one's principles. The third condition concerns speech: when speaking, one very often allows the flow of ideas to unfold automatically, without direction; instead, words must always have meaning and value relevant to the circumstance, and not be a casual expression of passing thoughts. The fourth condition concerns movements and attitudes in the external world. Every gesture, every act, should unfold in full consistency with one's ideas and resolutions, for the contradiction between idea and act produces a harmful force. One must clarify

the aims of one's spiritual tasks and adapt one's behavior in the external world to them.

The fifth condition concerns the organization of life. One's entire existence must be, both on the physical and moral planes, a harmonious unity of thoughts, speech, resolutions, and actions. It is necessary to exercise continuous self-control, so that nothing hinders this harmonizing activity. Likewise, one must examine one's own aspirations (sixth condition): do not allow aspirations to arise that are in conflict with the spirit and with ourselves. These vague aspirations lurk in the depths of the consciousness and very often go unnoticed, but they are forces working within us against us; we must therefore become aware of them and at the same time strengthen those right aspirations that are in harmony with our being, which do not work in opposition to the latent forces.

The seventh condition requires the disciple to learn to observe life. The events of life must be regarded as a continuous opportunity for inner experiences. Everything that happens must be brought before the consciousness so that we may eventually discover an indication of karma or identify some aspect of ourselves that has been neglected, because we did not want to or could not see it. It is a matter of observing life in such a way that it suggests to us the correction of our attitudes and activities and points us in the right direction.

The eighth condition involves periodic inner reflection to assess the actions carried out in accordance with the seven preceding points. The disciple questions their own fidelity to the path outlined by the seven preceding conditions; from this may spring, as in a synthesis, a clarifying vision of the purpose of their life, the aspirations to cultivate, and the direction to follow. Serene adherence to the identified path leads to the awakening of the inner centers, which begin to stir, nourished by the harmony of all the forces aroused.

Another important quality to observe is truthfulness. Speaking the truth promotes perfect correspondence between the world and the inner world. If the truth is distorted, the passage of content through the somatic and spiritual levels takes circuitous paths, and this produces, in the long run, an inner distortion of such severity that it becomes definitive. The detours created by lies become ingrained and make it increasingly difficult to be clear with oneself. Many people, unconsciously and without any purpose, continually distort the truth, because in them the habit of lying—even about trivial matters—has by now become ingrained.

Sometimes it may be altruistic not to tell the truth, but the moral purpose of this attitude does not avoid what has already been said. Even the abuse of rhetoric and exaggeration can lead to distortion; hence the need to present things with the utmost rigor and precision.

Above all, remember never to lie to children. Often parents, and adults in general, tell children things that are not true or make promises they do not keep, and this has a very bad influence on a child's inner life.

MORALITY AND KNOWLEDGE

The particular function of the two-petaled lotus flower, located between the eyes, roughly at the root of the nose, requires some further consideration. This *chakra*, unlike the others which begin to rotate as soon as they develop, exerts its action by projecting outward, extending horizontally like two branches, with the task of “bringing out” the etheric body.

In very ancient times, when the etheric body did not coincide with the physical body and did not permeate the human head, this lotus flower was responsible for that form of spontaneous, unconscious clairvoyance with which humanity of that era was

endowed. With the passage of time and changing conditions, this *chakra* slowly moved inward from the outside, losing strength and quality. Today, thanks to occult development, it tends once again to move outward to inspire the modern, conscious form of clairvoyance that characterizes the current stage of evolution.

This lotus flower has a very special relationship with the etheric body, the importance of which becomes apparent when, at a certain point in inner experience, the development of the lotus flowers must be accompanied by specific work on the etheric body: for through this center, in fact, both the currents descending toward the larynx and the heart, and the currents moving toward the hands, will form that network—sometimes encompassing the entire upper part of the etheric body—which, as it gains mobility, is thus transformed into a body of perception. The etheric body is currently subservient to the senses and the physical body, but thanks to the action of the two-petaled lotus flower on the currents moving toward the hands, it gradually becomes autonomous and free, transforming entirely into an organ of perception.

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Rudolf Steiner observes that it is very important not to speak of the stages of development of the lotus flowers, not even with one's own guide. In fact, what the disciple can report regarding their own experiences in this field generally does not correspond to reality, and this produces a distortion in the developing organ. It is good to cultivate, toward what cannot initially be understood, an attitude of prudent silence and wise patience, remaining silent even to oneself about one's own experiences until certainties have matured. Insisting on trying to conceptualize what is still premature artificially induces, in the lotus flowers, tendencies and inclinations that do not conform to reality—true deformations. One must accept what is experienced as it presents

itself, without immediately translating it into representations, all the more so since the subtle action of these organs unfolds equally well without the need for dialectical understanding. Everything that is prematurely enclosed in words and representations is as if it were dying, especially as regards the development of these most delicate organs.

* * *

The twelve-petaled lotus flower is cultivated in a manner analogous to that of the sixteen-petaled one, namely by developing certain qualities; these pertain to one half of the lotus flower, namely six petals; the other six, as in the case of those found in the larynx, take part in the rotation as soon as the first ones have developed.

The sixteen-petaled lotus flower—which we have already described—imparts the perception of “forms.” Just as with color, form becomes a particular way through which to “receive” impressions from the outside, almost imaginatively cladding them according to a certain design. One may, for example, perceive a threatening thought as a sharp point, as the image of a dagger blade seeking to harm us. Through the twelve-petaled lotus flower, located in the heart region, the perception of form—where this has been achieved through the development of the throat *chakra*—is accompanied by a sensation of warmth or cold: certain soul manifestations evoke a sense of inner pleasure, others an unpleasant sense of paralysis, very similar to the sensations produced by heat and cold.

The qualities associated with the development of this lotus flower are, in part, the same as those cultivated through the well-known five preliminary exercises, which are undoubtedly useful now to those who have already practiced them. The first quality results from the control of thought. Normally, thoughts arise through involuntary, almost instinctive associations: instead, after

choosing a specific subject, one must train oneself to direct the flow of thoughts in accordance with the topic, so that each thought is logically connected to the next, according to the pure relationship linking the preceding thought to the following one, while ensuring that the entire process is guided by deliberate attention. In essence, this involves consciously achieving in the waking state the opposite of what occurs unconsciously during sleep, when images arise and associate in a completely automatic manner.

In the presence of people who think automatically, superficial, and illogically, those who have cultivated conscious thought cannot help but feel a sense of distress, and to a certain extent this form of thinking can indeed be harmful. To prevent this from happening, it is advisable to mentally compose the stream of distorted thoughts and correct them. There is little point in doing this directly out loud because everyone, in accordance with their own nature, believes they are thinking and expressing themselves freely and coherently. Those who understand the importance of thought perform a useful function if, as thoughts are expressed, they silently correct disordered thoughts. In this way, without unnecessary opposition, one prevents harmful thought forms—which all erroneous and illogical thoughts effectively are—from wandering through the soul's environment.

The second quality is cultivated through the control of actions: it involves aligning action with thought, establishing an intimate coherence between them to avoid the separation and contradiction that ordinarily characterize their relationship. Very often, actions may simply be determined by perceptions that awaken impulses not subjected to the conscious scrutiny of thought. This may also occur in those who have become accustomed to exercising a certain control over the automatisms of thought: they may find themselves unaware of the origin, the impulsive cause of so many movements, small gestures, reactions, and the performance of even insignificant tasks. It may be that this depends on images unconsciously recorded in childhood, or

on impressions received from particular people or situations. The dualism that results from this, however, produces a dissociation between the ego and the organ of the will, between thinking and willing, which can be remedied only by the constant application of conscious thought to action.

The third quality concerns the development of perseverance.

Once a correct decision has been made, one must not go back on it: it is better not to make it at all than to go back on it. Being fickle in one's decisions has a harmful effect on this lotus flower. Doing good resolutions and then failing to follow through is far more harmful than not making them at all: in the latter case, one may merely delay the development of the lotus flowers, but at least one will not compromise it with serious deformities.

The fourth quality to be developed is tolerance. The disciple will certainly find himself in situations where he may feel that things around him are not proceeding in the right direction, that those close to him do not think and act rightly, and this may be a cause for irritation and indignation. Well, this way of reacting to the errors of others is today absolutely useless as well as primitive; it might perhaps have had a justification in times past, when anger and righteous indignation played a positive role in the development of the astral body. In the present age of the conscious soul, understanding and knowledge must replace, in the face of error, those ancient and noble reactions. We must seek to understand the motives and limitations of those who err and, without opposing them, but rather by following the course of the error, turn to good what was born under an adverse sign. Reproach and criticism today provoke in the other a reaction, an awakening of self-esteem that has no beneficial effects. Calmness, on the other hand, understanding, and above all the warm desire to be of service to the other, give our words and our expression that tone and intensity which allow access to the other's soul and thus positive results in situations otherwise deemed irreversible.

Objectivity is the fifth quality to cultivate. It corresponds to the fifth preliminary exercise and consists in not immediately rejecting something that is said to us, and likewise in not refusing to reexamine something already known: this may in fact seem the same thing without actually being so, or reveal something new, different, or never before considered, to our changed sensibility. Automatic reactions, whether positive or negative, must be transformed into objective receptivity, loving and full of trust, so that whatever is placed before us. A deep trust that everything can be understood and improved must nourish the deepest substance of our inner activity. This precious nourishment is what frees us from instinctive associations as well as from automatic reactions. Ultimately, the unfolding of the lotus flowers tends precisely toward this end: to transform everything that, arising as instinctive nature, presents itself as incoherent and disordered into a volitional field of action for the harmony of spiritual forces.

The sixth quality is imperturbability, the “equanimity” of the preliminary exercises. It develops by practicing the suspension of normal emotional reactions, so as to then accept or reject them once they have been examined by the consciousness. It is not a matter of impoverishing one’s emotional life or becoming emotionally barren, but of accustoming oneself to receiving emotions without passively enduring them, and of deciding upon them with the will of a clear and active consciousness. One can then, in the many situations that arise, say to oneself: “I surrender to this feeling rising within me and accept it,” or: “I find that this feeling demeans me, takes hold of me, limits my freedom in the face of things and people, and so I push it away.” “If this pain—let us assume it is pain—can serve as a lesson for me, I surrender to its understanding; but if it leads to the paralysis of my faculties, I summon my inner calm and push it away.” The ability to push pain away can extend even to physical pain, which can become less intense when it is addressed from the center of inner calm, cultivated through the practice of the exercise described.

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One must not believe that the difficulties presented by the unfolding of the lotus flowers are insurmountable, to the point of having to postpone them to another period of existence because they cannot be faced immediately. It is undoubtedly a difficult discipline, but at the same time one is amazed at how far one can go in this field with good will and how all this, little by little, can serve to build a special inner strength which, regardless of any other spiritual achievement, is indispensable for facing with steadfastness those vicissitudes of existence that often seek to overwhelm us.

In this way, one comes to develop an intense and strong inner life, a secret refuge that must become the central point of one's being, from which one can act autonomously to think, feel, and will.

Little by little, thanks to this faculty residing in the region of the heart, one attains the freedom to deliberately isolate oneself from the external world in order to concentrate one's entire being on a single point. One will be able to look in an internal or external direction, thereby excluding all others; to will to hear a sound and no other than that, freeing the consciousness from any other sensation, perception, or representation. It is not, as often happens, a matter of being drawn to something—a vision or a sound, etc.—so that one's attention is captured by it, but rather of directing one's attention, freely and voluntarily, toward the chosen object. This exercise can be performed at any time; even while walking down the street, one can focus one's attention on a single point, not because it exerts a particular attraction, but by one's own decision. The ability to concentrate, for example one's hearing, on a single sound, pushing all other noises aside and silencing the senses, is truly extraordinary and, in a certain sense, unlimited. Every moment of life can become an opportunity for

this exercise: even when one is preoccupied with a particularly important thought—perhaps to the point of being obsessed with it—one must have the ability to replace it with a deliberately different focus.

We will now turn to *the chakra* located in the region of the stomach, namely the ten-petaled lotus. Regarding its development, Rudolf Steiner does not distinguish the necessary qualities but speaks of them as a harmonious whole. In fact, for this center, what matters is one's entire way of life; one must consider the totality of one's inner world, the origin of so-called "spontaneous" ideas, personal tastes, and feelings of sympathy and antipathy. For the ordinary person's consciousness, the origin of these inclinations is generally obscure. We know that it resides in the etheric body, which registers many impressions that escape waking consciousness.

To bring these subtle impressions—which would otherwise be ignored—into consciousness, without resorting to psychoanalysis, one must awaken within oneself the memory of what may have determined them and subtly imprinted them in us as tendencies of taste, instinct, or feelings of aversion or sympathy. Just as we must work on automatic thoughts, automatic feelings, and automatic actions, so too must we not allow impressions—even in their potential state—to take root within us and translate into moods whose origin we are unaware of. It is remarkable how, by working in this way, one achieves such an awakening of memory that one can recall and reassess the importance of events perhaps forgotten by ordinary consciousness. We are thus drawn into the current of etheric memory, of the truth perceptible beyond the lies and illusions with which the human ego cloaks itself daily, and it becomes increasingly difficult to persist in the general tendency to deceive oneself about oneself: to attribute certain moods to very noble, very important causes, rather than to certain distant and forgotten impressions that are, perhaps, far more petty.

The foundation of all inner exercises, however, is the capacity for concentration, thanks to which every exercise becomes possible. In every circumstance and setting of ordinary life, when it is useful or necessary, one must be able to isolate oneself from external influences—both physical and psychological—and become independent of internal and external impressions. Concentration helps establish, through the growing independence of thoughts, feelings, and will, increasingly co-conscious relationships with the world; once all conflict and dualism in one's own conduct have been overcome, these will harmonize the ideal and the real in the univocity of cognitive synthesis. And a world of dross falls away when, slowly but surely, one is reborn into self-mastery.

The unfolding of the ten-petaled lotus flower enables the disciple to perceive in others their future potential and latent capacities. What one perceives in individuals will no longer be merely their current state, as it appears at that given moment, but also that which is evolving within them—whether unexpressed or not yet manifested by their personal destiny. For the sake of objectivity in perception, however, take care to distinguish within yourself any influence of unconscious memories. Every individual, in fact, may inadvertently draw upon memories of past experiences with others and remain unconsciously influenced by them when faced with new experiences that present themselves.

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The six-petaled lotus flower, found within the abdomen, develops thanks to the harmonious cooperation of body, soul, and spirit. The harmony of these three human faculties, previously possible only exceptionally and under specific circumstances, must now occur continuously and spontaneously: what is realized internally must be able to express itself externally

directly, without effort. The effort made up to this point must now be able to translate into spontaneity of the spirit, which, so to speak, can “move forward without struggle.”

What rebels in the astral body and the physical body can be overcome, or merely subdued. If one limits oneself to struggling against one's own inclination or tendency, the underlying problem will be postponed to another time, perhaps to a subsequent life in which it will reappear with the same difficulties. To remove these difficulties, it is preferable instead to act directly on the deep causes of these inner forms, driven by the physical body and the astral body. When this is not possible, Steiner advises pausing for a moment to try to ennoble and sublimate passions and instincts, rather than proceeding by trying to keep them at bay through struggle and self-denial. For it is not a matter of dominating the body, but of making the body an instrument for the spirit.

The difficulties that stand in the way of the immediate expression of spiritual activity through the physical and astral bodies should by this point have already been overcome, giving way to an absolute sense of freedom, to happiness, and to the joy of serving in the spirit and for the spirit.

Thanks to this lotus flower, one can come into contact with spiritual beings, for by now our entire being is ready to follow the spirit, to receive impulses from the higher worlds. However, for *real* contact, one must also have been transformed “organically”: having transformed one's etheric body into an organ of perception.

The etheric body has roughly the same shape as the physical body: it differs markedly in the upper part, less so in the lower part. This organization of the etheric must be related to the different degrees of consciousness permeating the physical; in fact, there is a waking state in the upper part of the body, a dreaming state in the middle part, and a dreamless sleep state in the lower part.

The entire etheric body is in motion: it is traversed by currents that move continuously, following the blood circulation or other specific directions. The center of the etheric forces, in those who have developed it, is related especially to the twelve-petaled lotus flower in the region of the heart. Being situated between the upper and lower centers, this lotus flower is very important: through the etheric currents, it becomes, in a certain sense, the pivot of an action that is transmitted to *the other chakras*, carrying with it the repercussions of any imperfections it may have. For this reason, the regular development of the qualities inherent to it is fundamental.

The astral-etheric convergence in the heart region constitutes an organ of a solar nature, something marvelous that appears resplendent to the clairvoyant eye.

In their movement, the etheric currents transcend the being itself and are the cause of that inner atmosphere that every spiritually evolved person carries within, and which they, in turn, can also recognize in others.

For the development of the etheric body, these currents must be traced starting from the head. In the central region of the head there is, in fact, a very special point where the etheric body and the physical body are united; a point that, due to its peculiarity, does not even physically resemble any other part of the body. It is here that the currents of the etheric body are initially formed.

To prepare for the radiating of currents from the twelve-petaled lotus flower toward the other *chakras*, a provisional center must first be established in the head; this is because the current state of evolution—unlike in ancient times, when it was possible to work from other centers as well—requires the disciple to undergo inner development while fully awake and conscious. Today, the head represents the part of the body where consciousness most fully manifests its waking state, hence the need to establish a temporary center here, which can subsequently be transferred to its true seat, near the heart. From the center of

the head, therefore, through exercises in concentration and meditation, one will gradually descend to the center of the larynx and then to that of the heart.

The etheric body, which ordinarily adheres—in the most literal sense of the term—to the physical body, acquires through inner practice a certain mobility, a certain independence with respect to the physical body. For the use of the sense organs, in fact, the etheric body must shift until it corresponds perfectly with them. Through inner exercise, however, attention is diverted from the physical senses: the practitioner detaches from them and, by freeing their etheric counterpart at that precise moment, prepares the entire etheric body to become an organ of supersensible perception.

This mobility can be such that the etheric body becomes an organ of vision, while the physical body becomes, so to speak, transparent, until it disappears, leaving only the imaginative counterpart.

The etheric currents emanating from the two-petaled lotus flower have a wavy form, which could be described as a progressive circular movement; conversely, the currents of the etheric body engaged in vital functions have a more linear character. The former currents gradually descend downward, directing themselves toward the hands, then branching out densely to create a sort of network covering the entire body, yet remaining more differentiated at the top than at the bottom. Thus a sort of sensitive and receptive organ is formed: the etheric body tends to abandon its own rhythm to conform to a cosmic rhythm. A relationship is established between the rhythms of the etheric body and cosmic rhythms, between the inner world and outer cosmic harmony.

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The qualities cultivated during the development of the lotus flowers come together as if in classes which, at this point, take on special importance, the result of the various exercises examined thus far, true stages of the initiatory path. The first quality that emerges from these “classes” is the ability to discern the true from mere appearance: at every moment, it must be possible to see the spiritual reality of things, feeling it deeply in the soul, beyond the immediate impression or subjective opinion; one must be able to nullify the substance of appearance at every moment and, as if through an instantaneous focus, move from the exterior to the interior of things themselves.

The second quality is the evaluation of what is just and real in relation to appearance. It is not enough to distinguish truth from appearance; it is also necessary for spiritual reality to assume its proper value within the whole of personal moral life.

The third quality is that which results from the five preliminary exercises, supplemented by the exercises of perseverance and patience: control of thought, action, and feeling; perseverance; trust; and imperturbability. When a particularly intense and unsettling situation arises, one must have the ability to evoke absolute calm and serenity within one’s being—and this is possible only if the aforementioned exercises have been practiced—that is, the ability to assess the true dimensions of the event. It is not a matter of suppressing or stifling a feeling, but of placing oneself in a specific perspective whereby the unpleasant event, thanks to a serene assessment and precise inner focus, can reveal its objective value without the usual personal involvement.

The fourth quality, of enormous importance, is the love of inner freedom. One must be able to recognize within one’s own dispositions the subtle personal pleasure, the attraction of the sensory world, to the point of feeling its weight and thus the strong desire to free oneself from it. Then things will no longer be seen in relation to what they represent for oneself, but to what they truly are in the economy of the world.

What follows along the initiatory path is difficult to comment on, because ultimately it speaks for itself. At this point, one must sense a kind of maturation, of fulfillment: a feeling of being ready for something. Naturally, one does not reach this moment through gradual and forced progression in the exercises described, but by moving now in one direction, now in another. In occultism, in fact, the effort is not carried out in rigidly connected stages—as the description of the initiatory path might at first suggest—but according to the opportunities and possibilities offered by life itself to develop first one quality, then another. For this reason, for a long time, those who follow the spiritual path may appear less harmonious, less complete than others who move on a lower but more secure plane.

It is relatively easy to contemplate the entire initiatory path through a book; it is difficult to realize it in life. In life, it is not like in a book, where one step is described after another. It is essential, however, to have the complete picture of the path before one's eyes and to move according to the possibilities that life presents, often changing direction.

In any case, what is felt daily as maturation is always a state of greater freedom with respect to the astral body, the etheric body, and the physical body—a greater affirmation of one's spiritual being within the inner context in which one is immersed.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SELF AND THE “CONTINUITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS”

From the coincidence of the etheric centers with the astral ones, according to the modalities described above, there also results a change in the nature of vision.

The etheric body is already a spiritual principle: rather than being inherent to Space, it is inherent to Time, even though it is constrained within Space by its connection to corporeality

(vegetal, animal, human). However, as soon as it can free itself from the body-etheric bond, it sheds its physical-spatial garment, allowing the individual to experience the course of their own life in reverse and revealing its originative nature in Time.

Contrary to what occurs in the higher worlds (vegetal, animal, human), the action of the etheric body with respect to the mineral world unfolds from the outside: it surrounds the mineral without penetrating it, shaping its structure and form. Human beings can exert a certain influence on the action of etheric forces not bound to space, but less so on those already spatially constrained. The influence is therefore weaker the more elevated the etheric form is, such as that of the animal or the human. These forms can, however, to a certain extent, be directed by the presence of the seer: this is especially the case with the thoughts, desires, and passions of others and the particular forms emanating from them.

Where man cannot exert any influence, however, is over what, in the form of thoughts, desires, and passions, emanates from within himself. Once emitted, these forms can no longer be controlled. In addition to facing the external, sensible world, man thus finds himself facing the inner world that he himself has externalized—and which nonetheless belongs to him—through the emission of his thoughts, desires, etc. He finds before him, as reality, what he has previously cultivated as an inner image and force.

During occult development, at first, the higher Self, through an inner movement, places itself before its own inner world: not through a true vision, but through the careful observation of its own inner life, of what moves within the realm of thoughts. Subsequently, what one has intimately sought to observe in consciousness becomes objectively visible, real on the outside, as a result of the externalization of one's inner world into particular forms. It must also be noted that what has originated from oneself appears as something that returns; something that, if one does not wish to be overwhelmed, one must oppose, seeking to

keep it outside of oneself. Essentially, what occurs is that kind of reversal of images typical of the astral world: words, numbers, and figures appear inverted not only in their form but also in their movements. In this regard, Rudolf Steiner recalls the nature of spiritual vision in Greek tragedy, particularly its evolution from Aeschylus to Euripides. In the *Orestes* of the ancient Aeschylus, the animic forms created by hatred and remorse appear—true entities that haunt him. In Euripides, those entities revert to being inner movements expressive of the characters' consciousness: they become remorse, the passions of hatred, of vengeance, etc. With Euripides, there is a reversal of primitive clairvoyance, from which derives a state of consciousness similar to the present one, but which now, as it once was, tends once again to free itself to the outside, to return to being a vision of one's own objectified inner reality. The difference is that today man acquires this faculty as a conscious force.

Those who have practiced the exercises in an inconsistent, disorderly manner, without direction or a solid foundation for development, if they were to “see”—which is indeed rare—would see these thought-forms as haunting and aggressive figures, sometimes taking on the likeness of animals or hideous beings, and could not help but be frightened or even possessed by them.

The imaginative perception of one's own soul as an external landscape is necessary for the realization of the Higher Self, of an “I” no longer experienced solely within one's own consciousness, but as a reality that, once glimpsed, assumes such a forceful character as to truly constitute a sense of “presence.” At this point, the experience of the “I” begins.

The experience of the Higher Self does not, therefore, consist in individuating oneself at a point in consciousness, but corresponds to an objective reality. Ordinary consciousness, in reality, cannot transport itself into the Higher Self, but only move toward it through the layers that compose it; it is a striving toward the Self, a journeying along the path toward it as toward a direction barely glimpsed. Moving away from the lower Self may

give the sense of already being in the Self, but it is merely an approach. The true realization of the Higher Self begins when, amidst this “spiritual exteriority,” one can see its image; just as the eye sees without seeing, so the Higher Self cannot be realized unless its image is simultaneously both *in front* of and at the *center* of what externally appears as the essence of the soul: it is like an image transported into a space at the center of which appears the reality of the Self.

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For the experience described above, the special importance of the two-petaled lotus flower is once again highlighted. This now not only becomes an organ of vision for higher realities and beings, but also provides the light to see them; it illuminates the objects—if one may say so—it illuminates everything that man becomes capable of seeing.

The preparation of the two-petaled lotus flower for this function consists in studying and meditating on the teachings of esoteric science, and in a most particular way on that which concerns the Hierarchies. As I have had occasion to emphasize more than once, such study, such a faculty of representation, must be cultivated not intellectually but through

“pictures,” that is, through the inner image, for example, of the Hierarchies, of their interaction, of their functions, of what they have given to humanity over time, of what can be traced in humanity as their imprint. The entire picture should be perceived, as much as possible, as a simultaneous panorama, for the maximum vitality of the lotus flower depends on this. Then, with these “pictures,” what happened with the Higher Self occurs: little by little, reality replaces the image, and the spiritual beings become visible.

From the foregoing, it can be understood how the exercises gradually shape the disciple, preparing him to receive the experience of spiritual reality. The exercises prepare within the organism and the consciousness the proper receptacle for receiving the spiritual reality to be attained: they almost construct its image, so that it may then become a real experience. In this way, one comes to establish relationships with spiritual beings and to feel their affinity with one's own Self.

Proceeding through this sequence of experiences, one arrives at what might be called the historical vision of one's higher Self; that is, the knowledge of the repeated earthly lives traversed by the Self, and simultaneously of the law that determined them and established their course; in a word, one arrives at the knowledge of one's own *karma*.

At this point, the soul has, as it were, reunited with the Higher Self, the source of its own being, and has thus attained complete freedom. From this moment on, *the disciple never turns back* because, permeated by the life of the Higher Self, he no longer feels the attraction of what is inferior to him.

But even before this, the disciple had been able to observe a transformation in his dream life. In the experience of the dream life, one can find the first traces of inner progress. The dream, as is well known, is eminently symbolic; between falling asleep and waking in the morning, one receives experiences which, unable to manifest directly to the waking consciousness, are communicated through particular figures, conditions, and events. When, during sleep, the astral body detaches from the etheric body and that polarization occurs whereby the entire consciousness undergoes a modification, the brain is already filled with images, experiences, and figures imprinted upon it—consciously or unconsciously—during wakefulness, and all of this remains in constant motion. In the morning, upon waking, the experiences of sleep resurface in the brain: then the astral body chooses, so to speak, from among

the images those that best represent the experience undergone during sleep.

The more powerful the experiences during sleep are the more clearly their reality appears through the symbolic image. Their power depends on the application, during waking life, of the meditations and exercises through which the disciple approaches those conditions of spiritual experience that occur during sleep. Consequently, the transition from the symbolic exteriority of the dream to true spiritual experience will be facilitated; one will then see that there are indeed experiences that do not belong to what is experienced in sensory life: one will have images that express conditions and things that also do not belong to sensory life. Naturally, in the face of all this, it is necessary to have impartiality and patience, so as not to jump to a hasty conclusion, nor to dwell on a sense of inner satisfaction. It is wise, at times, to pause before the mystery and limit oneself to “sensing” it, rather than seeking to know it at all costs.

This “sensing” allows us, little by little, to adapt ourselves to that experience which, conversely, is exhausted when we seek to define it hastily. We must therefore know how to wait.

* * *

When the lower self becomes a faithful instrument of the higher self, the disciple becomes particularly sensitive to the influence of the latter. This influence originates from the center of the heart; and by heart we mean both the etheric formation and the lotus flower that has its seat there. The heart, considered as the center of spiritual forces, is therefore an organ of supersensible perception.

In reality, the ego does not have a spatial seat in the heart, for it presides over the organization of the entire physical body. The ego works from within upon the heart, choosing it as its own

organ of perception. This type of perception occurs in a very special way: through it, the first image of reality is attained. The things and forces of the spiritual world, previously taken into consciousness through the intellect, are now experienced in the heart directly according to their reality. One comes into contact with the objects themselves through immediate vision. The heart as an organ of perception is in reality an organ of union: there is no longer any need to describe or imagine anything about the object or being encountered, but one lives within it, in its possibilities, in its complete reality.

In occult terminology, the one who experiences this is called the “wayfarer,” because he has abandoned the inner static state and images and ideas now pass through him in such a way as to allow him to move, on the spiritual plane, from one reality to another. The “wayfarer,” however, by immersing himself in other beings, does not lose the reality of his own being, as happened in ancient times when the consciousness of the ego was not as strong. One must always and in any case resist the danger of “losing oneself,” and therefore to live one’s own spiritual reality as shaped by experiences, destiny, and the passage through the stages of inner education: all that which, so to speak, has formed one’s personal “color.”

From now on, the disciple will always carry his own inner reality with him as something to be compared with every other value, in order to rediscover himself in the face of the spiritual realities to which he gradually gains access. In occult language, this is called “creating a spiritual homeland” or “building a shelter,” that is, preserving one’s essential identity in the face of the spiritual world. At this point, clairvoyance—initially connected only to the spiritual that pervades the physical world—rises to the forces surrounding it: to the elemental realms, then to the world of human instincts and passions, and further still to the reality of spiritual beings and their relationships with humans.

A complete transformation of the dream life occurs when the deep consciousness of sleep persists, uninterrupted, even during wakefulness: that is, when the consciousness of the higher Self is so developed that it resists the sensory world in such a way that the latter reveals its spiritual side; it must have become so strengthened that it can have experiences during sleep which, in order to surface into waking consciousness, no longer need to be reflected in the cerebral mirror as symbolic images. This is the *continuity of consciousness*.

We have touched upon the possible transformations in the disciple's dream life. The occurrence of such transformations is merely the beginning of the inner process culminating in the continuity of consciousness between sleep and wakefulness.

During sleep, as is well known, a person experiences the two distinct states of dreaming and deep sleep, or dreamless sleep, during which breathing becomes shallow and very slow. From this latter state, normally, nothing emerges, because there is no activity that can be transmitted to the brain in the form of memories. While in dream sleep an imaginative content—mostly symbolic—is revealed, in dreamless sleep the content is not clothed in images, and therefore cannot, upon awakening, be transmitted to the brain.

As one progresses along the initiatory path, the dream loses the disordered character inherent in its illogical nature—the concatenation of images in the dream occurs not through logical relation but through intimate affinity—and organizes itself according to a direction increasingly tending to “continue” the events of waking life.

It must be remembered that the sensible world draws its origins from a higher world. The human being is the result of spiritual impulses: he is a being coming from the spiritual worlds,

clothed in a body for earthly existence; indeed, everything that can be observed in nature has its causes on a spiritual plane. During waking life, human beings thus find themselves facing an incomplete world, whereas during sleep they have the opportunity to live in the world of causes, in the spiritual world, and to supplement the results of sensory perceptions with their spiritual counterparts, invisible to ordinary experience.

Through the study of Spiritual Science, one learns—at first only intellectually—that the sensory world is a world of effects, whose causes lie in the spiritual sphere.

During sleep, consciousness experiences precisely this reality; it is as if lifted from the realm of intellectual knowledge into pure spiritual reality. If a person could carry the experiences of the sleeping consciousness into the waking state, they would reunite what is perceived as a sensory effect with its spiritual cause. If one could therefore bring back from sleep something experienced there, the reunion of the sensible with spiritual reality would take place, and in waking life, the two otherwise separate realities would be united.

During deep, dreamless sleep, consciousness is in a special state: it penetrates ever more deeply into the spiritual world, all the way to the beings who dwell there; the individual's life is now no longer merely related to what occurred during the daily waking state, but freely makes contact with the beings of the spiritual world. It is important to note that when one begins to gain insight from dreamless sleep, one encounters images expressed through a form higher than ordinary visual perception. Consciousness in dreamless sleep is, in fact, a higher form of knowledge, and the corresponding faculty of perception is the “auditory” one. At first, this type of perception occurs upon waking, a moment when the disciple should always be in a receptive state. It should be noted that the first messages received in this way appear as if spoken “by oneself to oneself.” One has the sensation of speaking to oneself. This peculiarity is to be

related to that reversal of images and perceptions in general, which I have mentioned on other occasions.

When such voices manifest, it almost seems as if one is hearing oneself answer questions that have likewise arisen within. Relations with spiritual beings thus take the form of questions and answers, and when, at first, one begins to receive something, it is felt as coming from oneself: upon waking, one hears an inner voice that brings light and clarity to one's entire inner life, and, at the same time, an orientation toward outer life. Before this is fully realized, one experiences, upon waking, only "the impression" of having received something—something that cannot yet be defined. In such a case, one should not strain to grasp its meaning, but, remaining fully focused, one must place oneself in a state of receptive passivity. If one does not receive it clearly, it is better to be content for the time being with the state of mind that will likely manifest as a harbinger of a more distinct perception. One must, however, avoid exerting effort to recall nocturnal experiences, because this awakens the world of images belonging to the dream, which lies outside the heart of authentic experience.

Little by little, these sensations upon waking, these messages, become increasingly clear and complete, so as to bring all the experiences of spiritual life into waking consciousness: continuity is established between the waking state and the state of dreamless sleep. Once established, this continuity of consciousness is carried by the disciple even through the gates of death, and with it the fullness of memory in the life between death and new birth.

An indispensable condition for all this to come to pass is the practice of concentration, applied especially to everything concerning the constitution of the world and relationships with spiritual beings: meditation, the elaboration of these relationships in connection with one's own individuality, with one's own activity in the world. Concentration and meditation on these subjects truly lead to a maturing of the soul; a maturing that R. Steiner compares to the development of the embryo in the womb, to a sort of gestation from which the soul is reborn, liberated.

Through this development, the life of sleep begins to live in sounds and words: it is the beginning of a dialogue with spiritual beings, in which questions are posed by the disciple in a waking state and the answers from the spiritual world are received during dreamless sleep. In this way, the goal of Initiation is attained, which consists in the true continuity of consciousness. Thus, through direct vision, contact with the spiritual world is achieved while awake, and likewise, through inner training, contact with spiritual beings is established during sleep.

By following this path and through the attainment of the continuity of consciousness, one reaches the goal to which the book *Initiation* alludes. Of course, it is a distant goal, but as one moves toward it, one can experience flashes of light that mark the stages of the journey and provide certainty. It is important to bear in mind that occult evolution does not occur in the progressive manner described in the book, and that even at the beginning one may have experiences such as those described, which must therefore be interpreted correctly.

* * *

We mentioned, in our first meetings, the need to make thinking, feeling, and willing independent of one another. Now, we must bear in mind that the realization of this separation exposes the disciple to experiences—which are, moreover, inevitable—that are quite harsh and difficult. The liberation of the three human faculties is necessary for the development of the spiritual sense organs, and to this end, we must above all take care not to cause harm to the delicate organism that is gradually forming within us.

On this path, the experiences that may arise are of great importance. Individual character begins to play an increasingly decisive role, in the sense that the aforementioned separation can reinforce a character trait at the expense of the necessary balance

of the three faculties. It may happen, for example—where there is a propensity toward intellectualism—to become abstract theorists of detached thought from life, cold and indifferent toward existence, and find satisfaction only in the life of thought cultivated in solitude. Thus, a sensual nature may find itself carried away by a feeling of exceptional devotion, or by a kind of extreme enjoyment of the contents of one's own consciousness, and lose its objective relationship with things. Likewise, the willful person may become carried away by hyperactivity, finding fulfillment solely in altering the external world, and allowing themselves to be swept up in dominating and influencing others. One must bear in mind that such imbalances can indeed occur: many, because of them, suddenly discover within themselves an unsuspected master who blocks their path and creates serious difficulties in life.

* * *

Normally, in an individual, thought, feeling, and will manifest themselves in an immediate, instinctive way, according to a sort of personal *habitus*, whereby a given event triggers certain thoughts which, in turn, give rise to certain feelings, which ultimately lead to a certain behavior. This interdependence, which is natural and logical at its own level, begins to break down at a certain point along the path; the disciple loses the natural spontaneity of action and finds himself in a position where he must choose to voluntarily determine his own behavior in the face of events: he must, from time to time, decide whether to give free rein to his feelings and thus act in full independence from the usual reactive automatisms. It may happen that certain situations, which previously spontaneously aroused certain feelings—for example, compassion—now instead require almost a “dry” decision on the part of the disciple. Only at a superficial glance does this new way of behaving seem like an impoverishment of the soul; in reality, this is not the case!

The ability to control one's reactions and feelings, to think and act as one intends, imbues the entire being with a profound sense of strength and stability, since emotions no longer hold sway over one's equilibrium. There is no circumstance—however sudden or extraordinary—that, if deemed harmful, cannot then be controlled, contemplated, and even neutralized in its impact. The fundamental sense of serenity and the strength of balance thus established in the disciple is a far greater gain than what is lost in instinctiveness, even if the latter is organized according to the ordinary pseudo-balance. Not only that, but the will that emerges from this new inner condition is far more powerful than that which previously manifested as a natural impulse. Thus, through this renewed feeling as well, one can now experience previously unknown depths, and through the strengthened concentration of thought, one can arrive at the solution of previously insoluble problems.

Inner equilibrium is now founded on a new moral personality (Steiner has repeatedly pointed out that every step on the spiritual path must be matched by three steps in morality), which must, as it were, “protect” the disciple from the temptation to use the acquired freedom for personal ends, and impart a constant awareness of what the disciple owes to others, to the spiritual world, and to the reason for his own existence in the world. Freedom presupposes that selfishness has been overcome, that a degree of morality and balance has been attained such that one can begin to live no longer for oneself, but for the community.

The disciple now lives with the awareness of depending on higher worlds, with the resolve to serve the cause of spiritual beings. Only under this condition is it possible for him to attain a freedom of feeling, willing, and thinking that does no harm to his spiritual and moral nature.

At this point, the liberated person can access the fundamental experience of the “Keeper of the Threshold.”

THE THRESHOLD

We have already spoken of the importance of regarding what occurs within the human interior as a result of the interplay of thinking, feeling, and willing. We then noted how it is necessary to attain such inner maturity as to be able to achieve the true separation of these human faculties. The exercises we have indicated for this purpose, by weakening the ordinary automatic reaction, operate in such a way that the disciple can face a perception with autonomous discernment and will, enabling him to consciously choose—through a sort of inner awakening—the thought, feeling, and conduct to adopt.

All of this, initially, occurs in a rudimentary way, but little by little, as the automatic bonds fade, the disciple begins to decide for himself regarding his own feelings, thoughts, and volitions. This separation corresponds to a transformation in the etheric and astral bodies, whereby the disciple directly assumes responsibility for his own actions. It is no longer the environment and habits that stimulate his conduct, but he himself determines it based on what he recognizes as the path to follow in harmony with the spiritual world.

At a certain point, as the bond between thought, feeling, and will loosens, the experience of the first Guardian of the Threshold draws near. Having freed the etheric and astral bodies from the automatisms of thinking-feeling-willing, what could previously be seen only within, thanks to the clairvoyance developed through the exercises, now manifests outwardly. The level attained through the exercises becomes objectively visible.

The Guardian of the Threshold becomes an independent being. Whereas previously one was interwoven with him—that is, with what cosmically represents one's own being, one's own possibilities, and the very essence of life's events—now not only is one no longer obscurely influenced by these forms, but they

become outwardly visible in a single entity. Having developed a certain degree of clairvoyance means that what was once internal now becomes objective, and that one's inner movements translate into a movement in the outer form of this Being.

The encounter with the Guardian of the Threshold takes on an almost spectacular character, given its sudden appearance. From one moment to the next, one finds oneself face to face with this Being that is part of oneself. Whether one understands it or not, this experience can arouse terror. Many, in the presence of the Guardian, recognize their own inadequacy to bear the vision and choose to withdraw from it. One may retreat out of fear—even though a particular form of fearlessness should already have developed—or because one recognizes that one is not sufficiently mature to face this Being who, moreover, usually appears for the first time at the moment of awakening, that is, at a completely unexpected moment capable of arousing a feeling of almost insurmountable terror.

All this is difficult to understand, but one can resort to a simile: suppose a man has a deformed face and knows he has it even without ever having been able to look in a mirror: what will be his immediate reaction when suddenly confronted with a mirror placed before him? And it is quite different to know of one's own ugliness than to be able to observe it suddenly by oneself! The bewilderment that follows is entirely understandable. This analogy, only remotely and in a mitigated way, can give an idea of the encounter with the Guardian of the Threshold.

In the Guardian of the Threshold, one recognizes one's own objective limitations and simultaneously the reasons for them: one's flaws take on a vivid and real character, quite different from the ordinary and abstract representation one usually has of them. Not only that, but this Entity is deeply linked to individual destiny: through her, the powers of karma determine the events of life. Before the encounter, although one knew of karma, it was not possible to directly perceive the connection between a pain or a joy and karma itself; now, however, one sees one's own living

past with the causes of pain and joy. To see all this in an Entity, in a real presence, suddenly, without the slow and natural progression of the course of existence, can truly be a cause of bewilderment.

If one can overcome this bewilderment and turn the face of the Guardian, and succeed in accepting this Being as it presents itself, then one consciously takes one's karmic debt upon oneself and assumes the task of seeking the possibility of paying these debts, almost by going to meet them. One's responsibility increases so much at this point that any attempt to evade it causes a "disaster" in the spiritual order. Once one has had a vision of the Guardian of the Threshold, every weakness, every shortcoming ends up being reflected in a demonic way—as Rudolf Steiner says—in the Guardian's appearance. It is therefore necessary to overcome the feeling of fear and have enough strength to fully assume all the debts incurred and to face the struggle with one's own limitations with determination and clarity.

The courage to face the Guardian is therefore also the courage to take one's fate into one's own hands: to give oneself even that which may cause pain, renunciation, and burden; to embrace a rigorous path in life that disregards the usual search for the path of least resistance, but consciously moves toward what is most difficult and arduous.

Once the limit of fear has been overcome, the task will be to transform the Being that stands before us, which will become ever more luminous to the extent that we have worked on our own karma, that we have purified ourselves.

Until the moment of the encounter with the Guardian of the Threshold, one does not know what and how many burdens still lie ahead, but afterward, even if one has only glimpsed him for a moment, even if one has rejected him, one is no longer the same as before, because one has seen enough to experience a completely

new and different condition, one that no longer allows one to close one's eyes and deceive oneself.

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Having separated will, feeling, and thought from their ordinary connection does not yet mean having severed ties with one's living environment, with the legacy of family, race, etc., to which a whole series of reactions must be attributed that cannot be defined as individual in the strict sense, but are precisely dependent on the legacy of heredity. One cannot, however, ignore such an influence; indeed, in the face of it, one has duties, a specific mission to fulfill arising from one's belonging to one's family, one's people, etc. In this regard, we must ask ourselves what the soul of the people wants from us, and what is the correct interpretation of its tendencies, beyond the distortion they undergo in external events; very often, in fact, what appears is nothing but a disguise of the people's true mission. We must therefore identify the tasks truly entrusted to us and, through thought, feeling, and action, become bearers of the life impulse in which the soul of the people is urging. From this conscious collaboration, active in an uplifting sense, spring a broader vision and a more fruitful knowledge.

The recognition within oneself of environmental influences and their transformation make possible the objectification of the people's inner nature, its contemplation, and the further intuition of the action to be undertaken.

The tragic error of peoples consists precisely in failing to follow the right direction of their particular soul; it is therefore necessary that there be individuals capable of seeing this in the right way and who, with the spiritual strength they bring to the environment, act in such a way as to allow for the recognition of that direction. By overcoming within oneself the legacy of the

race and the influences of the environment, one also learns to make proper use of their distinctive qualities.

This individual work is of great importance for the disciple who, in a certain sense, thus anticipates the future: for he seeks to realize today what future humanity will one day have to realize; he must, from this moment on, associate himself with those spiritual powers that guide humanity toward that very goal which he seeks to attain today.

* * *

In reference to the Guardian of the Threshold, there is a symbolic allusion to a swirling wind that accompanies his appearance; in reality, that wind is an expression of what the soul feels even at the mere glimpse of the Guardian, who brings with him a turbulent force in the midst of which it is difficult to maintain balance and stability. In any case, at this point one realizes what freedom truly is: as long as one is blind to one's own karma, one cannot be truly free. Only after recognizing karma in the guise of the Guardian, and having relinquished the guidance of the powers of karma by taking it directly upon oneself, only then does one understand what the words "Christ has set us free" mean, for now the forces of Christ take the place of those of karma.

And from the conscious self-transcendence achieved within oneself springs the sudden possibility of encountering, in place of the forces of karma, the presence of Christ. The calm and serenity that now illuminate life allow one to truly act in the world by following the right spiritual direction.

* * *

During the experience of the little Guardian of the Threshold, the human present reveals itself with its chains of the past. Human nature, therefore, is no longer composed solely of qualities and possibilities, but essentially of chains that extend far back, to causes rooted in previous existences. The same is true, to a large extent, regarding the external world, in that external objects—everything that is perceptible—appear linked to causes found in the spiritual worlds. All the essential facts of life now appear no longer detached, no longer isolated on the sensory plane, but interwoven with connections that branch out through time and space, and beyond.

This is an experience of great importance for the initiate, in that his life, the external world, and the value of being, thanks to the connection with causes, reveal themselves in their true reality. Now, for all that is himself and the outer world, the veil of Maya no longer exists. One of the certainties he acquires after meeting the Guardian is that he can see and understand all this in the spiritual world thanks to the effort made in the sensible world. The gestation of his spiritual birth took place in the world; he feels the full importance of this outer world in relation to the spiritual world. We have said that at a certain point continuity is established between sleep and wakefulness; well, now continuity is also established between past and present, between the sensible reality and the supersensible reality. This is of the utmost importance, even beyond ourselves.

Rudolf Steiner clearly states that the supersensible world can continue on its path only if there are beings on Earth capable of understanding its direction. And it is the human hierarchy that must accomplish this; it is the human hierarchy that, alone among the others, can bring spiritual meaning into matter.

This tremendous effort, this profound penetration, is reflected in the spiritual worlds, and this is the novelty of the human contribution. The current of evolution could continue by passing over the human current if, at a certain point, human beings did not do what the Hierarchies expect of them.

Understanding the direction of the Hierarchies is therefore the beginning of a conscious contribution to the spiritual worlds. Everything that a person does in earthly life, after death, following the dissolution of the etheric and astral bodies, is delivered in its essence to the spiritual world. This content becomes the consciousness of the spiritual world; thanks to it, the cooperation that presupposes the human being as one of the cornerstones of the evolution of the spiritual world itself can thus be accomplished.

If we wish to glimpse this work, we must recall a legend certainly familiar to most: after creation, God called the spiritual beings, showed them the plant world and the animal world, and asked what they were, but they could not answer; then He called man, questioned him, and he was able to name each thing; then He showed him the Hierarchies and asked him to name these as well; Adam gave each its name. Then God asked him: "And who am I?", and man replied: "You are Adonai, you are the Lord." In this we see a reflection of what man's conscious action brings into the spiritual world: what man gathers through the intellect in the world becomes a force in the spiritual worlds, one of the guiding principles of the evolution of the spiritual worlds themselves. By meditating on this legend, one can indeed grasp these relationships, catch a glimpse of the human contribution to supersensible evolution.

The transcendence of the sensible world, therefore, must take place, but the fruits of experience, the results achieved there, will be incorporated by the Hierarchies into the spiritual worlds. On the one hand, therefore, we see the world dying; on the other, its rebirth; and we see humanity living within this dying shell of the ancient world, yet developing within itself the seed of the life to come; and this rebirth is what humanity achieves through its spiritual development. It prepares itself, within the perishable, to live in the spiritual world. The first Guardian of the Threshold marks precisely the union of the perishable and the imperishable: he represents the transition from one to the other, and when man

is ready, he asks him if he is mature for the passage, for the Threshold of the spiritual world. If man succeeds in withstanding the first Guardian of the Threshold, it means that he has gathered within himself enough strength to accept karma and to devote himself entirely to the work of the spiritual worlds. It means that he has already transcended the bonds of race, caste, and family, and that he has already dissolved the ties of personal interests, which no longer constitute the selfish impulse for his actions in the world.

At this point, the encounter with the second Guardian of the Threshold, or the Great Guardian of the Threshold; the individual has already entered the lower regions of the spiritual worlds. A radical transformation must have taken place within the disciple: the separation of thinking, feeling, and willing—the importance of which has often been emphasized—must have reached such a degree that even in the physical brain the development of centers subtle centers, new and different organs of thinking, feeling, and willing.

But something else is happening at this moment. We have seen that a continuity of consciousness has already been established between waking and sleep; at this point, if the second Guardian of the Threshold were to be passed, continuity would have to be established between life, death, and rebirth.

At the moment of death, karma is veiled, but the work performed by the spiritual forces is one in which the human being is present and cooperates consciously. At this moment, the sense of liberation should be complete. What the Guardian of the Threshold now asks for is dedication to the spiritual currents. We cannot, of course, imagine these conditions; we can only know what is required of us, because Rudolf Steiner has told us. At this moment, the extinction of personal interest ensures that all the forces we have acquired are committed to leading other human beings along our path. It is no longer possible not to feel solidarity with other human beings; indeed, at this point, if we were to try to escape this impulse, we would feel a deep pain

arise: the pain of having something that other people do not yet have or see, that they cannot yet see, but that they will nevertheless have to have; even if they have not yet even set out on this path.

And so it is natural that the momentum of all the soul's forces is directed toward the grand task of guiding other beings toward the spiritual worlds.

At this point there is still a danger: the temptation to abandon oneself to the sense of bliss and enjoyment provided by the possibility of accessing the spiritual worlds. This enjoyment truly halts the soul on its path: instead of continuing the ascent to the supersensible world, it, betrayed by the lure of the egoistic worldview, holds itself back and withdraws into itself. This kind of temptation arises to the initiate who has not yet learned to give of himself entirely. There is nothing in Steiner's work that explicitly states this, but it seems that this form of temptation may be induced by the Asuras.

And it is with great gravity that Rudolf Steiner speaks of the danger of this seduction—as he calls it—of bliss. What can then save a person is the feeling of the world's pain, the silence of human beings in the spiritual world. This pain prevents them from embracing the selfish feeling of bliss: for what they now possess is not shared by others. If this obstacle is overcome, liberation is complete; the initiate stands before the luminous being, the Guardian of the Threshold of the spiritual world, and then he participates in the work of the Hierarchies, participates in the aims of evolution that foresee the liberation of all beings and not that of a single one. Every person, therefore, who collaborates in this work of liberation and education places themselves on the side of the Hierarchies and in alignment with the aims of spiritual beings. The decision to collaborate with the spiritual worlds finally brings the person to a plane where it can be said that their good will has accomplished all that was required of it.

Massimo Scaligero

PRACTICAL HANDBOOK
OF MEDITATION

*The distant stillness of constellations
and the Earth's yearning for Light
ignite the soul's rhythm,
meeting your endless gift.*

FOREWORD

That the human evil of our time is Dogmatism is a hypothesis suggested by many signs. Upon radical examination, one must admit that the ancient Dogmatism of revealed truth may today have been reincarnated in the barely recognizable form of rigorous rationality: the Dogmatism of Dialectics and Science.

Endowed with the trappings of progress, Dogmatism can be recognized in the fact that every doctrine presumes to proceed from its own object as from an original given, conceived, however, through an inner act that determines its fundamental value, but which, as such, eludes the subject engaged in the inquiry: whereby the object becomes the foundation without actually being so. In the intuition from which it proceeds, the subject does not recognize itself as a co-creator of the foundation; the investigator or theorist identifies his own thought with the object, but does not perceive it: whereby the object stands before him as an entity founded upon itself. Rising to the status of an original, self-sufficient given, the object becomes an unconscious idol: in reality accepted on the basis of a subtle faith. This unconscious faith develops further in relation to "phenomenology, which idolatry indeed resurfaces in scientific-technological form.

The ensuing inductive-deductive process is the dogmatic edifice: logical, dialectical, rigorous, yet erected on a mystical foundation. The presupposition, as an inner act, which, if possessed, could guarantee the development of the cognitive process according to reality, eludes conscious thought; therefore, the object, in its very otherness, excludes man. The dehumanization of culture needs no further explanation.

The data of Science or Dialectics acquires universal value, outside the thought that validated it: the particular has

illegitimately assumed the role of the universal. It is Dogmatism that today pits opinion against opinion, man against man, dialectic against dialectic, current against current, people against people: according to an incommunicability, in which the logical-dialectical relationship replaces the original relationship that has been eliminated. The obtuse horizon of thought goes unnoticed, however, thanks to the perfect mechanism of Dialectics that moves it and gives it the illusion of moving on its own: thus it grasps of reality nothing but what is weighable and measurable; [the most wretched aspect of it, which it presumes to be all of reality,

In this situation, which today forms the basis of a collective mental alteration—unnoticed by most, yet surfacing as a general human neurosis, as a mystical conviction in the dialectical solution of problems that are in truth impenetrable to dialectical thought, and as an irreconcilable conflict between individual and individual—anger between factions, the remedy is the conscious restoration of the dynamic element of thought—a modern path to meditation. This is the purpose of this manual, whose practical content springs from the experience of Western Spiritual Science, incorporating within itself the ultimate essence of Eastern techniques.

The reader who believes they perceive a contradiction in the manual between the premise of the conscious experience of meditation and the esoteric references it draws upon for its development may be reassured by the very positivity of the method, which proceeds solely through the logical mediations required step by step by experience, up to the immediacy of the origin of thought, which is the only thing that requires no mediation: true logic, the logic of the Logos. From this alone can the liberation of the human soul spring forth.

It is not technological civilization that shapes man, as certain backward-thinking Italians have concluded with facile plausibility; on the contrary, it is man who fails to grasp the thought from which such civilization arises. Conditioning does

not lie outside of man, in civilization, or in society, or in the technological structure, but rather within him, in his thought, which lacks the inner dimension that allows it to arise as thought: hence he erroneously conceives the world as devoid of that dimension, and as such he elevates it, deifies it: he makes it dominant in the legitimate logical, dialectical form.

M. S.

THE HIDDEN STRUCTURE OF MAN

Man can be recognized as the synthesis of the realms of nature, dominated by the very Principle intuited at the origin of these realms. The univocal Principle, logically intuited at the foundation of nature, is partially incarnated in man and emerges as the Self.

In the constitution of man, the following are practically recognizable: the mineral kingdom, which forms his visible physical body, known in Hinduism as *the fibula Aarira*, the structuring force of the plant kingdom, which forms his vital body, or Clerico, *Unga Aar/ra*; the soul-life of the animal kingdom, which operates in him as the sentient body, or astral body, *kama rapa*, through which man has a sensory and sensual relationship with physical life, not unlike that of animals.

To this threefold constitution, whose structural identity with the threefold realm of nature is recognizable, there is added in man a Principle not found in the other realms of nature, because it dominates them from a higher degree; the Principle of individual consciousness, *the soul*, or the I, essentially supersensible, which shapes the interrelation of the three systems, right up to its corporeal manifestation: thus distinguishing the human realm from the other realms. The 'I' of which man normally speaks when referring to himself is indeed *the Self*, but this barely surfaces in his astral-etheric-physical organization: the animal element is only partially dominated by the mental-spiritual element.

Of all the constituent principles of man, only that is visible: the others operate imperceptibly. The etheric body is extra-spatial, the astral body is extra-spatial and extra-temporal, and the I can be conceived as the void of the astral body itself. One can also say that the physical body is a body woven of space, the etheric a

body woven of time, the astral a body of extra-spatial and extra-temporal Light, the I the essence of Light, insofar as it is in itself identical to the Principle of Light. One can say that the relationship between the astral, etheric, and physical, or Spirit-soul-body, constitutes in itself a hierarchy.

Everything that man expresses on the physical plane presupposes the dynamics of the three imperceptible principles. The action of these is perceptible in the bodily form, brought by the presence of the I to a refinement that is lacking in the animal; it is, however, deducible from the manifest activities of the soul, of thought, and of self-consciousness. The breakdown of psychic and physical life, which leads man to illness, aging, and death, originates in the alteration of the hierarchical relationship of his principles with respect to their supersensible essence. It can be said that the meaning of human life is the restoration of this relationship: the healing of the breakdown.

Human beings share with the physical world the mineral, visible body; with the plant world, the etheric, non-visible body; and with the animal world, the astral body, which is likewise invisible: through these, however, they act as spiritual beings, becoming self-aware thanks to their own characteristic inner activity, which, through the sense organs, reaches into the physical world. In these first three respects, man is akin to the animal, which, through the senses, is driven by instincts and emotional impulses, depending on them without any possibility of autonomy. Man, on the other hand, transforms the sensations proper to his bodily organization into thoughts: he has the ability to connect to the spiritual Principle that which, on the animal level, is normally utilized by the spiritual in opposition to the Spirit: he can control instincts and passions.

The Spirit, which manifests itself in minerals as material fixity, in plants as form, and in animals as psyche, arises in humans as thought: at the level of thought, however, it does not possess the power it expresses as energy in the crystal, as form in the plant, or as instinctive psyche in the animal, but achieves an identity with

itself, albeit initially reflected, in which it begins to express itself directly as such. The task of the thinker is to realize, at his own level, the identity with itself to which the Spirit renounces at the levels of Nature, in order to express itself as psychic, vital, and mineral structure.

Man's inner *work* is the realization of the mediation that is initially given to him as thought: thanks to this, he can reestablish the hierarchical correlation of the principles of which he is the bearer: the ego as *atma* must come to dominate the astral body and, through this, the etheric body and the physical body. On the day he has spiritualized the astral and restored the original power to the etheric body, he will have transformed the physical body into a limb of the Spirit, whose mineral nature will possess the creative transparency that for now he can exceptionally experience in pure thought.

For now, the light of the I begins to shine only in thought: when this light shines, the life of feeling and the current of will minimally regain their original correlation. Such a possibility, however, resulting from proper inner discipline, rarely comes to pass in the individual. The astral body normally binds him below to the physical nature just as it binds the animal, while above it is permeated, through reason, by the light of the I. The nature of the astral body is therefore twofold: animal and spiritual. Even the ordinary cannot be not separated; on the contrary, they are mixed, and this mixture generates the continuous contradiction of the soul's life. The unconscious prevalence of the animal nature generates ephemeral culture, false ideologies, erroneous scientific orientations, ever-unsatisfied cravings, selfishness, neurosis, and a host of diseases.

The prevalence of the lower nature over reason stems from the bond of the astral body of depth to the functions of nature. This bond rises as a craving for life, being regularly idealized and codified. Desire generates the lower life of the ego, or selfishness: selfishness generates aversion, the individual's regular opposition

to other individuals: the daily human error, which, unless addressed by the spiritual Principle emerging in the conscious soul—capable of controlling the lower nature through reason—is necessarily corrected by pain, illness, and ultimately death.

The astral body, due to its dual nature — animal and spiritual —simultaneously manifesting the impulses of sympathy and antipathy, attraction and repulsion, pleasure and pain, regarding which the possibility of distinction, control, and conscious choice belongs to the emerging spiritual Principle as the ego. The impulses of the animal nature and those of the spiritual nature are mingled in the astral body: hence the soul continually oscillates confusedly between pleasure and pain, attraction and repulsion, where the I does not assert itself as a principle of distinction and responsibility.

In the oscillation between the two opposites and in their mingling, the ego is constantly compelled to a helpless acquiescence to *the* resulting *turmoil* of the soul. This *chaos* is essentially a reversal of the established Spirit-soul-body hierarchy. The functions of the body involve the soul; the soul conditions the ego through thinking, feeling, and willing. Man is led to find true and right that which accords with his instincts and which, in reality, imposes itself upon him by rising through the will and the thirst drawn from bodily life. He believes he chooses by way of logical thought, according to the free ego: in reality, he gives logical form to his choice according to the impulses of his animal nature.

Such a reversal of the spirit-soul-body relationship, from which all of humanity's ills—without exception—stem, has but one conscious remedy: the discipline of concentration. The simple exercise of concentration suggested in this treatise, according to rules drawn from direct supersensible experience—that is, from the type of asceticism preparatory to the Initiation of the new age—and not from texts prescribed by traditional Wisdom, which are technically alien to humanity's present situation, restores the Spirit-soul-body hierarchy, albeit for a brief

moment. This moment, however, thanks to persistence in the discipline, can be prolonged and repeated over time.

The exercise for this technique, in accordance with the very purpose of its execution, must be extremely simple: as will be seen, it consists in concentrating one's thought on an object devoid of special significance. The physical object, evoked and placed at the center of conscious attention, enables the ego to act through thought upon the forces of the astral body and, through these, upon the etheric-physical body.

In the simple exercise of concentration, the Spirit-Soul-Body hierarchy, which is normally always disrupted, is temporarily reestablished: therefore, it is the exercise least acceptable to the instinctive nature, the most laborious despite its simplicity. It is the least appealing, as vogue exercises—or mystical, sensational ones that appeal to the sentimental, instinctive, or animal nature of man—appear more convincing.

Once the wise use of concentration is grasped, for the restoration of the intuited hierarchy, other types of exercises will gradually become necessary to give way to the resurgent correlation—Spirit-soul-body correlation to connect with the intentions of the human Archetype; so that the lower nature, which tends to assume a spiritual guise and to use the initial powers of the Spirit for purposes elusive to nascent self-consciousness, may not benefit from it in a more subtle form. This is the danger of the irregular paths to the Supersensible in the present age.

All paths, by virtue of their existence, correspond to degrees of the soul's development, but with respect to the evolutionary impulse of the times, they are recognizable as irregular to the extent that they ignore the process of thought through which the Spirit rises directly within the soul: in a movement opposite to the "traditional" one, whereby the soul avoided thought in order to unite with the Spirit, essentially escaping from time.

The freedom to which man aspires, giving it different meanings depending on the degree of his own evolution, is in reality nothing more than an event of thought—He who takes away freedom from others essentially has the power to give form to his own unfree thought: with such thought he acts as if he were free, ideologically and ethically convinced of his own right.

Freedom is thought that actualizes its true nature, which is normally altered in the dialectical process. Dialectical thought can be free only on the dialectical plane, but such freedom is spiritually nothing. Thought is free when it rediscovers its connection with the Self. This connection never truly occurs, because dialectical thought is reflective, and in being reflective it has no connection with the Self, but rather with its psychic projection, the rational, conscious Self, the ego, the reflection of the Self.

To realize its true nature, thought must experience its own freedom: this is the highest experience of the soul. Thought, in fact, normally presents itself as the mediator of all sensory or extrasensory knowledge, never of itself. It can perceive itself only if, through concentration, it isolates itself, even if only temporarily, from the psyche, from instincts, from feelings, from sensory contents, from its own intellectual expression, and from every content that is not its own pure being. In this pure being, it actualizes its own true nature: it becomes alive, expressing as its essential content a force independent of the mechanistic nature of dialectical intelligence. With this content, it can truly encounter the sensory world, imparting to it the inner being of which it, in its appearance, lacks; simultaneously, it can penetrate, as a vehicle of essence, into the world.

Will and freedom go hand in hand in discipline. The elevation and creative intensity of feeling spring from the harmony of thought with will. The cultivation of will corresponds to the liberation of thought. The harmony of these three forces is the path to the reintegration of the soul's Light of Life, capable of

shaping the physical body: the ultimate meaning of man's earthly experience.

The problem of freedom concerns only thought, insofar as it loses its true nature by depending on the sphere of sensations and the psyche, and by depending on the brain, through which it nevertheless becomes conscious at the sensory level. This dependence is a state of alienation of thought: from which arises dialectics, the logical-quantitative interpretation of the world, and the series of ideologies that perceive reality reflexively, outside of its foundation.

The dependence of thought on the brain is contingent and temporary, serving only, at a specific stage of human evolution, to make thought independent of the ancient spiritual authority, so that it gradually realizes within the depths of its own autonomous movement (that authority & It is this instrumental dependence that gave rise to the quantitative knowledge of reality; beyond that—qualitative knowledge—corresponding to the etheric, astral, and spiritual spheres—the sensible-quantitative world is isolated from its metaphysical foundation. The error of modern man is to take the alienation of thought for granted and to regard the resulting quantitative vision as real, whereas the era of the exclusive experience of “quantity” is exhausted: having already given thought what it expected from it, the logical possibility of freedom. The flaw in present-day thought is its lack of awareness of what it has truly sought through the experience of science and technology.

Thought, being dependent on the brain and thus on the sensory sphere, compels the feelings, volitional impulses, and aspirations of the soul to resonate in accordance with its alienation. Codified desire, the cult of animality, the denial of the Spiritual, and the corresponding instincts and passions arise from the absolutization of a stage of deterioration in the function of thought: the real alienation of the mind.

The theme of freedom concerns precisely that inner element through which the soul binds itself to the brain, in order to attain logical knowledge of the sensible. This bond consists in the irreversibility of the sensible dimension: an illegitimate irreversibility, because it stems from thought's inability to retrace its own movement, whereas its true task is precisely to retrace it. The theme of freedom therefore concerns thinking exclusively: not feeling, nor willing. The altered function of feeling and willing, and thus the series of contradictions in psychic life, depends on the freedom of thought.

The liberation of man depends on the liberation of thought: there is no other liberation. Through discipline of concentration, thought frees itself from the sensory element, from its hostile resonance and its etheric resonance: it frees itself from the mechanism of logical structures, inasmuch as it moves according to its own pure logic: it becomes the vehicle of the ego in the human being. Man rises from his alienation. The action of free thought becomes liberating when, in harmony with the cosmic Powers sustaining humanity, it comes to act upon the etheric body.

The disciple acts upon the etheric body through the will, that is, by working upon it through liberated thought. The direct action of liberated thought upon the etheric body is only a prelude: the transformative action, however, can be performed only by the transcendent cosmic Powers evoked by the rite of liberated thought: the thought of concentration, meditation, the pure idea—in reality, the act of the I—which appeals to these Powers, even if it does not presuppose their existence.

To come to act ritually upon the etheric body means to proceed toward the ultimate meaning of liberation, Initiation: to transcend nature, the bonds of race, family, and the collective animal entity; to begin to weave the true relationship with beings, according to inner reality: true brotherhood. Which cannot be the correlation established on the basis of psychophysiological

necessity: true brotherhood is in itself sufficient to resolve even the problems inherent in such necessity,

The lower nature possesses man through the animal and instinctive memory of the etheric body, which is, as in the animal, associative: association eludes the light of the ego, functions as automatism, and normally results in the ego's powerless assent. Etheric association, removed from the ego, is the basis of mental illnesses: a phenomenon studied today by the analytical sciences of the psyche, as well as by Spiritism and the simplistic *yoga* systems propagated throughout the world, with mediumistic concentration techniques.

Freedom, as the restoration of thought's original nature, is a liberation of the higher, or spiritual, memory from the lower, or animal, memory—the sediment of the impulses of the species, the family, the blood, and so on. The lower memory normally dominates man, appropriating his thought and his capacity for association. Real memory, on the other hand, contains the recollection of one's history, extending back to that of previous incarnations: in the alienated human being, this memory lies dormant; it surfaces in a weakened state within the psyche as instinctive memory, which manifests itself through the brain, at the level of which it is formed according to the system of rational knowledge.

Man's animal memory utilizes the forces of spiritual memory through the contingent dependence of thought on the brain. Spiritual Science shows how the human brain is the organ that, in past eras, the Spirit shaped it to exert influence—as I do upon physical nature. At first, thought becomes autonomous from the ancient metaphysical nature, gradually binding itself to the cerebral instrument: from the necessity of determining itself through this, it derives the impulse toward freedom.

That which is animal in man asserts itself through cerebral activity: through the organ by which he thinks. Solar asceticism reverses this process: it achieves the independence of thought

from cerebral activity and establishes a rectifying relationship with the instinctive element; it is a reintegrative action, sometimes dramatically opposed, through which the ego regains its primordial powers linked to physicality. This struggle takes place in consciousness, thanks to gradually liberated forces of thought—including those of memory—in a zone where the lower nature and the higher nature meet. Memory is not bound to intellectuality: its forces, essentially supersensible, are nevertheless normally utilized by that which ascends into the mental as an instinctive current, through alienated thought—that is, thought conditioned by cerebral activity; this results in a reversal of the true function of memory, tending to become constitutional.

That a stimulus to memory can be achieved, according to recent experiments, by inserting a needle into the brain, does not mean that the brain contains memory, but that the etheric body of the brain has been mechanically stimulated, just as it is stimulated by perception through the sense organs. Through the needle, the perception of the ether is directed, but foreign to the ego, in that it is provoked without the mediation of the organs of perception: whose content, usually, when the ego is not present, connects through the cerebral channels with the sentient memory, arousing an association that gives rise to the instinctive response (up to the well-known phenomenology of “conditioned reflexes”), in which the ego’s assent is passive: the ego does not grasp the concrete content of perception, but rather what is suggested by associative memory: that is, the association of memories on the astral-etheric plane, according to a mechanism proper to the animal nature. In such a case, the connectivity of the etheric body, though an extrasensory process, eludes the ego and functions as automatism.

This is the way in which memories normally disturb the weak-minded person, or invade the ego to the point of obsession: the sentient body eludes the ego, yet uses its own force, which normally operates in consciousness with a centripetal power. This centripetal power, in essence, is reversed and thus acts against its

own principle. Every drug, every hallucination, every alcoholic intoxication, every mediumistic trance, every facile *yoga* accompanied by emphatic *mantras*, fosters a power of self-concentration a state that is hostile to the ego, leading to damage to both soul and body. The remedy for this situation is, first and foremost, a volitional-physical one: the removal of the causes and the use of detoxification therapy. But radical healing lies in the ego's ability to restore the flow of force through right concentration, that is, through the legitimate use of centripetal force. Its ultimate purpose is the liberation of thought, through which alone the ego can act upon psychosomatic animality, rediscovering within the depths the Powers from which it has degenerated.

The ultimate purpose of the disciplines is freedom. True liberation is not the unleashing of oneself, which is always the explosion of physical nature—with its ideological codifications—but rather the chaining of oneself. Restraining oneself according to a strict program, when it is an act of free thought—that is, free from human aims yet free from desires—restores the original light to the etheric body.

Thought is free in itself, but the etheric body, bound to animal nature, does not obey it: therefore, thought is normally lifeless. The more the etheric body is constrained by rigorous discipline to withdraw from its harmony with the craving inherent in the functions of nature, the more it becomes a limb of the Spirit, an instrument of liberation. To constrain oneself, to command oneself, to follow the most difficult path, to positively embrace the endurance of all that is heavy and constraining—this is the path to freedom: the more the animal nature is led to obey and respond to a rhythm that governs it, the more it returns as a power to the higher Principle of the Self, and thus becomes a co-operator in the reintegration of the human being.

If one has properly understood the meaning of what is here called constraint, as asceticism of the etheric body, it will not be

difficult to understand that such constraint is not a form or a coercion, but an absolutely free inner mediation, that is, an acting through conscious representations upon the current of the will, setting tasks for it that the etheric body, due to its habitual harmony with animal nature, tends to evade.

There is no human creation or elevation that does not require a long, sacrificial effort to free oneself from the inertia of psychophysiological nature. In this direction lies the mission of thought. In reality, the conscious human being draws the formative power of the concept from the nobler forces of the etheric body, causing their power of metaphysical synthesis to resonate in the physical sphere as a structure of knowledge.

FORMATIVE POWER OF THE CONCEPT

For what the disciple actually tends to experience, through the disciplines, is the force by which the concept is formed in consciousness. There is no concept without this formative power, but the ordinary person—who remains ignorant of this—is concerned only with the dialectical use of the conceptual form. The disciple, on the other hand, takes the concept as a vehicle of the power of thought: he goes back to the formative power of the concept, independent of its specific meaning. Every concept presupposes this power, insofar as it is a synthesis of a multiplicity, corresponding to a real entity as an original “type” beyond the senses.

The dialectician of the present time normally ignores the moment of synthesis: while he assumes its power to be real, he does not even believe in its existence; he does not realize that, with the concept of “horse,” he refers to a single entity that lives in all horses and presents it as a concrete reality. He does not know what he is doing: he regards as real a “universal,” whose existence he dialectically denies or ignores; he draws, without knowing it, upon the formative power, or power of the concept

shifts. Through concentration, the disciple experiences precisely this element of life, of which thought is normally deprived. In reality, there is no concept of modern dialectics that carries life as its own content: the series of concepts of an ideology is invariably a system of ignorance regarding inner life, to which it nevertheless refers: see the concepts of fraternity, morality, value, universality, etc. No advocate of fraternity believes that there exists, as fraternity, a univocal non-physical force that can be concretely brought into play precisely because of its non-physical nature.

The exercise of concentration restores the concept's reality. In effect, when a concept is evoked, a force is summoned that brings it to the surface, but it immediately retreats into the unknown of consciousness: it is the force of memory, which manifests itself in the thinking process and immediately yields to the dialectical-abstract form at whose level it becomes conscious. A remembered concept is an ever-new act of creation, but the living moment of the mnemonic act each time eludes dialectical consciousness—which is bound to cerebral activity. The living moment of the concept, or of its memory, on the other hand, being preconscious, is not bound to cerebral activity. Concentration appeals to this living moment: thanks to it, thought reaches its own foundation, which is not the brain; the true foundation is a primordial force of the soul, which tends to rise up into consciousness. Those who one day will address human problems according to reality—that is, according to meditative insight—rather than according to ideology, must be capable of reawakening such a force.

The force that brings the concept to the surface of the mind when it is evoked is the same one that operates in the original formation of the concept. In both cases, it springs forth as a power from an inner realm that eludes consciousness. In concentration, consciousness tends to bring forth—precisely this power, which its continuous movement presupposes.

One can therefore evoke a concept because, in substance, one already possesses it. One possesses an indefinite series of concepts of things and entities, but, if one observes, in fact one has not

operated with deliberate forces of consciousness in their formation. A higher force, like a superior spontaneity, has acted in the thinking relation with the object.

Consciously, one perceives only the representations of an entity: one ends up having the concept, which is in itself a power of synthesis, but one has not directly operated with a determined act of consciousness toward such a synthesis. Nevertheless, one normally uses the concept as if one possessed such a synthesis: as if, in saying “horse,” one had the perception of the entity that lives in every single horse, as its archetype. Concentration consists in consciously mastering the dynamics of the archetypal process, emerging from the depths of the soul into the conscious mind.

Where one can experience the power of the concept’s synthesis, one gains access to a realm of reality that is normally imperceptible, because it is too vast and powerful for the conscious mind: one gains access to a realm of supersensible powers, which is perceived as the absolute foundation of the sensible realm. Today, the free human being has the ability to demonstrate the reality of the supersensible to himself.

The preconscious activity through which the concept is formed can be experienced as the primordial inner current, which within the organism transforms matter into spiritual energy and spiritual energy into living nature. In this activity, the ascetic of the present age has the possibility of grasping what Tantric Yoga calls *shakti*, in particular the current of *kundalini*. This power, through such Yoga, is indeed unattainable today, due to the impossibility of its technique being applicable.

Concentration on an evoked object essentially moves from its own core: that is, from that very notion that within consciousness there is a power of active synthesis, not possessed. This power is objectified: the ego lives with its own current of inner force, thanks to the fact that through a series of representations the object is reconstituted as a concept, that is, as an original synthetic power.

This power, a substance woven from will, requires, in order to be perceived, the persistence of will in thought: it is so intensely willed that the determination of thought and its volitional content ultimately coincide. The will, willed with such intensity that it ceases to require effort, becomes a current of life reconnecting consciousness with the source of its strength.

CONCENTRATION

Concentration is the key exercise of the discipline, and yet the vehicle of enlightenment and liberation. It consists in gathering, through a theme, the flow of thought into a single point, so as to achieve a dynamic synthesis: this synthesis objectively realizes what thought is at its origin.

Thought is originally a power of synthesis, but at that level it does not know its own content, because it is not self-aware: normally it becomes self-aware by turning to the sensible, taking the sensible—or its speculative echo—as its own content. In consciousness turned toward the sensible, it immediately becomes analytical and dialectical, thus opposed to its own original nature. Concentration restores to thought this original nature: which the disciple recognizes as one with the universal forces sustaining his existence.

The operation consists in reconstituting, from an object or a theme, the synthesis of thought that underlies it, the dialectical-analytical unfolding, until the pure initial concept is rediscovered. Conceptual determination, however, can be fully grasped as the evocation of an object produced by man: from this object, the disciple can derive the entire analytical thought through which it was constructed, tracing it back until he rediscovers it as the intuitive thought that conceived it: as a concept.

The object should simply be evoked, not perceived at the same time: perceiving it during the exercise would be a mistake, since

the task is to experience thought free from sensory input: in reality, the idea of the man-made object is not in the object, but in the human mind, whereas the object belonging to living nature (crystal, plant, animal, etc.) bears its own idea immanently within itself: here the idea is present as the potential of its form. The correlation of the parts of a crystal is inherent in the archetypal form of its crystallization system, whereas the correlation of the parts of a machine is organically meaningless, responding to an abstraction of the human mind, foreign to the real relationship between the mineral substance of one “part” and that of the other “parts.”

From representation to representation, the exercise mnemonically reconstructs the original synthetic thought. Therefore, the object cannot be something not produced by man: it cannot be a crystal, or a plant, or an animal, or the sky, etc.: concentration on these objects does not achieve the wisdom of the exercise, which consists in extracting from an object all the thought that conceived it, so as to be able to eliminate the sensible support and have before one the idea-synthesis. In the crystal, the plant, the sky, etc., the disciple finds himself faced with an object embodying a thought that is not his own, and which he can therefore grasp as a conceptual determination only speculatively. But the exercise of concentration has nothing to do with speculative processes: these, on the other hand, may sometimes be called upon to cooperate, in a conscious measure, in the exercise of meditation.

With objects that express the thought of the universe operating as living nature, the disciple does indeed unite with them through his own thought, but thanks to another type of exercise that requires the perception of the object. The perceptive contemplation of the object and that of the non-human thought embodied in it constitute a single movement of the soul: yet they fall under another chapter of the discipline; they are not the typical exercise of concentration—the key to the liberation of the

thought with which man thinks daily, and which is the subject of this paragraph.

The disciple must start from the thought with which he ordinarily thinks: this thought he must liberate. Therefore, he must start from objects that typically express his current—rational, dialectical—thought; through this, he can reach his own activity of thought independent of the object, and this liberated activity is given to him as his first conscious experience of the Spiritual.

If the disciple were to begin by concentrating on objects in which universal thought is directly expressed, he would never reach it, because he would always mediate it through his own representations bound to the sensible: he would mediate the universal abstractly, with a thought that nonetheless bears within itself the opposition to the Universal. This observation applies to any exercise considered valid due to its immediate regularity with respect to the Supersensible, but which essentially prevents the attainment of unmediated thought, that is, of liberating mediation.

The exercise of concentration consists in evoking of a man-made object: preferably one that can be exhausted in a minimal series of representations, through which it is possible to express the maximum force of thought: therefore, the simplest object.

Since the purpose of concentration is the experience of the synthetic element of thought, normally alienated in the analytical-rational process, the object must be such that its meaning exerts no influence on the operation, which requires only the pure and apsycheic volitional determination of thought. In this volitional determination lies the original force of thought: it need only be rediscovered. In the activity aimed at rediscovering it, it is itself in motion. This motion is fundamental to the entire life of the soul and its relationship with the Spirit and the body, because for the first time the typical order of soul-spirit-body is realized, an order normally contradicted by

everyday experience. For this reason, this elementary exercise is the key to equilibrium and to the health of soul and body. The fact that, despite its simplicity, it is always difficult to carry out, can be explained by its truly exceptional premise: that it is the model operation for the restoration of the original balance of the constitutive principles of the human being.

The wisdom of this exercise lies in its simplicity: one calls to mind an object—a pin, a pencil, a button, etc.—describes it precisely, briefly recounts its history, and identifies its function. This substantial operation, carried out with the bare minimum of representations, ultimately gives rise to a synthetic image, or concept, which it is beneficial to hold before one's consciousness, objectively, just as the initial image of the object. The more this synthetic image can be objectively contemplated, the more concentration becomes an experience of the Spirit. During the exercise, it is important not to allow oneself to be distracted by any other thought: if this occurs, one must retrace the path

MEDITATION

Meditation differs from concentration in that, while the latter takes an object or a theme as a means for the dynamic synthesis of thought, regardless of its meaning, meditation is thought that moves directly according to the spiritual meaning of an object or a theme. In concentration, the content of thought is of no importance; indeed, care is taken to ensure it is foreign to the interests of the Spirit. In meditation, however, it is the content that, insofar as it is spiritual, gives rise to the movement of thought in its pure immediacy: the image that simultaneously unites thinking, feeling, and willing.

One turns to a content that can be immediately grasped as an image. Such an image must correspond to objective, comprehensive experience; therefore, it must be drawn from a text of Spiritual Science or Traditional Wisdom, or suggested by a

spiritual instructor. For example: “Earthly gold is the mineral trace of the Sun.” It is not a matter of analyzing the concept of “gold” or “Sun,” nor of rationally analyzing the relationship between them, but rather of taking in the image as it is directly given in the words: to receive the immediate resonance of these in the soul. The three forces of the soul—thinking, feeling, and willing—in their purest state, are simultaneously called upon in this immediate resonance.

To meditate is to contemplatively nourish the element of life through which the image first arises in consciousness. Meditation requires no reflection whatsoever. Like concentration, it is an essentially simple operation: it is not to argue, not to analyze through thoughts, or to investigate in order to uncover hidden meanings, but rather to contemplate by imagining or to imagine by contemplating the content assumed, until the calm perception of the image-synthesis or the corresponding feeling: nothing else. Since the image-synthesis and the correlative feeling usually arise immediately, there is no other task than to let them live in the soul: as soon as they fade, the disciple’s art is to return and renew their moment of arising, for a certain number of minutes: thus to imbue the soul with them. This technique also applies to meditations that require the connection of different systems of images, such as, for example, the Rosicrucian exercise, and are carried out through representations that transcend sensible reality, as deliberately arbitrary constructions, united at their core by a precise supersensible content. (See “Power Of Imagination”).

In essence, meditation is not an intuitive elaboration of spiritual themes: this, if anything, is a cognitive operation possible at a later stage, through the forces derived from meditation. Nor is it a dialectical or logical analysis. The exercise of the dialectical-logical intellect, at best, is a preliminary training for the exercise of concentration.

Meditation, on the other hand, is the direct arousal of the soul’s forces through a spiritual content: whatever arises spontaneously from its absorption is received and nourished.

Since inner strength matters more than its dialectic, the task of the meditating disciple is, ultimately, to make continuous and objective, for a certain number of minutes, the initial moment of ignition of the inner forces according to a specific theme of the Spirit: an image, a phrase, a symbol, capable of resonating by its own power within the soul.

DEEP CONCENTRATION

The object, theme, concept, or image, or the sign of light, or the symbol, which the disciple attains as the final synthesis of concentration, must stand before him objectively: it does not matter here what form it takes, or whether it has no form at all. He must not concern himself with seeing something with a specific form, but with seeing before him³ the *essence* that symbolizes, formally or informally, the thought-synthesis. This *essence* may even be nothingness, and yet exist, as imperceptibly as desired.

This *essence* must be contemplated calmly, resolutely, with the utmost attention, and with a subtle, sustained effort of will—while at the same time fostering a spontaneous rest within oneself: a contemplative detachment that brings to fruition the power of profound inertia, or ATAHASSIA (see entry), alongside the intense, incorporeal activity objectified through concentration. This intense incorporeal activity is, in essence, the original identity of the Self with things, arising, albeit for a brief moment.

The disciple understands the importance of contemplating the sign-symbol in a state of silent purity. Such purity is substance ('independence of the Self')—concentration, in fact, is realized to the extent that it is not altered by feelings, memories, tensions, psychisms, or psychosomatic states. Like a mathematical formula—dry and objective, devoid of psyche, yet trans-subjective—the

sign-symbol must stand before the experimenter, with its invisible light, excluding any personal psychological element.

The true strength lies in keeping the sign of light outside oneself, in its intact adamantine nature, or in its absolute impersonality. It is the symbol of the liberation of the ego within the soul: the beginning of its autonomy from the astral body, that is, from the psychic realm in which the continuous cycle of instincts and emotional states resides.

Concentration is achieved beyond what one constitutionally is, independent of the mental and physical condition with which one has identified. It must not operate through the forces of what one is existentially, but through the most unbound thought: in essence, it must be added to what one is. The psychophysical being that one is must not intervene at all: it must be temporarily ignored; whereas yogic and traditional methods imply its participation in the inner process, indeed, they rely on it. This distinction is important.

The current of thinking attention, as an incorporeal force capable of acting beyond the body, yet upon the body, must be developed to the fullest outside the organism with which one has not identified: it must be activated beyond oneself, outside the normal malaise that presents itself as psychosomatic life, whatever the fatigue, or the pain, or the depression, or the exaltation, or the existential impossibility, or the traumatic event. Indeed, the psychosomatic impediment itself can facilitate the distinction from it of the activity that transcends it.

The object of concentration, until it reaches its clear light, must be perceived as such, beyond the sensation of the body or the psyche. Feeling normally reconnects consciousness with corporeality and paralyzes the force. To realize the clear light, or the extrasensory sign, of the object—which as a physical object is in truth extinct—beyond what it is, means to overcome the subjective-instinctive element of the psyche, which normally tends to make every inner operation its own. — whether of Yoga,

or Magic, or Mysticism — through subtle feeling, linked to corporeality. In the feeling of the self, bound to the corporeal being, man is normally manipulated by extrasensory forces opposed to his liberation: concentration, becoming operative, therefore postulates the asceticism of feeling.

THE ASCETICISM OF FEELING

The asceticism of feeling is achieved by every exercise that harmonizes thought with the will. The extrasensory force that essentially connects thought with the will is feeling. Ordinary feeling is not the true life of feeling, but rather its alteration. This alteration is healed by the exercise of the will's response to liberated thought.

Feeling, as a pure force of the soul, can arise where normal feeling is silenced, which is, in any case, the vehicle of the animal nature of the human being. As a result of meditation, feeling tends to arise as the rhythmic force of the soul, already indirectly stimulated in this sense by every wise connection of thought with will. For the soul's rhythmic power to manifest directly, the state of absence of normal feeling must be technically produced: like a gateway opened to depersonalized feeling, capable of immersing itself in the interests of others and in the world, with the spontaneity normally aroused by personal interests.

One must train oneself to refrain from the normal emotional reaction on certain occasions. The exercise of "non-feeling" is the condition for pure concentration and for the consequent resurrection of feeling—that is, for the flowering of pure feeling, which frees the mind from corporeality—but it is also the pure thought that opens the passage to non-feeling and frees the mind from rational, sentient subjectivity.

The power of attention directed toward the object suspends the nervous system's conditioning to inner activity, but precisely

this temporary immobility of the nervous system corresponds to the “void” of egoic feeling: the habitual nervous reaction ceases to dominate the life of the soul. The resulting absence of astral influence becomes the environment in which the flow of pure thought-force is possible. But it must be said simultaneously that the awakening of pure thought-force makes the astral void possible: the environment necessary for the emergence of the cosmic Principle of thought.

The temporary absence of subjective feeling brings about the detachment of consciousness from the nervous system, that is, the independence of the higher astral realm in which the Self dwells from the lower astral realm in which the Self is obtusely manipulated. This detachment isolates the nervous system and reduces to its proper function the inner entity that, through this system, manipulates the life of the instincts.

In reality, by not listening, the disciple temporarily frees himself from the collective entity that dominates the blood: that is, he halts the action of the entity “Lucifer,” the instigator of emotions, passions, moods, and thoughts that contradict the essence of the soul. But as you suspend, even for brief moments, the influence of the Adversary acting in the blood, you automatically isolate the Adversary acting through the nervous system: you render the soul independent of the “Ahrimanic” entity which, by manipulating the nervous system, expresses itself fully in the instinctive human being. In such moments, the nervous system is limited to being a pure transmitter, or a neutral mediator, according to the same process that operates in the sense organs. In fact, the sense organs function as objective mediators, because the action of the emotional or instinctive entity is excluded from them: it was originally eliminated by the building forces of the ego. The senses, in truth, do not deceive: it is thought that fails to be consciously alive in itself with respect to them, as when it is aroused by their content, thanks to the neutral mediation of the nervous element.

The independence, albeit temporary, of the mental from the nervous system restores the hierarchical correlation of Spirit-soul-body, reawakening an original power of the Spirit in relation to its own astral-etheric-physical being.

Constitutionally, the physical support of the ego is blood, the support of the astral is the nervous system, and the support of the etheric body is the glandular system. In moments of suspension of lower feeling, which expresses the alteration of the aforementioned hierarchical relationship, the ego enters the blood according to its irasmic light: thus, simultaneously, it tends to restore to the nervous system—rendered immobile—its original metaphysical life. As a consequence of the original metaphysical life lost by the nervous system, in fact, the lower self can dominate it unopposed, even if in the sense organs such domination has the aforementioned limit. In reality, through the nervous system, the Ahrimanic entity not only prevents the perception of the supersensible—which sustains the world everywhere—from reaching the human being, but also succeeds in impressing its own influence upon the blood current: ascending to the head and filling the mental with destructive impulses. The ascetic practice of suspending feeling establishes a pause for the reactivation of the relationship between the spiritual and the physical, as during sleep, temporarily altering the nature of the breath and its connection to the rhythm of the blood.

BREATHING

The relationship between consciousness and breath is realized through concentration. Breathing is normally, in the state of otgallism, a rhythmic imprint of the lower astral realm. With the suspension of the nervous system's conditioning and the realization of the "emptiness" of feeling, breathing ceases to move according to the lower astral: it gradually detaches itself from the

nervous system. But this must not be felt or followed, even if one knows it is happening.

As it is gradually brought to essential autonomy, the breath regains the rhythm of the higher astral, which is its own in depth, but from which it is normally alienated. However, it is not a deliberate breathing discipline that can restore the breath's secret light, but rather the "ataraxia" of the rational-sensing astral: something that can be called a zero of psychic life, a metaphysical acriticism, in which the fundamental forces emerge. Only at this stage can the appropriate breathing exercise be practiced. In our other works, we have spoken of a state of eristic ataraxia as a prerequisite for the new type of breathing.

One can bring the breath to a state of functional calm, from which it actually arises, and perceive this calm as a state of absolute independence from the nervous system: a state attainable from a direction other than the nervous one, thanks to the aforementioned discipline of "not feeling": this corresponds to deep concentration, that is, to the perception of living thought, beyond what we are as individuals deriving self-awareness from the nervous system.

Breathing can become a vehicle for pure extra-corporeal force, not because it is manipulated according to the techniques of *Pranayama*—which today inevitably stimulate the mechanisms of the physical body, where the Spiritual is alienated—but because one perceives its pre-corporeal nature, detached from the rational-sensory astral, and its origin in a cosmic rhythm: not linked to feeling, but rather to willing; that is to say, to the original feeling, to the constitutional purity of bodily being, independent of the nervous system. As can be seen, this is a form of breathing that has very little to do with that of Yoga techniques.

Breathing is normally the support of feeling; but since this feeling is the psychic motion of subjectivity, it is the breath that expresses the subordination of the Spiritual to corporeality, that is, the vital nourishment of the ego, of illness, of bodily

destruction. One cannot operate ascetically with such a breath: it asks for only one thing, to be left alone.

Detachment from the nervous system makes the breath a vehicle of the metaphysical vitality of Light: this possibility corresponds to that of the liberation of feeling, or the extinction of subjective feeling, which is illegitimately inherent the nervous system. Unbound breathing unfolds as the rhythm of the will: it becomes a profound relationship with the power of the cosmic Entity, which has the element of air as its support on Earth. Air is the perceptible vehicle of Light.

Just as the inner man has the mental body as his physical support on Earth, there exist super-sensible Entities whose earthly support consists respectively of elements such as fire, air, water, etc.: when the disciple detaches the breath from the nervous system—as a consequence of the detachment of thought from the physical brain and the stillness of feeling—he perceives the metaphysical element of the breath. For him begins the experience of the Archangel of Air, whose function has been revealed to certain disciples by the Master of the New Age.

The secret of the Philosopher's Stone is linked to the knowledge of this breath, granted by the Spiritual World to the disciple who attains the inability to make personal use of the Force. The disciple who knows this breath, in reality, feels that he must resort to it only minimally, and that only in rare moments may he deserve to benefit from its aid, since the content of holiness it carries necessarily encounters a profound inadequacy in the current cosmic condition of the soul.

The disciple is directly made aware of the moment when he can become conscious of the metaphysical breath and the radical rhythm it requires, in order to become once again a vehicle of the Light.

MENTAL SILENCE

The thought of concentration, when possessed, can be brought to absolute stillness: it is not eliminated, but united with its essence. It unites with this essence, gathering the powers of the soul around it: silently, preventing the soul from giving any form to it. The thought-force becomes immobile, united, identical to itself: it identifies with its own original silence: it generates mental silence.

As the disciple progresses in the discipline, once he considers himself ready to advance to a higher level of experience, he must consciously eliminate the supersensible contents received through mental silence, until he attains a more radical form of silence. This more radical silence is what occult literature refers to as “emptiness.” It is clear that the disciple can turn to it only after becoming familiar with the initial mental silence achieved through concentration.

Every higher experience is mediated by mental silence: any further ascent of consciousness presupposes the possession of the level from which it moves and from which it is occultly related to every other level, whether lower or higher. Any ascent requires the ability to eliminate, through the void, the supersensible contents attained at the level which it moves to mental silence, in essence, prepares the experience of emptiness: but each time the ascent to a higher degree of consciousness requires being mediated by the emptiness of the supersensible content possessed.

Mental silence constitutes a positive achievement for the experimenter: not only is it the pacifier of the psyche and the nervous system, but above all the gateway to the higher forces of the ego.

AFTER MEDITATION

After meditation, the evoked supersensible force tends to become life: to incarnate itself, however, it requires the ordinary waking state of the individual, that is, the state of positive unconsciousness proper to the ordinary activity of his animic-physical organism: it demands that he forget the accomplished work and immerse himself with dedication in the life of every day. In the spontaneity of action, the evoked forces are led to flow, inasmuch as they are unseen. To see or sense them is their paralysis. This positive forgetting, however, does not mean that with regard to ordinary life the experimenter must forget the responsibilities that come to him from meditation.

Just as the cosmic forces that restore etheric-physical vitality can operate through sleep, so too do the forces evoked in concentration and meditation require that positive state of sleep of the physical-etheric body—which is its normal spontaneity—as much as the waking life. It should be emphasized that the phenomenon of sleep concerns only the human astral body, where a shift in the polarity of consciousness occurs, while the rest of the etheric-physical organism remains in the same relationship with the astral and the ego as in the waking state.

The difference lies in the fact that during the waking state, the ego and the astral body, lacking their co-creative connection—and thus their true wisdom—exert a destructive influence on the etheric-physical organism through the normal process of instincts and passions. During sleep, however, the ego and the astral body are in communion with their original state, in a fullness not permitted during the waking state by that transformer of experience into content of consciousness, which is the brain. In the head, indeed, man is ordinarily at the mercy of instincts and passions.

The ascent of the ego and the astral to their cosmic domain during sleep essentially amounts to a descent of the ego into the transcendent system of forces of the middle seat, or the chest, and, more deeply, into that of the seat of the will, which is likewise the seat of the processes of exchange and the dynamics of instinctuality: seats from which the Ego, together with the higher astral, must temporarily separate, because the experience of their transcendent systems of forces through sleep may be possible for it. Every uprising of the lower astral against the higher hinders the detachment of the latter and prevents or hinders the process of sleep.

The penetration of the Self into the supersensible, thanks to the descent of the sun, is essentially a descent into the mystery of the body's organization. It is not a descent of the rational or mental ego, but rather of the pure ego: therefore, at the end of the meditation, the ascetic gives himself over to ordinary life, immersing himself spontaneously in action: so that the forces of the pure ego, evoked and tending to penetrate the bodily organization, may descend according to their solar quality, or their flow from the Logos: for this requires the non-consciousness or daily state of sleep of rhythmic life and that of instinctive volition.

The inner operations take place on the stage of mental consciousness, but the latter must not follow them into the organic depths to which they reach. They must be carried out unseen. The disciple must limit himself to working through pure thought and imaginative *insight*, independent of corporeality. Only at an advanced stage of development can he act directly upon the astral-ethic currents, but always through imaginative determination. Asceticism becomes a liberating descent into the deep systems of force within corporeality.

Direct action will one day be possible to the extent that the Spirit has become nature, or instinct. The disciple prepares for this future possibility in the present moment: at certain moments he senses the profound identity of the Self with beings, with

things, with the world, as if a single Self were at their center, as the real source of brotherhood, and he perceives how, in the face of this higher unity of the human, the human essentially opposes itself through the series of ideological fictions of morality, progress, and sociality.

For the ascetic capable of assuming responsibility for his own inner development, the moments of the original identity of the Self with things and with beings can be prolonged and repeated throughout the day. He will be able to proceed, understanding that development for its own sake—that is, conditioned by earthly ends or by preconceived representations of a spiritual action to be carried out on Earth—makes no sense.

Only the supersensible level attained can illuminate the nature of the action: but pure action itself, discipline, and *the ascetic life*, he can recognize as that which, by its own virtue, works creatively within the supersensible realm of the Earth. The consequences of human thinking, feeling, and willing are received by cosmic entities that transform them into threads of destiny.

Individual inner action can attain such a state of impersonality that it works for the benefit of humanity as a whole. There is a current of *karma* that stretches back centuries and millennia, but it manifests itself in a form determined by the potential ritual actions of spiritual communities, that is, of *the elites* immune to ideologies.

The discipline of concentration ceases to be a subjective technique when the disciple receives the virtue of impersonality from the liberated mind. As he progresses toward deep concentration, he understands the importance of reuniting individual intelligence with cosmic intelligence, of which the former is a degradation. The strengthening of thought is not sufficient: it must acquire an awareness of the 'moral standard required of it by the level attained.

Individual intelligence, strengthened through concentration, can unconsciously reinforce the lower subjective boundary that opposes it to cosmic intelligence. The disciple attains living solar thought only when he opens himself to the knowledge of the Entity that governs cosmic necessity, the Archangel of Thought: his thought is liberated from the cerebral mind, that is to say, from the current of the ego; then it can know everything, without the mediation of books or doctrines, because in his very soul he sees the secret of life unfold. The disciple's connection with this secret is the path of the Holy Grail. Due to the necessity of uniting the meditative current with the guidance of the Archangel of Thought, the path of the Rosicrucians, as a "direct path," differs from every other path of the present age.

PURE PERCEPTION

This is the technique through which the disciple comes to experience the inner process of sensory perception. He starts from a specific perception and directs his attention to it, which gradually enables him to have before him the content independent of the subjective form with which it is normally clothed: in essence, he separates the representation and the sensation from this content.

In perceiving, he grasps the presence of an inner, non-conscious life that is not immediately apparent in the way it ordinarily presents itself. The form and the content of life are identical, so that the form is itself the content he contemplates, but insofar as he simultaneously separates it from the sensory impression: through the exercise mentioned, he begins to perceive the vital, or etheric, element.

Thanks to attention deliberately directed toward a perception — just as in concentration he has learned to direct it toward a thought — the disciple trains himself to isolate its supersensible content. In concentration, he usually comes to contemplate his

own thought; in the exercise of pure perception, he contemplates a more powerful thought: that of creative nature. This thought may arise within him, inasmuch as he brings his silent consciousness to meet it. It is a thought that he must not think, but simply let act within him.

It makes no sense to contemplate an object constructed by the human being: such an object can only be evoked for the exercise of concentration, but not contemplated for the exercise of pure perception, which requires objects in which the creative thought is immanent. Only the distinction between perceptions of the inanimate human product and the animate elements of nature can be of preparatory use to (initiates of a connection between the two types of perception. At an advanced stage of ascetic practice, the disciple can experience, through inner perception, what “spirit” inhabits the inanimate object constructed by man. ,

The perception of the living in nature is, however, mediated by the mineral element in which it presents itself and through which it is perceptible. Through the purity of immediacy inherent in perception, the disciple realizes in terrestrial minerality the medium in which the I expresses itself directly, with its power of identity. He can consciously realize this power of identity.

In ordinary perception, upon encountering earthly minerality, the ego (from which the inverted and dormant spiritual powers arise as the life of consciousness): but consciousness is normally closed off to this inner resurgence of the transcendent reality of the mineral world through perception, because it is caught up in the subjective apprehension of forms, which are alive but arise as forms of a “process” of death: a process that moves away from man, identifying itself at that level with a degree of nature’s death. In the appearance mediated by perception, that reality is nevertheless about to rise again. But consciousness usually escapes it, binding itself through desire to the immediate, tangible, sensible aspect of reality—that is, to the form grasped by the sentient soul: which is the garment of the state of death of the

mineral. Which, on the other hand, is about to rise again through touch, sound, taste, scent, etc.: the immeasurable qualitative aspect that emerges in perception.

In truth, perception does not exist to be enjoyed as a sensation, but to be experienced as a power of the Self, springing from its encounter with physical minerality. Indeed, the ego is on the verge of bringing physical minerality to life in metaphysical reality, overcoming the power of enchantment whereby the appearance of minerality—imprinting itself upon sentient feeling and willing—rises to physical reality, not unlike a powerful hallucination. Such a hallucination is fueled by desire.

In ordinary perception, one must grasp a magical, transcendent act, continually lost to the craving for the apparent sensory content: a direct relationship of the ego, of a power in relation to which waking consciousness is inadequate, like a cataleptic state of consciousness compared to the waking state. One might say that the art of Solate Magic consists in conquering as a power of waking consciousness that which the Self already accomplishes by bringing the world into being through perceptions, via the senses.

The consciousness of sensory experience postulates a Science of the Ego, or a Philosophy of Freedom. Solar asceticism leads the disciple to experience the estrangement of the content of perception from the activity of the sensory organ through which it manifests. What takes place in the sensory organ during perception can be explained solely by the presence of the I; the perceptual process, as a process of the physical organ, is extraneous to the actual content, just as the telephone has nothing to do with the content of a conversation, nor with the corresponding voices.

The sensory organ does not serve to transmit sensory contents to the human body endowed with a sentient soul, but rather to enable the ego to grasp such contents as relations already existing

between the sentient body and the world; relations that persist even without the presence of the ego, as is the case in animals.

The ego perceives its own presence in the world: the absence of a more radical, or more individual, activity of consciousness—one that would enable it to perceive this grasping of its own presence—or its own power—in the world through perception—makes the life of the senses overwhelming as the realm of an immediate multiplicity, one that cannot be overcome by the feeble unifying opposition of numbers and logic.

The sensible image of the world arises through the supersensible power of perception: not because the content of the world is illusory or subjectively existing, but because through perception it takes on the form that appears as reality. Pure perception leads the ascetic to the threshold of the perceiving Self: to the Self that is always presupposed, never seen—the force that is presupposed and never is. Through pure perception, the ascetic enters a process of deep concentration, into which the force of the Higher Self flows. This force normally eludes the ordinary person, who, as they pass from one perception to another, always avoids its penetration, continually drawn by the craving for sensations. The ascetic separates perception from sensation; however, they must have already sufficiently trained conscious attention through the practice of concentration.

Visual impressions typically lend themselves to the practice of pure perception: once this process is mastered, it can be extended to all sensations, with a gradual progression from the most conscious sensations to the less conscious ones, such as smell, taste, touch, etc.

As a preliminary step, it is helpful to turn to objects whose nature allows for the easy separation of inner content from sensation: e.g., crystals, metals, plants, flowers, water, the sky, the play of light between a plant and the sky's background, etc. The exercise consists of contemplating, with the utmost attention and at the same time with total silence of thought, the object, until

achieving absolute stillness in its presence: sensation and representation must be silenced. Before the creation of nature, stillness spontaneously passes into profound quietude: it is the quietude of the Power of the universe, which manifests itself in ethereal-physical forms.

The object becomes an imaginative symbol of a specific creative current of nature: in contemplative continuity, the disciple encounters the supersensible structures whose formative power the object signifies. These structures arise in his soul as force-images. The process gradually becomes clear and intense, coming to coincide with the dynamic of the relationship between the ego and the sensible realm from which the physical appearance of the world arises.

The relationship of the ego, as we have seen, is direct: therefore, in pure perception, the disciple learns the art of grasping the modes of the soul's life before they take form or become sensations. In substance, this transcends cerebral mediation with respect to the contents of thinking, feeling, and willing: he can initiate an action of control and integration of these contents, grasping them in their pure state, unaltered by the subjective element.

This realization of the pure relationship of the Self, independent of the astral body, teaches the practitioner three things: detachment from one's own and others' *karma*, thanks to an ascent to the sphere of freedom from which it is possible to contemplate the current of *karma* and cooperate in its positive fulfillment: which is true ethics, the autonomy of the Spirit in human action, for an action of depth in the human: the possibility of grasping the original element of thinking, feeling, and willing, in motion, before it is extinguished in dialectical consciousness: the possibility of acting upon them before they become destructive within the psyche and in human relationships.

The inner process of perception, as mentioned, can be gradually extended to all perceptions, including the inner, subjective, or psychic ones; to instinctive impulses; and finally to sexuality. It is wise, however, to follow a gradual process of exploring the different types of perception, from those that are more independent to those more closely tied to physical corporeality.

It will be understood that the art of experiencing the higher forces of the soul in sex—and thus true purification—consists in separating perception from sensation. True spagania consists in this separation: an art more subtle than that required by the simple perception of forms, colors, sounds, etc., because its inner content is immediately identical to that of erotic sensation. The path indicated in this manual provides a way to achieve pure perception in this sense, so that the pure warmth of the will may be grasped (see “The Power of Eros”).

THE POWER OF IMAGINATION

The disciple transforms the imagination into an objective force, utilizing the power of spontaneity inherent in its immediate form: a power that is normally subjective, in that it moves not according to its own inner principle, but rather by deviating from it, in accordance with the demand of the sentient soul or of psychophysiological nature.

Imagination is a force that tends toward its own realization, according to the impulse that truly moves it from within. This impulse can be creative or destructive: ordinarily it is destructive, because it arises from the sentient soul, that is, from the soul instinctively opposed to its own supersensible source. There is no imagination that is not the seed of a reality in the process of coming into being: a seed almost always driven by an impulse that is diametrically opposed to the original nature of thought. Ordinary imagination is the expression of this impulse as

immediate thinking: the representation. This representation, however, can be directed by the will and enhanced by non-subjective content. The ascetic will learn that there is no creation that does not have as its initial seed the imaginative power of thought, insofar as it liberates from subjectivity.

Usually, the imagination is dynamic, thanks to the spontaneous or instinctive volitional element that is inherent to it, insofar as it is linked to the psychophysiological nature, and therefore subjective. The disciple, striving to liberate the volitional element of the imagination from nature in order to make it an objective force, encounters precisely this difficulty: the flow of the imagination loses its power of spontaneity when its form is determined by consciousness; once determined, it loses the force it naturally possesses. The art of the ascetic consists in reviving the imaginative impulse through the will: in reuniting its flow with its original force, making spontaneity a current of the will, which is effectively its origin.

The discipline of the imagination is cultivated by focusing one's attention on specific mental images until they evoke a particular feeling. Representation is the initial act of imagination, normally employed by the sentient soul or the affective-rational soul; in any case, it is the initial movement of imaginative thought. Subtly conditioned by feeling, it must, through discipline, free itself from this condition, so that feeling may arise in response to the imagination it has evoked.

The imaginative faculty is cultivated: a) by allowing the images of humanity's cosmic history, as described by Spiritual Science, to act upon oneself, based on a state of contemplative stillness; b) through the contemplation of the mineral or plant world (see "Pure Perception"); c) by constructing an image according to a specific spiritual content and contemplating it: nourishing its movement; d) by imagining a color, abstracting it from its physical medium through which it normally manifests, so as to contemplate its non-sensory content: one can then imagine the juxtaposition of two colors, e.g., red and blue, and perceive their

subtle relationship, which must arise as a living entity. It is important to ensure that every image finds its fulfillment in the soul, resonating with a specific feeling. This feeling opens a passage to the Spiritual, which reaches down to the physical.

The discipline of imagination involves the broadest capacity for choice and independent use of images, subject to the rigorous control of a force to which, however, it must simultaneously grant the utmost autonomy of expression. It is appropriate to speak of free will and science: the expression of the imaginative power is essentially a mediation offered to the flow of the highest inner life, whose impersonality is assured a wide passage in the soul, of unlimited mobility.

With the flow of this force, the disciple makes an inner element of life his own, identical to that of the creative nature: he possesses the first form of inner Magic. It can be called the Magic of the new times, because it is founded on the soul's internal logic: the seed of a conscious redemption of humanity and a real evolution of ethical-social processes, insofar as it responds in consciousness to the archetypal power of the concept, that is, to the principle of the original synthesis of normal thought. It is rumination that the ancient ascetic did not need to free himself from, as he was not bound to his nervous system, but rather it flowed freely from the psychosomatic condition itself: his art was to either surrender to it, sink into it, or escape through it.

The modern disciple faces an opposite task: to liberate the imagination from the psychosomatic condition. In doing so, he experiences within himself a cosmic process. One might say that whatever exists humanly and in the world is the condensation, down to the minutest degree, of powerful superhuman imaginations, according to cosmic archetypes. Such imaginations, of course, have behind them even deeper creative powers: those of Inspiration and Intuition of cosmic Entities. One begins to understand a plant only when one recognizes in it the reimagination of a superhuman thought made real: for man can at most translate his own objective power of imagination into a

machine, which is a lifeless object, just as his ordinary imaginative thought is lifeless, in that it is not experienced beyond the realm of the cerebral.

Thus, illness is extra-conscious imagination incarnate. It is based on an intense imagination, correlated with a physical condition, through which the Spirit strives toward a specific achievement. Such imagination, when possessed, is the principle of healing. The practitioner capable of imagining their own healing already sets the healing force in motion: naturally, self-knowledge, and thus knowledge of the thermic causes of their ailment, must guide them. Where they come to recognize the metaphysical causes of the ailment, they can act upon themselves: this is, however, a recognition quite different from that of a psychic analysis. Even in the context of such an inquiry, the technique consists in bringing to life, through repetition and rhythm, certain key images.

The practitioner who wishes to give free rein to the creative imagination must first master the art of concentration and meditation. He detaches the imagination from the astral body, *kama rupa*, so as to direct it with the utmost power of control: this control, however, as has been mentioned, is what normally dampens its power of spontaneity; but it is precisely this spontaneity that the experimenter tends to adopt as a vehicle for reviving of the astral body: so that this, in turn, may express the higher imaginative faculty.

In deliberate imagination, something intimate and more powerful than mere rumination is at work. Free imagination is activated through the will, rather than by volitional effort: the latter paralyzes its power. An image becomes dynamic when it can be contemplated disinterestedly, like a finished painting. One must will with the utmost force, yet with an absolute absence of determination, with a Taoist-style non-will: which does not mean, of course, according to Taoist discipline, but rather by virtue of an incorporeal motion of thought, as intense as if it were

corporeal: that is, according to the Rosicrucian discipline of thought.

Imagination is exercised through concentration and meditation. If one observes, concentration is essentially an exercise of imagination; likewise, meditation is an act of imagining that unites thought with the subtle forces of feeling and will according to an original harmony.

The ascetic who possesses the power of contemplation possesses the principle of Divine Magic. Any self-realization becomes possible for him through the rhythmic and repeated exercise of imagination. The ascetic who feels lacking in the forces of devotion can imagine devotion, its power, its content, and the transformation of his inner life thanks to its arising. The consecration of the self to the Spiritual World always begins as intense imagination; in fact, there is no inner realization that is not first and foremost an imaginative one.

For decisive inner operations, the imagination must draw upon its cosmic origin: only thus does it become pure, freeing itself from the subtle egoic impulses it necessarily conceals within itself. If these were not eliminated, they would give rise to demonic imaginative magic. It must possess pure thought and be familiar with the path of knowledge, so as not to stray onto the mediumistic paths of egoic imagination.

Ultimately, each person realizes what they truly imagine: each 'finds outside themselves' what the imagination nourishes within themselves. The impure person cannot help but encounter impurity outside themselves. The pure person always encounters what is pure.

The thought that man truly thinks is not the rational one, but rather the thought that carries a charge of life: Imagination. Normally, however, it is the imagination of the sentient soul or the astral body, that is, of the soul compelled to resonate with corporeality. Rational thought is always the codifier of what is truly thought according to the instinctive charge of life. Usually

this life force comes from subjective feeling, from the psyche, from the physical nature. The disciple's task is to draw it from the very source of life. He must restore the objective power of life to the act of imagining.

It is not the external situation that gives rise to the psychic state, but rather the psychic state that projects itself into an external situation. Imagination, in this sense, is the creative force. It can create evil, error, worry, and desire, giving power to that which destroys the soul and the body. Physical evil, as mentioned, is an unconscious imagination realized. But while destructive imagination has an immediate force that comes from nature—that is, from the self that is one with nature—creative, uplifting, or healing re-imagination requires the conscious determination of the will. This determination initially involves effort, as a liberation of representation from psychophysical limits: but the effort is eliminated as the pure imaginary, with its unlimited power of spontaneity, is freed from subjective nature.

One might say that the Spiritual World nourishes the living through powerful imaginations. Human imagination is not merely the inferior projection of such the Imaginary. Modern man egoizes and stunts the imagination; he can fantasize, but in practice he creates only machines, and even on the aesthetic plane he now produces nothing but a cerebral art, devoid of the living element—that is, devoid of the real Imaginary.

As mentioned, exercises in concentration and meditation serve to liberate the imagination. Once such liberation is achieved, the practitioner's responsibility toward themselves and others becomes serious, because, as an initial magical force, the imagination can destroy if used incorrectly or if it escapes the practitioner's control, as it is reclaimed by the egoic nature. The ascetic can seriously harm himself and others if, in moments of lack of self-awareness, he loses control of the awakened imaginative power.

The reason why the Spiritual World does not grant certain powers to the disciple is the danger of misuse, which can occur if true independence from the egoic nature has not yet been achieved. When the imaginative power is awakened, the disciple's life must be a continuous control of one's own spontaneity, down to the smallest details, so that this power does not become a force adverse to human evolution.

THE ROSE CROSS EXERCISE

The Rose Cross Exercise, first communicated by Rudolf Steiner (See *The Occult Science*, Ch. IV), briefly consists in visualizing the birth and formation of a plant, and in comparing the image of man to it: man lacks the purity and impersonality of the plant, inasmuch as being endowed with consciousness and autonomy of action implies, as its counterpart, his subjection to instincts and passions. But man, through asceticism, can attain in the soul—and thus in the body—the same purity that characterizes the plant: he can realize in the blood, whose heat is the vehicle of instincts and passions, the same purity that circulates in the green sap of the plant. At this point in the exercise, the red rose is taken as a symbol of the ascetic's metaphysical transformation: in this flower, the green sap turns red in the petals. This image must be intensely felt (See the entry "Meditation"). Then, suddenly, one imagines a black cross, as a symbol of purified passions and instincts, with seven flaming red roses in a circle at its center. This concluding image must be contemplated, so that it may impart the feeling that belongs to it.

The exercise, if observed, engages thought, feeling, and will: it summarizes the operations of concentration, meditation, and imagination: due to the metaphysical content to which it imaginatively appeals, it can lead the disciple—whatever his level—to a higher state, provided he accompanies it throughout the day with the typical exercise of concentration and, if necessary,

with supplementary disciplines required by his personal development. At a certain level, the exercise, elevated to a calm intensity capable of concentrating the lower astral and guiding the life of the soul, can lead the disciple to a connection with the invisible Order of the guides of humanity, known as the Brotherhood of the Rosicrucians.

THE POWER OF DISTRACTION

This is the faculty of withdrawing the mind from an intrusive thought or state of mind. This faculty is cultivated by practicing the sudden shift from a train of thoughts in which one is particularly absorbed to another in which one has no interest and in which one voluntarily immerses oneself, to the point of becoming absorbed in it: then repeating the same diversion with a further train of thoughts. The same applies to a feeling or a state of mind. In practice, the exercise consists of surrendering oneself to an attractive thought or feeling, to the point of a controllable phase of being subject to it; then, suddenly, one lets it go to devote oneself to another thought or feeling that is not attractive, into which one sinks, with the same self-surrender.

Everything that takes hold of us—to the point that we cannot do without it—is evil, even if it appears to be a spiritual impulse. An impulse of goodness or morality, when it is authentic, does not dominate the ego, because it is an expression of the ego. Even a spiritual impulse must pass through the filter of conscious decision-making.

Impulses of goodness and generosity can be recognized as authentic when they are the transformation of the lower impulses of the astral body: they constitute a meaningful life of the soul, in which the real Self essentially expresses itself. The presence of this real Self in the world is already a transformative action: any form of this action is a relationship with the Self, which must not take control of the Self. The virtue of the relationship comes from the

Spirit; it cannot come from moralistic exaltation, which is almost always a pretense or a performance of the Spiritual.

The practice of volitional distraction has the task of freeing the soul not only from forces opposed to the Spiritual (Ahriman), but also from those of spiritual pretense (Lucifer).

However, the use of a moral impulse can become illicit if it is not the decision of the Ego, but rather of the astral body's desire. The science of morality is first and foremost a Science of Freedom, that is, a Science of the Ego. The true evils of the world are the product of a morality used not by the Ego, but by its opposite: a morality upon which dialectically there is nothing to object to, but which is essentially deceptive to man and organizes the systematic alienation of the human, in that it is merely formal: its systematic content does not come from the spirit of brotherhood, but rather from aversion.

The exercise of distraction is the catharsis of the forces produced through concentration; the power resulting from concentration must be linked to the impersonal direction of the Self. Through this path, the disciple learns the shift in polarity necessary for the transition from subjective, or mental, concentration to the concentration of depth bearing the impersonality of the Higher Self.

Once you are sufficiently strong, you can attempt a more demanding form of the exercise, by deliberately immersing yourself in a tormenting thought, so as to perceive its illusory tormenting content. Once you have reached a state of saturation in this way, suddenly turn away from it to immerse yourself in a thought of opposite content; with this, perform the same operation: the strengthening of the formal structure until the content is penetrated. The exercise should conclude with an inner comparison of the two contents, the evocation of which sets in motion an identical force.

In the same vein, the following is an internal exercise. Imagine a situation that normally compels a certain feeling as its

irresistible counterpart, and practice forbidding yourself that feeling: by mentally contrasting the situation with a state of absolute imperturbability.

This exercise, which might seem to cultivate a sort of selfish insensitivity, serves instead to awaken sensitivity toward situations that normally leave us indifferent because they do not contradict the ego. There are neutral or dull zones of the soul, in which the deepest opposition is rooted to the Spirit: one reaches them by dominating the sensitivity through which they normally manipulate *the Ego*.

The part of the soul that remains imperturbable because it is obtuse normally maintains its power through the part that reacts in the form of emotions and passions. In this regard, one can understand the importance of training oneself to consider the situations of others as if they were one's own, and one's own as if they concerned others. The value of such an exercise lies not so much in its moral content as in the technique of its *dytiamis*.

The light of strength requires a logic of the soul's movements as rigorous as that of a mathematical theorem. Spontaneity is creative power, endowed with the infinite that entails overcoming the determined, but therefore first and foremost the possession of rigorous determinacy.

THE INSTINCTS

Instinct is a fundamental impulse of the psyche, which manifests itself authoritatively despite the ego: indeed, it comes to use the ego. The group of dominant instincts from the sphere of the will or from the deep astral is what truly manifests as force in man: the greatest force at his disposal. Thought bears within itself the light of reason, the transformative idea of the will, but lacks the will's strength. The art of concentration and meditation consists in fortifying thought so that it may attain the power of

an instinct. This thought becomes a dynamic synthesis of feeling and willing, which, in turn, thanks to discipline, are removed from the dynamics of the instincts.

The problem of the ego's autonomy with respect to instincts is a problem of the ego's relationship with the potential forces of the actual human condition: an overwhelming instinct is a destructive force of that state; a dominated instinct becomes an edifying force, indeed the decisive force. It is easy to realize that autonomy from instincts cannot be improvised; it can begin to form on a secure foundation, thanks to concentration and meditation.

Once a minimum of inner independence has been achieved, one can practice acting through instincts, utilizing their power: it is a matter of inserting oneself into it as into something that is already there. One prepares oneself through the imaginative technique, evoking a specific instinct: intuitive quickness and imaginative power are required to perceive the evoked instinctive current and plunge into it, not being carried away by it, but rather overcoming it, going beyond it, adding an element of guiding will to the already existing current. It is a matter of cultivating dynamic imagination and subtle perception, so as to grasp the instinctive current and carry it beyond itself. Instinct is harmful because it presses upon the ego and overwhelms it: the art is to introduce a more powerful ego into the instinctive current—to insert an “extra” ego into the lower impulse, so as to reverse its direction. It is a sort of inner *judo*, which prepares not only for the ego's mastery of the instincts, but for their rebirth as direct powers of the Spirit. The power of the instincts can once again become an instrument of the ego.

This possibility is likewise cultivated through exercises of the will. The will is strengthened through the discipline of concentration and meditation, but it can be brought directly to a level of strength through the exercise of pure action, which consists of imposing on oneself unsolicited duties in daily *life*—

actions that are entirely simple and insignificant—to be carried out through a precise correspondence between intention and execution: all the more effective if a certain period of time elapses between the decision and the execution, e.g., twenty-four hours. A personality with a weak will decisively strengthens itself by giving itself a series of commands to carry out actions that are ends in themselves, even from one hour to the next throughout the day, so as to avoid intervals of inertia or apathetic dissipation of energy.

The Master of the New Age provides specific preparatory exercises for the power capable of transforming instincts. For example, recalling the impressions received from an individual seized by lust: visualizing him in such a way as to perceive something more than what was felt on that occasion, so as to observe how lust operated on his behavior and his facial expression: thus feeling the lust, but within him. In this way, the disciple evokes that lust within himself and at the same time masters it, thereby depersonalizing it and perceiving it objectively. The completion of this exercise is to evoke the individual who has achieved the satisfaction of the craving and is therefore, in himself, joyful and at ease. To feel this fulfillment, while remaining independent of its harmful nature, is a further active penetration into the sphere of the instincts.

THE EXERCISE OF MEMORY

The conscious evocation of certain impressions and inner situations from the past can become a contemplation of a process of forces that then involved the soul and that now, instead, may arise as revelations of their objective content. Mnemonic contemplation likewise becomes a connection with the surging forces of the rhythmic center (chest) and enables an initial autonomy of the breath from the nervous system. In essence, the exercise gives rise to a presence of the higher Self within the

rhythm of the etheric body; however, it corresponds to a subtle experience of time, insofar as it is an etheric current independent of the perceptible spatial form in which it manifests.

The exercise consists in recalling an event or a situation from the past, so as to derive the state of mind associated with it; then, in isolating the state of mind from the corresponding sensory phenomenology and contemplating it objectively, just as one contemplates the final content of concentration, upon completion of the exercise. The deliberate reproduction of an inner content tends to revive an element of depth within the will, which in the past experience was indeed present, but subconscious and therefore not assimilable. In conscious recollection, the volitional element of depth is perceived; as instinctive power, it is reintegrated by the higher forces of consciousness.

The exercise of recalling past experiences enables the practitioner to perceive the fabric of time as the rhythm of the etheric body, up to its emergence from the sphere of the “musicality” of the higher astral. This musicality enchants the serpentine element of the instincts: in reality, the experimenter intervenes in the pure inner content of the remembered event, still subconsciously present, and transforms it into content of consciousness, accomplishing a redemptive action of depth within the sphere of the instincts. In this way, it also strengthens ordinary memory.

CALM

Calm is a state of peace with beings and events, whatever they may be, that realizes the true nature of humanity: a state of peace that is valid, above all, when it is achieved even when the grounds for conflict or the reasons for disapproval are ethically justified. Essentially, it is the possibility of eliminating the spirit of aversion that is inseparable even from the ethical expression of the ego.

Without overcoming the spirit of aversion, true calm is not possible, nor, therefore, is the spiritual path. It must be emphasized that precisely such a state of peace with others, despite conflicts, that allows situations to evolve and transforms human attitudes.

Calm is easy for those who do not react to the evil and error of the world, possessing a capacity for adaptation or positive coexistence with it. This calm, however, is not a strength of the soul, but rather of a soul dominated by nature: a condition of dullness, feigning the strength of the soul.

Even the most prudent disciples can be torn apart by indignation and momentarily lose their calm when they encounter manifestations of disloyalty, wickedness, or immorality. Correcting these and the corresponding severity are just, but they are always marred by the spirit of aversion that accompanies them. It is necessary to separate the spirit of aversion from them, transforming it into the strength of cognitive insight into the phenomenon. Separation is a form of detachment, essential to seeing the background of the human struggle and to healthy inner development. Without calm amid the turmoil, there can be no supersensible experience, nor the possibility of being just as well as helpful toward one's neighbor.

The spirit of aversion can indeed be confronted when it manifests legitimately alongside justified feelings of disapproval of what is unjust and evil. Observing oneself and removing the impulse of hatred from these feelings gives them their proper course: it makes them vehicles of a healing rectification. One technique of the Science of the Spirit consists in practicing redirecting the impulse of hatred toward the spirit of error and falsehood, diverting it from the person who is merely its vehicle. It is methodologically important to practice understanding the other person's point of view and, in that sense, to justify it.

When the impulse of hatred, which attempts to surface in legitimate indignation, is mastered, one can look upon it with

understanding at the event or the people who provoke disapproval. This understanding gives the soul calm, and this calm is the correlation that, as mentioned, secretly causes the event or another's attitude to evolve.

Calmness reveals the true nature of the soul: there is no movement of the soul that is authentic if it lacks this essential quality: calmness. This arises when one succeeds in seeing, in the perpetrators of reprehensible actions, individuals possessed by Entities from which meditative discipline provides a means of liberation: the practitioner discovers that he can free himself from them, because others are subject to their influence. The ultimate meaning of this is that he feels the responsibility to understand and help those who endure the sacrifice of subjugation, the overcoming of which he has the privilege of possessing the inner technique for.

Understanding and forgiveness for all, without exception, the acceptance and endurance of unjust situations, must arise from knowledge: for as attitudes or sentimental positions, they hold little weight, even when they are not mere pretences. As achievements of penetrating thought, they are the vehicles of true calm—that is, of the inner state from which alone the energies of a reparative action, eliminating error, can arise.

Conscious peace is achieved above all through the cognitive understanding of those events or beings that provoke our most severe condemnation and, consequently, our aversion. Just as we cannot feel aversion toward a natural phenomenon, so too can we not feel aversion toward an event of *karma*. That which, arising from others, may provoke disapproval or indignation is always a product of *karma*—that is, of the instinctive impulses and temperament by which beings are led to certain actions or a certain behavior: it does not come from their free will. To justify all of this according to the *dharma*, the law that governs them through *karma* and the corresponding conviction of being in the truth, fosters a sense of ease and peace with beings, which is the

principle of the soul's autonomy. It alone has the power to heal human injustice and error without partiality or bias. Just severity cannot do without the perception of the inner background: it can come only from the calm of knowledge and the understanding of the real motives of human subjects.

Calmness, combined with a compassionate contemplation of the unpleasant event, subtly corrects the error: it develops the forces of brotherhood, beyond the manifestations of dissent and struggle. One must be at peace with struggles, so that the Threshold of the soul's life may be known. "Everything goes as it must" is the wisdom from which the disciple draws his fundamental calm: the art is not to oppose what is happening in a disorderly manner or to set out to prevent it from happening, but to work to remove the causes for which unpleasant things occur. These causes are, however, always spiritual and must be removed through spiritual action, right where they originate. The real evil of this time is the lack of original agents, that is, the lack of action that operates on the level of causes: the most arduous task indeed. Those who truly dedicate themselves to this action attain a higher state of calm, necessary as inspiration for the tasks of ritual agents.

Technically, calm is the spontaneous state of the soul when it actualizes its true nature: independent of corporeality. Where it can thus be perceived as an objective entity, calm must be allowed to act as a natural state that one previously unconsciously resisted: it can be intensified to the point that nothing in the world can remove it. This inner calm must be understood as a prerequisite for true supersensible experience.

At certain moments, one must withdraw into inner silence and let the calm of what one originally is descend, free from human attitudes: to be as one is, until the exhaustion of tensions, which in truth do not exist for the ego, but only for what the ego is not. Calm is the foundation from which one continually moves without knowing it. Being is already being calm: it is a matter of

knowing it. It is a matter of being what one is, from the foundation.

THE ROSICRUCIAN METHOD

Calmness must be possible at any moment, under any circumstance. One must be able to evoke it at will, for which one must be meticulously prepared. One should possess the state of autonomy and detachment that follows intense concentration. This state of autonomy and detachment, once evoked, should be sufficient each time to restore calm.

Where the situation is so overwhelming that such self-control is possible only partially or superficially, then the Rosicrucian method of retreating into the essence of the astral body is advisable. In simple terms, the art lies in “giving in,” yielding, surrendering completely, and not resisting. Resistance is the mistake. We refer once again to the concept of inner *judo*. This is not a mere metaphor, but rather a precise technique that draws upon forces currently present in the relationship between the astral body and the ego, yet which have nothing in common with *judo* proper. Any form of agitation is essentially nothing more than the illegitimate prevalence of astral impulses over the ego: these impulses, if they did not dominate the ego, would manifest as their own forces.

What we call, for convenience, inner *judo* is a technique provided for in the Solar Tascsi, as a discipline that restores the astral to its original state, utilizing the forces of the disturbance within the disturbance itself; This technique consists in surrendering even more deeply to the agitation, beyond the extent of its hold on the soul, to the point of being able to add a volitional force to the impulsive current.

One must not forget that will and impulsivity are the same force under different dominion within the soul. The first

movement is to escape the grip: to yield beyond the very limit of alienated calm; here to insert oneself, or to insert the imaginative-volitional current, already trained through the exercises, so as to descend into the deep zone of the self, where the original forge of the forces lies.

Surrendering, the subtle yielding, the loosening of bonds while simultaneously acting as in *judo*, is, from the occult perspective, an operation for the inherent forces of the Buddha, which today cosmically animate within human interiority the capacity for liberation from the sensible within sensory experience. The original contribution of the Buddha, aimed primarily at sparing the ascetic from the conditions of sensory experience, becomes today the positive impulse of the soul grasped by the sensory. The Buddhist processes in the soul in this sense now fulfill their function: they cooperate with the action of the Logos essence in the ego; they open the way to Christ.

The state of alienated calm can be attained through deeper forces of the ego evoked by the state of need, that is, by dwelling: for these forces work toward an unconscious restoration of calm at the expense of the physical-etheric organism: such calm is fictitious, because it does not spring from the volitional action of the ego in the astral, but from the ego's insufficiency with respect to such action, and thus confirms that dependence of the astral on the lower nature, which will reproduce the agitation.

The inner *struggle* succeeds in unleashing forces more radical than the ego through the deliberate sinking into alienated calm, that is, through the very forces of agitation that automatically involve the ego. One must take possession of this automatism: it is a transfer of function from instinct to imaginative will, possible as a *judo-like* yielding; it responds to the attitude of "Thy will be done," technically bringing it to its ultimate conclusion.

Usually, this attitude is a passivity of inertia: it must be taken beyond, from its essence, to the power of inert passivity. This taking passivity beyond itself is a descent into the depths, until

reaching the intact root of being that organically dominates physical corporeality. It is a foundational presence of the Self, from one of its highest states.

True calm is attained when it becomes a golden zone of the soul, into which the experiencer can retreat as into a magical landscape, to return independent of conditions when these become overwhelming: like an actor who leaves the stage where he is playing a difficult part in which he has identified himself, and rediscovers himself, realizing the functional unreality of the world he has just left: an unreality whose human measure is pain and suffering. Of these, living calm truly realizes the metaphysical content: profound peace.

Despite the possibility of such a state, the problem of calm nevertheless remains when the cause of the disturbance persists: when the agitation stems from a situation of fault that does not change, or worsens, or awaits us on a specific date. For this situation, we refer to what is said in the paragraphs concerning, respectively, “Karma”, the “The Power of Distraction”, and the redemption of “Instincts”.

SPIRITUAL APATHY

Spiritual apathy is the experience that follows that of absolute calm: it is the possibility of contemplating, without residual feelings of condemnation or aversion, the evil of the world; of responding with the pure relationship of knowledge and self-giving: the premise of Initiation. It is the metaphysical stillness from which the maximum Force of the astral body springs.

Essentially, it is the radical presence of the Higher Self, which manifests in the physical sphere as the stillness of the nervous system with respect to the astral, which moves through it, due to its relationship with consciousness (See “The Asceticism of

Feeling”): the more the nervous system detaches itself from astral motion, the more the original force springs forth from it.

Metaphysical stillness is the work of the Self, but, as stillness of the nervous system, it is mediated by the astral body itself, where, in the cerebral mind, it has a direct hold on the nervous system through thought. The arrest of the flow of thoughts, mental silence, is therefore revival. It is worth remembering that there is no higher experience of the astral body than the experience of the Self.

An authentic experience of the astral realm is always an experience of the Self: the Self is, after all, the Subject, the unseen experiencer of the astral realm. Just as the carp is not lost in clear water nor in murky water, but rather remains the master of its own element, so the Self is not lost in the astral world, neither in the higher nor in the lower realms, but moves confidently within it: the more deeply it is immersed, the more it dominates it.

The altar of the astral is that experience of the I at the center of the soul's life, which in another section we call the vortex of immobile power, or the whirling immobility. It realizes the zero of the astral body's bond to the sensible: in effect, it reawakens the astral body's original nature. If one considers that this bond is what renders it destructive toward the physical and etheric bodies and the higher currents of the ego, one can understand that the annihilation of the bond, mediated by mental silence, is the principle of Solar Magic. One can understand the meaning of Rosicrucian meditation as the contemplation of the pure astral of the plant: pure and primordial, because it is not incarnated in the plant; just as that of the ascetic should be, even though it is incarnated.

What truly lacks in man is not the strength of the Self, of which he has an abundance in the forms of the ego: what he truly lacks is the relationship of the Self with the astral body, or the original soul, in which he is richly immersed, so much so that he uses it as a body of desire, yet is always overwhelmed by it: in

reality, it is, like the astral body, used by the astral body: whose true nature is divine.

Creative self-denial is the apathy of the astral, realized through volition: a detachment from the value of appearances, which has nothing to do with quietism or tamasic inertia, inasmuch as it is the force of profound stillness: an overwhelming whirlwind for all that is sensual and inert, that is, rajasic and tamasic.

Radical stilling is absolute independence from the duality of the self: immersing oneself in the self without limit, as if letting oneself sink into an abyss, against which no bond with the body or the psyche can stand. It is an absolute descent that ignores any impediment, dissolves from any impurity, and frees itself from any habit. according to the power of an original non-being, which is true being. In reality, it operates within the physical body, exhausting the need for physical support, until a radical estrangement from what one is constitutionally. In this estrangement, one receives the Force that dominates the psyche and the body.

The operation consists in dismantling the constitutional evil of the soul, which is essentially desire. The descent into the depths is the increasingly subtle liberation from the lower bonds of the astral body: bonds that continually reproduce the inversion of its original forces, so that the force of love becomes hatred, and the capacity for giving becomes desire. Psychophysical regeneration is possible, but only on the condition that one has the courage to restore the astral to its original purity: which is precisely a descent into its empty depths, devoid of any support other than the pure force of the Self.

It is the courage to descend into an abyss, at the bottom of which, without any support, lies absolute stability. It is, however, a courage that can spring from the cultivation of the qualitative element of asceticism: consecration to the Work, which implies morality, fidelity, and continuity.

The path of the Rosicrucians is characterized by the experience of the soul's depths, or of the real astral body, through the axial power of the Self (see "The Power of the Cross"). In particular, the practice of the Rosicrucians opens the way to the experience of the divine astral, or the inner fabric of the soul, unknown to normal consciousness. In reality, man bears within himself the Kingdom of Heaven, but he is unaware of it: he does not lack the central impulse of the Self, but rather the crucial experience of the Self within the soul; he lacks the experience of the "Virgin," or of Isis de Sophia, and thus of the true, androgynous nature of the soul. The pure, driving force of the ego is normally corrupted into dialectical consciousness.

PRAYER

Just as meditation is the process of the soul's elevation to the Divine, for the sake of the Divine itself, so prayer is such an elevation according to a human request. This request, however, is a purely ideal determination: if it is a request of the psyche or the egoic mind, it makes no sense.

The ideal determination is directed toward the Divine, as a proposal and support for its action. The ideal force of the determination is the degree to which the subjective, or egoic, limit is overcome, so that prayer may acquire the power of fulfillment. Prayer bound to the ego has no power whatsoever: if, despite the egoic bond, it achieves its objective, this is the concession of Powers of a subsensible order, which assist on the condition of dominating the soul of the petitioner, according to a lower magic, polar opposites to Solar Magic. Thus a "pact," from whose consequences the human contracting party will find it difficult to escape.

One may pray with traditional prayers, or, even more effectively, with simple, profound intent. This profound intent, which is a wordless prayer, is more difficult to achieve because,

lacking dialectical support, it can easily become a confused mixture of thoughts and feelings, incapable of transcending the subjective limit. Indeed, the intent must be brought to a purity of impulse, lucidity, and continuity, so that the communion may be realized, inseparable from the certainty of the Divine's response.

In wordless prayer, according to deep intent, thought, feeling, and will rise in unison toward a single idea, which must attain the intensity of concentration necessary to maintain the purity and continuity required for the objectification of the force. At a certain moment, within the ascetic's ascending force, the force of the evoked Divine stirs.

We must leave the use of prayer as a means of mediation to the Divine, so that the Divine may determine its form. The form—that is, what is requested in prayer—must be determined not by the ascetic who prays, but by the Forces to whom he turns. It is important that he ask for nothing for himself that is not suggested to him by the Forces themselves. He may begin by praying that he be shown what he should ask for, if he does not intuit it directly. But the most effective prayer is that which has no specific object, one that actually works for the Divine and, consequently, for the human community.

Prayer is the human mediation for changes in collective *karma*: therefore, its ultimate content has to do with the radical forces of the will, through which individual *karma* is expressed. The mystical power of prayer is, in fact, the power of depersonalized will. As a higher form of Solar Magic, capable of inducing evolutionary changes in *karma*, prayer implies a connection with the Solar Principle, or with the Christ, as expressed in Rosicrucian terminology; Therefore, intense, objectless prayer is the most powerful form of prayer.

The connection between prayer and ascetic *practice* is attainable if one understands that meditation is the highest form of prayer and that what is kindled as the Light of Life in meditation is indeed aroused by the initiative of the Self, but is

possible insofar as the decision of the Spiritual World responds to it.

The connection with *the* ascetic-magical *opus* is achievable, provided one realizes that the forces of prayer pass through the arms and hands and that the hands joined in prayer are the conduits of the powers of prayer. The hands think and feel more devoutly than individual thinking and feeling, because the Superindividual expresses itself in them directly, without depending on cerebral mediation: through them passes an evocative wisdom that ordinary thought does not yet possess. The hands open and close a circuit of force in which the infinite Power of the Cosmos is present: they can bless and heal, because the soul—better than the so-called magnetic force—which is still a lower dynamism of nature, opposed to the Spirit save for rare exceptions—conveys the cosmic soul through them.

The ascetic has already found the path to reintegration when his entire life is one continuous, profound prayer, and he feels the Force flowing through his joined hands, working to heal the world's ills. The task of prayer is to lift the individual out of the state of deafness, prosaicness, and animality, so that the soul may know the part of itself immersed in physical corporeality and therefore ignored: the divine soul, the wisdom of love, or Virgin Sophia, which is continually hidden from it by its identification with corporeality.

The image of the Virgin is the symbol of the innermost essence of prayer: the offering of one's entire life to the Force that kindles, from the unique essence of souls, universal brotherhood.

THE SOLAR WORK

The Solar Work begins when the changes that the Ego brings about in the astral body, through meditation, come to be imprinted in the etheric body: which is the body of memory, of

habits, of temperament, of instinctive sedimentation. Any inner change always ends up evaporating and yielding to the return of the old nature, unless it is imprinted in the etheric body. An instinct gains power and intrusiveness through the astral body, since it has roots in the etheric-physical realm.

Instinctive sedimentation and germination are continually nourished by sensory impressions, since their subconscious movement conditions the content of representation from the sensory sphere. In this way, the function of representation—the activity that should mediate the autonomy of the ego in consciousness—is continually inverted. The possibility that inner acquisitions may be imprinted in the etheric body belongs to the ego, which is capable of moving within the soul according to the Logos, which is intimate and original to it.

As a Principle transcendent and yet immanent to the ego, the Logos-Force gives the ego the power to imprint the acquisitions of the astral body onto the etheric body. It can be said that the disciple attains the pinnacle of clear consciousness when he succeeds in intuiting in the Logos-Force something more than the ego and yet present within the ego: an unlimited power, yet inconceivable to the ego as its own creation. One can speak of an essence of the ego, capable of transcending the ego and acting through it as Logos: all the more so the more the free ego is itself. The ego posits the Logos, but in doing so it receives the thought that springs from identity with It.

Certain impressions, particularly erotic ones, invade the subtle zone of the etheric body to which supersensible intuition—or the pure power of inner transformation—responds animically: they paralyze any possibility of vision and of identity with the Logos. This zone is corrupted by the continuous process of the imaginative ego: the opposite of creative imagination, and thus of the central, or “solar,” impulse of the ego. The slightest subconscious erotic impression, the most innocent one—such as, for a man, admiring feminine features, and for a woman, taking pleasure in being looked at with desire, or accepting in this sense

the homage of someone other than the one to whom she has dedicated her life—traumatizes that subtle zone, which is likewise a vehicle of pure intuition and the virtue of the Grail, or of the experience of Sacred Love. Rare are the beings who can look or be looked at without suffering subconscious contamination. They know the independence that the Ego, being identical to the inner Logos, possesses with respect to the astral body.

When speaking of the experience of the Threshold, one must consider as the greatest barrier to it the inner zone accustomed to resonating constitutionally with the impulses of an obstructing Entity inserted into each individual as a “double” with which each individual identifies from birth. This “Ahrimanic double” does indeed have the task of providing man with the sensory perception of the world, but at the same time it works, through the nervous system, to imprint the sensory realm upon the soul as the sole dimension of reality. It is the realm of the sensual euphoria of bodily physicality and personal magnetism, but equally of the subtle nourishment of desire, aversion, and fear: the sphere in which the will is mobilized for ends that are nonexistent from the Spirit’s perspective and yet constitute the driving force of human experience.

The liberation of thought is the initial mental independence from the realm of this Ahrimanic double, normally indistinguishable due to its perfect entanglement with neuropsychic life: in typical forms of analysis today assuming the legitimate appearance of the unconscious. Deep concentration is always hindered by the power opposed to inner liberation, which ascends from this realm. This power habitually employs the mental. In the mental, therefore, the first liberating action takes place, but at the same time a patient elaboration of the processes of the Ahrimanic nature begins, aimed at taking possession of the initial subtle forces acquired.

To cross the Threshold is to liberate the etheric of depth and to imprint upon it the golden mold to which the soul has opened the passage through asceticism. According to alchemical

symbolism, the Solar Work is realized as the *Aurea Operatio Lunae*. For the Logos that grants the ego the power of depth is the Solar Principle, bearer of the Philosopher's Gold, which penetrates the lower astral, or "lunar body": for it is through the lunar body that the Ahrimanic double normally dominates the life of the Soul.

The liberating golden light has as its vehicle feeling elevated to the devotion of love, or "Michaelitic" *bhakti*, in which the ideal of Rosicrucian asceticism is kindled. Such transfigured devotion is possible insofar as it springs from rigorous discipline of thought—that is, from an asceticism of thought and will—which ritually persists according to the rhythmic power of the seat of the breath, until the purification of the ether of the depths. The asceticism required is concentration brought to its maximum intensity and, at the same time, to absolute detachment from the etheric-physical body: from which springs liberated feeling, the true mystical force, capable of affecting the etheric of the depths.

This process is a subtle lifting of the etheric body from the constraints of the physical form, guided by a lost musical creative power: it is a granting of autonomy to the heretic's ability to stand up to the forces of physical minerality, and yet to convey the pure impulses of the soul—the condition of true devotion. Before this, devotion can only be a formative exercise of the soul.

The technique of this transmuting and *Vanimad-versta* incision of the unlimited autonomy possible for the Self is through the virtue of the Logos that is internal to it: it is fidelity to the path of thought, that is, to knowledge immune to dialectics: one is not deceived by the mirages of earthly powers, even "spiritualistic" ones, nor by the facile mysticism that feeds the soul's dependence on the corporeal nature. One must truly love devotion, to make it, rather than a bond according to sentient necessity, a vehicle toward the its supersensible form. There is an ecstatic and fervent tenderness, the art of which the cat, or the bear, or the serpent, can teach to man; yet it is always a

matter of the astral motion linked to physical nature: a motion that must not be eliminated, but purified; it opposes the Spirit if it is not lived independently of nature, according to the light proper to the pure idea. Human love can reach the physical senses if it springs from its source as a free inner act.

THE HIGHER SELF

Disciplines, inner action, and daily struggles have as their ultimate purpose the awakening of the Self. In modern man, the Spirit presents itself as the individual Self: within this Self, which expresses itself as the ego, lies the Higher Self, the Spirit, *Atman-Vurusha*.

Although all the power of the Spirit is present in the core of the ego, normal egoic consciousness, compared to the higher level of dreaming and, in other respects, of deep sleep. Man, in truth, is not awake in the waking state, but descends into the state of dreaming or sleep every time he ascends to the levels where he ought to realize his true waking condition.

Disciplines, action, and inner struggles are operations of the ego, but within the limits of its precarious waking state, which is opposed to the higher levels of consciousness—in relation to which it is in a state of sleep: thus, they occur through a contradiction of its own force, which prevents its real action precisely in order to arouse it.

Technically, the incorporeality of the meditative operation and its non-psychicity are fundamental: these must be brought to the highest metaphysical level. One must prevent the current of the ego, as soon as it is stimulated, from being seized by the psychophysical nature, as occurs in all operations of the yogic operations and with deliberate pathological intent in mediumistic practices. One must not forget that the yogic-mediumistic imprint is inevitable in any inner practice that ignores the

conscious path to which we refer, namely the path of the ego's real waking state, which can be experienced through the liberation of thought—that is, the only activity of consciousness that carries within its movement the potential for independence from physicality. Normally, feeling and willing are perceived only after they have already penetrated the physical organism; only thinking can be perceived before its penetration into the physical, through simple concentration on its normal movement.

At certain moments one can be in the ego, or rather at the threshold of the ego. It is neither meditation, nor concentration, nor contemplation, but that which ultimately blossoms from them: the intuition of the ego at a height independent of disciplines and, from this height, possessor of all depth.

It is true, then, that the Higher Self can operate only when the tormenting tension—which in any case opposes it, even in the effort of concentration and meditation—ceases. The advent of the Self is possible when the world of egoic desires falls silent. The silencing of the echo requires the Self's maximum power within the echo. But it is not the ego that decides the advent of the Self, even when it works toward its own silencing.

The Higher Self operates within the ego, according to an identity that the ego normally reduces to itself, thereby preventing the ego's true action. Through the faculty of freedom, which descends from the Higher Self but is actualized in the individual consciousness, man can choose the Ahrimanic or materialistic direction, opposed to that of the Higher Self: but precisely for this reason he can freely choose the path of the Higher Self, or of the Logos-Principle. The individual element and the Logos-Principle must coincide.

What the Higher Self truly is, as a cosmic entity or Logos Principle brought by Christ to man, is so different from the ego—transcendent and inconceivable—that the ego, which has it within itself, constitutes the greatest opposition to it, failing to identify with its own earthly support. The Self rediscovers the

Christ-Force that is intimate to it, perceiving the Force beyond its own support, as that which is not itself, which is before and after, and beyond the possibility of conceiving it: and thereby fully actualizes its own individual being, the radical identity with the Force.

At a certain moment, one realizes that effort, discipline, and the rigor of asceticism are means of the ego, still incapable of bringing about its own extinction: that it opens the way for the Higher Self. This is present in the ego of every moment, in the ego that opposes it and therefore strives to survive through concentration, through meditation, through asceticism. The ego must exhaust all its aspirations for elevation, so that this elevation may be realized as its death and resurrection: its daily “Crucifixion” has no meaning unless it knows Death and Resurrection.

Through discipline, the ego prolongs its life and thus its involuntary crucifixion, resisting its own Death and Resurrection. The crucifixion must become an act of the will, so that it may give rise to Death and Resurrection.

Through asceticism, in reality, the individual attempts to survive, because he does not yet have the strength to let go; he fears ceasing the effort to survive; he wants to prevent the ultimate act toward which he is in fact striving through asceticism from being fulfilled. The progress of the ego that meditates and concentrates and explores the paths of the supersensible is its yearning progress through time, due to its inability to stop, so that the Power from outside the process of time may burst into the human. This bursting of the Super-human into the human shatters all the ego’s schemes, which therefore intimately leads him to postpone it through the continuity of disciplines: undoubtedly useful to his strength, but to the strength that deviates each time, not to the authentic strength capable of overturning the direction to which it is subjected: that is, capable of the individual direction of the Self, which moves first through the direction of the ego, opposed to the soul.

There is a moment in which all spiritual aspirations cease, and the Spiritual arises: the self's withdrawal, its disappearance, and its true birth. Its non-being is its being: the pinnacle of the individual is the absolute transfiguration of self-negation. Egoism, however, still desires itself, even through its own destruction. The point is to understand that it must not be destroyed, but only led to its non-being—to its true individual being.

Each time, meditation should conclude with a feeling of gratitude and a union of the soul with the Higher Self: with the Logos. Furthermore, the impulses of the sentient and rational soul, which tend to appropriate the final content of the Ascent, should be controlled—only the Power of Christ in the soul can enable this content to be preserved intact.

THE POWER OF THE CROSS

Individual volitional determination and self-consecration, as positively opposed polarities, constitute the balance of forces that continually intersect in the chest area, otherwise known as the “seat of rhythm” or “median seat.” The synthesis of these forces is perceptible at the intersection of the axis of light descending along the spine with the horizontal current, which is typically felt at the level of the shoulder blades. The point of intersection of the two forces explains why, lacking awareness of it, Siegfried was vulnerable.

It can be said that at this intersection of forces, the Higher Self of man is potentially present: he has the power to realize it. It is the intersection that occurs at every point in the organism where balance is restored or healing begins: where a lunar soul current is countered by the corresponding solar current. Wherever the meeting of the two currents of force is realized, the Higher Self lives, and the Solar Man assumes dominion over the human.

The image of this cross, evoked by the disciple, is within him the first realization of the corresponding harmony of forces: he feels the Self asserting itself along his spine and acting as a liberating release. All disciplines ultimately converge toward this crucial harmony, which typically takes place at the point indicated between the two shoulder blades, but is realized in every other area, wherever the vertical current of the Self meets the astral forces of the soul. Non-encounter, or opposition, is the evil of man; the crucial encounter is its healing.

The contemplation of the back is the perception of the cross. Man's true strength begins when the shoulders relax and the back fulfills its liberating function at the median point: as it receives the virtue of the axis of Light that meets the astral forces of the soul. The utmost calm, power, and spontaneous self-giving arise from the middle seat, when the back becomes the bearer of redemption according to the crucial scheme. It is the scheme of the most powerful life forces, which descend into the human being when, through asceticism or by facing trials, a pre-agonistic state is produced within it. The Higher Self, through this path of transparent will and courage, takes the reins of the human.

The power of human redemption, mediated by the axis of light, springs from the cosmic correlation proper to the rhythmic seat (chest). This correlation is unconsciously contradicted by the mind bound to intellectualism, which the axis of force, the vehicle of the echo, the bearer of rhythmic equilibrium, the producer of the failures of the psyche and the body. Along the spinal axis, the ego dominates, according to a lower sense of the Self, as a spirit of aversion. The profound opposition to the Spirit, tenacious even in the most solitary disciple, flows as an illegitimate current along the path of light of the spine, making it the path of that which degrades and kills man. The legitimate current of the Light of Life flows when the disciple confronts the forces of the *Motte*—the aforementioned pre-agonistic state—through intense inner life and the elimination of the fallacious supports of the human: the ego then receives the Logos-Force

that is internal to it, but to which it is unconsciously closed and opposed.

The liberation of the mental through the Immediacy of the Self, realized consciously in thought and, thanks to disciplines, brought to the intensity required to confront the pre-agonistic state, opens the passage for the descending current of Light along the spital axis. The light descends into the vehicle of the will capable of overcoming the pre-agonistic condition; thus, in high liberation, its encounter with the Seat of Rhythm is the experience of the Cross: which dissolves the breath of corporeal nature, in that it enacts a motion opposite to that of *the pranayama*, binding the breath to that nature, according to a technique legitimate for ancient man.

The peace that settles in the back according to the spiritual pattern, following the moment of intensity and courage, must be contemplated rather than physically felt: it is a pure inner state that demands to be embraced beyond the sensation of well-being it inevitably entails; in fact, it must govern the body from outside the body. The body must not be introduced into the experience: the less it participates, the more it is permeated by the Light, which is originally its own. In reality, Lego bases its strength on sensation of the self: it lives on the feeling of the self, which continually eliminates the Spirit from the senses. This feeling, bound to physical corporeality, normally conditions the life of the soul.

In the crucial experience, feeling, freed from its corporeal nature, rediscovers its superindividual connection: it is perceived as the Life of Light. This Life of Light does not require physical breath: it demands only the metaphysical movement of the breath (See, "Breathing"), whose technique can be identified as the very secret of the final attainment of alchemy: the Philosopher's Stone. The profound calm of the middle seat becomes the place where the intersection of the solar current with the lunar current restores a lost original human-cosmic equilibrium, which leaves

behind the animal breath to bring about another kind of breath: that of the Life of Light. Secret breath, utterly incorporeal, the beginning of every resurrection, which is at once the healing of the human and communion with the Divine: the one process being inseparable from the other.

The deepest human pain is invariably the demand for the restoration of the crucial rhythm, according to the essential need of the ego which, not being accepted as such by consciousness, causes the conflict of forces. This conflict is inherent to the ego: it is suffered because it opposes the restoration that is essentially demanded. The inherent conflict has ordinary breathing as its support. The erticial experience demands absolute independence from such breathing: *Ynga* breathing techniques, on the other hand, reinforce it. The crucial condition from which the new breath can spring must be related to what is called “Spiritual Apathy” in another paragraph.

In the case of difficult situations, or trials of grave importance, in which the succession of attacks on the inner rhythm is more intense, the art lies in activating the power of endurance inherent in the back, where astral apathy opens the way to the light of the spine, and thus to the equilibrium of the Cross. In reality, the return of strength is the art of bearing the Cross. The disciple accepts the trial and endures it as the path of the solar axis of light and its intersection with the lunar current. This intersection is the beginning of androgynous synthesis, corresponding to the primordial structure of the soul.

At first, the disciple gathers the energies by not opposing the Osial-creating force: in this way, he releases the tension in his shoulders and back and makes them the seat of the Force, since in this zone of the median or rhythmic seat, as has been said, the vertical solar current and the horizontal lunar current tend to meet, under the dominion of the Logos. The more he allows the crucial currents of the “rhythmic seat” to act, through stillness and profound self-surrender, by means of the wisdom of the sincere, the more he receives the healing virtue, becoming a

bearer of calm, a guardian of the crucial peace necessary for the inner condition of the Earth.

The meeting of the axial Force of the Logos with the profound life of the *Faï&u&* ina is the Power of the Cross, realizable when the soul transcends its affinity with the animal nature, which prevents it from realizing its own original nature. This original nature is a “stellar” structure, a confluence of the Forces of the Cosmos, which the soul bears within itself as a synthesis, by virtue of the unifying Force of the Self, or of the Logos, but which it contradicts by dualizing itself, identifying with corporeality. Because of this identification, the soul knows only the mineral appearance of nature and the Cosmos, materiality: it cannot perceive its own cosmic structure.

The union of Logos and soul is the principle of the restoration of Edenic nature, which the soul carries within itself unconsciously, as a secret androgynous structure, ordinarily rendering it a destructive duality due to its identification with nature—from the mental to the sexual. The oppositional *Shiva-Shakli* duality of the Hindu tradition gives rise to and is dominated by creation, so that the unifying current of the *kundalini*, in whose form *Shabda-Brahman* is expressed, is normally prevented from its transmuting circulation; in modern man, this is overcome by the crucial conjunction of the soul with the Logos.

The *Shiva-Shakti* union, which, according to that Tradition, brings about the transformation of sexual power into spiritual power—capable of recreating human nature—is essentially realized by the soul, which, through the liberation of thought and the corresponding purification, unites with the Logos, or with the essential force of the Self. This union reawakens within it the original androgynous power.

In reality, what is gradually brought about as the transformation of the dual current in the sphere of sex (see “The Force of Eros”) is prepared, according to the virtue of the Cross,

in the middle seat: spurred by this virtue, it ascends from the lower centers of Eros to reunite with its forgotten source: the heart center.

THE FORCE OF EROS

The force of Eros is the primordial power of the Spirit, devoid of its unifying virtue, or the virtue of synthesizing the solar-lunar cosmic currents, of which it is archetypically the origin, according to the symbolism of the Androgyne or the Shiva-Shakti union (Logos and the creative Power of Sound).

The essence of the Force is in the heart: but there is an etheric center “within the heart,” and more internally an astral center, and, even more essentially, a spiritual center, thanks to which the Higher Self is present in the heart, one with the cosmic Self. In the heart, man bears the forces of the Universe uniquely gathered. At the center of these is the Principle that governs them, but as the ordinary Self, he is outside this world of Powers: he is unaware of the secret of his own inner self.

There is no concentration in the heart through which the disciple can even remotely approach the realm of Powers in the heart: it is already an exceptional achievement for him to attain the perception of the etheric heart, insofar as he comes to move, through living thought, in the etheric current which, freeing itself from intellectuality, reconnects the mind with the heart.

In the head, man is normally cut off from this etheric current, because thought is bound to the brain organ. Thought, in order to become conscious and dialectical, separates itself from its own etheric current and establishes a consciousness supported by bodily sensations rather than by the etheric organism. A concentration of such consciousness in the heart may also give rise to extrasensory sensations, or extrasensory perceptions, in

that they are subconscious, but it remains nonetheless an operation foreign to the spiritual realm of the heart.

The pre-dialectical perception of thought, achieved through its strengthening, thanks to the discipline of concentration enables the disciple to experience the etheric current that rises from the heart to the head as the primordial power of the Life of Light. This current moves in a direction that is constantly and unconsciously opposed by the current of dialectical thought. Any yogic concentration, insofar as it does not know the etheric liberation of thought in the head, opposes the etheric current ascending from the heart, as the direction of the cosmic Self, or Logos, bearing the maximum of man's spiritual power.

Where this current is perceived and allowed to ascend, one receives from it the inspiring principle demanding a very precise supersensible action, whose symbol is the Grail: the disciple has the initial contact with the astral-etheric current of the heart. But the keys to this realm he can grasp only through the liberation of the mind from the cerebral system: which for him to escape the dominion of the zone from which Eros arises, from the deep center of the sex. Through the cerebral organ, Eros dominates the astral body, and thus excludes the action of the real Self from individual consciousness.

The disciple can operate with complete autonomy on the sexual center, within the vehicle of the imaginative-volitional current awakened through attunement with the heart's etheric current: this imaginative-volitional current, attuned to the heart—even if still unable to identify with its transcendent center—acquires the power to descend into the depths. In effect, it moves from the center within the forehead, traveling in a straight line toward the nape of the neck, descending along the axis of the spine, and joining with another direction of its force at the level of the solar plexus. Its action tends toward the resolution of the center, which will subsequently enable the disciple to unite with the spiritual essence of the heart.

At the point on the spine corresponding to the solar plexus, the disciple encounters the type of extracorporeal breath, a provisional vehicle of the imaginative-volitional pole, insofar as it is a breath made independent of thought. The current, initially conveyed by this breath, is the dynamic synthesis of the two liberated forces of thinking and willing, having nothing to do with the *ida* and *lingala* currents of occult Tantric physiology, whose dynamics belong to a human type constitutionally different from the modern one. The *Shabda Brahman* does indeed take the form of *Kundalini*, but its manifestation through the physical form, *sibilla*, is conditioned by the subtle, or etheric, form, *saksnia*, which man experiences through liberated thought.

The *Cintamani* stone is both the obstacle and the gateway to solar magical power: it symbolizes the brain, that is, the seat where the ascetic can experience the true essence of the Grail, to the extent that he recognizes in it the occult seat where Divine Love and the forces of Death meet. In this seat, through the radical forces of the conscious soul, a work of resurrection of the life of Light from the mineral is continually accomplished, made possible by the sacrificial offering made on Golgotha and the victory of the Logos over darkness. Resurrection, however, is potential for the human soul, insofar as it is related to the act of its freedom, that is, to the use it can make of the forces of Self-Consciousness in the present moment.

This Divine Love, victorious over Death, can arise as human love, or as Sacred Love, where the *opus* of the Grail is realized through the current forces of the conscious soul, which are normally alienated in the dialectical process. Thanks to a transcendent, yet absolutely impersonal, form of this *opus*, directed by incorporeal Powers of spiritual-corporeal wisdom, the pure mineral essence of daily food unites each time with the pure substance of sensory contents, in a regal zone of the cerebral organ that has remained intact from the damage of the "Fall," but unknown to man, not even known to the great Yogis of India:

today, however, knowable thanks to the presence of the Logos in Self-Consciousness. A regenerative etheric current accomplishes the synthesis of the pure essences of the mineral world, exceptionally resurgent as a mineral reintegrated by the Spirit: it is a power that, from the mineral sphere, ceases to seize the human soul through desire; it no longer acts as a force of death upon the soul insofar as it is physically incarnated. A power of death, in fact, normally bars the way to Sacred Love and turns every human love into a path of betrayal of the Spirit.

The current of the Life of Light that operates in the secret royal zone of the brain is connected with the noetic liberation of the breath: thanks to this liberation, the spear ceases to wound Amfortas: in the seat of the head, the asceticism of makes the Sacred Spear the magical weapon of Parsifal, which restores to Amfortas the virtue of the Grail. The path of Sacred Love passes through the liberation of thought. Thanks to this liberation, the current of Light of the breath becomes independent of the median seat of the breath; indeed, it leaves intact, in a state of metaphysical immobility, the psychophysical center normally involved in the breath.

The practitioner learns how to pass through the state of non-breathing. Supported by the current of negative breath, he travels the path that leads to the realization of the Philosopher's Stone. A new kind of breath is bestowed upon him. The Masters of the Rosicrucians ensure that the secret of this breath is not known to those who, despite the development of their occult faculties, might make improper use of it.

One may attempt for years to transcend the limits of egoic breathing and persist in connecting negative breathing with the sphere of magical will, without even coming close to the secret of the Philosopher's Stone: it is a knowledge that does not depend on human sagacity, but rather on the worthiness that the Masters come to verify in the disciple.

However, at a certain moment, the activation of the etheric current is decisive; it moves from a point halfway along the spine, at the level of the solar plexus, and descending passes through the center of the sex, to rise again through the abdomen, reuniting once more from the solar plexus to the spine. The disciple feels the current of will flowing through the limbs in relation to it, acting with pure autonomy, arousing the analogous magical-volitional current of the sex, normally dominated by primal desire.

The will that flows through the legs down to the soles of the feet, in its incorporeal state, can be intuitively recognized as the bearer of pure autonomy, capable of acting, through etheric induction, upon the current of will that normally becomes lust in sex: the deepest. Where the analogy of liberating autonomy regarding this current can be inductively realized, it returns as a luminous dynamic flow of liberation of sex, a vehicle for a union in which the power of reintegration reaches where the being normally loses itself in voluptuous swoon. The liberation of the essential currents of corporeality is possible, through which the highest Hierarchies of the Solar Order of the Earth operate within the human being: of which the Brothers of the Rosicrucians are mediators in humanity.

The operation is possible for the disciple to the extent that, within that current, he has been able to achieve the synthesis of two types of forces: representation and will, ordinarily separated in consciousness, insofar as consciousness is dialectical. The one expresses the feminine principle; the other, the masculine principle. Their separation, corresponding to a constitutional dissonance in modern man between the nervous system and the circulatory system—gradually destined to manifest as a universal nervous system—normally paralyzes the androgynous virtue of the soul.

The asceticism of thought restores the original harmony of the forces of representation and will, according to a secret coincidence of Light with the Life of Light, whose ultimate

purpose is the awakening from the millennial slumber of the high Mystery of the Androgyne. This awakening is identifiable with the experience of the Grail, or of Sacred Love, bearing the Power of the Logos, thanks to which the Resurrection can be realized, as the initial act of man's conscious will.

This current synthesis of the two principles, masculine and feminine, is the primordial force of man, reconstructible in its germ within the essence of thought, when thought, freeing itself from dialectical presumption, becomes one with the current of the will. That which has been separated for long ages is reunited by virtue of an inner act, which harmonizes the the head with the metabolic system: this act is the "first matter" of the Work, that which must be prepared by the experimenter. He cannot resurrect the androgynous element slumbering in the depths of Eros unless he prepares the seed of synthesis, which depends solely on him in the mental realm, as the meeting of the forces of thought with those of the will: a possibility proper to modern man, capable of thinking independence from the psyche.

The virtue of androgyny—reconstituted as the nucleus of living thought, thanks to the currents of the binary polarity of consciousness—works in a resuscitative manner within the forgotten primordial androgynous current. Where this is reawakened, its power—truly granted by the Spiritual World—turns toward the secret of the heart's cosmic-magical forces. The preparation for such a possibility is in itself a liberating introduction, offering a glimpse of the ultimate meaning of the work: the inconceivable to dialectical consciousness.

The current of desire comes, called upon to irrumate with its dominant tendency: at the point where it bursts forth, it is met by the conscious androgynous current, which does not allow it to ascend, but seizes its force and continues it, using its mobility to reach the center of the hero. This schema must first be imaginatively prepared by the disciple over a long period of time, until the stage is reached where absolute detachment is possible in the face of the ascending heat of erotic desire, continually stoked

by sensory impressions and the corresponding imaginings. A lower part is consciously open to such impressions, while a higher part is absolutely independent of them and can therefore meet them head-on.

Until the disciple has acquired absolute mastery over erotic impressions and imaginings—extended above all to the subconscious—he cannot have the real solar experience of thinking, nor³ can he attain the preliminary stage of imaginative consciousness. The most prolonged and patient work is the transformation of the imagination through which Feror dominates the human mind, via the subtle channels of the cerebral organ. Thought, as a ray of the Light of Life, is in itself independent of that organ, but, as normal rational thought, it is conditioned by the rhythmic-metabolic processes of the brain through which the “desiring” ascends to the mental.

With regard to the dominion of the psyche, the disciple must understand the apsyche function of purely logical-rational thought as a cosmic function in itself, and realize it as such by intensely desiring such thought through the technique of inner determination, typical of the modern investigator: for it must have a relationship with the brain independent of the brain’s vital processes.

Pure thought, as the initial movement of the original synthesis, brings about independence from the imaginative impulses of the brain: at this point it can give rise to the real imaginative movement, opposite to the ascending one from the brain. It is this volitional-imaginative movement that can operate in the depths, as an initial “rotor of androgynous reintegration,” capable of directing the current of desire into its proper place. As long as this current is capable of invading the mental, *the very idea* of imaginative liberation is impossible: it may be attempted and even initiated each time, but each time it is annihilated by the erosive currents of Eros. The highest power of the human, inverted, continually annihilates itself: it expresses only a moment of autonomy, however, diverted toward animality, in the

fulfillment of the act necessary for the generation of a new being; but from this moment of autonomy, man is authoritatively excluded, having by force only the dual relationship of desire: the animal relationship.

The “synthesis of androgyny,” which begins as the life of solar thought, is brought into contact with the imagination that expresses the inverse synthesis, that is, the synthesis opposed to the ego, the Shiva-Shakti opposition of Tantrism, made operative by the obstructive Powers enjoying a degraded power of the ego. This power, in its pure state, is the initial life of the ego, capable of overcoming the opposition that is indeed unknown to the ordinary consciousness of the ego.

In the preparation for androgynous imagination, it is not a matter of not feeling erotic impressions, but of encountering what they truly are outside of the lustful identification with them. The ascetic encounters them through the independent imaginative current, in the place where they are formed according to the power of oppositional synthesis. The ordinary person never encounters them, because he lacks independent, or pure, perception with respect to them: he undergoes them, that is, he feels them when he is already taken by them. He cannot encounter them, because he identifies with them.

The Rosicrucian experimenter, who knows the art of pure perception, brings such perception to meet them: he confronts them with the imaginative current that has resolved the dyad within itself, that is, has realized the “sacred union,” the Sun-Moon connection, Shiva-Shakti, and has overcome within itself the duality that feeds craving. With this androgynous power, he centers the deepest power of duality, requiring the maximum intensity of the original androgynous power. The Shiva-Shakti union realized in the conscious soul is here the decisive synthesis of the most powerful opposition, for from it the error draws its radical power of irresistibility.

The seeker who knows how to delve deeply into the redemptive forces of the error is accepted by the Brothers of the Rosicrucians among the candidates for *the Aurea Opero Lunae*, which is the Grail experience: he revives in his imagination the primordial androgynous force—the current that continually robs man of Life and enslaves him to the currents of desire and the Motte. The ways of the hero are the ways of betrayal of the Spirit, the most powerful barriers to the current of the Light of Life, that is, to the true current of Love, whatever their form: from the sensual to the passionate and affective or sentimental, in any case driven by the desire for the animal appearance of the other, and not by the encounter with the solar secret of the soul. To love according to the secret of the soul's solar Logos is the art of the revival of the Edenic Archetype, which has come to be called Sacred Love.

The paths of the fall and of “betrayal” can become the paths of ascent and reintegration, thanks to *the Aurea operatici Lunae*. The Human Archetype expresses itself in an infinite series of forms of the soul's life, through the dualization of the sexes, up to the individual form, which physically bears the imprint of “differentiation”: but the component of the “initiatory couple,” retracing the path of differentiation and the forgetting of the original form, realizes fidelity, because it rediscovers in the other the synthesis of all forms, up to the vision of the Archetype that perpetually emanates them.

SACRED LOVE

This is the relationship yearned for and continually destroyed by the human couple: the relationship operating in the rare moments of mutual self-giving—the secret of attraction—as the restorative virtue of an original harmony: one that is not supposed to have been lost and to be on the verge of being rediscovered.

Every couple moved by an immediate affective impulse bears, obscurely, the vocation of such restoration, and yet each time betrays it due to an insufficient openness of consciousness to the original element from which it springs: an element that tends to resurface as an impulse toward the absolute self-giving, of which each of the two senses only obscurely the power of eternity. Each time, the insufficiency of the soul's life turns the self-giving into a parody: it leads to the loss of the supersensible premise, which at that point demands the asceticism of a rite of perpetuity and conscious consecration. Such a rite cannot come from traditional disciplines, but only from the asceticism of the new age, or Solar Asceticism, which the disciple may likewise identify as the Way of the Grail. As has been shown, traditional disciplines ignore the relationship between the ego and thought and between thought and the brain, which characterizes the inner constitution of modern man: consequently, they ignore the type of experience of feeling that can arise from the liberation of thought.

In the current experience of love, the human couple has a moment of possibility for the conscious resurrection of the Sacred, but rarely senses it. Since they do not know the irregular subjugation of feeling to the nervous system and of thought to cerebralism, they ignore where what has been kindled within them should be perceived: even if this is their true ideal. They allow the kindled fire to die out, because they are unaware of the technique of its essential sacredness. The content of this is, however, the legacy of an agreement stemming from past lives, which tends to continue: the two partake of it without awareness of its transcendence; they do not know that it demands to be sustained through the present forces of consciousness, lying behind dialectical consciousness. They gradually lose the bliss that led them to swear eternal love, in the realm of memory and vision: over time, from longing to longing, from disappointment to disappointment, they will seek in vain in other experiences a substitute for the original condition they fleetingly intuited.

The couple who know Sacred Love are indeed “bitten by the Dragon,” for they become aware of the ancient evil of animia, of the limit of the sentient soul. It is said that “the bite of the Dragon does not heal.” Amfortas’s wound is incurable, but it will be healed by the Spear reconsecrated by Parsifal. One must understand this symbolism: the bite of the Dragon is ancient, for it precedes the era of Breath-consciousness; indeed, the latter will arise as a consequence of the former. The Dragon’s bite, in truth, manifests as a deep unconscious pain, which the love that has come can heal, because the gift of the Redeemer flows within it. The dialectical man, however, cannot know this Mystery: indeed, he unconsciously opposes it. He can attain awareness of it only if he overcomes within himself the dialectical limit: rationalistic or traditionalistic. The path of solar asceticism can lead him to the Threshold of the Spiritual World, where the decisive trial, esoterically called the “Trial of the Three Monsters,” awaits him.

The initiatory couple experiences as an intimate process of the soul what occult literature calls “the bite of the Dragon”: they discover it as they harmoniously follow the solar path and begin to comprehend the power of the resonance that will wound them. The memory of Sacred Love then decisively confronts the trial of the electrifying element of Eros, upon which it can assert the dazzling element of Light. It likewise confronts the trial of the mundane and the “all-too-human”: it knows the experience of Eros as the path of degradation, but at the same time as the victorious force over the bondage of desire.

“The Dragon’s bite does not heal”: for the initiatory couple, there can be no meaning to existence without a conscious restoration of fidelity to the principle of Sacred Love. Even when called to this principle, the soul may lose the initial “Life of Light” and proceed once more unconsciously according to the captivity of the ephemeral: a captivity that appears external, but from which in reality there is nothing but inner liberation: the conscious rekindling of the meta-Fire, the reconquest of the

Mystery of the highest power capable of descending as a healing virtue into the earthly realm.

The high Mystery of the Light of Life is the virtue of the original Love reawakened through will, beyond the bondage of ordinary consciousness: a bondage that manifests as legitimate dependence on one's own sphere of life, in the bonds of *karma*, in the constraints of human relationships. And this is the proof that presents itself as the legitimacy of the "conventional" in contrast to the metaphysical assumption of Sacred Love.

Sacred Love is the victory over ephemeral correlation, which holds the maximum force of eros, yet manipulates the human being both above and below, causing them to idealize the desire that in reality ascends from the animal nature. This animal nature, however, is perverted by the mind dominated by desire. The impulse of Sacred Love is not Eros, but the power of the Logos, which in the soul makes Eros its vehicle until it can manifest itself in the animal nature; that is to say, it truly conquers Eros, actualizes the primordial will of the Self, or solar will: it is inevitable that it will encounter Sacred Love, but this, if received before such a victory, nourished by asceticism and self-giving, leads to victory over the hero who is destined for his transmutation.

The ascetic who conquers Eros is, in an initiatory sense, a solar hero: he cannot conquer it except through a love higher and freer than that bound in any way to the animal appearance of the human form. The life-giving force of such love is the Light of Life springing from the sacrifice of the Redeemer: the stages of this sacrifice must be known as visions that arouse the Love which liberates the Logos in the soul.

It is inevitable that the Dragon's bite will not heal until the ascetic finds within himself the strength capable of overcoming the hero who normally kills human Love, even when it arises in accordance with the redemptive harmony. The ascetic must know the ultimate meaning of the hero* before perceiving its power: he

must know the secret of the Resurrection founded on the Tetra by the Redeemer.

There is no love that must not be experienced in the soul, like a resurrection from death, in order to become sacred and true: so that on Earth it may restore the healing harmony, which it bears within itself as a fundamental yearning, yet which it normally betrays time and again. This yearning is a yearning for Resurrection, but to be realized it must become, in the soul, Love that conquers Death, for it conquers the hero* and recovers from it the Life of Light, through whose transformed power it serves the human. It is the yearning that enables the ascetic to defeat the Dragon, drawing from the suffering of its bite the impulse for combat and victory. In every being that knows the vocation of perpetuity and the sacredness of correlation, this yearning first ignites as a spark. But in order to become the power of life through the radical act of the will, it must pass through the experience of Death and Resurrection, the path to which was opened by the rite of the Son of Man.

What the ascetic attains—as a conqueror of Death in the depths of the soul—is the secret of the highest power attainable as the restoration of the Edenic correlation and its healing power over original evil. Solar asceticism leads to a similar possibility: knowledge becomes perception of the transfiguring Amotc, according to the original premise of correlation: which is directed toward the other being, considered “infinitely loved,” but normally not known to us as the bearer of the secret of the infinite. Only this knowledge can make the assertion of self-giving a reality.

KARMA

This Sanskrit term is used to denote, among other things, the transcendent law by virtue of which everything that manifests in the present life as “fate” can be explained by causes situated in a

previous life. The doctrine of reincarnation is therefore presupposed, though it is not the subject of this manual, whose focus is the practice of disciplines leading to the direct experience of the truths alluded to in the doctrines of the Spirit. We are rather interested in characterizing the significance of *karma's* presence in human daily life.

Everything that occurs in daily life to the point of presenting itself as a physical fact—that is, as an event capable of unfolding on the sensory stage—manifests a karmic origin: it is not causal, or improvised, or unexpected; even if it appears to be so, it is not.

According to the doctrine of *karma*, the event that occurs to the point of being physically perceptible has already been prepared, sometimes for centuries: it stems from past processes and is, in itself, already accomplished. Recent elements naturally converge within it as well; in any case, it is prepared through the interplay of various spiritual components, according to a prior impulse that is absolutely rigorous in its logic. The event, the “fact,” as the ultimate result of these elements, is always inevitable: *karma*.

With regard to the form in which the “event” occurs, the decisive factors are the spiritual forces at work—namely, the forces of inner freedom, or independence from *karma*. In form, it can undergo changes in a positive, even transformative sense, or in a negative sense, depending on the presence or absence of the ego's autonomy: but its substantial content nevertheless belongs to a reality that is already established, awaiting the responsible subject.

Such a view, as a key to daily events, when brought to the meditative level, can provide its content of wisdom. The event does not exist to provoke personal pleasure or displeasure, exaltation or condemnation, worry or pessimism: these, in truth, are *maya*. The sentient reaction is always the expression of ignorance of a latent content, which instead requires the soul's activity of a higher perception, foreseen in its development: to

which it can arrive by exercising itself to assume the act according to an inner impulse that is neither its pleasure nor its displeasure. Pleasure and displeasure must be transformed into organs of perception. One must understand what “fate” truly demands through certain events: particularly those to which one is most sensitive.

The event, like a symbol, speaks to us or teaches us something: it is the world of necessity that appeals to freedom, that is, to the free inner act, to the thought capable of essential identity with the object. The event is that which at first presents itself as an inescapable fact, insofar as it lacks an act or inner content. This inner “content” must spring from a contemplative engagement with the event: the force that causes it to evolve. There is no event whose ultimate meaning is not the demand for a conscious act, that is, its interpretation: we are faced with the symbolism of a language that does not ask of man sentimental or instinctive reactions, but rather knowledge.

The development of such an attitude does not dampen the capacity to feel, or to love, or to understand through compassion; on the contrary, it elevates it to its highest form: it is the power of action as an expression of self-sacrifice, in that the action does not spring from an egoic reaction, but from the objective content of the event.

Find out what the unpleasant event demands of the soul, and it will begin to fade away. *Karma* is a book whose language reveals to the experiencer the secret of the form of existence. To be free from *karma* is to become the possessor of the insight that it imparts personally through daily circumstances and events, especially the unpleasant ones. These can be interpreted in the most diverse ways from a subjective point of view, up to their rational or psychological codification: but such a point of view grasps nothing of reality and leaves man a constant plaything of events, with which his only relationship is that of reflected thought and sentient reactions: the most obtuse relationship.

To be independent of *karma* means to move beyond the world of the ancient Law into the realm of Freedom: but this implies penetrating the inner workings of *karma*. To be free means to act not according to the impulses of the past, but by virtue of overcoming the iron chain of cause and effect: that is, to act out of love, breaking the endless spiral of necessity—and thus of human hatred. Example: a man who kills someone today—by whom he was killed in a previous life—has evidently not developed sufficient forces of freedom and love to enable him to escape the law of metaphysical causality, which demands retribution: in the next existence he will in turn be killed by the other, unless the free Self has arisen in the other in the meantime, capable of overcoming karmic necessity and thus giving him a way to atone spiritually for his own guilt: so that he himself may in turn be led to find the free Self within himself. Struggles and wars in the world will not cease as long as the law of *karma* totally dominates man, who is incapable of asserting himself through the inner Principle of Freedom, and thus of overcoming the iron mechanism of “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.”

Nothing escapes the iron law of *karma*—the blows of fate, “tragic” events, illnesses, collective sufferings, the catastrophes that befall entire populations—are not random: they are structural events governed by internal correlation, of an absolutely mathematical nature.

In effect, each of us pays off the debt incurred in past lives on a daily basis: this is the true meaning of life—to settle one’s debt in order to attain freedom. The real evil lies not in failing to recognize this, but in blaming others for situations that concern only ourselves. 11 Evil is also when non-recognition is used as a tool in a struggle that claims to remedy the situations of certain communities, to the detriment of others. If one ignores the law of *karma* and the inner principle that transcends it, it is impossible not to shift the responsibility for one’s own difficulties onto others. Only beings endowed with exceptional morality are capable of blaming not others, but themselves. A series of

oppressions culminating in tyranny, with all the trappings of sociality and the dialectic of the redemption of peoples, is naturally a karmic debt that the oppressed are paying—but it is equally the ignorance of the law of *karma* that makes it possible, rendering the debt inextinguishable, because the accusation directed at the apparent perpetrators reaffirms it. The unjust draw their strength from the ignorance of the just: knowledge of the law of *karma* in the modern world has been hindered not only by Materialism, but also by the false currents of the Spirit. The ancient sacred legal world today becomes political-sacred: the ancient “system” (based on Law and not on Freedom) illegitimately dominates the present world, assuming the appearance of a social evolution that in reality has the task of hindering it, above all by preventing knowledge of the karmic background of the social problem.

If liberating knowledge does not provide a way to extinguish the debt through radical changes of the soul and the birth. Through the impulses of true brotherhood, *karma* asserts itself with mathematical rigor. It is not punishment, but the deep will of the Self to realize its higher nature by settling the debts incurred with its lower nature. Thus, the hardship suffered by a community due to abstract political measures is indeed the repayment of a debt, but simultaneously the preparation of the debt of those responsible for such hardship. Similarly, for the difficulties caused by an economically unjustified strike that harms groups already struggling to cope with their own hardships, all those who have contributed to it in even the slightest way—even if unwillingly—and thus to the resulting suffering, must bear responsibility: even if such difficulties and sufferings are themselves a normal karmic debt. Thus, there is no money unlawfully taken from the human community that need not be returned; there is no illicit profit, embezzlement, misappropriation, etc., for which one need not be held accountable: neither oppression, nor abuse of power, nor moral or physical lynching, nor false judgment, nor lie, nor denigration: it

is inscribed in the book of Law corresponding to a Justice from which no one escapes: unless they know the new path, that of Freedom and Love, which leads them to desire the extinction of their own debt and to cooperate in the extinction of others’.

Every day the drama of life makes us witness the manifestation of *karma*, that is, the affirmation of a Law which today, after a millennial pause, should find in man the free knower, that is, the responsible one according to independence from the ancient necessity, that is, according to Love. Every day we see beings who, unconsciously driven by the ancient legalistic spirit, presume to alter the destiny of others through ideologies and external measures, whereas it is urgent that they first know themselves and their own karmic debt, in order to help others become aware of their own and of their daily responsibility with regard to its content. This responsibility does not change simply because one lacks self-awareness. Thus, for example, in the case of a book that constitutes the denigration and moral destruction of someone, or the falsification of historical content, responsibility lies not only with the author, but also with those who contribute to its publication, right down to its distributors. Likewise, a pornographic book incurs liability even for those who innocently cooperate in its production. The systematic distortion of facts for polemical reasons, defamatory propaganda, incitement leading to partisan clashes and violence, lawsuits filed for ideological reasons, accusations lacking any real basis of guilt but necessary for specific strategies, and every attack on the autonomy of the legal system, as well as the cultural and economic spheres, weigh karmically more heavily on those morally responsible than on those who, as executors, carry them out. He who, out of a nihilistic spirit, destroys things or objects that are the fruit of human sacrifice and labor will return with a destiny that will compel him to rebuild, piece by piece, what he has destroyed, even if the times will be different and the payment of the debt will take a different form. Moreover, the vast population of the physically and mentally disabled, the paralyzed, those with

encephalitis, the schizophrenic, etc., stands before us as a question pointing to something more radical than the tautological explanations of science or obvious human compassion.

There is no human measure that can avert the consequences of *karma* for those who carry its impulses within the forces governing their own psychophysical organism. It is inscribed in the structure of the cosmic Order, bearing the forces of a Justice from which no one—whether materialist or spiritualist—can escape, until the day when the Self awakens in man as a free being, capable of deciding beyond *karma*, beyond natural necessity, that is, out of love, and by virtue of sacrifice of oneself: which is the message of Christ. Those who care deeply about the themes of brotherhood and sociality, when they love them to the point of dedicating their lives to them, cannot help but discover that the social problem is inseparable from the problem of *karma* and that knowledge of the law of *karma* is the transforming force of future society.

BROTHERHOOD AND SOCIALITY

Although in the present age the themes of brotherhood and sociality seem to coincide, in their identity they do not escape the law of reflected thought, which makes every inner content its inverse on the dialectical plane.

It has been seen how the thought of modern man, becoming dialectical insofar as it is reflected by the brain, becomes a mediator of the psyche bound to corporeality, unless it accomplishes the conversion of itself through the typical asceticism of its very movement, according to the disciplines summarized in this manual. In reflected dialectics, devoid of the original inner element, the spirit of the opposition of the reflection to the light is inevitably expressed, due to the

contingent identity of the reflection with the cerebral support, in which the impulses of the lower psyche operate.

Typically, brotherhood is a sign of the Spirit's presence in humanity; yet, precisely for this reason, its dialectic can essentially express opposition to the original content. Throughout the world today, for many groups of people, the relationship of fraternity is determined not by autonomous conscience, but by a transcendent power that holds the necessary system of information and regulation for it: it is determined by the group spirit that unites them—by the dictates of the church, the party, or the race that binds them together. In essence, ideology establishes the limits of the fraternal impulse: whereas only beyond those limits could it truly operate in the world.

For such beings—incorporated, persuaded, or indoctrinated—brotherhood is determined on the basis of political information regarding those to whom they intend to direct it: they include within the circle of brotherhood those regarding whom information is as prescribed, excluding others as if they were strangers: a truly conditioned brotherhood, which explains the hatred and the inexhaustible war in the world. It does not occur to any of the informed to question the information.

In fact, the fraternity that one believes to be established within a group dynamic and its prescriptions begins only where these prescriptions are overcome, that is, where one is capable of a free act, so that one recognizes the other as spiritually identical beyond the apparent indications of divergence. Brotherhood, as a relationship limited to the group sphere, is not true: it is inevitably a fiction, albeit an unconscious one; it begins to be true only when it is capable of transcending the “circle of the group soul” to manifest itself toward beings who appear outside of all boundaries. Only outside of this does brotherhood begin to be true. There is no merit in loving those with whom one agrees: nor can this agreement be authentic, arising as a function of aversion.

Those who believe in society as a genuine relationship that transcends distinctions of race, culture, political party, or religion determine the nature of fraternal relationships based on the dictates of their own conscience: they draw upon their own inner sense of responsibility rather than on the directives of a spiritual director or a group organization. The deep solidarity of the “group” can only be based on hostility. Fraternity begins to take shape when one acts independently of the verdict of the group’s political color-coded dictionary.

A community or group whose fraternity is confined within the limits of a correlative ideology, beyond which it sees beings with whom no understanding is possible, does not yet know the New Testament. Without realizing it, such a community, despite the appearances of a social vocation, still lives within the domain of ancient anti-social impulses, because it lives within the domain of the Law or the Herd, beyond which alone is the experience of brotherhood possible.

Legitimately, the name “sociality” can be given to a conception that includes everyone, excludes no people, current, category, or race: indeed, it considers each one necessary and irreplaceable. This discourse, however, falls short or becomes naive when it comes to the realm of politics and its strategies, which demand at any moment a shift from agreement to disagreement and vice versa: the opposite is true: politics takes sociality as a pretext to dominate politics; indeed, throughout the world today the opposite is true: politics takes sociality as a pretext—that is, the rhetoric of those who presume to provide for human needs, ignoring the extrasensory structure of the human being.

He who does not know how to meet the other as an individual and does not recognize in him the being with whom a relationship is possible that is not conditioned by race, church, or party, cannot be said to be free. He needs a spiritual or political guide, just as the animal in the flock needs a shepherd. He still belongs, despite the modern facade, to the ancient group soul: unconsciously racist, because an identical spirit binds him to

others as a group, according to the psyche tied to the physical body.

In the pre-Christian world, brotherhood, as a form of sociality, was possible only insofar as it conformed to the Law, not to Freedom. From transcendent norms one could escape Truth and Justice, not Freedom and Love. In the modern world, the persistence of the pre-Christian spirit in the current ideological and political shaping of the collective psyche is the survival, in every corner of the Earth, of the moral impulses of the Spinilo: in reality, social evils, despite their guise of pacifism and sociality. It is precisely the radically antisocial impulses of today's advocates of sociality that are at the root of irremediable social injustices, class struggle, and the inextinguishability of war.

Social thought is still incapable of being alive, beyond the abstract dialectic of its plausible clichés. Truly social thought begins to be that which transforms man: meditation. Only the liberation of the movement of the idea from ideology can enable man to actualize in his consciousness the features of the group soul (see "Freedom") and, consequently, fraternity as an expression of the free Spirit.

The lack of fraternity on the part of those convinced of a sociality that is learned rather than thought depends on the tendency to operate on the level of ideologies rather than on the level of ideas. It is unlikely that a contemporary theorist of society would be able to distinguish an idea from an ideology. He does not believe in the reality of the Idea, which, as a living seed, is the principle of fraternity and society, but he accepts its dialectical product, ideology, because it has already interpreted the world for him, sparing him the effort of thinking. He does not know that nothing can come from ideology—indeed, the opposite of the idea—since it is a lifeless reflection, a delusion born of the formal plausibility of its arguments, necessary for the Ego that fears having to come to terms with itself and confront its arguments with ideas.

When one cannot identify Terror on the level of ideas, one is led to fight Terror in physical persons, to whom a category is assigned, no more and no less than as race: one fights a preconceived category, but fails to realize that one is, in effect, practicing a subtle form of racism.

In the system of planned brotherhood, an adversary is conceived as the embodiment of the utmost danger, thus constituting the most despised category, to which the causes of all evils are attributed, and to which is even applied a name that sounds as magical as a *taboo*, in accordance with the infernal power ascribed to it. Often, however, in practice, it does not become an adversary because it actually belongs to that category, but rather is treated as belonging to that category because in this way it is possible to strike at it as an adversary.

A lack of social awareness prevents the theorists of brotherhood from recognizing that in reality, as has been briefly mentioned in the preceding pages, everyone carries the true Adversary within themselves as an Ahrimanic double: but it is precisely this “double,” with which one unconsciously identifies, that leads one to constantly see outside oneself the adversary upon whom one can legitimately shift “all responsibility”;

The Spirit of the Inquisition, which once determined what was within and what was outside the infallible truth of the Church, finds its reincarnation today in the dogmatism of ideological sociality, where the living impulse of thought—or the idea—is indeed lacking: that which, within the human soul itself, has the direct power to separate the social from the antisocial.

Indeed, the accusation normally directed at the “system,” at “society,” the “class,” etc., would be valid only if directed at that antisocial, dogmatically social thought—which, despite its progressivism, is retrograde, like every dialectical intuition, in which the Spirit is powerless to recognize itself. This recognition of the Spirit in every form of its immediacy, out of a duty to

honesty as well as to the purity of intuition, is precisely the meaning of the asceticism indicated.

ASCETICISM

If one were to state in simple terms the purpose of the series of inner operations prepared for us by Initiation, one could say without fear of error that it is the conquest of a higher form of self-mastery. And this is the ultimate content of the contemplative meditative discipline described in these pages. One might venture to say that, toward such an ideal, morality must ultimately rise to the level of sanctity. Naturally, this is not the morality to which one conforms, as to the set of agreed-upon norms of good conscience, but rather the morality produced by the free inner act: as *something* that the Spirit creates, almost always in a form not foreseen by the agreed-upon norms.

For the candidate for Initiation, the state of holiness is not an end in itself, but rather a means: necessary for self-knowledge and liberation, that is, for the purification of the sentient body, *kama rupa*, the astral body. At the same time, self-knowledge is an indicator of the state of holiness and of its wisdom in not appearing as such: in not being a mere attitude.

It is easy to be good—being weak—and it is easy to be strong—being evil. It is difficult and heroic to be free, so as to be good through an excess of strength. But this excess arises as the possession and mastery of the capacity to be evil. For human freedom is founded on the experience and awareness of evil nature. There are spiritualists who, by virtue of their goodness, commit the greatest evils: an inability to be strong in the face of their own wickedness makes them “good.”

The excess of strength is essentially love for one’s neighbor: the most difficult achievement, in that, prior to self-knowledge and the purification of the astral body, love for one’s neighbor is

almost always a pretense, even when expressed in acts of unquestionable commendability: it is the performance behind which lurks the craving for a spirituality that one does not actually possess; in relation to which they have a reason to exist, within certain limits, the techniques that scorn moralism and contemplate an affirmation beyond the rules: a path of immediate freedom.

But immediate freedom will itself be a deception if it springs from the impulses of the astral body—called in occult literature the “body of desire”—which is not fully known and which takes the place of the Self; this is one of the greatest traps of the pre-initiatory phase, as inevitable as the test of the Self’s true initiative. Any choice that is not a choice of the ego is not free, because it belongs to the astral: to which all mystical and initiatory attitudes are possible, from the Gnostic to the yogic. The problem of self-realization is, in truth, a problem of the search for the ego.

In the Self independent of the astral body lies the Spirit; but the Self can act within the human being only on condition that it immerses itself in the astral body and identifies with the faculties of the astral body; thinking, feeling, willing; such an identification is the inevitable weakening of the Self, before it attains self-identity at that level: it is its subjugation to the functions that the astral body, through thinking, feeling, and willing, assumes in relation to the etheric-physical body, that is, in relation to the animal nature: functions which, in the mental human being, are led to degenerations impossible for the animal. Hence the constitutionally contradictory or ambiguous situation of the ego, which operates through the astral body by means of an identification with it, which acts in its stead, and to which it entrusts itself as the determining vehicle: the unconscious identification with bodily nature. Hence the ego, which is the center, is not at the center; it does not express the Spirit from which it moves, but becomes the expression of nature, of race, of temperament, of the sentient and rational soul: of the astral body,

dominated by Entities hostile to man, tending to possess the human.

But precisely the realization of the Self in such a level, demands the development of forces that it would otherwise never bring forth on its own.

Only liberation from the illicit identification with the astral body can enable the ego to identify with itself and to realize, through rectification, the higher nature of the astral: that is, thinking before it is a reflection of the astral, feeling and willing before they are the expression of the astral involved in the life of the senses. That is to say: thinking, feeling, and willing, as currents of force that are original in themselves and, as such, cosmic.

Asceticism is the assumption of the ego, not of the astral body. The world of instincts and passions that overwhelms man and paralyzes the element of immortality within him is the astral body that substitutes itself for the ego, operating with the authority of the ego. And it is the continuous inversion of that original hierarchy—thanks to which, beyond all semblance of *chaos*, the Spirit nonetheless substantially dominates Matter—that appears as freedom but is instead the paralysis of the principle of perpetuity; only this can awaken the secretly perennial essence of the astral body: the true meaning of asceticism.

The power of the astral body, once removed from the Ego, works against the Ego in the form of a current of instincts. The deception underlying all false rebellions, all ambiguous redemptions, all apparent acts of revenge, and all facile struggles against authority... can be recognized as the revolt of the “body of desire”—or the astral body—against the Ego.

The revolt, which can give rise to its own system, is not the work of man: it is secretly manipulated by Entities hostile to man. When the astral body does not resonate with the ego, yet acts with the authority of the ego, claiming for itself a freedom that belongs to the ego, then it is the destroyer of life. Existence is

then organized according to abstract theories, devoid of soul but replete with dialectics. Such a process is nevertheless sustained by extraordinary forces of intelligence and will, supplied by the aforementioned extra-human Entities: They tend to possess man, in order to express themselves on a plane cosmically forbidden to Them, but in which they can assert themselves through the power of man's freedom, used by him negatively, and taken from him.

PEDAGOGY

The general exaltation of the astral realm in opposition to the ego, which can also take spiritual forms, is the greatest obstacle to humanity's current evolution: the principle of so-called Counter-Initiation. On an ordinary, earthly plane, it is valued today above all through a pedagogy that stimulates impulses of freedom in the child's astral body before the age at which the principle of the ego emerges in him, according to the rhythm of an occult cosmic law, for which alone a concept of freedom can exist. In the sense of such a law, the problem of the freedom of the ego can be understood in contrast to the needs of the astral body.

Spiritual Science, from which a pedagogy aimed at the generations of the new age springs, teaches that in the first seven years the child, in accordance with the rhythm of the aforementioned transcendent law immanent in the ego, organizes itself as a purely physical being; in the second seven years as an etheric being; in the third as an astral being: around the age of twenty-one, the ego, which from the beginning has worked as a metaphysical principle from outside the body throughout the three periods of formation, becomes integrated into the astral-etheric-physical organism. From that moment on, the human being can experience life according to the freedom of the ego: this freedom consists in the possibility that the ego may express itself without being conditioned by the threefold astral-etheric-physical

structure with which it is clothed, but rather uses this structure as an obedient instrument.

If, during the first three seven-year periods, impulses of autonomy—which belong solely to the Ego—have been instilled in the adolescent’s soul, these will inevitably act from the astral body against the Ego, leading it to a premature identification with them, as illicit instinctual impulses: upon the completion of the third seven-year period, as the ego emerges, they will essentially oppose it, arousing a feeling of oppression and constraint regarding any authority emanating from the ego; whereas true authority and responsibility can arise only from the ego.

The young person who has lacked the discipline of obedience and devotion necessary for the astral body lacks the capacity for obedience to their own central being, the ego, the bearer of responsibility and freedom: the path to neurosis is open to him, but more easily that of criminality, inasmuch as the astral body, illicitly aroused by impulses of freedom during the three-year formative period, comes into conflict with the ego and tends to supplant it.—

The inner formation of the child, and thus his capacity to grow strong and radiant, depends on the moral climate created for him by the family environment. In the very earliest years, the child, whose ego is still guided by the Spiritual World, actually lives as if in a temple, immersed in his own sacred atmosphere, from which he draws nourishment and which he would not wish to be deprived of. Parents could learn, through a wise contemplation of the child’s natural being, the meaning of sacredness; instead, it is they themselves who contradict and destroy it with their frivolity, even if it is intentionally affectionate. More often than not, a child’s crying expresses the pain of feeling torn away by the frivolity of the “grown-ups” from the angelic world in which it is naturally immersed: the impoverished inner state of those who approach it immediately affects the child in a negative way.

The child's true spiritual level corresponds to that of meditation. Parents who truly love their newborn should build for him an inner cradle made of their harmony and, if not of a precise meditative thought, at least of a sense of conscious religiosity. The sacred element of the child—that which will later manifest in him as the power of the will—is, in the present age, literally thrown into chaos and rendered ineffective by very those who presume to love and educate the child.

A sound pedagogy, proceeding from an understanding of the inner background of the child's development, ensures that the child grows in such a way that his or her soul and physical forces are gradually prepared to receive the ego, that is, to become truly free: this is a discipline of obedience, devotion, and admiration, directed toward all that in the panorama of creation bears the imprint of the sublime, the self-sacrificing, and the heroic. In this way, the child's spontaneity is cultivated as a form of his or her potential freedom.

One must examine the inner background of the problem of pedagogy, and the fallacy of the cult of impulses of freedom in the child's soul, before the soul itself is formed and ready to receive the ego, if one takes into account that the aforementioned entities hostile to humanity can act through the child's astral body: they have no power over the ego. The reception of the ego, upon completion of the third seven-year period, is prepared by a supersensible disposition active as spontaneity in the child: in the first seven years, he is led to mechanically repeat everything he receives from his environment; in the second seven years, this repetition evolves within him and transforms into imitation; in the third seven years, Limiting becomes a tendency to model oneself after a higher human ideal. As can be seen, the child's development up to the age of twenty-one requires a wise preparation for the acceptance of the ego. Such preparation is compromised by the pedagogies through which the Entities act, who fear the birth of man's Spiritual Self: they know that, because of this birth, the subjugation by which they enslave the child

comes to an end; they prevent the birth of the Self by acting prematurely on the astral body and arousing movements that man will later mistake for his own free impulses.

Discipline, devotion, and admiration for superior models of life are all forces that guide the being. The adolescent's physical self is prepared to receive the Principle of forces that is the ego, in which the Spirit manifests itself and is therefore the true strength of man—that is, the source of courage, loyalty, creative imagination, boldness, inexhaustible will, and balance.

This contribution of the ego is compromised by a pedagogy that cultivates autonomy in children before their time, granting them the indiscriminate expression of impulses—and thus also of those that, arising from the animal nature, immediately take precedence over the others. It is this unwise modern pedagogy, which is responsible for the rise of neurosis and criminality in the world and for the vast population of spiritual misfits endowed only with the energy to act on whatever presents itself to them as instinct. It is the pedagogy that makes the young person an unhappy, unstable being, seeking escape from life, driven to compensate for the lack of inner order by any means, from drugs to passively becoming a pawn in the strategies of profane power.

THE PATH TO INITIATION

Only the Spirit, as a principle distinct from the soul, can manifest itself in man as freedom, without contradicting the laws of the Universe. To the objection that may arise from certain esoteric systems asserting the superiority of the Initiate over the laws of the Universe, the answer is that man can transcend the laws not by breaking them, due to an inability to conform to them, but by first and foremost knowing them: only by knowing them can he realize the Principle within himself, rising to it from the awareness of his own inner structure. Transgression is always the hysterical assertion of freedom; as for correction, where

adequate discipline of the conscience does not intervene, *karma* provides it with ironclad severity.

When the Spirit is dominated by the impulses of the astral body, and the Ego takes on the form of the Ego, any expression of freedom is the ignorance that dominates man and, through him, finds the ideological or legal justifications necessary for its own manifestation: hence the false individual freedom of one cannot but clash with the false freedom of another. And this is the normal condition of modern man, which allows for oppression by a spiritually less evolved power, through its pre-established legal framework.

Only when freedom is the expression of the Spirit—which dominates the astral realm yet has no need to break its laws, since it possesses them, moving from the essence, that is, from its own law—does free action coincide with moral action: but not insofar as the Spirit conforms to morality, since morality is precisely the product of its freedom, not of rules. Rules are necessary where the direct action of the Spirit is not yet possible.

Initiation is the restoration of the Spirit's original condition, despite its human incarnation: we often think it loses this condition by identifying with the soul, by assuming it as the vehicle of correlation with bodily physicality. Physical corporeality imprints the soul, and the soul involves the ego. There is a preparatory phase that unfolds as the restoration of the Spirit's original relationship with the soul, or with the astral body: a relationship that has always been the focus of ascetic paths and mystery traditions, since within the soul operate deities opposed to the liberation of man as an individual being: hence, in ancient times, the process of Initiation required of the disciple an absolute detachment of the ego from the individual element: the ego and the higher astral were separated from corporeality and the 'lower' astral, and immersed in the Spiritual World, so that they might acquire the power to imprint the golden-solar element upon the physical etheric body.

In the modern world, Initiation—as a transcendence of the ordinary human condition—is possible, provided that asceticism is practiced not through paths leading to ecstasy or *samadhi*, but through the waking state realized at the level of the ego, superior to that of the ordinary astral: a conquest equivalent to the realization of consciousness that is kindled in sensory perception. And the state of wakefulness intensified so as to realize the presence of the Self in the soul, according to a condition devoid of meaning for the ancient ascetic. For the modern man, in fact, it is not the bodily structure that binds the soul, but the soul that, through desire, binds itself to that structure, due to a lack of awareness of its own spiritual essence at that level: a level to which it can now reach, as a spiritual element, only insofar as individual consciousness.

The state of wakefulness that must be brought to completion is that to which he has arrived through rational self-consciousness, experiencing the ego on the physical level in a way that was not possible for ancient man. Normally, thought attains its maximum intensity through its expression in sensory perception: outside of this, it possesses no intensity; deprived of the perceptual support, it becomes weak and abstract: the task of asceticism is to actualize conscious thought with the same intensity as when it is embedded in the sensory support.

Physicality in and of itself has a chaste structure, which enables it to enter into a direct relationship with the Spirit—a relationship of which human beings, immersed in the astral realm, are unaware. This chastity is perceivable through sensory perception, possible as an absolutely objective process, insofar as it is a direct relationship of the Spirit with corporeality through the sense organs. The instincts and passions that normally influence human judgment, altering its objectivity, have no power over the objective function of the sense organs.

The fact that through the sense organs man perceives only the sensible, being deprived of the supersensible, depends on the structure of these organs, which have changed over time so as to

convey the supersensible element—inseparable from the sensible form—less and less, until man began to identify the content with that form. But precisely because he was able to take appearance as reality, he was able to attain the possibility of freedom. For only a reality, in fact, can constrain thought, not an appearance. Thought, which possesses only the numerical and logical semblance of the real, is potentially free: it is conditioned by the measurability of the real, yet through this it harbors the illusion of totally dominating it.

However, despite its becoming a form of the sensible, the faculty of perception must be recognized in itself as supersensible: as such, however, it is not perceived, because for now consciousness is active at the level of appearance. The sense organs were constituted in such a way that the supersensible element would not disturb man's physical vision: necessary, in its exclusivity, for the period of his autonomous ego-individual experience; so that within this he might subsequently rediscover the Supersensible through his inner means.

A modern researcher of the supersensible must be able to explain how sensory experience itself leads to what he seeks. Perception, in its pure objectivity, independent of psychic influences, is a direct relationship of the Spirit with corporeality: a relationship which, as such, takes place at a level of consciousness corresponding to deep sleep. One of the fundamental techniques of solar asceticism, as we have seen (see "Pure Perception"), is to raise to consciousness, through contemplation, the extra-sensory relationship of the ego with the sensible in perception. The contemplative experience of the sensory process, through the perception of specific entities of the physical world, is one of the operations specifically aimed at the purification of the astral body—that is, at the relationship between the astral body and the ego—which prepares for Initiation and has been described as the attainment of essential morality: a purification of the soul and the body.

Pure perception is an inner experience possible only to modern man: unknown to the ancient, traditional ascetic, whose sensory perception was constitutionally guided by its own inner content. The inner content was congenial to sensory perception: the modern ascetic must conquer it through the will. *Pralaya*, as a technique of Yoga, was a discipline intended to liberate the corresponding inner activity from the sense organs, so as to utilize it for supersensible experience: whereas pure perception, possible for the ascetic of this age, consists in grasping the correlation within perception itself, in order to directly experience the metaphysical forces that the ego manifests, through the sense organs, in physical reality.

The corruption of the sensory data does not belong to sensory perception itself, but rather to the use made of it by the astral body as a “body of desire.” To the extent that thought pertains to the sensory content, that content is altered by it: thus the experimenter cannot grasp the direct relationship of the ego to the sensory. The perceptual content is always altered by the sentient soul and by the thought that pertains to it. Therefore, in the thought with which he ordinarily thinks, believing himself to be autonomous, man is essentially dominated by impulses of a physical nature, and thus passively led by *karma*. In this way, not being free, he undergoes his own *karma* and cannot recognize it as a force capable of acting even upon the physical.

Asceticism consists in liberating thought from the content of the senses. Thought thus liberated reveals a content that is proper to it, with an essence normally ignored because it is never brought to manifestation. This higher essence is experienced as the primordial current of the unbroken astral, and thus the source of the purification of the astral body itself. Going further in asceticism, a transcendent event is possible: in this current, the ascetic can encounter the presence of the Logos. The Logos, whom the ancient ascetics sought through the paths of ecstasy and *samadhi*, yoga, and the specific technique of *pranayama*, the ascetic of this age can find in the inner life of thought: an inner

life that, in its purest form, manifests as a power of absolute autonomy with respect to the lower elements of the astral, or the ordinary psyche. It is not yet the Logos, but its Threshold: it is up to the experimenter to cross the Threshold.

The type of thought in which the experience of the Logos is potential is the rational thought proper to modern man, as an activity foreign to the psyche: abstract thought formed in the one-sided, quantitative, logical-mathematical experience of the sensible. It is the thought of the “fall,” the thought of science, which, by binding itself to the senses, must ignore, as has been mentioned, the supersensible content of the world, in order to free itself from the ancient spiritual authority, knowing the world as quantity; but which, freed from the senses, thanks to the self-movement possible at that level, can rediscover within itself, as an autonomous essence, the lost primordial supersensible.

The impurity of the astral body, normally the bearer of corruption—that is, the distortion of the original force—is remedied by the presence of that original force within the inner sap of thought. This force expresses itself as the capacity to form rational concepts, which is a capacity of modern man, not of ancient man, who perceived universals as living entities outside himself. Modern man, however, uses concepts without knowing the force continually brought into play for their formation: asceticism is for him the experience of this force. As can be seen, these are forces of knowledge. It was said of this knowledge that it becomes a power of morality, insofar as it is the bearer of the original purity of the astral body.

Sensory experience can become the direct experience of the Spirit, to the extent that ‘liberated thought raises the astral body to its true level.’ Hand in hand with the liberation of thought, the disciple, through a specific technique, is able to gradually experience in sensory perception the direct relationship of the Self with the physical world. This relationship is in itself the act of absolute Transcendence within immanence, continually experienced by the perceiving human being and yet unconscious

to him. It is the mediating act through which the I encounters, on the physical level, the supersensible life of matter, or of the Principle that governs matter: a supersensible life never perceived as such in sensory perception. In this perception, the disciple has the opportunity to encounter the Threshold of the Spiritual World: he holds the key to the forces that flow from the Supersensible into the creative nature; simultaneously, by supporting physical life, he is able to divert them, through the processes of the soul, toward the sentient sphere, where they become instinctive powers.

In pure perception, as in pure thinking, the disciple holds the key to the ascetic discipline of feeling and willing, which can be experienced as the soul's primal forces. Such ascetic discipline called solar, because the inner force of thinking, feeling, and willing flows from the Solar Logos, or the spiritual Principle of the Sun, which is the essence of the I, but at the same time the supersensible Essence of the Earth. The inner structure of the Universe has the Solar Logos at its center, and this is present as essence within the I.

Initiation in the present age presupposes a purification of thought, because in thought the consciousness of the Self and its correlation with the sensible world is kindled. As we have seen, the power of the Self, in its pure but unconscious state, is present in sensory perception as the initial identity of the Spirit with the physical world. The disciplines must provide a way to experience within it the very force by which the modern rationalist forms the concept, obscurely tending to reconstitute the solar core of thought on the mental plane.

The content of Initiation is immutable, but its form requires a meditative preparation—one that responds to—the current conditions of the disciple's consciousness. For the present age, the preparation, as has been observed, is essentially the asceticism of pure thought, that is, of the very function by which thought is called upon to operate in the exercise of concentration and

meditation. Such a path, in its pure form, is the prerequisite for the disciplines.

SPIRITUAL HEALING

Spiritual Healing is a service that the ascetic can, where permitted, render to his fellow human beings by mediating certain conditions of their *karma*, thanks to an intuitive connection with the forces that manifest within it. Therefore, the healing of evil is possible only when requested for others, not for oneself: one's personal health must be the result of righteous asceticism.

Asceticism alone heals the ascetic daily of his own afflictions: therefore, he does not subordinate it to personal therapeutic ends: 1 ailments should not be healed through such subordination. On the other hand, there are ailments that the ascetic sometimes carries with him as aids that allow him, at a certain level, to show no respite from the animal lust for life, or as aids to the healing of others' ailments.

The disciple can be a healer not because he sets out to be one, but because he cultivates solar asceticism; thus he sometimes becomes a mediator of others' *karma*—he mediates the transmutational variations, by virtue of being free from *karma* and thus bearing the metaphysical Force of the Logos,

One becomes a spiritual healer precisely because one does not presume to be one; on the contrary, one carefully conceals this mediating power, always attributing the credit for a healing to others. In reality, there is no merit whatsoever: the ascetic can facilitate healing, in that he acts as a supplicant—of the transcendent intervention—that governs *karma*. One can be a healer, provided the world does not know it. Any title of healer attributed to the ascetic paralyzes his power: any *cliché* of a healer

with which he identifies prevents him from maintaining a lucid, karmic connection—the mediating function.

The healer who is not an ascetic capable of connecting with the Power that governs *karma*, and whose logic eludes all earthly logic, is not a true healer, but rather a physical bearer of forces capable of manifesting ethereally and acting mechanically upon the patient, giving him momentary relief from his ailment. These healers are useful within certain limits and to the extent that they conform to a rigorous discipline and a style of absolute impersonality—a truly rare occurrence—but in any case their intervention is only provisionally useful: and they themselves are compelled to a series of strains, if not pretences, of their power, when this, being bound to physical corporeality, fails to function or begins to wane with the body's aging: whereas the true ascetic has the opportunity for a deeper liberation of the mediating forces.

The ascetic can be a therapist insofar as he does not presume to be one and takes care not to appear as such. His method consists first and foremost in leading the patient to a moral examination of his own life, so that he may understand what must radically change within himself and, in this sense, make a commitment to himself: he leads the patient to appeal to the necessary forces of the ego himself, to arouse and nourish them, so that he may begin to be his own healer.

When it comes to actual illnesses, that is, organic diseases, healing can occur only on the condition of a decisive change in *karma*: a change that is granted by the Spiritual World, on the condition that an extraordinary change takes place within the patient's, as the removal of inner causes: but even in such a case, the prerequisite is the ego's appeal to the innermost primal Force, that is, to the Force that cannot be that of the ordinary ego. That the Principle of conversion, or of healing, or of renewal, is intimate to the ego may be the greatest obstacle to it, inasmuch as the ego identifies itself so completely with its own human

limitations that it cannot conceive of an inner Force beyond these limitations. The secret of the Logos, and indeed of every kind of healing, lies precisely in its being a Principle that operates absolutely beyond such limits.

The ascetic healer can cooperate in the transformation required of the patient's astral body, first of all by helping the patient become conscious of what must change within them, and simultaneously through deep prayer: which has the response of the Spiritual Principle, inasmuch as it is a request not for oneself but for others. The power of prayer derives from the fact that it arises from the ascetic's soul as the culmination of the highest impersonality, connected to his self-denial. This is an infinite dimension of prayer, which does indeed result from ascetic practice, but insofar as it is essentially granted by the Spiritual Principle itself.

The sick person may sometimes be healed in a miraculous way, but only insofar as the system of supersensible forces permits it, thanks to the fact that a human mediator—a conscious ascetic, not a *medium*, indeed the opposite of a *medium*—acts as a conduit for the forces. However, it is essential to bear in mind that it is not the virtue of the healer or their ability to use extrasensory forces that can bring about a healing, when this does not fall within the scope—however broad—of *karmic* variations.

The intervention of a force of Grace, as mentioned, is possible in relation to what the patient has been able to develop, even if only as an intuitive sense of his or her supersensible human condition. This genuine feeling, which is in fact an inner perception arising from suffering, can indeed be the gateway opened to Grace. But from the moment this force comes into action and healing is accomplished, it is necessary—so that its gift may be preserved intact over time—for the kindling of that feeling to become a daily ritual: a living memory, always accessible to the soul, as an element of life—as necessary to it as oxygen is to physical breathing. The forgetting of the gift and the

cessation of gratitude are a gateway decisively reopened to the destructive forces, which were exceptionally dominated at the moment of danger by the restorative forces.

THE FUNCTION OF SUFFERING

The function of suffering is always to rescue the soul from craving. For craving to return as the current of the Self, and for the Creative to be able to operate in the depths of the soul, down to the etheric and the physical, pain arises. This takes shape from any event that seems to provoke it. In essence, pain, required by the spiritual depths of the soul, makes use of that event. One must not be deceived by the thought that, were it not for that specific event, pain would not arise.

Pain is a call from the depths, arising when one is incapable of a movement into the depths in accordance with conscience, or asceticism: when the call has weakened and become a form, *a routine*, a habit devoid of inner life.

When suffering ceases, the soul normally has no real relationship with the world, unless there is desire. This prepares the way for further pain: unless one follows the asceticism capable of transforming the power of desire into the power of the Self. For the ascetic, however, suffering continues, alongside the contribution of knowledge, according to a changed relationship with its function. He who exhausts his individual debt deserves to accept that of others.

The obsessive persistence of suffering is essentially a power of the ego, diverted: the ascetic can assume it, without changing the mediation: referring the content to the ego, up to its sensory expression.

When the craving, which normally dominates man down to the physical level, is removed only partially and therefore remains

as an impulse in the physical etheric, the conditions for illness are set: for the neuropsychic illness, with its range of degrees, and, where the impulse in this form is not exhausted, for true illness.

Illness is, in this sense, the form of the repression of desire in the organic depths, which the ego is incapable of achieving through asceticism or catharsis. It is a radical demand of the astral, to which the current of the ego, operating as the life of consciousness, responds only partially, so that the ego is led to act directly according to its original relationship with the physical Lethe, within the realm of *karma*. The limits of this sphere can be removed by the ego in the event that, under the impulse of the disease, its forces are capable of a specific metaphysical action. This specific action can be performed consciously: through asceticism, it can establish a communion with the Entities of the Hierarchies that govern the affairs of the etheric-physical organism through *karma*.

The ego's action on the physical is, in any case, mediated by the Hierarchies. In reality, man has no direct power other than that of thought: this power of thought is what can be received by the Hierarchies and transformed into human destiny.

Suffering is a continuous unconscious cooperation of thought with the action of the Hierarchies. The healing of suffering is the conscious elevation of thought to the level at which autonomously cooperates with the Hierarchies. Through discipline, thought carries out its pure imaginative movement and realizes the possibilities inherent at that level.

INTERNAL CRISIS

In the gradual work of purification, dissolution, and recombination of the soul's forces, the disciple may experience moments of tension, struggle, or despondency, which are in fact

indicative of inner tasks or trials: moments inherent to the experience.

If he fails to recall the meaning of such moments and does not draw upon the central principle of the Self—whose crystallization requires precisely a radical confrontation with the fragments of the “un-self”—the situation may become severe and, if not adequately controlled, pathological. The disciple who is overwhelmed by such a situation faces an event that lies within his own: he must go back and start all over again. His wisdom is precisely the humility to start all over again: in doing so, he draws upon true strength, perhaps with an immediacy and purity previously unknown to him.

In the moment of crisis, however, the disciple can be active, to the point of mastering the phenomenon and drawing from it further self-knowledge: the extra strength he actually needs. Moments of difficulty are for him the reappearance of an old limit, of an identical limit that demands to be overcome, because in fact, deep down, he has decided to overcome it.

In the moment of crisis, the art is not to resist: through a minimal act of awareness, to allow the disjointed currents of the soul to move freely, so as to arrive at contemplating them. This is what we call inner *judo*. In this initiative, which appears to be a renunciation of the path, but is merely the search for an initial state of autonomy, one recognizes a moment that passes through and, through this knowing, begins to take the reins of the process. The small *chaos* of the soul is possible thanks to the illegitimate use, by obstructing Entities, of forces that belong to the soul and that the Ego has the task of recovering. In not resisting, in not opposing, in desiring to contemplate, the soul begins to gather its own forces.

The forces of the soul receive their pure circuit from the presence of the ego. The ego begins to be present where it begins to operate autonomously: this is initially contemplation. In contemplating, the ego begins to be independent, and in its

independence gathers around itself the forces of the soul: that is, the thinking, feeling, and willing involved in the chaotic crisis. The ego must begin to operate within the soul: but in doing so, it realizes its own cognitive immobility in relation to the chaotic mobility of the soul—which is not the soul.

The soul is still unknown to man, inasmuch as the ego has not yet penetrated it in the waking state. There is a deep zone of the soul, unknown to the ego, because it is occupied by obstructive entities, whose action within the soul is mistaken by the soul for its own action. The initial movement of the soul's liberation is suffering, but the obstructing entities also take possession of this, inserting aversion and fear into it.

In fact, the first positive movement of the ego within the soul is the experience of its own powerlessness: this enables it to realize the “zero” that is necessary for it to move of its own accord, *ex se*. Surrender, non-resistance, and the recognition of the state of powerlessness lead the ego to that foundation of itself from which it can move—that is, assert the power of its own metaphysical immobility in relation to the chaotic movements of the soul.

The movement of the ego is the feeling of being a stranger to the chaotic movements of the soul, of viewing them as something external. In this contemplation flows the strength of the ego within the soul: this strength is withdrawn from the chaotic currents. The strength of the ego, which is the power of its centrality—unassailable and its exercise unoverthrown—operates insofar as one is capable of evoking it. The intense remembrance that within the ego lies the absolutely unassailable power is already a surfacing of the ego's presence. The crisis of soliloquy takes hold due to the absence of memory of the ego.

The memory of the Self actualizes the presence of a transcendent Power, which, even if unseen, is the absolute lord of the soul's forces. One must remember that one is in reality the Subject of the movements: the experiencer, not the one subjected

to experience, with respect to the soul's movements. Then the soul revives.

Technically, the task is to isolate oneself as the ego from the soul's situation, so as to have it objectively before oneself. Non-resistance is letting go of the chaotic currents; it is, in essence, the first movement of the ego: subsequently, the ego immerses itself or sinks into *the depths* of the soul, yet its state is not one of backwardness, but rather a descent with its resolving power into the sphere of the Will, where a struggle actually takes place. Surrendering, yielding volitionally, immersing oneself in the inner state, is essentially an entry of the ego into the depths of the soul with its reordering force. It is clear, however, that such a descent of the ego must be prepared through a specific asceticism of the imagination and the will.

The art is not to fight, so as to let the ego fight. This is the secret of victory in every trial of the soul. Not fighting, undoubtedly similar to the Stoic non-action, is essentially the art of not agitating the soul involved, that is, the way of avoiding reacting with the tension and weakness of the soul. It is a matter of working to connect the problem with the Self: chaotic movements with the Self, weaknesses with the Self, the soul with the Self: unloading everything onto the Self, that is, the Principle that can indeed sustain everything. The greater the weight it bears, the more it strengthens itself within the soul.

Here one can understand the true meaning of painful trials: they are always a call for the presence of the Self—the stimulus for man to realize that he carries within himself the Force that can do all things. Instead, he is foolishly led to rely, as in ancient times, on the soul, through which he once legitimately united with the Atman or the Tao or the Buddha.

The ascetic of this age must attain the wisdom to walk the path of the Self. Traditional methods do not lead him to the Self, but to the soul and the body: they bind him even more to the psychosomatic nature, that is, to his weakness.

Only the Self can descend into the soul and the body and come to know the soul's involuted forces, passing through them without being touched, thereby rectifying them. This descent of the Self is, in essence, an ascent: a perception of the original forces. The essence of the Self is the Principle of invulnerability and of absolute identity with the creative Entities of the world: the Principle that knows no contradictions, but only univocity. The presence of the Logos in the ego, as its innermost essence, is not merely the possibility of healing every kind of failure of the soul's forces, but the path to reconciliation with things, with one's neighbor, with the world, but above all the principle of the restoration of that which is original and cosmic in the structure of the soul, through trials: which in reality are brief moments of death.

ANXIETY

Anguish is the psychic resonance of an altered physical condition, almost always a nervous breakdown, which fails to develop into a full-blown illness. In this sense, it must be addressed therapeutically on the physical plane: internally, the causes must be removed, but first they must be identified. From an occult perspective, we are in the presence of a "vampiric" force that has managed to reach the physical organism, from where it exerts its power over the etheric and astral bodies.

For inner therapy, a key image: anxiety as a stagnant pool into which one must let the strongest current flow to set it in motion and make it flow. One must use anxiety as a vehicle for a more powerful flow to which to open the channel. Overcoming anxiety is always the beginning of a more stable equilibrium of the soul.

A technique: discover within oneself the psychophysical contraction that serves as a defense against anguish, and release it. Do not resist the anguish, but let it be until it reaches its fullest expression: achieve a sense of calm helplessness in the face of it.

Use it as a support to which to surrender, until you realize the sense of futility of any oppositional effort: which, in truth, is part of it. The sense of helplessness and futility must be pushed to the limit, until you give it your whole being, allowing all one's strength to coincide with it: surrendering to a state of annihilation—zero, the principle of calm, but simultaneously the state necessary for the Higher Self to take the initiative and act with its authority.

Zero is the deliberate annihilation of the will to live. Anxiety, in fact, is nothing but the sign of a disappointed will to live: a disappointment that bites deep into the very flesh. We must strive toward zero as toward a pure nothingness, a functional ataraxia: into which we must plunge, as into an abyss, letting ourselves fall as if dead. We must die to that which, in such moments, seeks to assert itself in spite of us: the state of anguish, which tends to annihilate us. We must utilize its power of annihilation, to the point of a voluntary annihilation. We must take this process to its deepest depths, until all willpower is exhausted. Such an exhaustion of will, if one observes it, amounts to an offering of oneself to the spiritual Principle. At this point, in fact, the ego has a clear path: it can no longer retreat into the darkness of the soul but must establish its strength and its security.

The transformation of anxiety, becoming meditation, leads to the threshold of the ego. In reality, anxiety is a demand of the ego: it obscurely and intensely demands the awakening of the ego. It presents itself with the insistent fixity of a force of nature, which must be countered by an equal power of conscious insistence: that of concentrated, profound action, which makes possible the action of the liberating Force. Such concentration can directly leverage the power of basal inertia (see “Inner Crisis”), which is the bodily *manifestation* of the deepest will.

Weariness is almost always illusory, whatever its form: the rest that eliminates it is always a process, independent of the physical body and, in that sense, capable of acting radically upon it.

In the fatigue of the muscular system, the disciple has the opportunity for that positive surrender of the physical organism to itself, which fosters the activity of thought free from physicality, and yet simultaneously the maximum rest of the latter. He can use the condition of physical fatigue as a vehicle for bodily calm—which is essentially inner calm—because in such a condition the etheric body spontaneously tends to free itself from the consciousness bound to the physical organism. In essence, the disciple has at his disposal the state of physical relaxation brought about by concentration and meditation.

The only possible obstacle to the inner utilization of fatigue is the easy onset of sleep, following an impulse of spontaneous surrender to it, regained precisely thanks to the inner attitude. It is up to the disciple to resist this invitation of sleep, or to use it to free himself from fatigue. It should be noted, however, that apart from such a deliberate surrender to rest, sleep is an obstacle to meditation: it is the means by which the lower nature reasserts itself, annihilating the transformation produced by concentration and meditation. This case, of course, has nothing to do with the need for normal nightly rest.

Fatigue affects only the nervous system. This phenomenon must be viewed in light of the following principle: in reality, only the physical brain becomes fatigued, not the etheric current that manifests itself through it as thought, nor, therefore, the etheric body. The etheric current from which thought arises, beyond the dialectical threshold of consciousness, is by its very nature inexhaustible: indeed, the more it is called upon to bestow its activity, the more it is strengthened.

Thought, independent of the brain, could think indefinitely, thereby strengthening itself ever more. It is the physical instrument of thought, the brain, that tires, not thought itself. Precisely because thought is bound to its physical instrument—and thus to sensory impressions, feelings, and related impulses—its physical instrument tires, deteriorates, and becomes the seat of

disturbances in psychic life, the source of nervous disorders, depressions, anxieties, and the related series of illnesses.

The true healer of fatigue, as of every disturbance of the nervous system, is the thought that achieves its autonomy from the nervous system and, in the etheric sphere, unites the soul with the ego. Thought can enable the etheric body to act upon the physical body as it does during sleep. In reality, during concentration, the thought that focuses on a single point produces in the remaining consciousness a condition of detachment of the ego and the astral from the etheric-physical, analogous to that which occurs during sleep: a condition of sleep near the highest state of wakefulness, in which the edifying action of the ego is possible,

Normally, thought must be connected to sensory life in order to be awake and conscious, since it is not capable of a state of wakefulness and self-awareness based on its own extracorporeal principle—that is, without sensory support, which is to say without the mediation of the cerebral system. It is this mediation that binds the life of the soul to the nervous system more than is necessary, and is therefore the source not only of fatigue and the various forms of the emergence of emotional-instinctive life, but of all physical ailments.

The overcoming of fatigue, as of every physical and psychological ailment, always comes from a restored circulation of the Light of Life, that is, of the *dynamis* of the etheric body. One can understand what the required technique is in this sense, if one takes into account that the dynamic sphere of the body in its formative, or pre-dialectical, moment is precisely the etheric body. The formative power of thought is an etheric force. Concentration and meditation, when they conform to the specific canon of the human being of this age—a canon called “solar,” inasmuch as it corresponds to the soul’s relationship with the Solar Logos—appeal to the etheric current whose metaphysical source is the Sun, and whose essential center is the human heart, certainly not the physical heart. The disciple who

possesses concentration and meditation can, through the solar canon, direct the currents of the etheric body: which in this way reunite his human being with the Principle that bears the Divine within (See, “Initiatic Principles”, etc.).

THE JOY OF EXISTENCE

The joy of existence is always a deception of the soul that craves bodily life rather than its own life. True is the joy of being: that which the soul knows, when it experiences sensations as incorporeal while held within the corporeal: a content that has nothing to do with the corporeal instrument through which it manifests, being in reality a soul experience of the Self: normally ignored.

It is not the sensations that are deceptive, but the soul’s swoon within them: the joy of the swoon is the pleasure of escaping, or of sleeping, or of avoiding (the struggle, of shirking responsibility, of evading inner discipline. The joy of this swoon is commonly taken for the joy of existence. This joy regularly paves the way for pain: it is deceptive, because it ignores its own real content independent of the senses—a content whose true function is to nourish the soul, not its dependence on the senses.

Joy is rarely pure; yet it can always be made pure, provided one recognizes its resonance within the soul as a process in itself—one that is not perceptible: then it becomes of the soul and of life. Even joy that is considered inner is linked to the senses, due to the fact that modern man has a mental life founded on the nervous system, yet devoid of awareness of the metaphysical element of thought: an element that expresses itself dialectically through cerebral nervous processes, while being in itself independent of them.

Normally dependent on the senses, joy is always the prerequisite for pain. It is not an error as a sensation, but insofar

as it is a sensation that enslaves the soul: it inevitably prepares the way for pain, in that it opens the soul to vibrations that are not in accord with its essential nature—indeed, they oppose it. Events that appear painful as external facts are always aroused by the pain the soul requires as a corrective to the ephemeral condition of sensual joy—in which authentic joy, as an event of the soul, is excluded. In reality, it is the ego that is excluded.

The joy of being and the joy of serving the Divine, or of expressing the Divine within the soul, coincide. When joy is not identical to the joy of serving the Divine, it is a precursor to pain. The joy of existing, due to the contradiction it carries within itself, is the continuous precursor of pain, necessary for the soul to discover the supersensible content of which it is continually deprived in the sensible realm.

Physical joy, always sought, is never truly possessed: to possess it metaphysically is its ultimate meaning. The craving for it is never satisfied, because the soul seeks its own content in a sensation that continually eliminates it, so that it seeks it in the next sensation, in which it loses it again: being led to grasp it in ever-new sensations, through a craving that gradually strengthens itself.

The ascetic experiences pure joy, because he trains the soul to feel every pleasure, not as its own ecstasy but as its own content, separable from the sensory form. In another region of the soul, he feels the blissful Indine arise that previously seemed to him to arise from the senses. In reality, this arises through the senses, but belongs to the higher soul, being connected with the action of elevated cosmic Entities: for it is a movement of love, whose ultimate meaning, or real meaning, is solely to be offered to the Spiritual World. There is no joy in the physical world whose essential purpose is not this offering; every joy that escapes this consecration is a theft perpetrated in the constellations of the Super-sensible; therefore, it secretly prepares sorrow.

In reality, the soul's swooning in sensual joy is the exclusion of that part of the soul where the Self is present, the element of the soul that is divine in itself: it is not a matter of forbidding oneself the normal joy of the senses and the spontaneous immersion in it, but of referring it each time—and this is possible in some cases even at a later stage—to the innermost self, to the ego: to the contemplation and penetration of the spiritual, to bringing it forth. Within the ego is the Divine.

Enjoyment, which is normally the path of man's animalization, can become a vehicle of the Spirit: a magical vehicle. The ascetic trains himself, through certain sensations of joy, to extract from them the pure motion of the soul; the *dynamis* of the Light of Life, according to the true path. He learns the art of separating the Light-content of sensations from sensual ecstasy, which is the continuous destruction of that content. For a similar technique, see the entry "Pure Perception".

DIET

Diet is not a decisive factor on the spiritual path: nevertheless, at a certain stage of development, a diet in accordance with the knowledge of the effects of substances on the subtle bodies has its importance.

The meat-based diet, due to the nature of this food, leaves certain deep, astral-etheric assimilative forces dormant within the disciple; these forces are instead called upon to act when confronted with the vegetable element, as they must elevate the substance of the latter to the level of animal organization. Even deeper volitional forces are called upon to act in the presence of the mineral element: which, in essence, is currently the case with medicinal substances. Thus, *tea* hinders concentration, while coffee promotes it. Legumes carry an element of "tamnic" heaviness, due to their lack of the solar element capable of

stimulating the activity of the organism's etheric solar element, while grains nourish without causing heaviness. 1 Tubers in general, and the potato in particular, require a digestion that exerts a negative influence on the specific activity of the central nervous system, to the detriment of the inner faculties that can be aroused through independence from that system.

But the true physical opponent of the Spirit in the organism is alcohol. According to Rudolf Steiner, a person's relationship with alcohol undergoes a transformation when they also imbibe supersensible knowledge etherically. Alcohol, in fact, is something absolutely unique in the realms of Nature: it manifests itself in the human organism not only as a source of heaviness, but above all directly as a force antagonistic to the inner impulse of the ego. If we observe plants in general, we see how, in their organization, they normally exert a force only up to a certain point; an exception is the vine, which extends this force beyond that point. That is to say, while other plants reserve all their vegetative force solely for the new shoot—a force that is otherwise reserved only for the new shoot and does not flow into the rest of the plant—in the grape cluster, this force also flows in a specific way into the pulp of the fruit, in such a way, through so-called fermentation, through the transformation of what is formed in the grape—and in it is brought to maximum tension—something is created that actually possesses a force comparable only to that which the human ego exerts upon the blood. That which, therefore, develops as alcohol from the grape juice is something created in another sphere of Nature, being similar to what the human being must create when the ego exerts an action upon the blood.”

“We are familiar,” continues Rudolf Steiner, “with the inner relationship of the ego to the blood. It can already be characterized externally by the fact that when shame is felt by the ego, the flush of it rises to the person's face; when fear or terror is felt in the ego, the person turns pale. This action of the ego on the blood, however present in it, is occultly entirely analogous to that which occurs when the process of the plant is reversed, so

that what is, for example, in the pulp of the grape, originating from the vegetative process, is transformed into alcohol. The ego, as has been said, must normally create in the blood a process—speaking occultly, not chemically—that is entirely analogous to the one that is brought about when, so to speak, the process of organizing the grape pulp is reversed, yielding a chemical product, alcohol. The result is that, through alcohol, something is introduced into the organism that acts upon it just as the ego acts upon the blood. That is, with alcohol, an antagonistic ego is introduced, in direct opposition to the action of the Spiritual Ego. In reality, an internal war is unleashed, or, in the final analysis, everything that emanates from the ego is condemned to impotence when alcohol is set against it as an antagonist. This is the hidden reality. The person who does not drink alcohol ensures the full possibility of acting with his ego upon the blood; the person who drinks alcohol acts just like someone who wants to tear down a wall and, while pushing from one side, simultaneously places someone else to push against it from the other. In precisely this way, through the use of alcohol, the activity of the ego on the blood is eliminated. Therefore, those who make spiritual science the nourishment of their lives perceive the effect of alcohol on the blood as a direct struggle against their ego, and they know that true spiritual evolution encounters a serious impediment if this opposition is allowed to arise.” (From the lecture series *The Occult Evolution*).

Furthermore, on the same subject, Steiner states: “Alcohol must be avoided at all costs. A vegetarian diet is not essential, but it is beneficial” (from “*Guidelines for Esoteric Practice*”). “Of course, when one wishes to develop the astral body, the most important practices will be meditation and concentration. It is particularly important to avoid alcohol in any form: even sweets filled with alcohol have a harmful effect. Alcohol and spiritual exercises are therefore on dangerous ground...” (From a lecture in 1904)

Furthermore: “Rudolf Steiner was once asked what influence alcohol might have on a disciple following the specific occult path. He replied: “There is no answer to this question: for if one is an occult disciple, one cannot drink alcohol” (from: L. Kleeberg, *Wege und Welten*).

“A member once asked R. Steiner what inner consequences a member of the ‘esoteric class’ should expect if they drank alcohol. The answer was: “Then they are not a member of the class” (from: Simonis, “German Bulletin,” no. 67).

“Whoever wishes to understand the doctrine of reincarnation and rise above the transitory personality must abstain from drinking wine. Whoever drinks wine will never attain the vision of what is impersonal or spiritual” (from a lecture on March 17, 1905).

“There was a time in human history when wine was unknown. In the times alluded to in the Vedas, it was known only as ‘apta.’ In those times when men knew no alcoholic beverages, the idea of previous existences and the plurality of lives was widespread throughout the world, and no one doubted it. Since humanity began to drink wine, the idea of reincarnation rapidly dimmed and eventually vanished from the collective consciousness: it remained intact only among the Initiates, who abstained from drinking it. For alcohol veils memory, obscuring it in its innermost depths. Wine brings forgetfulness, it is said. This is not merely a psychological, momentary oblivion, but an organic, lasting one—a darkening of the etheric body’s power of memory. Therefore, when people began to drink wine, they gradually lost the spontaneous sense of reincarnation” (from *Christian Esotericism* by E. Schure: a reworking of lectures given by R. Steiner in Paris in May 1906, English translation by Bruno Roselli).

INITIATIC RULES

Initiatic rules given by Rudolf Steiner to the disciples of the Esoteric School in 1912 (English translation by the author).

The following describes the conditions that form the basis of initiatory preparation in the present time. It is not possible to make progress in this direction, through measures in either the outer or inner life, without fulfilling these conditions. All meditations, concentrations, and other exercises become worthless, and even harmful in certain respects, if life is not ordered according to the aforementioned conditions. It is not a matter of giving strength to the human being: one can only develop the strengths already existing within him. On their own, they do not develop, because they are opposed by external and internal obstacles. External obstacles are eliminated through the following rules of life. Internal ones are addressed through specific instructions on meditation and concentration.

I) The first condition is to achieve perfectly clear thinking. To this end, one must—even if only for a short time each day, at least five minutes (the longer, the better)—free oneself from the chaotic, frivolous flurry of thoughts. One must become the master of one's own world of thought. One is not a master of external situations—a profession or any tradition, social relationships, and even belonging to a particular people—the demands of specific moments of the day, the need to carry out a specific task, etc., dictate a certain type of thought and the way it is carried out. In that brief moment, one must therefore, of one's own free will, completely empty the mind of the usual daily flow of thoughts and, on one's own initiative, place a single thought at its center. One must not believe that this must be a lofty or interesting thought. Since what must be achieved is an inner state, it is even better attained if, at the outset, one strives to choose a subject that is as uninteresting as possible. In this way,

the autonomous power of thinking is stimulated more effectively, and it is this that matters, whereas an interesting topic itself carries thinking along with it. It is better to undertake this task of controlling one's thoughts with the topic "the pin" rather than with "Napoleon the Great."

One says to oneself: "I start from this thought and, through pure inner initiative, associate with it everything that can be appropriately connected to it." At the end of the exercise, the thought must stand before the soul just as colorful and vivid as at the beginning. Practice this exercise day by day, for at least a month: each day one can set a new thought; one can, however, maintain the same thought for several days. At the end of the exercise (11th phase), try to bring to full awareness the feeling of inner firmness and serenity, which, with more subtle attention, you will soon be able to notice in your own soul: concentrate on a point somewhat inside the forehead, between the eyebrows. Conclude (third phase) by imagining a line extending directly from this point toward the nape of the neck and descending along the midline of the back (from the brain to the spine), as if you were pouring that feeling into that part of the body.

II) Once you have practiced in this way for a month, add a further requirement. Try to impose upon yourself any action that, in the ordinary course of life, you would certainly not perform. Transform this action into a daily duty. It is therefore advisable to choose an action that can be performed every day for a long period. And it is even better if you begin with an insignificant action, which, so to speak, you must force yourself to do. For example, set a goal to water a plant—one you have specifically purchased—every day at a set time. After some time, a second action should be added to the first, then a third, and so on, until you can do it without interfering with the other duties of the day.

This exercise must also last at least a month. But, as far as possible, even during this second month, one must continue the first exercise, though not treating it, as in the first month, as an exclusive duty: one must not stop it, otherwise one will soon

notice how the fruits of the first month are lost and how the usual flow of uncontrolled thoughts is beginning again. One must take care that the results, once achieved, are not lost. When one has sufficiently mastered this action, performed on one's own initiative through the second exercise, one must become aware, with subtle attention, within the soul of the inner impulse that has arisen (II time). One must then, so to speak, pour this feeling into one's own body, so that it flows from the head to the heart (III time).

III) In the third month, the practice of equanimity must be placed at the center of life, that is, the cultivation of the soul's equality in the face of the fluctuations between pleasure and suffering, joy and pain: the "raising of cries of jubilation to Heaven and being afflicted unto death" must be consciously replaced by a stable disposition of the soul. Care must be taken that no joy carries us away, and that no sorrow overwhelms us; no experience should lead us to anger or boundless anxiety; no expectation should fill us with anguish or fear; no situation should disturb our normal equilibrium, etc.

Do not fear that this exercise will lead to dryness or apathy. Rather, one will notice that in place of what is lost through this exercise, luminous qualities of the soul arise, and, thanks to subtle attention, one will one day be able to feel an inner stillness in the body (The Time). As in the two previous cases, let this feeling flow through the body in the same way, causing it to radiate from the heart to the hands, then to the feet, and finally to the head (II tempo). Such an operation should not be required after every single exercise, since, in fact, one is not dealing with a single exercise, but rather with a continuous, direct attention to the life of the soul. At least once a day, one must bring this inner stillness to mind before the soul and then undertake the exercise of letting it flow from the heart. With the exercises of the first and second months, proceed as with the exercise of the first month in the second.

IV) In the fourth month, one must adopt as a new practice what is known as “positivity.” It consists of seeking out what is good, excellent, beautiful, and so on, in all experiences, entities, and things. This very quality is effectively illustrated by a Persian legend about Jesus Christ. As He was walking along a road with His disciples, they saw a dead dog, already in a state of decay, lying on the roadside: they all looked away from that sight in revulsion; only Christ stopped, looked thoughtfully at the dog, and said, “What wonderful teeth this animal had!” Where others had seen only the repulsive, the unpleasant, He found the beautiful. Thus, the esoteric disciple must aim to seek the positive in every manifestation and in every being. He will soon observe that beneath the shell of the repulsive, even beneath the guise of a criminal, something good is hidden; beneath the appearance of a madman, the divine soul is still concealed.

This exercise is connected in some way with what is called “abstention from criticism.” This should not be understood as if one were to call black white and white black; there is, however, a difference between a judgment that springs from the contingent personality and decides according to sympathy or antipathy, and the point of view whereby one places oneself, filled with love, within the outer manifestation or in another being, asking in every case: ‘How is it that he comes to be and act in this way?’ Such an attitude immediately sets out to help what is imperfect, rather than merely blaming or criticizing it. Here the objection cannot be raised that the living conditions of many people require them to blame and judge, given that these conditions prevent the person concerned from receiving a proper occult education. Indeed, there are conditions of life that largely make such an education impossible. The disciple should not, however, impatiently expect to make progress that is usually achievable only under certain conditions. If, for a month of practice, he consciously directs his experiences toward a positive vision, he will gradually (over time) observe that a feeling arises within him, as if his being were becoming permeable on all sides and as if his soul were opening widely to all the subtle and occult access points

of his inner being, which previously escaped his attention entirely. It is precisely a matter of combating the lack of attention that exists in every person regarding such subtle things.

Once it has been observed that the feeling described manifests in the soul as a kind of bliss, one should then (for a while) try to mentally direct this feeling toward the heart, to let it flow from there to the eyes and from the eyes into the space around oneself. One will notice that as a result of this, an intimate relationship with space is achieved. One grows, so to speak, outside of oneself. One also learns to regard a part of one's surroundings as something that belongs to oneself. It is necessary to apply great concentration to this exercise and, above all, to recognize that every tumultuous, passionate, or emotionally charged element acts destructively upon the aforementioned spiritual disposition. When repeating the exercises during the first few months, one should continue to follow the instructions given for the preceding months.

V) In the fifth month, one should strive to cultivate within oneself the attitude of approaching any new experience with an open mind. The disciple must decisively rid himself of that attitude whereby, regarding everything that has just been heard or seen, he usually says to himself: 'I have never heard this, I have never seen this; I do not believe it; it is an illusion'

He must be ready at any moment to face a new experience. What he has hitherto regarded as regular and customary must not be an obstacle to the discovery of a new truth. Even if expressed in radical terms, it is absolutely true that if someone approaches a disciple and says: "You know, the tower of Church X has been completely leaning since last night," he nevertheless leaves an opening for such a novelty—that is, for the possibility that his previous understanding of natural laws may have been expanded by this seemingly unprecedented event. Whoever turns their attention in the fifth month to acquiring this disposition will notice (The Time) a feeling arising in their soul, as if in that space mentioned in connection with the exercise of the fourth month,

something were coming to life: as if something were awakening within it. This feeling is extraordinarily delicate and subtle. One must strive to carefully perceive (III time) this subtle vibration in the environment and allow it to flow, so to speak, through all five senses—that is, through the eyes, ears, and skin, since the skin contains the sense of warmth.

At this stage, the disciple must not direct their inner attention to the impressions flowing through the lower senses such as taste, smell, and touch: it is not yet possible for them to discern the numerous negative influences that mingle with the positive ones existing at that level. It is therefore advisable for the disciple to postpone the ascetic practice of these sensations until the next stage.

At the conclusion of the five exercises, in the sixth month one must finally attempt to systematically resume them all alternating them regularly. As a result of this, a harmonious balance of the soul gradually forms: one will notice, that is, how the bitterness related to the conflict between the appearance and reality of the world vanishes entirely. A conciliatory disposition toward all experiences takes hold of the soul—which is not indifference, but rather, on the contrary, renders one capable of working toward the improvement of the world. A calm understanding begins to emerge for things that were previously of no interest to the soul. Even one's gait and gestures change under the influence of these exercises, and one day the disciple may even observe that his handwriting has taken on a different character: he may consider himself at the first step of the spiritual ascent.

As we have seen, the initiatory discipline comprises three stages: the first is the basic exercise, which acts upon the bond between the etheric and physical bodies; the second is the contemplative attention directed toward certain aspects of the resolution of that bond; the third is the orientation of the etheric currents that thus come into being: I) from the head to the spine, II) from the head, through the heart, into the body, III) from the heart to the whole person, IV) from the heart, through the eyes,

into the surrounding environment, V) a return movement, from the animated environment, toward our being.

The third phase of the third exercise can serve as a synthesis, in which the pentagram is traced through its movements, using the image of oneself with arms spread horizontally: following a line that goes from the heart to the right arm down to the hand and returns, turning downward to the left foot, then rising again upward to the point between the eyebrows, flowing back with a similar straight line downward to the right foot, and finally rising toward the left arm up to the hand: from there it returns to the heart to repeat the movement.

Once again, two recommendations must be emphasized: First, that the five exercises paralyze the harmful influence caused by other occult exercises, so that only what is beneficial remains of them. The second is that they alone ensure the positive outcome of the work of meditation and concentration. For the esotericist, even the pure and simple, albeit conscientious, observance of current morality is not sufficient, since this morality can be subtly egoistic, where the disciple, for example, acts righteously to appear righteous, or to consider himself righteous. The esotericist does not do good in order to be considered or to consider himself good, but rather because he knows that only good causes the soul to progress from degree to degree, while evil, stupidity, and ugliness place obstacles on the path to this.