

ENTERING THE INNER BEING OF NATURE

Since *Riddles of the Soul* was first published, Rudolf Steiner has continually enlarged on his far-reaching discovery of the three principles of the human organism—particularly, their relationships with one another through repeated earthly lives. The head forms the completion of evolution. It is the result of the prenatal work of the I—its experience of the cosmos as reflected in the head.¹ Thus, the head forms a sphere.²

The sense organs are concentrated in the head, and because of them the cosmos is able to see physically and etherically into the human being during earthly life. But again, each individual sense organ is, in all its details, a copy of the whole human being.³ In one lecture, for example, Steiner showed how the various parts of the ear represent an entire human being in miniature. In the head, the etheric body corresponds almost entirely with the physical body. The complete entry of the etheric body resulted during the course of human evolution in the possibility of self-awareness.⁴ Because past evolution is portrayed in the head, and because the “I” has imprinted its being there, the head serves internally as a physical and etheric mirror for the “I”-being between birth and death, just as it does externally for the cosmos.⁵ “I”-awareness arises through the reflection of consciousness and the other principles of the head.

The Leading Thoughts that follow contain profound words for understanding the physical out of the spiritual.

35. We understand the physical nature of the human being only when we view it as an image of soul and spirit. By itself, our physical substance is incomprehensible. Nevertheless, it is a picture of the soul and spirit in different ways in its various aspects. As a perceivable image of soul and spirit, the head is the most perfect and complete. Everything related to the system of metabolism and limbs is like an unfinished, or unformed, picture; however, it is still being worked on. And finally, everything related to the

1 See *The Spiritual Guidance of the Individual and Humanity*, pp. 62ff.

2 See *Earthly Death and Cosmic Life*, lecture 2.

3 For a thorough discussion by Steiner concerning the formation and activity of the senses, see *Anthroposophy (A Fragment)*, chaps. 2 and 7.

4 See *Rosicrucian Wisdom*, lecture 12; also *Cosmic Memory: Prehistory of Earth and Man*, chapter 18.

5 See *The Effects of Esoteric Development*, lecture 2; and *Human and Cosmic Thought*, lecture 4.

human rhythmic organization—the relationship of soul and spirit to the body—exists between these opposites.

36. When we contemplate the human head from this spiritual viewpoint, we find that it helps us to understand spiritual *imaginations*. In the forms of the head, *imaginative* forms are coagulated, as it were, to the point of physical density.

37. Similarly, when we contemplate the rhythmic aspect of the human organization, it helps us to understand *inspirations*. The character of *inspiration* is demonstrated by the physical appearance of the life rhythms—even presenting a sense-perceptible picture. Finally, in the system of the metabolism and the limbs, when we observe the full activity of its necessary or possible functions, we have a picture—suprasensory yet sensible—of pure spiritual *intuitions*.

The physical world is all surface to us. We try in vain to penetrate physically the inner being of an object. If we break it apart, we only create new surfaces that again obstruct entry. *The inner being is always spiritual*. When we emerge from sleep into physical consciousness, we often notice that dreams, as free-floating images—especially colors—spread over objects of the physical world and form their surface.⁶ Likewise, we can experience, when falling asleep, how the surface of the physical world frees itself from objects. Wherever there is surface, the inner corresponds to the outer; surface constitutes the boundary.

Mathematics makes it easy to picture this phenomenon. Let us imagine a mathematical sphere; its surface forms the boundary between inner and outer. Before the sphere's boundary was established, inner and outer formed a whole; thus, according to the law of the sphere itself, every point, every form of what is within, must have a corresponding form outside. Projective geometry addresses this matter.

Through detailed spiritual scientific investigation, Steiner demonstrated that the inner aspect of Earth becomes increasingly spiritual as we approach its center. He showed how this corresponds exactly to what happens as we move away from the Earth's surface into the cosmos.⁷ There is a sphere that helps us to recognize this immediately—the head. We must not, however, cut it open to see what it contains, since we would discover only more surface. If we remove the brain, we see that its essential feature is *surface*. We must instead experience our own head in a living way; in this way, we can recognize that sense perceptions are external, that thoughts are internal, and that they may correspond precisely with each other. When we transform thinking as described in Study 16, we find the *imaginative* world around us in place of the

6 *Founding a Science of the Spirit*, lecture 2.

7 *Ibid.*, lecture 14 addendum.

sense world. The head forms a boundary shaped by thoughts internally, and shaped by sense perceptions externally; the boundary is common to both of these. This is *imagination* in the sense of Leading Thought 36.

The situation is different in the metabolic and limb system. Certainly we could also open it up and look at its contents, but this would reveal even more surface than the head. Of course, these remarks are not in the least intended to imply anything derogatory toward anatomy or surgery. We should just be clear that such manipulations relate only to the outer and do not penetrate the essential nature. The formative forces in the head have come to an end; they are at rest. Because the head is the imprint of the forces of the “I”-being, the “I” can acquire self-awareness in this being side by side; the “I” can use the head as its instrument.

The metabolic, limb system is not completely whole nor at rest like the head; on the contrary, its very nature is movement. It continually works to become head, and during our life on Earth it is constantly prevented from doing so (Leading Thought 33). After death, however, it pursues this effort unhindered and, influenced by the cosmos, it truly becomes head in the next incarnation—as far as the connection of forces is concerned, while the physical aspect is newly added. From his investigations, Steiner presented concrete details in his lectures about this connection between earthly lives. To become head signifies a release from formative forces. When the “I” is active in the head, the head remains at rest. If the “I”—or indeed the astral body—is active in the metabolic and limb system, this system is carried along and begins to move. Thus, the “I” cannot become self-aware in this region.

The “I” thinks in the head and wills in the limbs. This willing is a truly magical act; in the movement of the limbs, there is magic; in the metabolic processes, there is alchemy. The spirit works directly upon the physical. The metabolic, limb system is surface only for the ordinary waking consciousness, the magic of the will works within and, for this reason is unconscious. The inner region is always spiritual; here, we are spiritually active in matter, but we do not know how. *Intuition* is a spiritual being within, spirit in spirit; in the metabolic, limb systems we have a sensible/suprasensory picture of the purely suprasensory *Intuitions* (Leading Thought 37). But it is expressly said, “If we observe it in full action, in the development of its necessary or possible functions.” This is really a mobile concept; the sum of all possible actions is contained in this picture of the *intuitive*. Eurythmy forms in their totality fulfill these possibilities.

In Leading Thought 37, the rhythmic portion of the human organism is spoken of in relation to *inspiration*. It derives its name from breathing. Leading Thought 34 shows how breathing and the blood represent an alternating union and separation between “I”-organization and astral body on the one hand, and physical and etheric on the other. This a wide field for

physiological research. In inner experience, it is like a continual setting of boundaries and withdrawing them again, a continual awakening and falling asleep (dreaming), a to-and-fro, an up-and-down between head and limbs, like a conversation between the inner and outer being of the spiritual as recitation is to eurythmy. True *inspiration* is a spiritual conversation, the rhythmic system is its image.

With regard to the descriptions of the rhythmic system in Leading Thoughts 29 to 34, attention may be drawn briefly to some facts that have so far obviously been unnoticed by physiologists in spite of the fact that they are easily observable. This will be a help for the understanding of the rhythmic system. Between two senses that are active in breathing, namely smell and taste, the following relationship exists: when we breathe in, we can smell; this is known to everyone. But with inhaling, the sense of taste, as far as it relates to aroma, is extinguished.

Conversely, when we breathe out, we can taste and, thereby, the sense of smell is interrupted. Therefore, if we wish to smell something, we must breathe in; if we wish to taste, we must breathe out. Each sense cancels out the other. If we hold our breath, breathing neither in nor out, we can neither smell nor taste.

The functions of both senses lie in their relationship to the sensory, nervous system and to the metabolic system. By breathing in, the “I”-being and astral body unite with the physical and etheric bodies (Leading Thought 34). The rhythmic system approaches the metabolic system and thereby withdraws from the nervous system. But it leaves behind a watchman for the latter—the sense of smell. It takes care that the sensory, nervous system comes to no harm as long as the rhythmic functions are turned to the metabolic system, for there are smells that are harmful to the sensory, nervous system, such as those that lead to fainting, narcolepsy, dimming of consciousness. Conversely, the rhythmic system turns to the sensory, nervous system in the process of breathing out and leaves the sense of taste behind as a watchman for the metabolic system so as to protect it against poisoning.

This whole subject is worthy of profound scientific study.

STUDY 2 I

CONCERNING MORALITY

The leading thoughts we have already considered led to a greater understanding of higher forms of knowledge—*imagination, inspiration, and intuition*—in relation to the human being. Once we have gained a certain comprehension of these evolutionary stages, we also establish a new relationship with the world. We can learn to comprehend spirit even with ordinary consciousness. The attitude toward life that arises from this may be properly referred to as *moral*. This leads to the creation of a new foundation for morality, since our old foundations for moral conduct in life have crumbled and fallen apart. No morality can be based only on the phenomena of the sense world. Consequently, natural science, which has no desire to enter the spiritual sphere, consciously maintains an amoral approach.

Let us look at what Rudolf Steiner said about this:

Natural science attempts to eliminate morality completely from its investigations. Thus, morality begins to lose out, because for science there are no inherent physical forces that support morality. Even the doctrines of certain religions attempt to cultivate ideas that form a kind of compromise with natural science, since scientists insist that anything related to the moral element must be clearly separated from anything physical, chemical, geological, and so on.¹

Nevertheless, if we delve beneath nature's surface as mentioned in our previous study, we come to realms where matters must be considered very differently than in the case of physical facts. In the physical world measure, number, and weight must have a specific value externally. In the higher worlds, measuring, weighing, and counting have inner value; they are moral standards.

Through our inner life, we participate in the spiritual worlds, but we must activate ourselves inwardly to make this participation gradually more conscious. Knowledge of the spiritual realm gives us a moral attitude, and this alone makes it possible to enter the spiritual world legitimately. Steiner stated that a foundation for morality in our time—having experienced the amorality of natural science—would be found only through forces related to life before birth in the spiritual world.

Traditional morality, which often appears complacent and satisfied, was, in terms of ecclesiastical impulses, based on a life after death; therefore, it could

1 *Building Stones for an Understanding of the Mystery of Golgotha*, lecture 4 (compare study 16).

never be free of egoism. The driving forces were fear of damnation and anxiety over continued personal existence. Only a Spiritual Science free of egoism can investigate life before birth. Before penetrating prenatal life, everything related to life after death must be overcome by the spiritual investigator during earthly life. Otherwise, the danger of egoism arises again with even greater danger, because, behind the prenatal life, even earlier incarnations will arise. Consequently, Steiner elevated his investigations of this sphere to a moral pinnacle. He raised individual karma to the sphere of a soul exercise. Previous earthly lives can be viewed without danger only by those who are able to observe their own destiny with the kind of calm approach found in natural science.

One of the most difficult problems is gaining an adequate concept of the spirit's activity in the physical regardless of the laws of nature. Such representations must be correct, however, in order to understand destiny and freedom. Contemporary science understands the physical world only as a continuous (mineral) causality. To get beyond this idea, we saw that we should investigate the difficult matter of introducing *imagination*, *inspiration*, and *intuition* into the transformation of the Categories (Study 18). Steiner appended a letter to Leading Thoughts 35 to 37. It contains exercises that help us to incorporate the genuine morality of higher knowledge of the human being into our experience. The studies that follow are based on these exercises.

The foundation of modern thinking is an affront to the human being. Although we will address this matter in other studies, it was already touched on in Leading Thought 7. Since the consciousness soul has been approaching since the fifteenth century, we should keep in mind that natural science could have included the whole sphere of the etheric. If this had in fact occurred, history—especially social history—would have taken a very different course. Goethe and his adherents were on their way to gaining a proper appreciation for a spiritual understanding of nature.² The forces of materialism, however, gained the upper hand once again. Steiner's appearance in the world was needed so that humankind might be able to correct this error.

Contemporary natural science is merely a phase. Despite all its value and great accomplishments, it is only an interlude that will be followed by another. Only then will it be recognized again that there is a higher way of looking at the world, one that sees nature and morality as two sides of the same being.³

When the etheric realm and the etheric human body are made available to natural scientific inquiry, the great disparity in the world between the physical and the spiritual realms becomes apparent.⁴ We see this disparity expressed

2 Ibid., lecture 5.

3 Ibid., lecture 4.

4 See Günther Wachsmuth, *The Etheric Formative Forces: The Etheric World*;

in human beings, since we often feel that the physical and etheric bodies must be placed on one side and the astral body and “I”-being on the other. This is where waking and sleeping separate, where after-death experiences turn away from the earthly to the cosmic, where thinking and the will—past and future—separate and unite. This also suggests the difference between natural and moral laws as seen in our studies. Only by clarifying these distinctions can we understand the union of opposite forces.¹

Leading Thoughts 35–37 help us to contemplate an image that can be taken very literally. Through it, we are inspired to see the various attitudes of soul when we consider a finished picture, the artist at work on the picture, or the future image still carried in the artist’s soul. While we are absorbed in a finished picture, we experience a spiritual activity of the past expressed in the physical. We do not need to know who the artist is—that person may be forgotten or long dead. The artistic attitude active in the soul corresponds to *imagination*; the word itself implies “image,” or “picture.”

I can, for example, exchange views with an artist at work, while the picture is in the process of becoming. I must, however, be an artist myself and have some understanding of painting in order to offer advice. The artist can also communicate to me the intended image. If I want to take part intelligently in another person’s creative effort, I must have the capacity to put myself in the place of the other. That is the soul attitude that corresponds to *inspiration*—harmony in breathing and in the heart.

If the artist has not even begun to paint, however, I will comprehend the future image only by uniting completely with the artist’s soul. I must, in my very being, *become* the artist who carries the image in the will; this is pure spirit experience. This attitude of soul corresponds to *intuition*. If I consider only the painting materials, however, my only concern has to do with the mineral aspects, whether the picture is finished or only the materials exist. In that case, perhaps the painter isn’t needed at all.

By moving these considerations into the realm of the human being, we become aware of how natural science has sinned. Without the original (although unconscious) cooperation of *imagination*, *inspiration*, and *intuition*, we would not have arrived at any natural science at all; but, in fact, this has ignored the higher, moral soul attitude.

38. We have demonstrated how to view human beings in their *image* nature, and the human spirit that reveals itself in this way. Once we have developed this perception, we are also at the point of being able to see—in the

Hermann Poppelbaum, *A New Zoology* (Dornach, Switzerland: Philosophic-Anthroposophic Press, 1961), chapter 1; and Rudolf Steiner, *Between Death and Rebirth*, lecture 7.

1 See *Cosmic and Human Metamorphoses*, lecture 4; and *Building Stones for an Understanding of the Mystery of Golgotha*, lecture 3.

spiritual world, where we see human beings living and moving as beings of spirit—the reality of the soul’s moral laws. Thus, the moral order of the world is realized as the earthly image of an order that belongs to spiritual realm. The physical and moral world orders are bound together now in undivided unity.

39. The human *will* acts out of the human being. This will encounters the natural laws we derive from the external world as something completely alien to their essence. The nature of the sense organs can still be understood scientifically because of their similarity to the objects of external nature. The will, however, cannot yet unfold itself in the activity of these organs. The nature of the human rhythmic system manifests in a way less similar to anything external. To a certain extent, the will can work into this system, but the rhythmic system is constantly becoming and passing away; thus, in these processes, the will is not yet free

40. The nature of the metabolic and limb system manifests in material substances and in their processes. Yet, these substances and processes are really no closer to this nature than the artist and materials are to the finished picture. Consequently, the will can enter and work directly. Behind the human organization, which lives in natural laws, we must be able to apprehend the human essence that lives and moves with its being in the spirit. This is the realm where we can become conscious of the true activity of the will. The human will remains a mere, insubstantial word for the sensory realm, and the scientist or thinker who claims to take hold of it within the realm of the senses leaves the true nature of the will behind and replaces it with theory.

STUDY 22

CONCERNING THE WILL

Leading Thoughts 38 to 40, as well as those that follow, present the human spiritual essence as will. Therefore, we accomplish the great transition—described in previous studies as the threshold experience—in a new way. The difficulties in understanding these leading thoughts recall our experience of Leading Thoughts 11–16, where the “I”-being was presented. It is useful to look again at these leading thoughts on the “I” in this new context.

There the human being is presented beginning with known facts. Spiritual facts are added to the physical aspects, and spirit is shown to be reflected in the physical. The relationship between these two realms is indicated by showing how the spiritual facts may be discovered. We have treated this polarity as concept and reality and endeavored to gain some understanding of how, at a decisive transition (between the etheric and astral bodies), we can discover the threshold of the spiritual world in the human being.

These leading thoughts also speak of the evolutionary path of consciousness from physical to spiritual knowledge. For example, during meditation we permeate our experience in thinking with the will. The will appears as an aspect of meditation practice. It is left to the individual to decide how far one advances along the path of meditation. Nevertheless, our understanding of suprasensory facts does not depend on this. The facts themselves show us our true nature as physical and spiritual beings. In order to *understand* these matters, however, requires an understanding of how they can be found. Without some understanding of the path, we cannot walk it properly.

Now we find the will again, and we already know how human beings pass through the gate of death, set aside the physical body, and continue the life of spirit; thus, we come to understand pure spirit in humankind. Then came our studies of how spirit is revealed in the physical. As a result, we have returned to facts relating to the human being in earthly life. Our way of asking questions, however, is different; we begin to direct our inquiry toward the relationship between spirit and the earthly in humankind. The comparison with a painting in Study 21 brings us to a new kind of inquiry.

We can also describe the difference in this way: previously we had to proceed from the physical to find the spiritual; now we proceed from the spiritual to find the physical. We asked: How do we cross the threshold to the spirit? Now we ask: How did we cross the threshold into the physical world? In Studies 5 and 6, this reversal was dealt with more in terms of a *theory*

of knowledge. Now a different perspective arises from *practical* knowledge (Study 19). This expresses, at the same time, the historic change in the moral foundation, from after death until a new birth (Study 21). Our task now is to understand the dominion within the physical realm of the will, whose principle is morality, and whose realization on Earth is destiny.

41. In the third of the previous leading thoughts, we indicated the nature of the human will. We penetrate with understanding this sphere of the world where destiny, or karma, works once the nature of will is recognized. As long as we perceive only the principles that rule the relationships of nature, we will have no understanding of the laws working in destiny,

42. Once the principle of destiny is discerned, we see that destiny cannot manifest during a single physical life on Earth. As long as we inhabit the same physical body, we can realize only the essential morality of the will as allowed by this particular physical body in the physical world. The spiritual nature of the will is fully realized only after we have passed through the gate of death into the realm of spirit. Then, good and evil is recognized in various ways—spiritually at first—according to their results.

43. Through this realization of spirit, we pattern and shape ourselves between death and a new birth. In being, we become an image of our actions during our earthly life. When we return to Earth, we form our physical life from this being. The spirit actively weaving in destiny is realized in the physical only if its corresponding cause has withdrawn into the spiritual realm before this realization. All that emerges in our life through destiny emanates from the spirit; it cannot otherwise take shape within the flow of physical phenomena.

The activity of the sense organs still belongs entirely to nature (Leading Thought 39). It shapes those organs and looks into them as if into a mirror. Our *being*, situated behind our sense organs, views this natural process between sense organs and outer effects on them (eye and light, for example).¹ In this process, however, nature draws toward herself the human spirit, who had separated from the spirit of nature. She lures the human spirit to herself along paths of sense perception. Sensual knowledge is gained through the object. Our being experiences itself surrendered to the object. *Human knowledge of nature is nature's self-knowledge*, which is, at the same time, an appeal to the human spirit; the selflessness of the sense organs is the precondition for nature's self-knowledge. *True knowledge of nature is a training in selflessness*. When we interfere with perception and the activity of the sensory organs through like and dislike or through the will, we are destroying them. "If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away" (Matt. 5:29).

1 *The Gospel of St. John in Relation to the other Gospels*, lecture 10; *Genesis: Secrets of Creation*, lecture 8.

The human cognitive nature is permeated by spirit. Selflessness expresses the moral aspect of perception. Spirit is active in the will. We could invent the word *spirit-“I”-being* (*Geistselbstigkeit*) to distinguish the spirit’s moral activity, just as we designated its permeation of the human being as *selflessness*. The will directly engages the system of the limbs and metabolism (Leading Thought 40). Its true being remains hidden, however, and weaves as the expression of independent spirit being out of the spiritual realm. There the will reveals its tendency to act in the same way as nature; just as natural science can become nature’s self-knowledge, so Spiritual Science can be human self-knowledge. These thoughts need only to be followed through. The vehicle of such self-knowledge is the *spirit self*.

This term for our higher self was first offered by Rudolf Steiner in *Theosophy*.¹ The *spirit self* creates for itself an organ of spiritual perception through its work on the metabolic and limb system; the object of this perception is destiny.

Consequently, the will looks down from the spiritual realm into earthly life between birth and death. Although we are unaware of this, our actions in earthly life express the will’s tendency to create a head from the limb system (Study 20). Thus, it is clear that the bearer of consciousness is not created by the will but originates in the life before birth. Nevertheless, there is a way to shape genuine revelation for the being of the will. That is art, which reveals spiritual self-knowledge. This is expressed most clearly in eurythmy. If we could see the movements and forms from the spiritual level, they would be revealed as human self-knowledge—reversed nature.

With Leading Thoughts 41–43, we begin exercises that lead to an understanding of destiny and karma. Much of what was new—what Steiner presented after Christmas of 1923—was described by him as *karma exercises*. These words were also meant to indicate a high moral standard, which is the only way we can speak definitively of karma. Any concept that can be applied to destiny belongs to a sphere that is inaccessible to ordinary consciousness as such. Such concepts are will transformed into knowledge, or will permeated with wisdom—in other words, *morality*. In order that Steiner’s teachings about destiny become exercises, they must be preceded by preliminary exercises in morality.

1 “The ‘I’ dwells in the soul. Although the highest manifestation of the ‘I’ belongs to the *consciousness soul*, it is also true that the ‘I’ radiates outward from there, filling the entire soul and exerting its influence on the body through the soul. And within the ‘I,’ the spirit is alive and active. The spirit streams into the ‘I,’ taking it as its ‘garment,’ just as the ‘I’ itself lives in the body and soul. The spirit shapes the ‘I’ from the inside out, and the mineral world shapes it from the outside in. We will call the spirit that shapes an ‘I,’ that lives as an ‘I,’ the *spirit self*, since it appears as the human ‘I,’ or self.” *Theosophy*, pp. 50–51.