

Life as Initiation and the Karmic Exercises

excerpted from *Divine Dialogue, a Co-Creative Path*
through the *Cycle of the Year with Rudolf Steiner's Calendar of the Soul*
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(Currently out of print)

Though some of the focus for the exercises are with the Calendar of the Soul, the exercises in regards to developing initiation consciousness and the karmic relationships exercises can be applied to any life experience. They were originally shared by Rudolf Steiner to support people to come to more clarity about their karmic relationships and destiny path.

The excerpts are a supplement our Monday Evening Holy Nights Community Conversations via the anthroposophyalive website: www.anthroposophyalive.com

Initiation

What is experienced in a natural way after death can be experienced through Initiation at any moment of life.

- Rudolf Steiner, *Karmic Relationships*, Vol. 4

Rudolf Steiner advocates that with training, each one of us can learn how to safely cross the Threshold *at will in life* to access the lucid wide-awake state of consciousness described by those who have recounted near-death experiences. Such training is called *Initiation*. All of humanity is now called to *cross the Threshold*—both individually and collectively. Initiation knowledge and Initiation training can help us to participate in that crossing with the full light of consciousness.

In the *Old Mysteries*, Initiation was undergone by a chosen few within the confines of Mystery Temples. Today, *everyone*, no matter what their life circumstances, can choose to undergo Initiation. Even if *we do not choose* Initiation—Initiation may *choose us*. It will become more and more apparent that each one of our everyday lives provides the given opportunities for initiation. The whole world has become our Temple and the enactment of our Initiation can be found in how we interact in our relationships with others, how we direct our economic transactions, what we do for our livelihood, how we impact nature, and how conscious we can be as we cross the Threshold from waking to sleeping to dreaming and back again.

Through Steiner's evolved spiritual sight and love for humanity, he asserted that we are all invited to understand the deeper significance of human experience. The mysteries of old can now be reclaimed with the dawning of new emerging soul faculties. In fact, he advocated that it is important that humanity *come of age* and reawaken to our soul and spiritual origins, so that we can find the courage and confidence to reverse the predicament of an overly one-sided materialistic world conception.

Imaginative Cognition, Inspiration, and Intuition

In the opening lines of Steiner's book, *How to Know Higher Worlds*¹, he says, "There slumber in every human being the faculties by means of which we can acquire for ourselves a knowledge of higher worlds".

In the previous chapter, we described the three aspects of consciousness in relation to the breathing cycles of waking life, dream sleep, and dreamless sleep which are related to thinking, feeling and willing. Each of these soul faculties can be consciously worked with, in order for us to increase our soul sensitivity and capacity for perception. There are three levels and aspects of supersensible perception in the *New Mysteries of Initiation*. These are called: *Imagination* (or clairvoyance), *Inspiration*, and *Intuition*.

There are different paths to the new mysteries of Initiation. One path can be found by reading the imaginative, inspirational and intuitive writings of an initiate, such as Rudolf Steiner or the work of St. John the Divine. As we read spiritual content written or spoken by an initiate with an open heart and mind and enter fully into the content with a receptive, inquiring soul – spiritual knowledge can be received that can gradually begin to awaken higher faculties of perception. Reading or listening with one's full attention and whole being is an exercise in itself.

The following exercises can also help one "step more fully into" any activity – reading, writing, listening, speaking.

Imaginative Perception

As was addressed in the Part One, if you've had a near-death experience through which you were able to retain consciousness and/or if you have read the accounts of individuals who have, you can probably relate to the possibility of mighty pictures unfolding through spiritual vision in a living picture tableau beyond the realm of time. This form of perception *where time becomes space* and unfolds in living imaginative pictures outside of sequential time is called *Imaginative perception or cognition*.

Imaginative perception is a metamorphosis of our capacity to think. The term Imagination, in initiation language, contrasts from the term imagination in everyday language which could refer to non-reality dreaming. In the context of initiation, the term Imagination means that we have the capacity to *see* the spiritual realities of existence in pictorial images. We begin to bring the light of our waking consciousness into the realm where we normally dream. The center of our activity of thinking begins to shift from our head to our hearts.

¹ *How to Know Higher Worlds, A Modern Path of Initiation* by Rudolf Steiner, Anthroposophic Press, 1994

Inspiration

Inspiration relates to our ability to hear the *hidden language* of natural forms and the living world around us. Through a developed sense of Inspiration we learn to hear what is being *spoken to us* by a *kind of inner listening* to the *characteristics* of the minerals, plants, animals and human beings in our environment. The *movement, gesture, form* or *tone* begins to reveal to us something about the inner nature of our encounter. We can also begin to hear beings of the *invisible* world and come to develop the capacity for a kind of *thought conversation* from *being to being*. Inspiration is a metamorphosis of the capacity to feel.

Intuition

The third level or aspect of spiritual perception is called *Intuition*. Intuition is related to the most unconscious aspects of our being – our capacity to *will*.

Through intuition we glimpse the true configuration of the world of spirit, which we otherwise see only in shadow images – the laws of nature. Now we come to intimately know the beings and their activities, which express themselves outwardly in the realities and laws of nature. – Rudolf Steiner²

Nature begins to reveal her secrets when we begin to live an intuitive life. We also begin to see the source of the inner motives of people around us and we begin to sense the lightness or darkness/heaviness of our own deeds. We begin to generate the light of consciousness out of the unconscious depths of our souls and we can also come to know our shadows, weaknesses, and character traits which need our love, attention, and choice. We can be a reflector of Truth for that which shows up around us.

Following these thresholds of perception, we can develop *Imagination* – the capacity to see the spiritual dimension of the realities around us, *Inspiration* – the capacity to hear the inner nature of spiritual dimension of the realities in our environment, and *Intuition* – the ability to know the being of the other.

Developing Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition

With the Calendar of the Soul Verses

The following exercises for working meditatively with the *Calendar of the Soul* meditations are condensed from Rudolf Steiner's indications for developing Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition. He describes this process in various books, but goes into the greatest detail in over 80 lectures he gave in 1924, months before his untimely death, where he introduces us to exercises, historical examples, and details of his own inner discoveries to help us awaken to our karmic

² *Macrocosm and Microcosm*, March 28, 1910 and reprinted again in *The Secret Stream, Christian Rosenkreutz and Rosicrucianism* by Rudolf Steiner, Introduction and Afterward by Christopher Bamford, published by Anthroposophic Press 2000

relationships with our colleagues, friends, family and business associates. Robert Sardello's revolutionary book, *Love and the Soul*³, is a lucid contribution to this process.

Before beginning these exercises, it is helpful to remember to connect with that part of ourselves which we *say I to*. This is the *I who recognizes that I Am* who has *choice* about where *attention* is focused. This invisible aspect of ourselves is often neglected because of its transparent nature, which can be both *within us* and *without us* at the same time. The *I* is also often confused with the *lower ego* and is disregarded in most Eastern religions as that which separates us from the world and that which is destroying the world. This is true of impulses that arise out of egoism, but not out of the selfless nature of the *I* that accompanies us from lifetime to lifetime. The *I* offers us free choice. Yes, without choice, we may not have the suffering we experience in the world, but there would also be no opportunity to *Love* out of self-conscious wisdom of choice.

Without the observational capacities of our I-being, we would be at a loss to come to an appreciation and true collaboration with the spiritual realities of the world. We could merge with those spiritual realities, but lose our sense of self and the capacity to choose.

Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition are developed from a starting place of a healthy I-consciousness. The words themselves contain numerous "I's" as do the words Initiation and Initiative. We can reclaim our wholeness with the world through our *I* without losing our sense of Self. Out of self-conscious freedom and awareness of the impact of our deeds in the world, we become more capable of free deeds of Love.

In a workshop Vivianne took with John McMannus, who studied speech training that arose out of Steiner's spiritual observations, John said, *When we are either one-sidedly thinking or one-sidedly willing, we stop breathing and lose our flow with life*. The presence of our attention in the area of the heart and lungs between thinking and willing is the point of balance within us.

Love is the most powerful healing force on the planet and brings us into right relationship to wisdom. We know from experiments that the power of love transcends the boundaries of space and time and can reach around the earth and act as a bridge to worlds beyond the physical.

OUR HEART INTELLIGENCE:

Research by the *Institute for HeartMath* in California has shown that the heart is the most powerful generator of electromagnetic energy in the human body:

- The heart's electrical field is about 60 times greater in amplitude than the electrical activity generated by the brain.
- The magnetic field produced by the heart is more than 5000 times greater in strength than the field generated by the brain
- The electromagnetic energy of the heart not only envelops every cell of the human body, but also extends out in all directions in the space around us

³ *Love and the Soul, Creating a Future for Earth* by Robert Sardello, Harper Collins Publishers 1995

- Our cardiac field touches those within 8-10 feet of where we are positioned (and perhaps in more subtle ways at greater distances)
- One person's heart signal can effect another's brainwaves, and heart-brain synchronization can occur between two people when they interact
- Research conducted at the Institute of HeartMath suggests that the heart's field is an important carrier of information

Tests at the HeartMath Institute conclude that we can heal and activate our physical dna when our heart is in resonance to the *experience of love* and that of *being loved*. In a research experiment, they took healthy dna and had an individual project hate towards it. The dna was impacted and became visibly damaged. They then took that same dna and asked another individual to bless it with love. The dna recovered its original form! We can't control what comes at us from the outside, but we can learn to master how we will respond. It is difficult to be angry or upset when we internally feel that we are loved and furthermore that we ARE Love.

Just by simply entering the realm of sleep with wonder, our questions from the day, a sense of entering a sacred dimension, and the heart-felt experience of *being loved* can change our lives.

If we can then bring the insights from sleep and recreate our vision for the day coupled with the feeling of *being loved*. Then, we can practice the inner experience of *I Am Love* and *I Am Loved* during the *in-between moments of our lives* until it becomes a natural ever-deepening state. It is a powerful place to begin any meditation, prayer, or co-creative activity.

Developing Imaginative Perception

In the following paragraph, Rudolf Steiner gives an indication as to how to achieve the first stage of perception in Initiation: the capacity to see with Imaginative perception.

So that the higher sensory organs may be developed with patience and endurance, the first stage involves the conscious elaboration . . . of words that concentrate profound cosmic truths. When cosmic truths are concentrated into symbolic sentences, we have access to a force through which we can mold our soul substance. – Rudolf Steiner⁴

In our case, the *Calendar of the Soul* verses can be the symbolic sentences we work with. We find it helpful to read the verse three times so we can later envision the contents of the verse without having to refer back to it. While reading, see if you can increase your capacity to build an imaginative perception of the living contents of the verse as you engage the full range of your senses. With each of the three readings you may find it helpful to intensify the *sensory-*

⁴ *Macrocosm and Microcosm*, March 28, 1910 and reprinted again in *The Secret Stream, Christian Rosenkreutz and Rosicrucianism* by Rudolf Steiner, Introduction and Afterward by Christopher Bamford, published by Anthroposophic Press 2000

feeling experience of the verse. After you have read the verse as described three times, are you able to *recreate* in vivid *picture form* what the verse describes as an imagination? Can you set the book down and resurrect the words on the page to form an imagination with as many of your senses as possible?

Next, relax and see if you are able to feel the *activity* and *movement* within the verses as vividly as possible. Inwardly explore the *feeling gesture* of each thought. The more mobility of feeling you can develop, the richer your soul experience of the verses will become.

*Through the patient and vigorous practice we will be able to immerse ourselves in imaginative content . . . which does not depict anything in the outer world. . . To arrive at this point, however, is not enough.*⁵

Developing Inspired Perception

Steiner describes the transition from Imagination to Inspiration in the following paragraphs.

“At the next stage, as soon as we have acquired a certain skill in picturing the imaginations, we must then reach a point where we can exclude those pictures from consciousness, concentrating only on the inner activity that created them. . . This means that we focus our attention on our own activity and ignore its product, (in this case the content of the verses) which is more difficult. After creating an Imagination, we ask, “How did I do this?” Most people will have to make numerous attempts to progress from the imagination (of the verse) to the activity that created it. This process can take a long time. It will be necessary to repeatedly create the imagination until we are able to dismiss it, thus enabling us to experience something very new without visualizing anything external – that is, the activity that created those images.

After practicing this, if we begin to feel an inner churning and swirling, progress has been made. We can then experience the moment when . . . we see a new realm before us. Now we have a new field of vision, and we have our first insight into the spiritual world.

This is what we experience. We have left the ordinary world; we have lived in a realm of pictures built up by our own activity. Then we are surrounded by a black darkness. Consciousness does not cease, but churns and swirls, stirred by our own activity . . . We renounce the world of intellect as well . . . We hold back what would otherwise flow into us as intellectual understanding. Now we see this world of the intellect from the opposite side; we see the beings we know as the spiritual

⁵ *Macrocosm and Microcosm*, March 28, 1910 and reprinted again in *The Secret Stream, Christian Rosenkreutz and Rosicrucianism* by Rudolf Steiner, Introduction and Afterward by Christopher Bamford, published by Anthroposophic Press 2000

*hierarchies. (Angels, Archangels, Archai, etc.) Little by little, everything becomes filled with life . . .*⁶ – Rudolf Steiner

Robert Sardello helped to clarify Steiner's above indications for going from the imaginative content of the verse to being able to access the *activity* that *created* the verse in his chapter on *Dreaming and the World* from the book, *Love and the Soul*. In the book, Sardello describes the activity in relation to understanding the imaginations that come through our dreams. We have paraphrased below as it relates to working with the *Calendar of the Soul* verses:

After you have successfully created an *imagination* of the *Calendar of the Soul* verse, next, imagine *stepping into* the verse and allow the *activity of the verse* to speak to you as a total living imagination, not line by line in time, but as though it is *happening* within and around you *all at once*. In this way, the *imagination of the verse disappears and your consciousness becomes the verse*. You become the heights, the depths, the feeling tone of the verse.

As the content of the verse is held back to reveal the activity that created it, interest in what the verse means begins to disappear. Your attention goes from searching for meaning to experiential activity.

As you become quietly attentive and upright within the living imagination of the verse, inspirational and intuitive insights about the verse and your life can come in flashes of knowing and becoming. In this way you can resurrect the verse from being an abstraction outside of yourself and enliven it as it enlivens you. You also come closer to the creative activity of the author—in this case Rudolf Steiner, and the activity he experienced in his soul as he wrote the verse.

Robert Sardello characterizes this process as follows which he refers to in his book *Love and the Soul*:

When we imaginatively step into (an imagination of a verse or) dream image, we have moved from image into activity. This activity can be felt as a kind of consciousness of pure mobility and creation coming into being. This mobility has distinct characteristics that vary from one dream (verse) to another, so that we are not dissolving into amorphous movement, but are very close to the creating activity of the I (or spirit), which will be different with every dream (verse) experience.

*... Working with dreams (meditative verses) in this way we gradually become more conscious of ourselves as creating beings who have the capacity to bring this creating into conjunction with the world...The world also then begins to have similar qualities of coming into being, for this work develops the capacity to experience the world as advent rather than event. We realize more clearly, however, that the world as advent can be forgotten and lost unless we do our part.*⁷

⁶ *Macrocosm and Microcosm*, March 28, 1910 and reprinted again in *The Secret Stream, Christian Rosenkreutz and Rosicrucianism* by Rudolf Steiner, Introduction and Afterward by Christopher Bamford, published by Anthroposophic Press 2000

⁷ *Love and the Soul, Creating a Future for Earth* by Robert Sardello, Harper Collins Publishers 1995

Following this process, we go from reading words as *content* outside of ourselves, to creating a *living imagination* through intensifying the *sensory feeling* content of the verse, to *becoming the activity* of the living imagination—all the while experiencing our Self as the one who shepherds the process. The creative capacity of our soul life can be strengthened and nourished as much by this activity as by the living content of the verse itself. This exercise can safely begin to develop super-sensible faculties of seeing (Imagination), and hearing (Inspiration).

But there is more . . .

Developing Intuitive Perception

The final step involves acquiring the power to renounce the activity we find ourselves immersed in. If we really make the attempt, we begin to realize how difficult this is. . . Usually we will fall asleep. If any consciousness at all is left to us, we will advance to the point where we not only hold back the world of reason but the world of spirit as well. Now from the other side we meet the world of spirit as well as the spiritual realities and beings in that world. —Rudolf Steiner⁸

In the realm of Intuition, we then inwardly take a *step into the consciousness* that created the imagination of the verse. We go from *imagination* to *activity* to *oneness with* the source of the activity. It is a matter of listening out of ever deepening receptivity within our soul. In intuition, the Sun radiance of our heart begins to discern what streams towards us in the blood of our intuitive will to the essential “beingness” of consciousness beyond the imaginations and inspirations. We are all connected at the level of intuition and we gradually awaken to the possibilities to really witness and “see” one another. Our soul becomes a vessel for wisdom that can stream toward us as we unite ourselves with the creative spiritual foundations of the world. After much patience and practice, we come to know the qualities of the inmost being of the author and the experiences he perceived as he wrote the verse.

As we make progress on our path, the consciousness shifts will begin to spill over into all areas of our lives. The exercises can begin to be habits that can help us in relation to all areas of our lives – from understanding our neighbor to what is needed by the soil in our garden.

The awakening of the soul to a higher level of consciousness can be called initiation. Through what takes place during the course of such awakening, the attributes that have been cultivated up to this time are now so deeply and permanently impressed into the members of the pupil’s being that they may be consciously used from this time forward as capacities for knowledge and also new capacities of feeling and of will for the experience and the cognition of supersensible worlds.

⁸ *Macrocosm and Microcosm*, March 28, 1910 and reprinted again in *The Secret Stream, Christian Rosenkreutz and Rosicrucianism* by Rudolf Steiner, Introduction and Afterward by Christopher Bamford, published by Anthroposophic Press 2000

—Paul Eugen Schiller, *Rudolf Steiner and Initiation*⁹

As with the building of any new faculties, the exercises described above become easier over time. They are shared for those of who want to work vigorously on conscious soul development. We all do these exercises each day to an extent. It is a matter of withholding judgment and listening at different levels of perception with *intention* and *receptive attention*.

⁹ *Rudolf Steiner and Initiation, The Anthroposophical Path of Inner Schooling, A Survey* by Paul Eugen Schiller 1981 Anthroposophic Press, translation by Henry Barnes