

Introduction

*I am not one of those who dive into the day like an animal in human form.
I pursue a quite specific goal, an idealistic aim—knowledge of the truth!
This cannot be done offhandedly. It requires the greatest striving in the world,
free of all egotism, and equally of all resignation.*

—Rudolf Steiner, in a letter, July 27, 1888

I.

Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), some of whose meditations and meditation instructions are collected here, was a truth-seeker, visionary, and seer. He was an exceptional spiritual teacher, whose unique genius was to translate into modern consciousness humanity's most ancient striving to know itself and, in knowing itself, know nature, the cosmos, and the divine. A philosopher, scientist, and esotericist, Steiner was a dedicated, servant of humanity, who gave unstintingly to the world of the wisdom he gained through the radical method of meditative, spiritual research that he inaugurated and practiced. The range of this research, far-reaching in its practical implications, included every aspect of human striving, from cosmology, evolution, and history to physics, mathematics, biology, psychology, and astronomy. On its basis, Steiner was able to make significant practical contributions to fields as diverse as education (Waldorf schools), agriculture (biodynamics), medicine (anthroposophical medicine),

and social theory (the threefold social order). He was also an artist, a playwright, and an architect. As a spiritual teacher, the side of him represented here, we may say that he was the foremost exponent of the inner path of Western spirituality in the twentieth century. The movement he started, Anthroposophy, represents the growing tip of the Western spiritual traditions. Above all, he was a thinker, a world-transforming, paradigm-creating figure, often likened in his far-reaching significance to other great thinkers and world-creators like Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Because he was a thinker, his anthroposophical path of meditation, whatever form it took (Theosophical, philosophical, Rosicrucian, or Christian-Gnostic) was always (whether it involved thinking, feeling, or willing) *a path of knowing*. His was a cognitive path.

2

Steiner's passion to know for himself is evident in the earliest document we have from his hand, a letter written when he was nineteen (January 13, 1881):

It was the night from January 10th to the 11th. I didn't sleep a wink. I was busy with philosophical problems until about 12:30 a.m. Then, finally, I threw myself down on my couch. All my striving during the previous year had been to research whether the following statement by Schelling was true or not: "Within everyone dwells a secret, marvelous capacity to draw back from the stream of time—out of the self clothed in all that comes to us from outside—into our innermost being and there, in the immutable form of the Eternal, to look into ourselves." I believe, and I am still quite certain of it, that I discovered this capacity in myself. I had long had an inkling of it. Now the whole of idealist philosophy stands before me transformed in its essence. What's a sleepless night compared to that!

3

Any introduction to Rudolf Steiner's instructions for spiritual practice must begin with the idea of research: the experimental (experiential) pursuit of truth, based on the need to find out for oneself.

"Thinking," too, must be mentioned right at the beginning, for that is where Steiner himself began. A "cognitive" element underlies all his spiritual exercises, no matter how far from thinking (as we usually conceive of it) they appear to be. Although he does not denigrate ordinary thinking, thinking in the higher sense that Steiner uses it does not involve any kind of ratiocination, cerebration, calculation, or logical deduction. The kind of thinking Steiner aims at does not demand that the "brain" produce thoughts, but rather that it become so still that, instead of thinking in the ordinary sense, we begin to experience—to think, feel, and will—what it is "to be thought, felt, and willed." Thinking is a suprasensory, "brain-free" activity. It engages the whole person: not "I think, therefore I am," but "It thinks me."

We may call this kind of thinking "*thinking of the heart*." Steiner believed heart thinking was the next stage in humanity's ever-evolving journey of consciousness and dedicated his life and work to developing it.

4

In this sense, then, Steiner is a thinker who seeks knowledge of the truth. He seeks to be formed by the truth, to be led by it. He understands that pursuit of the truth frees us from selfishness and egoism, and that "love of truth is the only love that sets the 'I' free." Truth, for Steiner, is synonymous with reality. It is the great teacher of selflessness. Experiences of states, no matter how elevated or profound, intense or transforming, are insufficient. We must pass beyond mysticism of that kind. Experience is only the

beginning of the path, which is a path of consciousness, of conscious research.

“Consciousness” by its nature witnesses and bears witness. It is “knowing with,” cognizing, and witnessing. To be a good witness, one must bear witness to, and be *transformed by what one has witnessed*. Furthermore, what one has witnessed must be *communicable*. One must be able to *communicate* what one has witnessed, otherwise one’s witnessing is vain and unfruitful. If consciousness does not communicate, that is, witness or testify, it betrays and forfeits the primal capacity to witness that defines human nature. For Steiner, consciousness is primary and communicates. Like any good witness, it is free, independent, and transparent, uncontaminated by preconceptions of any kind.

Unlike the legal witness who is passive, the spiritual witness is *active*, engaged. Rather than just happening to be there, the spiritual seeker as witness seeks to find out. Indeed, perhaps the basic meaning of a spiritual (or esoteric) path is to find out for oneself. The exoteric, or outer, vehicle provides the basic teachings. It contains information about the visible and invisible worlds—that the human being is made up of body, soul, and spirit; that Christ was God and that he incarnated in a human body to redeem humanity from sin; that all beings have Buddha nature; that the Earth passed through three previous evolutionary stages called Saturn, Sun, and Moon and will pass through three more; and so on. One can certainly understand these with ordinary consciousness. Ordinary thinking can determine—“by their fruits ye shall know them”—whether they make sense, and whether they seem healthy and life-enhancing. But unless one finds out for oneself, they remain mere theories to be taken on faith. There is nothing wrong with doing so. If one has determined that the teachings are “good” and, accordingly, leads one’s as if they were true, one will lead a better life. Some people, however, need to find out for themselves. They begin a meditative path.

5

There is no mystery about meditation.

Before you begin, you must select a meditation theme or practice—something that interests you, the layers of whose meaning you wish to explore. This may be a verse or line of Rudolf Steiner or of any spiritual or mystical literature from the Upanishads to an alchemical text (for example, a Gospel text or a line from Meister Eckhart). Or, it may be an image or symbol like the Rose Cross, the Caduceus, or Ouroboros—or a cosmological diagram from some old alchemical book. Or, again, it may be some natural or fabricated object (a pebble or a pin), or even a symbolic gesture like the sign of the Cross, holding the palms together, or outstretching the arms. It may even be a question that has come to you, or that you have formulated. Once you have decided—let us say that you have chosen the theme “Wisdom lives in the Light”—you are ready to begin.

It is best to choose a peaceful time of the day. Find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. Pick a comfortable chair, one that feels good to you, that you feel at home in, and where your back can be reasonably straight and your feet rest easily on the floor. Place a pen and notebook beside you. If you wish, and are used to it, you may sit on a cushion on the floor. There are no rules. The attitude is experimental. See what works. Find out what happens. Once you are seated, take a few deep breaths to relax. Relax your face, your neck and shoulders, your chest area, your stomach, your legs and feet. Let your hands rest lightly on your thighs or in your lap. Again, whatever feels comfortable. Settle in. Feel at home, at peace with yourself and the world. Think to yourself: “Now I am going to begin my meditation.” Relax your mouth into a half-smile, breathe lightly and easily, and allow the thoughts and memories of the day to dissipate slowly. Fill yourself with a mood of reverence or devotion by orienting yourself momentarily to the higher worlds—to God, or the angels, or whatever is highest for you. Now, carefully place the chosen phrase in the center of your consciousness. Think

around it, taking each word in turn, as well as the sentence as a whole, pondering, associating, and amplifying until you feel you have, for the moment, exhausted the possibilities. Now, collapse the sentence into one of its words. For instance, collapse “Wisdom lives in the Light” into the word “Light.” Then concentrate all that you have associated, pondered, and amplified into a single beam of attention and focus it on the whole sentence condensed into the word “Light.” Keep your attention as focused as possible. If you are distracted or wander off, simply return to the theme and refocus. Do this for as long as feels comfortable (or you sense your attention tiring). Then, when it feels right, release the sentence so that your mind is empty. Try to keep it empty as long as possible. See what happens, what comes down. If images occur, follow them and let them unfold. After a short period, at a certain moment in this process, you will feel a natural closure occurring. You will feel that the meditation is ending. Let it end. Sit quietly. At an appropriate moment, say to yourself, “Now the meditation is over.” Reach for your notebook, and write down whatever seemed noteworthy to you about what just happened. As for distractions, they are to be expected. If your mind wanders off, as it will, do not be discouraged (even if this happens repeatedly and continuously), simply return to the theme of your meditation.

6

Such meditation has a long history in the West. Though Rudolf Steiner never referred to any sources, and though he also (as part of his Theosophical heritage) drew on and practiced various Eastern, particularly Yogic, disciplines, the method he taught clearly belongs to the Abrahamic traditions of the Book. Two examples come to mind.

First, there is the monastic practice of *lectio divina*, or sacred, slow, contemplative reading. The reading and learning by heart of sacred texts lay at the heart of Christian spiritual practice from earliest

times, but it was not “formalized” until the twelfth century, when Guigo, a Carthusian, described reading as a four-step ladder connecting Earth to heaven. He called these steps or stages: *lectio* (or reading), *meditatio* (or meditation), *oratio* (or prayer), and *contemplatio* (or contemplation).

Lectio is slow, reflective, thorough reading and re-reading, word by word, sentence by sentence, sometimes only completing one or two in the allotted time. You read as if God were speaking to you. You read with your heart. You listen over and over again to the words, straining to hear what is being said, what God means and wants from you.

Entering the stage of *meditatio* or meditation, you begin to ruminate, ponder, associate, and think around God’s word, as if it were addressed directly and only to you, questioning your own life. One thinks here of Rilke’s famous poem on the Archaic Torso of Apollo: *you must change your life*.

With *oratio* or prayer, you stop thinking, and simply remain with your heart open. This is the moment of the heart’s response to what you have experienced up to now. Finally, in *contemplatio* (contemplation), you let go of everything. You empty yourself completely and simply rest in pure, empty, *listening*.

The second example comes from the Hermetic, alchemical lineage of those whom Steiner calls “the old philosophers.” This “Rosicrucian” tradition was also text-based, similar in many ways to *lectio divina*. In this case, the texts are esoteric, dense, symbolic, occult, paradoxical allegories, containing the most profound understanding of creation and nature expressed in radically non-dual language. Anyone who has ever tried to read an alchemical text knows how difficult it is to penetrate and understand even the first glimmers of the wisdom it contains. There is only one way. *Lege, lege, ora, et lege*: Read, read, pray, and read again. By “reading”—what Steiner in his description of the Rosicrucian path calls “study”—is meant something very close to the kind of meditation underlying Steiner’s teaching.

Here we should not forget that, for Steiner, as for the monks and the old alchemical philosophers of nature, *everything is text*. The cosmos is a vast, polysemous, multileveled “book.” It is to be read, as everything else is to be read: stars, faces, hands, flowers, rocks. St. Anthony, when asked by some visitors, “Sir philosopher, what do you do, deprived as you are of books to be read in your desert retreat?” answered: “I read the Book of Nature.” Reading in the book of nature, which is not an activity different in kind from the reading of a sacred text, lies at the center of Steiner’s vision of a renewal of cosmic intelligence in our time. Reading, when Steiner speaks of it, should never be taken in the narrow sense of referring to books alone, but as human cognitive activity engaged in active, redeeming perception of the world.

7

Such meditation should be done regularly and persistently. Working with the same meditation repeatedly deepens the experience, which is always new (never the same). One never exhausts a meditation; and there is no telling how long one must persevere before a satisfactory, though always provisional, result is reached. It is important to realize, too, that, although a meditation is formally restricted to its fifteen minutes, after which we return to our unimpeded daily tasks, informally, once a meditation is begun, its questioning continues to live spiritually through the days and months, and we never know when an insight will come. As Steiner says (in *Christ and the Spiritual World*), “If research is to reveal a truth that by its nature imparts the conviction of its rightness, *we must be guided slowly and by stages*. This ensures that we are not enticed into speculation or fantasy realms that lead us away from the truth we are seeking.” Thus it often seems that one is held back or delayed. There can be dry periods. But every now and then, like showers in a time of drought, landmarks appear to let us know that our task has not been forgotten. Insights may and do come, but, if we are honest, we must rec-

ognize that for the most part they are only way stations and not yet (very rarely) the goal. The clues we receive from our meditation are like parables: They reveal their true significance only gradually. When something more conclusive does finally come, Steiner points out, it is often in connection both with our karma and with something apparently unrelated to our chief concern.

Meditation or spiritual research of this kind does not take place in a vacuum. It requires a medium in which to exist and a place and an environment to support it. Its site is our very own human life, which engages us as whole persons of body, soul, and spirit. We live this Earthly life as human beings in interdependence with other human beings, with whom we constitute humanity, as well as with the numberless other beings (mineral, plant, animal, and spiritual) who make up our planet. Our task, which is the Earth's too, for we are one with her, is *love*—to transform the Earth into love. The medium of our meditation is thus the life of the heart; it is our moral life. Rudolf Steiner never tires of repeating the Golden Rule that one must take many moral steps forward to advance one step in knowledge. By this, he does not mean following any abstract code of behavior, but rather bringing loving consciousness and attention to our everyday lives and relationships. To do so is to begin to awaken to the soul's own true nature—which is moral through and through. It is to begin to awaken the soul faculties that we call virtues. A virtue is not something we do but is a power of the soul. To practice a virtue is to empower the soul. Steiner refers to many virtues, well-known to all, but ignored or excluded by our egotism. Underlying all is the ancient, primordial sense of reverence for, and devotion to, the divine. The sense of awe and wonder is fundamental, for it teaches us reverence as such. For the modern age, St. Francis (as Steiner shows in his little book *The Spiritual Foundations of Morality*) engendered a threefold translation of reverence into the interpersonal realm, making it ethical in a groundbreaking sense. His first insight was to extrapolate faith in the divine into faith in the

divine ground of each soul, with the result that everyone he met was, in essence, divine. On this basis, he then experienced and taught a new, boundless love for humanity as a whole, its being, in which each of us participates in unique and irreplaceable ways. This led him to the unshakable conviction that (as Steiner puts it) every soul may be guided back to the divine-spiritual worlds that are its and our true home. From these derive the basic practices of gratitude (the other face of reverence), forgiveness, openness, and solidarity and community with all life, as well as “simpler” practices like listening (non-judgment and impartiality), equanimity, self-control, control of thought, and so on. Steiner called these “supplementary” exercises, for they should accompany or supplement all meditation.

Meditation is thus concerned with two irrevocably intertwined mysticisms: the mysticism of human encounter and the mysticism of the self. The struggle against egotism—the struggle to become selfless—lies at the heart of both.

8

But why meditate at all? The reasons are paradoxical.

As Steiner often stresses, meditation is the only completely free act we can do. When we meditate, we perform a free act. Nothing compels us to meditate. Purposive “effort” is also out of place. We should meditate as a plant flowers, naturally, spontaneously, effortlessly, without ego, not because there is a reason to do so, but because *we* choose to: just because. To meditate is a free decision, a free deed of consciousness. As a free act, meditation is ideally (this is the non-aim) not only not purposive, it is without an object. Georg Kühlewind refers to “form-free attention,” by which he means “thinking without a thought” or an object of thought. At the same time, because it is free and we do it, it changes us. In other words, through meditation, we *become*. We become true subjects.

Meditation is also, and necessarily, playful.

Therefore, in the world's terms, meditation like art is superfluous, even useless. It serves no practical end. Life goes on very well without it. It will not necessarily make us either rich, healthy, or happy. Yet, it is the most important thing we can do in life. Like art, it gives life *meaning*.

This gift of meaning is a free gift of our creativity, given out of "poverty of spirit," without any expectation of reward.

It follows that meditation is an experience of grace. It allows us to experience that *everything is given*: "every good and perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights (James 1:17)."

All this means that, when we meditate, we start from nothing. Every meditation re-enacts the opening of St. John's Gospel: *In the beginning*. We always begin anew, from nothing. Yet, like art (as a form of art), meditation is the true source of love, because it allows us to intuit what is not yet and thereby begin to give it birth. Meditation is our most creative act.

So, we could say that when we meditate, we do so not for ourselves but for the sake of the spiritual world. Meditating, we become coworkers with God and his angels who can work with us directly only through our freedom, our human-angelic nature. This freedom, as theology explains, is *the freedom to turn*. From that freedom, all other free acts flow. Because our meditation arises from our freedom, it causes great joy in the spiritual world. The angels suffer with us in our fallenness, our unfreedom; but when we act freely, they rejoice in the recovery of our angelic nature. For them, our meditation is truly a gift, in the giving of which we receive much more than we give: participation in the evolving creative goodness of the world. When we meditate, therefore, we change the world.

Therefore, when we meditate, we begin to fulfil our human vocation as the "tenth hierarchy," collaborators with the Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominions, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Archangels, and Angels, as well as the whole exalted

company of beings in the spiritual world that includes all saints and masters, gods and goddesses.

Meditation may, of course, make us more serene and peaceful; it may make us more able to gain some measure of self-control and detachment. If we meditate, we may be better able to deal with life's inevitable ups and downs. We may even, as a result of meditating over a long period of time, gain certain soul capacities that allow us to confirm for ourselves what the great spiritual teachings affirm. But these are not, in fact, reasons for meditating. If we make them reasons, then our meditation will probably disappoint our intentions. Above all, meditation is to seek, without end—to become a question.

9

As a free deed, meditation is naturally individual, uniquely our own. It is where we most fully *become* ourselves. Its practice is also always individual. There are no rules. Just as every potter will elaborate his or her own way of making pots, so every meditator will shape his or her own meditation. No two people will do a given meditation in exactly the same way. The same meditation practiced daily will be different every time. Every meditation is experimental. One never knows what is going to happen. Part of the joy is watching, waiting, and witnessing what happens. Improvisation is essential. After all, we are not passive in this experiment. *We* are the subject, the active participant in what will happen. There is no “wrong” way of doing the meditation, except not doing it! Steiner was always leery of imposing too strict or formal an instruction. When counseling someone, often he would lay out tentatively, even hesitantly, the meditation's framework and parameters, with some indication of a theme. Then he would give advice as to how the meditation might be carried out, adding, “But suit it to yourself,” or words to that effect. “Meditation advice” is thus more accurate than “meditation instruction.” *Meditation is something to play with.*

While meditation is a free, individual act in which we are most ourselves, at the same time it leads us out of our ordinary everyday selves and allows us to begin to experience the least subjective, most universal aspect of who we are: our attention. All meditation is an exercise in attention, whether it is thinking attention, feeling attention, or willing attention. And attention, which in its purest form we may call “thinking (or consciousness) without an object,” gives us our first taste of the true “I.” In this sense, meditation is the art of self-knowledge.

10

Spiritual teachers have walked the path they teach step by step. There is nothing theoretical about their work. They know; and their knowledge is the matured fruit of lifetimes, cooked and transformed in the crucible of this present life with all its joy and suffering. They are exceptional human beings. We may call them *initiates*. R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz gives an interesting and quite useful explanation of the double working involved in the provenance of an initiate’s knowledge (and, in some sense, anyone’s spiritual knowledge) in the introduction to lectures he gave on his teaching (*La Doctrine*, 1926):

Above all, I inherited it as one inherits one’s blood. What I established through many struggles and nights of research is, in fact, only knowledge I possessed in a past life. The effort I made was an effort to unveil, not to acquire. But there is no merit in that; for the reward far surpasses any suffering or effort. However, this is only one aspect of the question. The other is *revelation*, a word often used without knowledge of its true import. Revelation is not inspiration, a sudden bedazzlement. It is a veritable giving birth. As in the case of a mother, for whom the natural term indicates the moment when the birth should occur, which then happens with all the pains of an effort demanded by necessity but refused by

the body through inertia, so the light of “revelation” enters the world.

One feels revelation coming, one knows the moment has arrived when an obscure but powerful desire will realize itself; one feels it coming despite all the incredible obstacles that life and the occult forces know to put in its way. Once one has lived through the experience, it is strange to look back over the mountains that rose up to lead one away from the event that sought to happen, that one longed for and feared at the same time. Then the sufferings come, that is, the renunciations, the shatterings of the ego, the denial of all that one wishes for, the very offering of one’s life to attain this moment when the spiritual fruit will be born. And there is another thing that one can hardly realize: you are both what receives the revelation and, like the mother, you are the one who knows least about the nature of what is revealed. Revelation occurs in a longer or shorter time, with more or less suffering, and one remains before it, astonished that it is there, and not yet understanding its meaning. Is that revelation? Not yet. You must nourish the child, learn to know it, study it under all aspects, see where and how it is ill. One is so imperfect, so ill-suited, to bring spirit into the world that the revelation runs the risk of being sickly. You want something so much, you are in such revolt against the spiritual world, you so much want to be yourself, that the process of revelation can well bring organic weaknesses into your constitution. Therefore you must now begin the real work, which is like a true maternity.

There is nothing quite comparable in Rudolf Steiner, who rarely spoke of himself in such terms. However, in a lecture on Goethe’s Rosicrucian poem “The Mysteries,” speaking of Brother Mark, the initiate hero of the poem, he describes what he calls “a

process occurring in human life in which the highest ideas, thoughts and conceptions are transformed into feelings and perceptions.” Explaining how this transformation occurs, Steiner says:

We live through many embodiments, from incarnation to incarnation. In each, we learn many things, each full of opportunities for gathering new experiences. We cannot carry everything over in every detail from incarnation to incarnation. When we are born again, it is not necessary for everything we have learned to come to life in every detail. But if we have learned a great deal in one incarnation, and then die and are born again, although there is no need for all our ideas to live again, we come to life with the fruits of our former life, the fruits of what we have learned. Our powers of perception and feeling are in accord with our earlier incarnations.

Steiner goes on to describe how Goethe in his poem shows us “the highest wisdom, which is a fruit of former knowledge.” He says that Brother Mark, the new leader of the twelve, “has transformed this knowledge into feeling and experience and is therefore qualified to lead others who have perhaps learned more in the form of concepts.” Rudolf Steiner was such a leader and initiate. We should be both awed and encouraged by this. Steiner was an extraordinary, exceptional being, one of the “hidden pillars” of humanity, yet, from the perspective of reincarnation, we are all initiates. For us, too, the fruits of our former lives are available inchoately in our feelings and perceptions, if only we awake and start now on a path of inner development.

11

What is the difference between a saint and an initiate, who works assiduously at self-development for the sake of the Earth over many

lifetimes? A simple, but in many respects misleading answer, is that initiates are self-made, while saints are made by God. This is misleading because the dynamic between nature and grace, or what is known in Buddhism as “own power” and “other power,” is complex and ambiguous. Nature from one perspective is grace from another. Put another way: One never ascends higher by nature than grace descends. They are two sides of a single coin: God’s two hands. Nevertheless, there is always a difference of emphasis. Citing a Rosicrucian legend, Rudolf Steiner frequently differentiates between what he calls, following the Biblical story of Adam’s two children, the “Abel” stream and the “Cain” stream. According to Steiner, the original Adam, who was male-female, “divided into two types in his offspring, one more masculine, the other more feminine.” For Steiner they represent two types of humanity or orders of service. “Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.” Cain worked the Earth. He represents a bottom-up approach. He works out of himself, transforming the Earth toward heaven, offering up what he has achieved out of his own freedom by his own effort and intelligence. He creates arts and sciences, which have their roots in the Earth. As Steiner says, “The physical is the mark of Cain.” Abel, on the other hand, tends what he has *received*: He is the receptive and devoted nurturer of the spirit bestowed on him by the spiritual world. Abel is the child of God, but Cain is the child of the Earth. From these, two approaches to the spirit arise. Abel’s approach descends from God; Cain’s rises from the human Earth. Through the sequence of Earth lives, human beings work to transform the Earth into a living divine-human-Earthly Sun for the glory of God. One is the path of the warrior or king (the Royal Art), the other the sacerdotal, or priestly path. As initiations, the one unfolds the so-called Lesser Mysteries (of the human being and the cosmos), the other the so-called Greater Mysteries (of God). One is the lineage of Cain, Tubal Cain (the primal smith who taught the use and working of metal ores and iron), Methuselah (who invented the primal Tau script), and Hiram, the architect of Solomon’s temple. This line

continues through the alchemists, mystical philosopher, and realized occultists, or initiates, of all ages. The other is the divine priestly lineage of Seth and Solomon, and the great company of saints formed by God. Ultimately, of course, such distinctions are untenable. We must unite both sorts of striving in ourselves. We are all called both to be saints—indeed we are already saints *potentially*—and to work the Earth and create ourselves by our own efforts. But there is always a question of emphasis. And for Steiner his path was clear: It was the Cain path, to be walked by and out of himself. His life is exemplary of his approach. Yet he sought also to reconcile the two paths and foresaw their future union.

In fact, there is no better introduction to the spiritual method Steiner taught than to meditate the life he lived. Whatever he encountered, from his earliest years to his death, was for him a spiritual exercise through which he could grow in consciousness, in knowledge of the truth, and in the practice of goodness. One thing, however, must be understood. What is most important is often unstated. Reading the story of Steiner's biography, even in his own words, could well leave the impression that knowledge of the spirit came easily to him. But this would be a misapprehension. Though by temperament typically Viennese in his sociability, congeniality, and sense of humor (and never losing the deep pleasure good company and companionship gave him), Steiner was an ascetic in (and for the sake of) his spiritual life. He dedicated himself body and soul to the mission he was given, and renounced the ordinary creature comforts of family and intimacy. In a word: He worked extremely hard (and suffered greatly) to merit the spiritual treasures he received. He does not speak of any of this, but one need only read between the lines of his texts and of his face to see that this is so.

12

Rudolf Steiner was born in obscurity in 1861 in the tiny railway town of Kraljevec, in present day Croatia, on the western edge of

the vast Hungarian plain. His father was a minor railroad official, subject to the whims of bureaucracy. Thus, when Steiner was six months old, the family was sent to a town near Vienna. After six months, they were moved again to the country station of Pottschach in Lower Austria, near the Styrian border. There, for the next eight years, Steiner was formed. Majestic peaks soared in the blue distance, intimate nature gently cradled the village, and through it all ran the railroad and telegraph, which served the local mills and factories. Also present was the Catholic Church, especially in the form of a friendly priest who, though Steiner's father was a freethinker, became an intimate of the family.

Given the speed at which time is now moving, Steiner's year of birth can seem very distant indeed. Yet, appearances notwithstanding, despite the nineteenth century trappings of his life, particularly evident in some of his language and the contemporary movements (occult, Theosophical, and political) within which he moved, Rudolf Steiner is nevertheless surprisingly modern, even postmodern. Growing up between nature and technology, with a deep feeling for both, as well as for the spiritual world, he was attuned to the evolutionary possibilities each contained. He saw clearly what was lacking for creative participation in a truly human future. In other words, he saw, and oriented himself toward, where we are now.

Initially, thinking and the inner world that opened into the spiritual worlds came almost more naturally to Steiner than the physical world. By the time he was eight, when the family moved to Neudorf on the Lower Austrian border, he already knew the difference between, as he puts it in his *Autobiography*, "things and beings that are visible and those that are invisible." He already understood thoughts not as representations of outer reality, but as "revelations of a spiritual world on the stage of the soul." Geometry, which he loved, he felt was the proof of this. We produce it inwardly, but its significance is independent of us. It seemed to him to confirm the truth of other inward perceptions.

It also fascinated him by its connections to higher mathematics and natural science, which seemed to him to pose questions and propose answers, in which he sensed some fundamental lack. Not knowing whether this lack lay in him or the subject, he elected science as his major course of study.

There were other “perceptions,” or, more accurately, feelings, that were not of the visible world. We could call them clairvoyant or “psychic.” For instance, one day he was sitting in one of his favorite hiding places, the railway waiting room. He saw the door open and a woman enter who was unknown to him but nonetheless resembled a member of his family. She walked to the middle of the room and, gesturing, said in effect, “Help me as much as you can.” For a while, she continued to gesture. Then she went over to the stove and disappeared into it. Later, he heard that a distant relative had committed suicide and he understood that it was her soul that had visited him in search of succor. The ramifications of such an event, when experienced consciously, are profound: one knows one lives in the spiritual world. As Steiner says, speaking of himself in the third person, in a lecture entitled “Self-Education” (February 4, 1913):

Beginning with that event, a life began to develop in the boy’s soul that thoroughly revealed to him not only the worlds from which outer trees and mountains speak to the human soul, but also the worlds behind them. From that moment, the boy lived with the spirits of nature.... He lived with the creative beings behind things, and he allowed them to work upon him in the same way as he allowed the outer world to work upon him.

The young Steiner thus lived on two levels. On the one hand, the spiritual world was a reality to him; on the other, with a free and independent spirit, he threw himself into his school studies. In *how* he brought these together, we see the life of spiritual exercises to which he would dedicate himself in the process of being born. We

witness, that is, the birth of an experimental consciousness, determined to uncover provisional truths, through prolonged thought or meditation either on the truths presented by any given subject or on the fundamental questions or riddles that it posed. We see him, inspired by a favorite geometry teacher, spending hours drawing with compass, ruler, and triangle, using the opportunity “to grapple with the phenomena of the sensory world to gain a perspective of the spiritual world that was naturally visible before me.” Doing so, he strove for a new kind of thinking: “one capable of grasping the true nature of physical phenomena.” Studying Immanuel Kant, he sought not only to understand the philosopher, but also to maintain harmony in himself between such thinking and religious teaching. For this, thinking had to become “a power that truly includes the things and processes of the world.” In the same vein, he became interested in a series of books on learning mathematics independently. Thus, he taught himself analytical geometry and trigonometry, as well as differential and integral calculus. All these, we might say, were preliminary exercises, aimed at proving for himself that “the activity in human thinking is in fact spirit.”

By this time, he was ready to enter the Institute of Technology in Vienna. His master was now Fichte, Kant’s successor in the lineage of German idealism. Fichte led him to understand that the human “I” is the only possible starting point for knowledge, deepening his meditative life by the addition of self-observation. From Fichte, he understood that something spiritual is present in consciousness when the “I” actively observes its activity. Such observation had to be precise and communicable in clear concepts. Page by page, he rewrote Fichte’s *Science of Knowledge*. Previously, he had sought to find the “I” by starting from natural phenomena. Now he sought to find natural phenomena by starting from the “I.” Living in the “I,” which is itself spirit, a spiritual being, he now lived in the world of spiritual beings. “The spiritual world was an immediate reality.” But he could not reconcile this experience with physical nature. Therefore, it became his task to do so.

To prepare him, destiny led him to Felix Kogutski, a factory worker and mystical herb gatherer. With this apparently simple “man of the people,” Steiner finally found someone with whom to discuss his spiritual experiences. Kogutski, who gathered medicinal plants and sold them in the pharmacies of Vienna, became an important teacher. Steiner says that although he had read many books on mysticism, when Kogutski spoke, elemental creative wisdom flowed from his soul, not book learning. He was one who “artlessly let stream into his heart each revelation as it came.” When he entered his inmost heart, observing nature around about him, knowledge lived in him that “did not seek for words,” but could be communicated in other ways. Under his tutelage, Steiner learned to “look deeply into the secrets of nature.” Many years later, Steiner would repay his Kogutski by depicting him in his mystery dramas in the character Felix Balde, “the man with the lamp.” Asked what must be done to give the powers of Earth what they so sorely need, Balde replies:

As long as only those
 Find hearing on Earth
 Who will not recall
 Their spiritual source,
 The lords of metal ores
 Will hunger in the Earth’s depths.

— *The Portal of Initiation*

Later, he says more optimistically:

We stand at a turning point in time.
 Some part of spiritual knowledge
 Who wills to open mind and heart to it
 Must be unlocked for everyone.

— *The Souls’ Probation*

Kogutski was “an emissary.” He led Rudolf Steiner to a mysterious figure Steiner refers to, in the so-called “Barr Document” he wrote for Edouard Schuré, only as “the M” (Master): “I did not meet the M. immediately, but first an emissary who was completely initiated into the secrets of plants and their effects, and into their connection with the cosmos and human nature. Contact with the spirits of nature was something self-evident to him, about which he talked without enthusiasm, thereby arousing enthusiasm all the more.” The precise identity of the Master is unknown, for Steiner never spoke of him directly. Tradition has it, however, that he was the initiate Christian Rosenkretz. From him, Steiner received the directive to build a bridge from modern scientific consciousness to cognition of the spiritual world.

His primary guide in this was to be Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the great German poet, dramatist, and novelist. Goethe was to be another initiator. Steiner was led to study him seriously by Karl Julius Schröer, his professor of German language and literature. Besides Goethe, Schröer also introduced Steiner to the living elements of German and Austro-Hungarian legend and folklore, including the famous “paradise” Christmas plays, often still performed today in Waldorf schools. Schröer was an idealist. For him, the driving force in evolution was the world of ideas. For Steiner, however, the life of the spirit lay behind the ideas. Ideas were only “shadows” of the spirit. Heated arguments ensued. When they discussed “folk souls,” they seemed closer together. Often, conversation on the relationship between the spiritual and the physical worlds would take them late into the night. Schröer was finishing his introduction to *Faust* for a new collected edition of Goethe’s works. *Faust* was, of course, literature. Goethe’s non-dual understanding of nature and spirit was more naked in his scientific works, which, as Schröer recognized, it was Steiner’s destiny to edit. Therefore he arranged for Steiner to be asked to do so (1882).

Goethe had created an alternative, participatory scientific method based not on theory or mathematics, but on direct, phenomenological

observation of nature. For Steiner, what Goethe had achieved in the organic realm was the equivalent of what Galileo had done for the inorganic realm. Goethe did not come to this achievement unaided, which would be important for Steiner, too. Informing Goethe's approach was a radical transformation of the science of alchemy. Steiner's first task (the complete introductions would take him more than ten years) was to work through the idea of *metamorphosis*, as is expressed, for example, in the plant's transformational genesis from seed to seed, a process that unfolds through leaf, bud, flower, pistil and stamen, and fruit. As Steiner puts it, in this alchemical process, "in the progressing, living transformation of concepts, images arise that display the being formed in nature." But how does one conceive of the guiding entity, the archetypal plant leaf, *in* the metamorphosing plant? Or the "archetypal human" in the larger evolutionary story? This demanded a different way of *cognizing*, or knowing. No such epistemology existed, so Steiner had to create it.

Encountering Goethe, therefore, engaged Steiner even more deeply in the cultivation of his philosophical and his esoteric life. Doing so aided him immensely. Meditative experience had led him to the experience of thinking as a direct experience of reality, which, because it was completely experienced, was *certain and immune to doubt* in a way that the sensory world was not. What was the relationship between thinking, with its certainty, and the sensory world with its doubt? As Steiner oscillated between the two, he came to conclude that it was through thinking that the sensory world expressed its true nature. They were not two, but one. In this, he learned much from the philosopher Hegel's writings, which he read as meditative texts. Hegel impressed him; he had certainly achieved living thinking. But Steiner was also repelled by Hegel, because he had not allowed this experience to lead him to a concrete world of spirit. Goethe went further. *He understood that what we usually divide into subjective and objective experience could be intuited as a whole by thinking purified of preconceptions.* Through such intuitions, Goethe was able to penetrate the spiritual world.

Steiner was also involved during this period with the cultural avant-garde, including Nietzscheans, feminists, and forward-thinking Catholic thinkers, as well as early Theosophists and occultists like Friedrich Eckstein. All of these helped deepen his sense of mission and his understanding of his time and place.

Eckstein, or “Eck,” was a Wagnerite, a vegetarian, a philosopher of symbolism, an alchemist, and a musician. After the M, he was the next significant spiritual influence. He introduced Steiner to the Western esoteric tradition. Steiner wrote in 1890: “There are two events in my life that I count among the most important. About one I must remain silent. The second is the circumstance that I came to know [Eckstein].” For a number of years, he guided Steiner in the understanding of the symbolic language of ancient and Hermetic texts and helped him unlock much of what Goethe had likewise expressed “symbolically.” They read Goethe’s poems together as well as alchemical and other esoteric texts. The few letters extant between them indicate the level of work and friendship they engaged in. For instance (1888):

Dear Mr. Steiner,

Since I absolutely need the book today, for the moment I will just note down the details and bring the book to the Coffee Shop on Monday.

The title of the book in question is: *Remarks upon Alchemy and the Alchemists*. It appeared anonymously, printed in Boston by Crosby, Nichols, and Co., 1857. The author’s name, as I know from a certain source, was [Ethan Allen] Hitchcock. On page 87, we find:

Nearly all of the writers quote a saying attributed to old Ostanes, that “*nature unites by nature; nature rejoices in nature; nature improves nature; nature loves nature; nature overcomes nature; nature perfects nature; nature contains and is contained by nature,*” and several of them caution their readers to keep these principles in mind.

... I will probably not be going to the café tomorrow. But I hope to see you there on Monday.

In 1890, we find Steiner writing to Eckstein, desperate for guidance in understanding two lines from Goethe's poem "The Bride of Corinth": "Salt and Water do not cool / Where youth feels."

Eckstein replies in full. He sees the symbolism in the context of the "bride," that is, the union of male and female principles (day and night, consciousness and unconsciousness, etc.). He invokes Christian ritual. *Salt* and *water* are both primary Christian symbols. A Catholic baptism is actually incomplete if those to be baptized do not have a grain of salt laid upon their tongues while the priest says the ritual words, "*Accipe salem sapientiae, ut habeas vitam aeternam*" (Take the salt of wisdom in order to have eternal life). He goes on to tell Steiner to consult Ezekiel 16. All in all, he confesses:

The esoteric meaning of salt and water is very difficult to communicate. *Water* purifies the human Augean stables. Hercules conducts Eurotas through the Augean stables. Why Hercules? Why the Augean stables. Read everything in the bible on "the water of life," Noah, etc., and on "rain," also Goethe's poem "Legends."... *Salt* is a primordial symbol for spiritual resurrection and immortality. *Salt* arises when wood is burned and the ash is leached out. Salt is matter that is clarified. It obeys only the pure mathematical law of spheres, leaving everything unclean behind in the mother liquor. Otherwise the flesh retains its rottenness. But God has sealed the elect with a *bond of salt*, as the Bible says.

Besides the traditional realms of alchemy and occultism, Eckstein, who had met Madame Blavatsky, also introduced Steiner to Theosophy and streams related to it. Steiner took note. For the moment, apparently, he felt no affinity. Certainly, A. P. Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*

struck him as displaying many errors and no great depth of thought. Besides, he had philosophical and preparatory work to do.

To this, he dedicated the immediate future. None of it was theoretical. Whatever he undertook was practical, existential, and initiatory. Over the next years, Steiner by his own effort, meditation, study, and suffering would realize the full power of the true "I."

13

Central to the work of the "I" is *The Philosophy of Freedom* (translated as *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path*). It is the work which, when asked which of his books he would most want rescued if some catastrophe should strike, Steiner always unhesitatingly named. Upon its basis all the rest, the whole vast edifice of Anthroposophy, could be recreated. It is no ordinary book. Each line arises from Steiner's own personal experience. It is a record of his spiritual journey and, in that sense, also a manual (for those able to follow it inwardly) of spiritual practice for us.

Following its publication, he wrote to his friend Rosa Mayreder (November 1894):

I do not *teach*. I recount what I experienced inwardly. Everything in my book is personal, even the shape of the thoughts. Someone fond of teaching might expand on the theme. I myself may do so one day. But my first wish was to show *the biography of a soul struggling to freedom*. There is nothing you can do in such circumstances to help those who insist on joining you in scaling cliff faces and crossing abysses. It's all you can do to get across yourself. The inner urge to cross burns too strongly to allow for stopping and explaining to others how they might find the easiest way there. I took my own path and followed it as well as I was able. This was the path I described.... My interest in philosophy is restricted almost entirely to the experience of the individual.

But not just any individual. Steiner is the individual who discovers what it means to *think* and to *think independently*, outside the box. Discovering in the experience of thinking that when we think we are the universe, he discovers the true freedom of thinking. This is not thinking as “having thoughts,” but actual non-dual being, beyond subject and object, inside and outside, concept and percept. It is not the conceptual husk by which we habitually know the world, but the living tip, or outer fringe, of the universal flow itself. To experience this is to experience the impossible: that we are co-creators, resurrectors, of the world. It is to think things through to the end. Ultimately, it is to commune with, and perceive, intuit, the essence of things, the universal spirit. It is to enter the spiritual world. Dead thinking crucifies the world. To the extent that we move from thoughts to the formative life of thinking and thinking becomes alive in us, we resurrect it. The world is resurrected. We can accomplish this only one by one—individually. As Steiner wrote in his introductions to Goethe’s scientific writings, “Truth is always only the individual truth of significant human beings.”

14

The period between the ages of thirty-six and forty (1897–1901) was critical to Steiner in a different way and led to his stepping onto the world stage as a spiritual teacher. First, having always lived in the spiritual world, he now began to live in and understand the sensory, physical world. His ability to observe physical processes and beings became more accurate and penetrating. He understood that the sensory world, including the world of human beings, could reveal something that only it could reveal. He also experienced how the physical world leads directly into the spiritual. All this led in a surprising way to the realization: The world is full of mysteries that are not to be solved by thoughts. Rather, the phenomenon of a mystery reveals itself in the reality that it is. At the same time he understood that the real key to all mysteries was humanity, the

human being, itself. *The world is the question; the human being is the answer.* Or rather, the stage upon which the answer appears.

Second, underlying the above, Steiner learned “through *inner experience*, the nature of meditation and its significance for understanding the spiritual realm.” As he himself says, “I had led a meditative life before then.... But now something arose within me that demanded meditation as an absolute necessity for my soul life.” Such meditation, he found, led to the participation and union of the whole person in and with the spiritual world. More than that, he discovered that meditation led to an awareness of an “inner human spirit” that could live within the spiritual world, completely detached from the physical organism. All this strengthened him enormously.

Third, he experienced the living presence of the Christ, crucified and risen. While always deeply Christian in his bones, during his years of philosophical preparation, when he had to discover the spirit out of his own resources, Steiner had often given the impression of having abandoned his Christian roots for a kind of spiritual free-thinking individualism, in which all religion, including the Christ, was a misperception of the human “I.” Approaching his fortieth year, however, he was tested, with a purpose. As he says, “Tests of this nature are obstacles placed in one’s path by destiny and have to be overcome in the course of spiritual development.” The test involved truth and falsity. Since error on Earth is a spiritual being in the heavens, Steiner recognized that his struggle was with *Abriman*, the principle of evil having to do with “premature” materialism and abstraction without full spiritual incarnation. The antidote, he realized intuitively, was “to contemplate the evolution of Christianity with spiritual perception.” Doing so, he was led to the dawning of a new “conscious knowledge of true Christianity.”

Around the turn of the century, this knowledge grew deeper. The inner test of soul, mentioned above, occurred shortly before the turn of the century. *This experience culminated in my*

standing spiritually in the presence of the Mystery of Golgotha in a most inward, profound, and solemn festival of knowledge.

This was not a sudden illumination in which the whole meaning and experience of Christ's deed was revealed in its fullness all at once. Rather, it marked the beginning of a gradual process, which would continue to unfold for the rest of his life. Thus, only a few years later, after having written his first "Christian" texts, he could note: "1903—The Christian mysteries begin to dawn." As a spiritual researcher, an experimentalist, Steiner could never allow himself to know more than he could experience; and the path of experience, as anyone who follows it knows, is a continuous raising of the veils, which, while not a course of trial and error, is not one of complete knowledge, but of endless approach, forever drawing closer and deeper to reality, which is unknowable in its totality.

15

With the turn of the century, Rudolf Steiner began his spiritual teaching. Over the winter 1899–1900, in response to an invitation to address members of the German Theosophical Society, he gave a first series of lectures on mysticism and contemporary philosophy. Marie von Sivers (later, Marie Steiner) was one of those in attendance and immediately recognized him as the great teacher he was. Her contribution to world evolution is therefore inestimable. From that point on, she became Steiner's helpmeet and organizer. It is not clear whether without her he could have accomplished what he did.

The theme of his lectures was mysticism as a way of knowing: that is, *Know thyself*, in the large sense of "know yourself as an organ of divine-spiritual-cosmic cognition." The key was "Die and become" (Goethe) and "Those who do not die before they die, when they die, rot" (Jakob Böhme). To truly exist, then, to become

an “I,” one must sacrifice one’s separate existence as determined by one’s organic, psychological circumstances. This is the transformation that the injunction of the Delphic oracle requires. It does not ask us to know ourselves as psychological beings. In fact, the individual, separate personality must die for the Self to come into the world, the true Light, whose illumination allows us to see things as they are.

The following year, he spoke on Christianity as mystical fact. In book form, these two sets of lectures, *Mystics After Modernism* (or *Mysticism at the Dawn of the Modern Age*) and *Christianity As Mystical Fact*, exemplify what Steiner’s approach to Theosophy would be.

He would take the Western path as it led from the religions of Persia and Egypt, through the ancient Greek philosophers and Mystery religions, into the Middle Ages of mysticism (Meister Eckhart, Nicholas of Cusa, Silesius), alchemy (Paracelsus, Basil Valentine, Böhme), and the beginnings of Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism, all the way up to Romanticism and German “Idealism” as indigenous Western European precursors of Theosophy.

He would bring Christ into Theosophy, making his entire vision and method pivot upon the “deed of Christ,” Christ’s presence in evolution, human nature, and the Earth, which he called “The Mystery of Golgotha.”

16

The die was cast. On October 20, 1902, Rudolf Steiner became General Secretary of the German Theosophical Society with the proviso that he would teach only what he saw fit, that is, what he could vouch for from his own personal experience. Esoteric work began immediately on (at least) five fronts.

FIRST, the “sacred” literature of Theosophy had to be absorbed, sifted, and meditated through. However difficult it was for him to do so, Steiner worked through *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret*

Doctrine, as well as Blavatsky's other works, including *The Voice of the Silence* and many essays and occasional pieces. Here his main intent was to make esotericism and its symbolism publicly available: to dissolve the distinction between exoteric and esoteric (that is, to ensure that the veil of the Temple was truly "rent"). He also spent time meditating Theosophical writers like Mabel Collins, whose work, especially *Light on the Path*, he held in high regard as an essential meditative text. He also undertook the direction of the Esoteric Section, whose purpose was to nurture the practical, not theoretical, pursuit of spiritual wisdom. He saw this enterprise as critical, for, as he wrote to Marie von Sivers (April, 1903):

Often the people facing us are hardly with us at all because they are under the control of forces that lead them this way and that into life's trivialities and gradually become the nerve center of their lives. Such things can only be opposed by true and complete Theosophists.... *Without a nucleus of true Theosophists to improve the karma of the present by hard-working meditation, Theosophical teachings would be expounded merely to half-deaf ears.*

SECOND, the art of meditation had to be deepened from the bottom up. This meant Steiner's own beginning again (and again) the work of self-transformation, of dying to self. In this regard, another letter to Marie von Sivers (two days later), which shows Steiner in a very human light, is revelatory:

Today, for the first time, it seemed to me as if I understood the nature of meditation on a somewhat deeper level, which is more creative than reflection, re-petition, and re-feeling. I wanted to preserve it, but then my morning work intervened, and now the letters, and I fear it is disappearing. You will probably say that I should have preserved it, despite the interruptions. But in that situation, the absorbed peace of soul—a fundamental condition—is lost, because of things that have remained undone.

There you have my freshly acquired insight. That, by the way, was something I realized particularly clearly while meditating today. The main obstacle for me was disorder. It gave me a heightened feeling of being in a rush and of a guilty conscience. Thus things that had not been done and had been omitted in everyday life intruded into the devotional and mental images. This is a deeper reason for my slow progress and, as long as this vice is not pulled out by the roots, things will not go well. *One has to start with the small things.*

Meditation work is thus, even for Steiner, always also work on oneself. Work on oneself and the concomitant awareness of one's weaknesses and failings, however, should never be allowed to overwhelm or distract one from the fundamental path of the meditation itself, which is both teacher and teaching. If you persevere, it will do its work, irrespective of your distractions. Distracted? Return to the meditation. Meditation with themes and exercises elaborated and perfected from time immemorial by the great sages, teachers, mystics, and initiates will, by the grace of the spiritual world, change and instruct you. Only do it, start now: Do it for the sake of the world.

Hence, the THIRD point. The framework and ambiance of Steiner's meditation was *research*. The term is at once accurate and misleading. It is accurate to the extent that a constant product of the inner work he practiced and taught was *cognitive* and produced experiences of knowing or insight in relation to whatever field he was investigating. Yet, such investigation or research is rewarded by the spiritual world only when it is not undertaken for selfish purposes, but to advance human-Earthly evolution, that is, out of a sense of service and dedication. *Spiritual research is therefore a special kind of cognitive service.*

Initially at least, Steiner practiced research/meditation in four different areas. Theosophy was a vast compendium or reservoir of

primordial esoteric symbols, doctrines, and teachings, often ill-digested, and at best half understood. One task was to penetrate these so profoundly as to be able to communicate and clothe them in a form and language accessible to contemporary consciousness. Another task was to penetrate the reality of evolution, under whose sign the Earth (and humanity) stood. Here Steiner walked a middle path between the abstract theories of Theosophy and the materialist literalism (nominalism) of modern evolutionary science. Following his old master Goethe, Steiner found this path by absorbing the wisdom of those he would later call the “old philosophers of nature,” the alchemists. A third task was to revive and give new life to the moribund traditions of the West: Christian, Manichaeic, Gnostic, Cathar, Grail, Rosicrucian, Masonic, and even Magic. Lastly, there was the continuous work of discovery with, for, and on the *Christ*. In all these endeavors, Steiner placed his work under the aegis of the Archangel Michael, Regent of our Age.

FOURTH, Steiner felt the need to connect, to assure continuity, with the representatives of the Western spiritual traditions, however decadent they might be. Anthroposophy was certainly something brand new, but it was equally something ancient, a heritage, with a lineage and ancestors that reached back through the ancient Mystery religions to the primordial teachers of humanity. Establishing connection meant spiritual, living union with this tradition through meditation and Earthly connection by actual transmission from existing representatives of different streams which, however decadent they might appear to be, nevertheless constituted the vehicle that assured continuity. “In order to preserve the continuity of human evolution it is necessary today to link up, as it were, with ritual and symbolism” (December 20, 1918). It is in this sense that we must understand the Rosicrucian, Masonic, Grail, and other initiatory elements that echo throughout Steiner’s life and esoteric instructions collected here.

FIFTH, Steiner understood that if there is to be a true spiritual renewal that would break down the barriers between the exoteric and esoteric, the whole of life must become *sacramental*. What formerly took place only at the altar must be the prerogative of all humanity. This means that our whole life must become (in a cognitive sense) ritualized.

During this first period of spiritual teaching, besides giving countless lectures and holding esoteric meetings wherever he went (and building up a large body of spiritual students), Steiner wrote the basic texts of Anthroposophy: *How to Know Higher Worlds*, *Theosophy*, and *An Outline of Esoteric Science*. These, together with *The Philosophy of Freedom (Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path)*, constitute the core teaching.

The esoteric work was carried out under the auspices of the Esoteric Section and the Cognitive Cultic (Ritual) Section of the German Theosophical Society. As in Freemasonry, there were three Grades: Apprentice, Journeyman, and Master. There were also individual students, who worked with Steiner one-on-one. At the end of his life, when he instituted the so-called First Class (of the High School of Spiritual Science) it, too, was to be the first of three.

Esoteric work runs throughout Steiner's life, ceasing (apparently) only during the period of the Great War (1914–1918), though of course he continued to give private instruction and meditations during this period too. Outwardly, his focus shifted as his “research interests” moved: through Christ and the arts (1907–1914), to recognizing and overcoming evil (1914–1918), and into social action (1918–1922). The break with Theosophy came in 1913. The last years (1923–1925), following the burning of the first Goetheanum and the foundation of the General Anthroposophical Society until Steiner's death in 1925, were a true flowering. Anthroposophy, the new spiritual dispensation, shedding the jargon of outmoded occultism, entered ordinary language. The ancient Mysteries were open to all once again.

17

This collection contains texts for meditation that are representative of Steiner's spiritual method, philosophy, and practice. It contains nothing that does not emerge from his own experience and was not practiced by him, if not exactly in the form presented here, then in some very similar form.

The organization is self-explanatory. It begins with three short pieces that illuminate the framework within which anthroposophical work takes place. Basic meditation instructions and explanations follow. Next, a selection of meditation sentences illustrative of "the way of thinking," drawn predominantly from Steiner's key work *The Philosophy of Freedom (Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path)* makes clear the cognitive foundations of the path. "The way of reverence" unfolds this path from its foundation in a certain soul mood and demonstrates how "devotion," "becoming as little children," can lead to transformations in our thinking, perceiving, feeling, and willing. This section is drawn from Steiner's classic *How to Know Higher Worlds*. Then come two basic practices: the so-called "six supplementary exercises" and the "backward review." This is followed by a manifold series of meditations for living the year spiritually. This anthroposophical "Book of Hours" contains, among others, the *Calendar of the Soul* verses, the verses for the days of the week, and the zodiac verses, as well as meditations for the different festivals. At the heart of the book are three sections drawn from Steiner's more explicitly esoteric work. This is followed by a selection of meditations for the dead. The book concludes with the central Foundation Stone meditation, which all who meditate following Rudolf Steiner should lay in their hearts. Finally, as a coda, the descriptions of meeting with the lesser and greater guardians of the threshold are presented. Therewith, readers in some sense are on their own in the company of the spiritual world.

There are, of course, many more practices than included here. The collection is by no means encyclopedic. Certain things have been left out entirely: for instance, karma and reincarnation research. Hopefully, however, enough has been given for those who wish to go deeper and further, to do so.

18

It is the essence of Rudolf Steiner's spiritual teaching that the student is free. Steiner does not wish to impose on our freedom. We shall choose our spiritual vocation (or it will choose us), according to our destiny and karma, which is our personal affair, and will come to us as a question of taste, style, aesthetics. We will create our own "beauty way." Steiner's own path, and what he hoped would be part of ours too, was lived under the sign of the Archangel Michael, the Regent of our Age, and in the service of Christ. He summarizes this path most movingly (and mysteriously) in his last lecture, given on Michaelmas Eve, 1924. He speaks of the sequence of incarnations of the being who was John the Baptist, the painter Raphael, and the inspired Romantic magic idealist, poet, philosopher, and novelist Novalis.

In Novalis, he says, we see "a radiant forerunner" of that Michael stream, which is "*to prepare the work to be accomplished at the end of the [twentieth] century and lead humanity through the great crisis in which it is involved.*"

Steiner then describes the work in the following way:

- Only when this work, which is to let the Michaelic power and will (which are only those that go before Christ's power and will to plant them in the Earth in the right way) penetrate the whole of life;
- Only when Michael's power can truly conquer all that is demonic and dragon-like (you well know what that is);

- Only when all of you have received this Michaelic thought with true and faithful heart and inward love; and endeavor to go forward until not only is Michael's thought *revealed in your soul*, but you are also able to make this Michael thought *live in your deeds* in all its strength and power;
- Only then will you be *true servants* of the Michael thought, *worthy helpers* of what must now enter world evolution as Michael intends it through Anthroposophy....

He goes on:

This is what I would have my words today speak to your soul:

that you receive this Michael thought as a heart faithful to Michael may feel when Michael appears clothed in the light rays of the Sun and points to what must happen for this Michael garment, this garment of light, to become the Cosmic Words that are Christ's Words that are Cosmic Words that can transform the Cosmic Logos into the Human Logos.

Then Steiner speaks his last public words:

Springing from the powers of the Sun,
 You, shining, world-blessing spirit powers:
 Divine thinking predestined you
 To be Michael's coat of rays.

Christ's messenger, he reveals in you,
 Bearers of humanity, the holy will of worlds;
 You, bright beings of the ether worlds,
 Bear Christ's word to humankind.

Thus the herald of the Christ appears
To waiting, thirsting souls;
To them your word of light streams forth
In the cosmic age of spirit humans.
You, students of spirit knowledge
Take Michael's wise gesture,
Take into your soul's high purpose
The word of love of the will of worlds.

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Every text is an occasion to encounter its author. This is especially true of spiritual writings. Reading the words of a St. Francis or a Jacob Böhme, we feel we have entered the presence of and are face-to-face with a great soul, whose dedication and intimacy with the divine has allowed the spiritual world to communicate itself through it. In this sense every work of Rudolf Steiner's is a portrait of him and of his relationship to the spirit. Every work is a gateway to meeting Rudolf Steiner and through him, the spiritual world. The more intimate the work, the more this is true. And nothing is more intimate than these meditation texts, many of which in fact were given to specific individuals. These texts allow us to meet Rudolf Steiner as teacher—the rest is up to us.