

## PREFACE

### *Ways of Meditative Experience*

FRIEDEMANN SCHWARZKOPF

ANYONE who reads Rudolf Steiner's *A Way of Self-Knowledge* (1912) and *The Threshold of the Spiritual World* (1913) merely for information will certainly gain some insight into the conceptual framework of Anthroposophy. But reading can itself become a spiritual experience—an empirical, spiritual science. This happens when one tries to read *meditatively*. In a meditative reading, the reader moves to the vantage point of *inner* perception from where the realms described by Rudolf Steiner may be experienced in *direct beholding*.

“Meditative reading” requires that we take every sentence as an invitation to move our center of awareness—the attentive “I”—to the place that the author describes. The key is not to speculate about the information contained in the text, but rather to ask, “How must I move my attention in such a way that the text *makes sense*?” In this gesture, it is the *attentional movement* that provides the medium and stage where the described worlds are experienced.

One can illustrate this gesture in the following way. Imagine that someone gives us an aerial photograph of the house in which we are sitting while reading this text. This person asks, “Tell me, from which direction, distance, and height was this photograph taken? And can you tell me whether the photographer used a normal, telephoto, or wide-angle lens and whether the photograph has been enlarged?” We must then imagine circling around the house at various distances and heights, in the basket of a hot air balloon, for example, and try to find the point in space that provides the perspective shown in the photograph.

Reading with this kind of effort has two results. First, the reader rises to a point of view from which it is possible to have the *experience* the author describes. Second, by activating the attentional forces in the imaginative process, the reader develops the inner *organ of perception*

that makes it possible to *behold* the experience. This “organ of perception” is not, of course, a tangible bodily manifestation.<sup>1</sup> Rather, it is a *faculty*, an ability of the “I,” of the spiritual self. If one remains aware that *seeing* is the “seat” of this spiritual self, and if one can abstain from identifying with what is *seen*, then one has already embarked on the journey of these writings.

If we follow in this way the sequence of viewpoints—the chapters—we pass through several stages of soul-spiritual experience. In the same way that we experience the sense-perceptual world, we now include *awareness* in our field of experience; for we could not honestly say: “*real* is only what I can touch with my hands, measure and weigh,” and at the same time exclude our observing *spiritual activity* (manifesting in our thought: “*real* is only ...”) from the experienceable totality of the world. Neither can we exclude from reality the dialogue in which we negotiated its definition. We would be like merchants who count only their assets and ignore their debts. Thus, the soul-spiritual phenomenon of our *light of attention* leads us directly into the “laboratory” where we directly experience spheres of the world that are not separate from the world, because without them, there would be no “world” for us.

At the very beginning of the first meditation in *A Way of Self-Knowledge*, Steiner evokes and invites us to an experience that can become like a growing seed. We encounter the words, “sunlight ... experiences itself in the soul, ... joy experiences itself in the soul.”

If we wish to accept the invitation to explore the deeper meaning of this sentence, we can begin by making “sun” a *reality* for us. To do this, we must allow our attentional activity to “sun,” as it were, by adding a little effort of *will* into our concentration. Then we must let this *willing*-thinking become radiant, streaming warmth and light and whatever else “sun” means to us. This radiance can fill us with a whole palette of feelings. First, in our concentrated beholding, we can experience our own creative activity—something comes into being that would not exist without our contributing participation. Second, we allow ourselves, in our inner, soul-spiritual sphere, to become a “stage” where a phenomenon such as sunlight becomes an inner experience. *Outer world* thereby becomes *inner world*, and the witness of the “I”’s increasing assimilation is: “sun.” Then, the blending of these feelings is

what we could call “joy.” From here, it is only a short step to understanding: “Joy experiences itself in the soul.”

Once we slow our reading to the point where we enter the timeless state in which we can actualize the experience of the contemplative image, so that the spiritual *reality* of the theme becomes an *actuality*—an event—for us, we have already attained a level of meditative consciousness. Experiencing this awakens us within the sphere of the *life* of consciousness, where meaning, spiritual activity, awareness and inner experience are *one* process, a soul-spiritual phenomenon. *We are* life, and *in* the light. This is an undeniable experience.

Once we have created this point of departure for ourselves within this *life*, we have established, by *doing* it, the foundation upon which our way is built. From here the progressive stations of this book—chapters that *become* meditations when read in a meditative consciousness—give us various views of the human being in relation to its physical and soul-spiritual nature. Now *experience* becomes the teacher. In an ascending movement, the “I”—experienced in everyday consciousness in connection with our time-and-place personality—emancipates itself. By merging with the perspective of the witnessing awareness, it discovers its identity with its spiritual self.

If one reads and re-reads the book in this way, one understands evernew dimensions of Steiner’s exemplary sequence of meditative levels. We are led to a living source. Thus one understands in what sense Steiner’s spiritual-scientific writings are “translations.” Even in the original German version, they are *wordless* experiences cast into language. The experiences themselves are much larger, wider, and richer than words are able to express. Words and sentences nevertheless invite us to go to the place where these worlds always *are*, in living movement and transformation.

The meditative writings contained in this book also shed light on certain aspects of Steiner’s notion of “meditation.” As the starting point of each meditation, we normally find a thought, or mental image that we are asked to create for ourselves. In order to do this, we must use our will to activate our spiritual activity. This does not happen in everyday thought in which we process only the content of information (as, for example, when we read the newspaper). Though Steiner gives us the

contents of our meditations, he does not provide us with the experience of our spiritual activity; this experience depends on the “I”’s initiative in *giving* attention.

By entering this spiritual activity, we gain direct experience of the *medium*, or substance, in which the *witnessing* self, the *true* “I,” is aware of its own spiritual nature. From this perspective the “I” now beholds everything that thinking produces, by following the invitation of the meditative text.

The “I” now lives in *spiritual* experience, no longer in the experience of the sense-perceptible world. But in order to translate the nature of this experience—to become aware of it, to communicate it to ourselves and to others—the “I” has to produce *images* consisting of elements that are familiar to us from the sense-perceptible world as metaphors (see the third meditation).

This *ability-to-translate* (an experience, for example) can serve us as a lead into the world that opens to us when we follow Steiner’s invitation: a world of meaning, a world of “speaking,” a *Logos world*.<sup>2</sup> Here experience and content are not separate as they are on the everyday level of consciousness, in which words and ideas appear in different spheres: words as distinct visible or audible phenomena (reflected in our mental pictorial representations), concepts and ideas in the *unity* of pure, wordless understanding.<sup>3</sup> On a meditative level of consciousness, content and experience are *one* event.

One can apply here what Goethe said about the archetypal phenomenon, that it is simultaneously ideal, real, symbolic, and identical with our very specific experience.<sup>4</sup> The phenomenon is like an “open secret,” it utters itself. As Goethe said, “one should not search ‘behind’ the blueness of the sky,” but understand and experience *blue* in the context in which it manifests.<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, the form and substance of our inner attentional light reveal everything in the experience of witnessing, until we meet our next boundary. At some point this, too, opens up—once our ability to experience the *speaking* gesture of the unconcealed phenomenon makes the inner veils of our initial naivete transparent for deeper understanding.<sup>6</sup>

When the “I” experiences the light of witnessing its own activity, it enters a continuous *movement of inner atunement*. Atunement to what?

To the feeling-knowing that guides the how of its seeing, feeling, and inner doing.

When one describes this process in words, it takes hours, or pages; yet it happens as swiftly as an inner dialogue. It is as if we were tuning a violin, where we continuously compare the tones of the physical strings with our *feeling-knowing*.<sup>7</sup> This tells us precisely whether the right “interval” has been reached. Likewise, we compare our gesture of seeing (and its activity) with our *understanding*. Such understanding can even be a *question!* If we are able to listen, the answer, the proposal of *how* to move our attentional light, always comes from a sphere of consciousness that is just a level above our present state. By aligning our doing to the guidance of our higher knowing, our witnessing, true self is elevated, as it were, to a higher vantage point. Thus, within the self-transparent clarity of *seeing*, our true self emerges from out of our everyday ego—which had identified itself in a clinging gesture with its transient body and soul-forms.

Such inner listening requires us to interpret the possibilities that our source of higher knowing supplies. Such listening does not seek literal words or messages but is an adequation to a *feeling of evidence*.<sup>8</sup> This is not a “felt” feeling, but an activity of cognizing feeling, a knowing feeling, or truth-feeling.

Initially, we may not be sure whether we understand the language of this guiding feeling. This is precisely the pedagogy, that we learn to align ourselves within the meditative stream to our innermost “speaking,” which may express itself in a qualitative *gesture*. Thus we learn the language of the realm where our witnessing originates. With some practice we find increasing surety, inner quiet, and peace in this new faculty of higher alignment.

Depending on our perspective, this language uses various forms of communication. It borrows either images from our pictorial experience of the sense-perceptible world or ideas and concepts, which we may find easier to express in the words of our mother tongue or some other human language, including the language of art, music, or the language of our deeds. Or it may express itself in immediate, direct *doing*, in which we *become* the meaning that we search to understand.

Steiner calls these levels of understanding *imaginative*, *inspirational*, and *intuitive*. These three levels are never strictly separated. They are

always mutually transparent, *one* event, a unitary *process*. Whether we call our inner beholding imaginative, inspirational, or intuitive depends only on our *focus*. For most of us, the experience of these levels begins as an awakening in the superconscious sphere where we grasp the nature of these levels as a subtle intimation of their true reality.

This can be illustrated through the image of modern theatrical stage techniques. Imagine a play that opens in a parlor where people are talking about others who are walking up and down a terrace just outside the parlor windows. Depending on the lighting, semi-transparent screens allow the “windows” in the stage set to be either transparent or opaque. When the lighting shifts to the people walking on the terrace, the windows are transparent. It is even conceivable to imagine behind the banister of the terrace another screen that opens our view to a landscaped park, and even farther, to an impenetrable forest beyond. Meanwhile, the conversation of the people in the “foreground” parlor continues. What they are speaking about happens everywhere simultaneously, in the parlor, on the terrace, and in the forest beyond. It is only the focus of the audience that determines the perspective and its pictorial, conceptual, or intuitive expression.

In this way the meditative steps outlined in the following chapters illustrate the beholder’s metamorphoses of soul and consciousness. We begin to notice our witnessing self, and, in the increasing alignment to our inner source of understanding, gradually our perspective shifts to higher levels. The road toward this source is an infinite approximation. It does not matter that the aim may seem to be very distant. It is like navigating on the open sea, where we have to approximate our direction by faraway lights, such as stars in the sky. As long as we have found our direction, we are *in alignment with our source*, even though, due to waves, the ship is continuously swerving to the left and right of our compass-course. The compass rarely rests for long on the ideal direction; and yet, since we *know* our course, we remain in the continuous activity of inner aligning.

In order to describe our *experience*, language and imagery have to be adjusted, depending on whether we describe our inner perception in terms of solid sense-perceptible objects, fluid movement, creative light, or the kind of warmth or burning that translates the *style* of our

activity. All these images, borrowed from our sense perceptual experience of the world of the elements, merely *characterize* the nature and state of our spiritual activity, which rests in its alignment to the intuitive, “speaking” source.

This speaking can be understood as a non-dualistic experience of *meaning*. On this level—above or beyond subject and object, where subject and object are united in the *process* of seeing—the witnessing “I” and the intuitive source are united simply by their *alignment*, regardless of how far away the goal may be.

It does not matter whether one wants to claim that “the ‘I’ *posits* the meaning,” or, “the ‘I’ *receives* the meaning.” Only for the every-day level of consciousness and its dualistic mode of expression are “meaning” and “otherness” distinct from the spiritual self. Here, meaning *happens*, and the “I” can practice its freedom to integrate itself therein according to its highest possible attunement.

## Notes

1. Even if the spiritual activity were to leave traces in the bodily physiology and we were to focus on these traces, we would not see. This is related to the fact that we could not see with our eyes, if we had to be aware of their physiology while we are seeing.
2. This is why one can also call this practice “Logos-meditation,” not because this type of meditation would take words, sounds, or images as departure points, but because the meditator enters the world of “Inner Word.” The predominant meaning of the Greek term Logos is “Word.”
3. This faculty can also make a translation transparent for the idea beheld and conceived by the author; for every translation has to be subjective in some respects—even if it were merely the syntax, grammar, and vocabulary of a mother tongue. Indeed, the entire socialization of a translator tinges the text—however slightly. But meditative reading can integrate most interpretations as one perspective of a whole—a whole seen from a higher level in wordless understanding.
4. “The archetypal phenomenon is ideal—real—symbolic—identical: ideal, as the ultimate knowable [erkennbar] entity; real, as it is beheld [erkannt]; sym-bolic, as it encompasses all cases; and identical, with all cases” (J. W. Goethe, in *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften* [Goethe’s Natural Scientific Writings], R. Steiner ed., 1897, Vol. V. p. 370, lines 9–13).

5. “The ultimate understanding would be that every fact is already theory. The blueness of the sky reveals to us the basic law of chromatics. One should not seek anything behind the phenomena; the phenomena themselves are teaching us.... No phenomenon is explained merely by itself; only a synopsis of many assembled phenomena, methodically arranged, will finally reveal something that we may call theory” (Ibid., p. 376, lines 1–4; p. 375, lines 6–8).
6. See the second meditation; see also *An Outline of Esoteric Science* (chap. 5) concerning the composition of a meditative image.
7. In meditative consciousness this happens not intermittently, but in a state of continuity.
8. Awareness of such feeling-knowing may occur only when we have translated it into words—before we can notice that we have superconsciously chosen such words for our own understanding.