

Spirit Recollection and Spirit Beholding

New key elements about the contrast mentioned above could be added only after the Christmas Conference. What Steiner characterized only in a sketch is deepened in various stages, in his *Leading Thoughts*.¹ We will turn first to *Leading Thoughts* 95 to 99, quoting extensively from them, and then to Letter 17 of July 13, 1924, “Understanding of the Spirit and Conscious Experience of Destiny.”

Leading Thought 95 (September 21, 1924) expresses: “In the manifestation of the Will, Karma works itself out. But its working remains in the unconscious. By lifting to conscious imagination what works unconsciously in the Will, Karma is apprehended. Man feels his destiny within him.”

Leading Thoughts 98 and 99 (September 28, 1924) reiterate these notions by further expressing the key difference between karma from the past and future karma: “The Feeling and Willing of Thought contain the karmic outcome of past lives on Earth. The Thinking and Willing of the life of Feeling karmically determine man’s character. The Thinking and Feeling of the life of Will tear the present earthly life away from Karmic connections.” (LT 98) And further: “In the Feeling and Willing of Thinking man lives out his Karma of the past; in the Thinking and Feeling of Willing he prepares the Karma of the future.” (LT 99)

The above premises find a culmination in Letter 17 of July 6, 1924, “Understanding of the Spirit and Conscious Experience of Destiny” (see Appendix 2). Here Steiner contrasts again the two paths—previously defined as Saturn (cognitive) and Moon (will) paths. The first path is such that the human being can think, “I am forming thoughts about what my senses reveal to me as the world,” and he can experience himself in his thinking, and therefore become conscious of the self. In the path of the will one directs one’s own attention to the inner world; then those events emerge into consciousness that belong to our life’s destiny, and in which our human self has flowed along from the point of time in which our memory goes back. In following up the events of his destiny, a man experiences his own existence. The human being who experiences this enhanced memory can tell himself, “I with my own self have experienced something that destiny brought to me.” This modality in the second path awakens the consciousness that one is not alone in one’s destiny, and that the world enters into the expression of one’s will. Therefore one goes from experiencing oneself to experiencing the world.

To recapitulate the contrast, through experiencing the world in thinking one can experience oneself; through going the path of the soul, one can experience the world. The one who takes the latter path, therefore, does not lose himself in the world of his own soul, as he would in false mysticism; he can receive a feeling of communion with the world even from the starting point of his own experience. Finally, this path means acquiring the feeling of receiving one’s “I” from the world. And Steiner concludes, “Anthroposophy finds the self by showing how the sense-world reveals to man not only

¹ Steiner, *Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts: Anthroposophy as a Path of Knowledge; The Michael Mystery*.

sense perceptions, but also the after-effects of his life before birth and his former earthly lives.”

From the extensive quotations given above, we can detect that in the space of one year alone, from 1923 to 1924, Steiner moved from a general to a much deeper characterization of the path of the will (through thinking). This change was made fully possible by the background offered through the teachings of karma and reincarnation after the Christmas Conference.

The contrast between Spirit Recollection and Spirit Beholding is completed in the encompassing expression of the Foundation Stone Meditation. We have looked at the first verse, or panel, in relation to the path of Spirit Recollection. We will now look at what is said in relation to the third panel and Spirit Beholding. Let us keep in mind that the imagination of the mantram needs the balance brought in by the second panel, which is the only one that mentions the Christ. We will return later to this in the next chapter. In the third panel we are told:

Soul of Man!
Thou livest in the resting Head
Which from the ground of the Eternal
Opens to the the thoughts of Worlds.
Practice Spirit-Vision
In quietness of Thought,
Where the eternal aims of Gods
World-Being's Light
On thine own I
Bestow
For thy free Willing.
Then from the grounds of the Spirit of man
Thou will truly think

For the Spirit's Universal Thoughts hold sway
In the Being of all world, beseeching Light.
Archai, Archangeloi, Angeloi!
Let there be prayed in the Depths
What from the Heights is answered,
Speaking:
Per Spiritum Sanctum reviviscimus.
The Elemental Beings hear it
In East and West and North and South
May human beings hear it!

Here, it could not be clearer that it is through thinking that we can apprehend the working of the spirit, in the quiet of the head. And thinking, penetrated through and through by the will, is what allows us to truly think “in grounds of the Spirit in Man.” In contrast, the first panel indicates that Spirit Recollection allows us “to truly live...in the All-World-Being of Man.”

It is very indicative that Steiner made repeated references to the contrast of the two paths in the years 1923 to 1924. All that has been brought forward above appears succinctly restated in the letter to all members, July 13, 1924 (“Understanding of the Spirit and Conscious Experience of Destiny”). The entire letter is given in Appendix 1.

The path of Spirit Beholding is the path of thinking transformed by the will. The path of Spirit Recollection is the path in which the will is transformed through thinking. This transformation is made possible by recollection, the activity that consists in looking back, both in reviewing factually, and in evaluating morally.

On the path of knowledge, the exercises in *Knowledge of Higher Worlds*, meditation, and the whole of anthroposophy form the essential foundation, which accompanies the pupil in his higher understanding of how the spirit permeates everything that we behold through the senses. To this, the Six Basic Exercises are added as an important complement.

In Spirit Recollection, the exercises we have described and other similar ones, form the essential core of the path. The whole of anthroposophy and even knowledge of karma and reincarnation (as important as they may be) form the complement. In fact, to walk at least the first stages on the path of the will, as Prokofieff confirms, it is not necessary to know anthroposophy. And the attitude of soul necessary on this second path also differs greatly from the Saturn path. This difference is clearly stated in *Philosophy of Freedom's* Chapter 12, “Moral Imagination.” In contrasting natural-scientific knowledge (and all external knowledge) with knowledge that leads to moral action, Steiner said:

The confusion arises because, as natural scientists, we already have the facts before us and afterwards investigate them cognitively; while for ethical action, we must ourselves first create the facts that we cognize afterward. In the evolutionary process of the world order, we accomplish something that, on a lower level, is accomplished by nature: we alter something perceptible. Thus, initially, the ethical norm cannot be cognized like a natural law; rather, it must be created. Only once it is present can it become the object of cognition.

The contrast between the two paths appears emblematically when we look at the polarities between the “pencil exercise” and the rückschau, as expressions of Spirit Beholding and Spirit Recollection respectively. In the pencil exercise we focus all our attention on an object, such as a pencil, by discerning our sense impressions of the object, thinking about its component parts and their relationships, imagining the steps of the process that created it, etc. During the few minutes of the observation all thoughts foreign to the object are carefully kept at bay, and that requires a tremendous effort of the will. It is truly an education of thinking through the will. The polarity, though not immediately apparent, is realized in the rückschau exercise. The intent is to focus inwardly upon the whole of the day or parts of it, picturing the events in the reverse order of their occurrence, and even in reverse motion. Instead of looking outwardly, we turn our focus inwardly with an effort of our memory. What our will has brought about throughout the day, all of which would remain unconscious or semi-conscious, is raised to awareness. This is also a conscious effort of the will, but here thinking places order in the unfolding of the will which was previously brought about during the day, reminding us of what Steiner tells us is the precondition for ethical action in which “we must ourselves first

create the facts." Looking outwardly in the pencil exercise becomes looking inwardly in the rückschau; the first addresses the thinking through the will, the second the will through thinking.

The conclusions reached through this study are echoed by Zeylmans van Emmichoven, who dedicated his life to the understanding of the Christmas Conference and of the Foundation Stone Meditation. Here is his contrast between Spirit Recollection and Spirit Beholding: "Practice spirit remembering' not only means that we learn how our own 'I' is part of God's 'I'—no, out of cosmic heights we hear resound: 'From the divine, humanity takes its existence,' the humanity together with which we must come to a brotherly, social community. ... The third task set us, 'Practice spirit vision,' is ultimately the path from natural science to spiritual science, from anthropology to anthroposophy." We will return to what van Emmichoven describes as Spirit Mindfulness by the end of the next chapter.² Of added interest is what he says, very briefly and specifically, about the path of Spirit Beholding in his book *The Foundation Stone*.³

In *The Occult Significance of Forgiveness*, Prokofieff offers examples of individuals who practice the "path of forgiveness" without any knowledge of anthroposophy.⁴ The path of forgiveness is a particular formulation of the larger path of Spirit Recollection. Abundant evidence of the same is offered in *A Revolution of Hope*⁵, Chapter 6, where I described various moral techniques that have emerged in the twentieth century: the Twelve Step program, Hellinger's Family Constellations, Nonviolent Communication, Appreciative Inquiry, World Café, Future Search, Theory U, Peacemaking Circles, and so forth. Many others could be named, such as the field of Life-Coaching, Playback Theater, Dynamic Facilitation, Technology of Participation, etc. These techniques cover the first stages of the path of Spirit Recollection up to the Lesser Karma Exercise. No previous cognitive background is necessary in order to work with these approaches. Certainly anthroposophy adds strength to those who engage in the path of the will, and anthroposophic knowledge becomes essential in the later stages of the path of Spirit Recollection, which in effect leads us to a personal understanding of the laws of karma and reincarnation. Table 5 summarizes the contrast between the paths of Spirit Recollection and Spirit Beholding.

We have characterized a path fully distinct from the path of knowledge in the narrower sense, that of Spirit Beholding. The formulation of this contrast clearly appeared only at the end of Steiner's life. However, we can also retrace the complementarity of the two paths in Steiner's earlier work. Although he focused primarily on the path of knowledge, or Spirit Beholding, the path of Spirit Recollection played a subsidiary role. That is the place of some of the Six Basic or Subsidiary Exercises (except control of thought), next to the specific exercises that form the essence of *Knowledge of Higher Worlds*. The Six Basic Exercises were introduced in *Occult Science* (Chapter 5, "Cognition of the Higher Worlds: Initiation"). These are: control of thought, control of feeling, control of the will, positivity, open-mindedness, and harmonious overall integration of the previous five. Among the aims of the exercises is

² Emanuel Zeylmans, *Willem Zeylmans von Emmichoven: An Inspiration for Anthroposophy. A biography*, 249.

³ F. Willem, Zeylmans van Emmichoven, *The Foundation Stone*, 42-43.

⁴ Prokofieff, *Occult Significance of Forgiveness*, Chapter 3.

⁵ Morelli, *A Revolution of Hope: Spirituality, Cultural Renewal and Social Change*.

this stated goal as a preparation for spiritual training: “Whoever, in this way, endeavors to regulate his soul life will also attain the possibility of self-observation, through which he observes his own affairs with the same tranquility as if they were those of others,” in effect very reminiscent of what has been said of the Moon path or of the exercises of Spirit Recollection. It is in the context of *Occult Science* that Steiner also intro-

SPIRIT BEHOLDING	SPIRIT RECOLLECTION
Saturn path (macrocosm)	Moon Path (microcosm)
Path of thinking through the will	Path of the will through thinking
Pencil observation exercise: looking at the outer world	Rückschau: looking at the inner world
Preparation through study of anthroposophy	Preparation through the karma exercises: review exercises going first to lesser karma and then to greater karma exercises.
Furthering through meditation, and deepening of the study	Furthering through study of karma and reincarnation teachings: eventually, karmic research
<i>Philosophy of Freedom</i> and <i>Knowledge of Higher Worlds</i> : the ideal individual development	<i>Mystery Dramas</i> : the individual development attained in concert with other human beings
Individual path	Social path
Adult Learning (Learning from the world) of Coen van Houten	Destiny Learning (Learning from Life) of Coen van Houten
3rd panel of the Foundation Stone Meditation	1st panel of the Foundation Stone Meditation
Understanding of the Spirit	Conscious experience of Destiny

Table 5: Spirit Beholding and Spirit Recollection

duced the rückschau, an exercise to review the day in reverse order, from end to beginning. Similar to the Six Exercises are the “seven requirements” expressed in Chapter 5, “Requirements for Esoteric Training,” in *Knowledge of Higher Worlds*. These are: improvement of physical, mental, and spiritual health; looking at our shortcomings rather than those of others; realizing that thoughts and feelings are as important as deeds we do in the outer world; acquiring conviction of our soul-spiritual nature as the foundation of our true being; steadfastness to our outer and inner commitments and detachment from results; and developing a sense of gratitude for all

that we receive. The seventh is a recapitulation and synthesis of the six. Likewise, in the same book, under the heading of “Inner Peace,” what is presented has the same stamp as what was later presented in fuller detail with the karma exercises. “We should allow our joys, sorrows, worries, experiences, and actions to pass before our soul. But our attitude toward these should be one of looking at everything we have experienced from a higher point of view.” Or further, “In the time we have set aside for ourselves, then, we must strive to view and judge our own experiences and actions as though they belonged to another person.” And, “As students of higher knowledge, we must find the strength to view ourselves as we would view strangers.” The above intentions that Steiner articulated at the early stage of the formulation of anthroposophy were amplified later in the karma exercises.