

# L4a) Meditation and Researching the Deeper Aspects of the Human Being and Kingdoms of Nature

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In modules 1 & 2, we considered the various research methods available in modern research as well as in Steiner Education. One of the ideas that we came across was that, even according to modern education research, traditional methods are limited. Arguably, modern research is caught in the unbridgeable gap between the purely sense-perception based empiricism and the more speculative metaphysical realism. In the case of the former, empiricism rejects the notion that there is more to the real World than that which is presented to the senses. In the case of metaphysical realism, reality is in a “Beyond” composed of physical entities and processes which give rise to the objects that we perceive. In neither case is the Depth Dimension of the Human Being or of the World accessible to human knowledge; the dimensionally “inner” of mineral, plant, animal, human is either conceived as non-existent or unknowable.

In terms of education, this is significant. Any form of education that educates merely in terms of the “outer” dimension of reality will leave the human being untouched by the real inner nature of the beings under consideration: everything is just surface. An education system that does include this enables the depth connection between the human being and the rest of the World and can lead to greater caring and compassion on the part of the former.

As was indicated in modules 1 & 2, logical positivism, as a special form of a narrow interpretation of empiricism, rejects the notion of an inner, or depth, dimension to the World and Humanity. If followed to its natural consequence in education, logical positivism leads to “teaching to the surface” or “to the shallows of reality”.

This way of thinking was beginning to be prevalent in Steiner’s day, so he wanted to develop an education based on the Depths of Life, the way to do this was through what he called “spiritual science”, a part of which is meditation.

## Meditation as a Scientific Method

To some, the notion that meditation can be seen as a science would seem to be an impossibility. As with many things, this depends though on how they are both conceived. What critics of Steiner / Waldorf education frequently have in mind in this discussion is an interpretation of science as the currently existing **body of knowledge** or of a potential knowledge of a similar type. Whilst there is not much space to go into this here, it is arguable that there is little credibility to this way of thinking. What the history of science shows is that science continues to expand on what it discovers and accepts as real or existing: the nature of the **content** of science is very different now from what it was 150 years ago. Similarly, critics interpret meditation as some kind of vague mystical practice involving loss of consciousness or dreaming. One critic of Steiner Education referred to this as “mystical barmpottery”. **But this is not the form of meditation that Steiner recommended, rather he was advocating an enhancement of basic human capacities used by all scientists of whatever kind or indeed all people.**

A more credible area of discussion concerns scientific **method** and whether or not Steiner’s “spiritual science”, especially in the form of meditation, can be considered an acceptable kind of scientific method.

The problem is though, even within contemporary academic discussions about scientific method there is often disagreement. So in order to come to an understanding of Steiner's place in this needs open and fair real life observations of the practice of scientific method and a discussion as to the range of options and if there is some possibility of a synthesis of the varying viewpoints.

Conventionally, discourses on scientific method range between the rationalist and empiricist positions, or their more contemporary interpretations. What this means in practice is that the former prioritises Theory and the capacity of Thinking whilst the latter prioritises **Observations** and the **Capacity of Observation**. If we accept both of these capacities for the moment we can move on to other elements.

Curiously, **Memory** has scant attention in these discussions as does Imagination. This is odd, because without memory all observations would be isolated moments unconnected with anything else – it is only through memory that observations start their journey towards meaning and their unification in a concept or a theory.

**Imagination** also has a role in scientific method in that scientists seek to corroborate evidence by acquiring further observations; this requires imagining how they are to be attained. This may be done through imagining places to go to make the observations as well as imagining the type of experiment necessary in order to generate the desired observation.

But here we have another point. If a scientist has no **desire**, or **feeling**, for making further observations it is highly unlikely that they would be made – hence the scientific process would stop. Without the **desire** for observation, experimentation or discovery, there would be no science. But the capacity for desire receives little attention in debates about scientific method and yet without it scientific method would not exist in practice!

A similar argument for the **capacity for action**, or the **will**, could be made. When a scientist wants to make further observations, either in the field or in experimentation, they have to be **enacted**. In other words, they have to be **willed**. Without the conscious will, science could not in effect be carried out, quite literally. Moreover, further observations could not be made, hence the journey towards meaning in the unified theory could not happen.

Another step that is usually absent is the role of that which may be called “I”. Without an “I” being present, none of the above would occur anyway and there would be no science to speak of. With some scientist or other recognising the “I” had this or that experience or made this observation or made this or that hypothesis, etc” there simply would be no science of any kind.

Looking at scientific method from the perspective of **human capacities** yields the following picture:

I

Thinking

Feeling

Memory – Imagination

Will

Observation



As will be seen shortly, Steiner attempts to describe ways of cultivating and enhancing these human faculties as a part of his spiritual science. As these faculties are a part of normal science anyway, the ascription of the name “science” to his advocacy of the “spiritual” should not be rejected simply because of false presuppositions concerning the former or indeed the latter. If an openminded consideration of actual real life scientific method is understood and accepted, then “spiritual science”, with meditation as a part of this, can be interpreted as a development of science as such.

In the following, we will see Steiner’s descriptions of how observation, memory, imagination, feeling, and thinking as well as the “I” can be enhanced and be of value for the educator.

## Meditative Science and Education

It is certainly the case that Steiner saw meditation as a valuable research method for educators and as a way to research the inner aspect of Humanity and the World:

“Now, strangely, exponents of the modern worldview seem unaware of what it means that they cannot reach the specifically human sphere [i.e. the soul and the spirit / “I” (RR)]. Nor are they willing to admit that, in this sense, their interpretation of the universe is incomplete. This fact alone is more than enough to justify all the efforts made by spiritual scientific research.” Steiner, R (1921/22): *Soul Economy: Body, Soul, and Spirit in Waldorf Education* (SWE), Anthroposophic Press, p. 31.

“I am not talking about taking extraordinary or even superstitious measures for the sake of this soul development. Rather, I am talking about the enhancement of quite ordinary, well known faculties that play important roles both in daily life and in the established sciences... **Memory** gives duration to otherwise fleeting impressions. This quality of memory is grasped as a first step in applying spiritual-scientific methods. It is then intensified and developed further through what I have called **meditation** and concentration in the books that I have mentioned.” [i.e. Knowledge of the Higher Worlds] Steiner, R (1921/2): *Waldorf Education 1*, Anthroposophic Press, p. 16/17. [My bold]

It is not just the enhancement of memory that is a part of the science of meditation, but also the fine tuning of **feeling** perception:

“But there is still a third book by Darwin that deals with the expression of **feeling**. To those who occupy themselves with problems of the soul, this work seems to be far more important than his *Origin of the Species* and *Descent of Man* [*The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (RR)]. Such people can derive great satisfaction from this book—so full of fine observations of the human expression of emotions—by allowing it to work in them. It shows that those who have disciplined themselves to observe in a natural scientific way can also attain faculties well suited for research into the soul and spiritual sphere of the human being... Nevertheless, the excellence of his observations shows that a training in natural scientific observation can also lead to an ability to go into the suprasensory realm. This fact lies behind the hope of anthroposophic work, which, in any task that it undertakes, chooses not to depart by a hair’s breadth from the disciplined training of the natural scientific way of thinking. But, at the same time, anthroposophy wishes to demonstrate how the natural scientific method can be developed, thus transcending the practical limits established by Darwin... It endeavours to show how the **suprasensory** world can be reached so that real knowledge of the human being can finally be attained.” Steiner, R (1921/22): *Soul Economy Body, Soul, and Spirit in Waldorf Education* (SWE), p. 34/5 (My emphasis).

We have also seen from modules 1 & 2, that Steiner conceived of other research methods, or pathways, which may, in principle, lead to this deeper dimension of the World, as stated, he called this method Spiritual Science but which also includes meditation. But this deeper dimension is also a multiplicity and, as we will see from the below, it includes the life forces, the soul forces (thinking, feeling, willing) and the human “I” or spirit; not just for humanity, but for all of Nature.

There are some, no doubt, who would consider this reality claim as rather strange to say the least – let alone assert that there is a scientific research method appropriate to it. Nevertheless, this is exactly what Steiner does claim and he has proposed a series of practical exercises to attain this deeper level of reality – exercises that awaken the practitioner to “Higher Worlds”.

But this expression evokes another question: what and where is this Higher World and where does it begin? For Steiner, this World begins, in terms of our knowing of it, in the everyday awareness of our own inner life. Steiner accepts that every human being is aware of their own thoughts, feelings, impulses of will and perception – this, for him, is a **natural state of awareness** – for him, it is an indisputable capacity of **all human beings**. In the earlier discussion about self-reflection we have, therefore, simply an enhanced version of what people do in their everyday lives: become conscious and reflect on their inner being – our deeper level of reality, our own **personal** “Higher World”, i.e. The personal higher world of thinking, feeling, willing and “I”.

The next step is a little more difficult. Through the fact that we can be aware of our own inner lives, we may assume, speculate, hypothesise, that other humans, and possibly also animals, also have inner lives. But Steiner proposes that we can go beyond these **inferential** activities, which are essentially purely **thought** processes, to be able to **perceive** this inner nature of being. Once this perception has occurred, it would be then possible, and more accurate, to formulate more realistic ideas about this Depth Dimension. In reality, by unifying the **perceptions** of the inner World with the truthful **concepts** thereof, we meet Steiner’s definition of cognition, i.e. science, as discussed in modules 1 & 2.

The epistemological **starting point** for this process is **other** inner perceptions that usually accompany our sense perceptions – perceptions that may normally go unnoticed. As we will see shortly, an example of this is in the conscious attention to **listening**. Let us say, in listening to a person speak. In this we would hear, obviously, the **sound** they make in sense-perception. But one would also have a different kind of perception: the **meaning** of their words, i.e. of their **thoughts** that shine through the sound. But also mingled in with this is a perception of how they are **feeling** or of what they **desire**. Steiner would claim that most people do, or can, become aware of these secondary accompanying perceptions. This type of perception, Steiner would argue, is already a first awareness of a “Higher World” – i.e. The Higher World of the other’s **Inner Life**. In this sense, the inner World suffuses the outer World. But this can be developed further and become a scientific / cognitive capacity – the first beginnings of a science of the soul and spirit.

Of course, anyone denying this possibility cannot know if this is true or not as it is a question of a proposed extended scientific empiricism (see modules 1 & 2). But then anyone who rejects this process, even as a possibility, has essentially excluded themselves from the paradigm of the scientific community concerned both in the traditional as well as the extended developmental sense of the term. For even mainstream science does not stand still and is ever developing new methods and techniques for the attainment of knowledge.

At this point, it may be worthwhile reading chapter 2 from Steiner's "Knowledge of the Higher Worlds" (In Reading File).

## Meditation and the Reality of the Child

Steiner envisaged that meditation should be at the heart of the educational process. One such type begins with the careful and considerate **observation** of the individual children in your care followed by an active **remembering** at some later point. The aim of this is to deepen one's knowledge (of body, soul and spirit) of the children with the aim of helping them with their education:

“**meditative** digestion of a true knowledge of the human being makes you an educator. You simply face the children as their teacher in an entirely different way if you have experienced what results from a genuine, spiritual-scientific knowledge of the human being. What makes us into educators actually grows out of the meditative work of acquiring such knowledge. Such observations as we have made today, if we keep returning to them if only for five minutes a day, will bring our inner soul life into movement. We shall produce so many thoughts and feelings that they will just pour out of us. **Meditate in the evening upon such knowledge of the human being and in the morning you will know in a flash**, “Of course, this or that is what I must do with Johnnie Miller,” or, “This girl needs this or that,” and so on. In short, you will know what to do in every case”. Steiner, R (2007): Balance in Teaching, Anthroposophic Press. 39/40. [My bold]

“In our human life it is important to bring about this sort of cooperation between inner and outer experiences. You do not even need much time for it. Once you have got the knack, in three seconds you can get an inner grasp of things that will keep you going for a whole day’s teaching. Time loses its significance when it is a matter of bringing the supersensible to life. The spirit simply has different laws. Just as everything contracts in a dream, things we receive from the spirit can expand. In the same way, on waking up you can have a thought whose time-content could fill weeks but shoots through your mind in no time at all: so permeating yourself through **meditation** with this spiritual-scientific knowledge of the human being can bring you to the point when you have reached your fortieth or forty-fifth year to carrying out in five minutes the whole inner transformation that you need for your teaching. You will be quite different then in ordinary life from what you were before.” Steiner, R (2007): Balance in Teaching, Anthroposophic Press, p. 40/41. [My bold]

“As teachers we must take up for ourselves the study of the human being; we must come to a comprehension of the human being through **meditation**; we must keep in our memory the nature of the human being—then the *memory will become vigorous life*. It is not the usual kind of remembering, but one that gives new inner impulses. In this instance memory wells forth from the life of the spirit and carries initiatives over into our external work. This is the third stage. Meditative comprehension is followed by active, **creative remembering**, which is at the same time a **receiving of what emanates from the spiritual world** [in terms of imaginations, inspirations and intuitions (see lecture 2)]. **We start with an acceptance or *perception* of knowledge of the human being; then comes *comprehension*, a meditative comprehension of this knowledge that becomes inward and is received by the whole of our rhythmic system; finally, we have a *remembering of the knowledge of the human being out of the spirit*. This means teaching creatively out of the spirit; the art of education comes about and takes form. This must become a conviction, must become a direction of soul.” Steiner, R (1923): Balance in Teaching, Anthroposophic Press, p. 41. [My bold and italics]**

For Steiner then educational meditation is at least a threefold process:

- 1) Perception in relation to the knowledge of the human being;**
- 2) Meditative comprehension in creative remembering;**
- 3) Reception of imaginations, inspirations and intuitions;**

**Leading to:**

- 4) Teaching creatively.**

We will now consider the question of meditation in more detail.

## On the Relationship between Sense Perception and Inner Perception

A frequently occurring theme on this topic of meditation, in relation to the human being or nature, is Steiner's insistence that a strong root is maintained with the **sense perceptible** world through keen observation and that this is always the starting point for further development and consideration: one should avoid pure speculation and fantasising:

“But attending to our souls in this way should not lead us to believe that we shall advance far on the path if we blunt our senses to the world. First, we must **look at things as actively and precisely as possible**. Only thereafter should we devote ourselves to the feelings coming to life in our souls and the thoughts arising there... Here it must be emphasized that the spiritual researchers should not lose themselves in reflection upon what this or that might mean. Mental activity of this kind will only lead us astray. We should look out at the world with healthy, alert **senses** and a keen power of **observation**, and then give ourselves over to our **feelings**. We should not try to determine what things mean with the speculative mind, but should let things themselves tell us their meaning” Steiner, R (1994): How to Attain Knowledge of Higher Worlds, Anthroposophic Press pp 40-43. [My emphasis]

In the context of education, this means that careful observation is necessary for an understanding of the depth dimensions of the human being and nature. But it also means the avoidance of speculation or guessing what the reality of the inner situation is. School communities are complex contexts involving thoughts, feelings and actions of other teachers, parents, children and colleagues. The practice here consists in resisting the temptation of speculating about what something may mean and cultivating objective feelings as well as allowing meaning to reveal itself through the other being, rather than projecting ones own thoughts and feelings onto the others. Just to note, the type of feeling that Steiner is referring to here is not the everyday kind such as liking and disliking or sympathy or antipathy, etc, they are of a more subtle and objective kind that lies behind these.

## Orientation of Soul and Spirit

As a universal attribute required of those wishing to develop the deeper perceptions to be discussed, Steiner writes of the nature of **orientation**. Unlike the capacities to be discussed, orientation is a necessary ability needed so that the later ones can be exercised and developed – without it the further ones are essentially impossible to do.

**Orientation is essentially a capacity of capacities:**

“Another important point is what esoteric science calls “orientation” in the higher worlds. We achieve such an orientation when we have filled ourselves completely with the consciousness that feelings and thoughts are actual facts, just as real as tables and chairs are in the physical- sensory world. In the worlds of soul and thought, feelings and thoughts affect one another just as sensory things do in the physical world.... **For this to occur, we must never allow ourselves false thoughts and feelings. Random musings, playful daydreams, the arbitrary ebb and flow of feeling—all these must be banished from the soul.** We need not fear that this will make us unfeeling. On the contrary, we will find that only when we regulate our inner life in this way do we become truly rich in feelings and creative in genuine imagination. Important feelings and fruitful thoughts will then take the place of petty indulgence in emotions and the playful association of ideas.” Ibid, p. 43/44. (My bold)

Orientation is fundamentally a capacity that enables the practitioner to concentrate the whole of the soul life, thoughts, feelings, actions, on the exercise at hand without straying onto other thoughts and feelings. It is comparable to the Epoché as discussed in module 1, with the extension to the whole of the soul life.

In a school community, the tendency to distraction can be very high. Not only does the teacher have to work with the thoughts, feelings and actions of the children, they also have to deal with those of parents and colleagues. The inclination towards “arbitrary ebb and flow of feeling”, etc, and indeed of thought and action, may be very evident to a practicing teacher. The exercise here consists in staying focussed in thought, feeling and action, holding all divergences from this at bay.

## Developing Deeper Perceptions across the Kingdoms of Nature

For Steiner, **listening** becomes one of the access points for a deeper connection right across the kingdoms of nature. In listening and contemplating the different quality of sounds made by the different types of beings there are, other, more objective, feelings and thoughts can arise than those that may be called sympathy and antipathy:

“The students of occult knowledge must also direct their attention to the world of **sounds**. Here we must distinguish between sounds produced by so-called **inanimate** objects (such as a falling object, a bell, or a musical instrument) and those coming from living beings (**animals** or **human beings**). If we hear a bell, we perceive the sound and associate it with a pleasant feeling. The scream of an animal, on the other hand, not only evokes an emotional association but also reveals the animal’s inner experience, its pleasure or its pain. In esoteric training, we focus on the second type of sound, concentrating our whole attention on the fact that the sound communicates something that lies outside our own souls. We must immerse ourselves in this “otherness,” inwardly uniting our feelings with the pain or pleasure expressed by the sound. To do this, we must disregard what the sound is *for us*—*whether it is pleasant or unpleasant, agreeable or disagreeable*. Our soul must be filled only with what is happening in the being from whom the sound comes. If we practice this exercise systematically and deliberately, we will acquire as we do so the faculty of merging, as it were, with the being that made the sound. Ibid, p. 44/45. [My Bold]

The exercise can be extended to other examples across the kingdoms of nature: the rush of water, the wind blowing through the trees, the song of a robin, the purr of a cat, the bark of a dog. The point of the exercise is to deepen one's inner perceptions of the World, no matter what they are, but at the same time experience how such sounds reveal something of the type of being that they emerge from.

For teachers, this practice not only deepens their own understanding of, and connection with, the World, it also enables them to develop an inner sense for the depth dimension of the curriculum they are to teach. One of the main challenges that all teachers face, whether Steiner or Mainstream, is how to enhance their students connection to, and learning about, the World. Propositionally, pure objectification leaves the learner on the “outside” of the thing they are trying to learn about. This, arguably, inhibits learning. Cultivating an objective feeling for the inner aspect of nature through “deep listening” can help overcome this, firstly through the teacher and then, indirectly, the student. This is not to say that one brings such an exercise to the student, but that, through the teachers experience of this deeper reality, they can teach with greater conviction and authenticity.

## Developing Deeper Perceptions of the Human World

For Steiner, the act of conscious **listening** is a significant access point for becoming aware of the inner life of the human being. This type of deliberate **intentionality** involves a number of different elements. Firstly, it requires the directing of consciousness into hearing, with a focus of this on the persons speaking. But it also requires the holding back of one's own inner life. In particular, our own thoughts can act as blockages to the **meaning** of the other person, we may often be actually only understanding our own interpretation rather than what the other person actually means. Our feelings also can act as filters to the other person and the processes of sympathy or antipathy may colour significantly the other persons meaning as well as their feeling life expressed in words. Steiner writes:

“Particularly important as we develop as scientists of the spirit is that we also work on the way we listen to other people when they speak. On the path to higher knowledge this listening skill is extremely important. We must become accustomed to listening in such a way that we quiet our own inner life completely when we listen. For example, when someone expresses an opinion and another listens, agreement or disagreement usually stirs immediately within the listener. Often in such a situation we feel compelled to express our own opinion at once, especially if we disagree. However, on the path to higher knowledge we must learn to silence any agreement or disagreement [inner or outer] with the opinions we hear... Not only must we silence our intellectual judgment but also any feelings of disapproval, rejection, or even agreement. Above all, we must observe ourselves carefully to ensure that such feelings, even though absent from the surface of the soul, are not present in its innermost depths. For example, we must learn to listen to the remarks of those who are in some way inferior to us, suppressing *every feeling of superiority or knowing better*. **Listening to children in this way is especially useful, and even the wisest of us can learn a great deal from them.** These exercises teach us to listen selflessly to the words of others, completely excluding our own personality, opinions, and feelings. Once we are practiced in listening in this way without criticism, then gradually, even when the most contradictory views and illogical statements are aired before us, we begin to learn how to unite ourselves with the being of the other person and fully enter into it. We begin to hear through the words, into the other person’s soul. As we consistently practice this new habit, sound becomes the medium through which we can perceive soul and spirit.” Ibid, p. 46/47. [My bold]

For Steiner then, intentional listening is a process through which a deeper perception of a higher reality can be achieved. The soul of a person is not in some other inaccessible space, but one that shines through into the world of the senses. Just as with the other kingdoms of nature, the teacher in a Steiner School can aim to listen to the inner reality of the people around them in a School Context.

## Enlightened Perceptions of the Kingdoms of Nature

In chapter 2 of his book, *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*, Steiner discusses practices which lead to “enlightenment”. These are invariably connected with the kingdoms of nature: mineral, plant, animal and human, and what is necessary to come to deeper experiences of their being. As such, the experiences can act as valuable background resources for the teacher in a Steiner School, whatever level they are able to achieve – a deeper experience and the development of inner relationships with the spectrum of nature.

## Inner Perceptions of Mineral, Plant and Animal

Steiner introduces an exercise that may enable one to have a deeper perception of the inner nature of mineral, plant and animal. The exercise consists in developing an awareness of the differences in their life of desire, or feeling. As always, the exercise begins with sense-perception and rises to a contemplation of inner perceptions that arise through the practice:

“We begin by examining [intentionally **observing**] different natural objects in a particular way: for example, a transparent, beautifully shaped stone (a crystal), a plant, and an animal. First, we try to direct our whole attention to comparing a stone and an animal. The **thoughts** that we form to make this comparison must pass through the soul accompanied by lively *feelings*.. We should say to ourselves: “The stone has a form. The animal also has a form. The stone stays peacefully in its place. The animal changes its place. It is instinct (or desire) that moves the animal to change its place. Instincts are also served by the animal’s form. Its organs and limbs are shaped by these instincts. Stones, on the other hand, are not shaped by desires, but rather by a force that is without desire.”.. As we immerse ourselves intensely in these thoughts, observing stone and animal with close attention, two very different kinds of feeling come to life in the soul. One kind streams into the soul from the stone, another from the animal.. If we add plants to our observations, we notice that the feeling streaming from a plant, both in its nature and intensity, lies midway between what streams from a stone and what streams from an animal.” Ibid, p. 49/50.

## Inner Perceptions of the Plant World

An exercise Steiner introduces concerns the awakening of perceptions to the inner nature of the plant world:

“The first step is to direct the soul’s attention toward certain processes in the world around us. These **processes are life**, as it **buds, grows, and flourishes**; and, on the other hand, all phenomena connected with **withering, fading, and dying away**. Wherever we turn our eyes, these two processes are present together. By their nature, they always evoke feelings and thoughts in us. Normally, however, we do not give ourselves sufficiently to these feelings and thoughts. We rush from one sense impression to the next. Now, however, we must consciously and intensively focus our full attention on them. Whenever we perceive a quite definite form of blossoming and flourishing, we must banish all else from our souls and, for a short time, dwell on this one impression alone. As we do so, we will soon realize that a feeling that previously only flitted through our souls has now grown and become strong and filled with energy. We must let this feeling quietly echo within us. We must become inwardly completely still. Cutting ourselves off from the rest of the world around us, we must attend only to what the soul has to tell us about the facts of blossoming and flourishing. “ Ibid, p. 39/40. [My emphasis]

Steiner also describes contemplative practices in relation to the individual kingdoms of nature. The first concerns the plant world in respect of its life forces and powers for growth and development:

“We place before us a small seed from a plant [i.e. **Observe**]. Starting with this insignificant thing, the point will be to think the right **thoughts** intensively, and by means of these thoughts to develop certain **feelings**. First, we must establish what we are really seeing with our eyes. We describe to ourselves the form, colour, and other properties of the seed. Then we ponder the thought: “This seed, if planted in the ground, will grow into a complex plant.” We visualize the plant, we make it present to and in us. We build it up in **imagination**. Then we think: “What I now visualize in my imagination, forces of earth and light will later in reality draw forth from this small seed. But if this were an artificial seed, an artificial copy so perfect that my eyes could not distinguish it from a real seed, then no forces of earth and light would ever be able to draw forth such a plant from it.” If we can clearly form this thought and bring it to life within us, then we will be able to form the next thought easily and with the right feeling: “Within the seed already lies concealed what—as the force of the whole plant—later grows out of it.” Ibid, p. 56.

Steiner goes on to describe a complementary exercise:

“We place before us a mature plant [**observe**]. First, we immerse ourselves in the **thought**: “A time will come when this plant will wither and decay. Everything I see now will then no longer exist. But the plant will have produced seeds, and these will become new plants. Thus once again I become aware that something I cannot see lies hidden in what I can see.” We saturate ourselves with the thought: “The plant form with all its colours will soon no longer be there. But the knowledge that the plant produces seeds teaches me that it will not disappear into nothingness. I cannot see what preserves the plant from disappearance anymore than I could see the future plant in the seed. Therefore it follows that there is something in the plant, too, that I cannot see with my eyes. But if I let this thought live within me, and the appropriate **feeling** unites with it, then after a time new force will grow in my soul and become a new perception.” Ibid, p. 59.

In these complementary exercises, Steiner contrasts the plant world at the beginning and ending of the life process. In each case, he begins with **observation** through the senses, rises to **thought**, through **imagination**, leading to certain types of **feeling**. As a reminder, these “feelings” are not the everyday liking and disliking, sympathy or antipathy, but are of a proposed distinctive and “objective” nature. In this exercise, it may eventually become possible to develop an inner perception of the **life forces** of the plant world through the active use of the imagination, etc.

## Inner Perceptions of the Human Being

It is at this point that Steiner reminds the reader of the moral requirement indicated at various points throughout this module. The “three moral steps for one of cognition” principle is proposed at this point, i.e. where deeper contemplations of the human being begin (and by implication also the animal). He further states;

“But before we take this step, we must work sincerely and seriously on the integrity of our moral character. We must remove all thoughts of ever using the knowledge gained in this way for our own self-interest. We must firmly decide never to use for evil ends any power we might gain over other people.” Ibid, p. 61/62. Later he says: “Observing and contemplating our fellow human beings in this way, we can easily fall into a moral error. We can lose our love for them. We must do everything imaginable to ensure that this does not happen... Then we shall not allow ourselves to think of our fellow human beings in any way that is incompatible with the profound respect due their dignity and freedom. The idea that another person could be merely an object of observation must never, even for a moment, take hold of us.” Ibid, p. 64.

He describes the exercise:

“We **visualize** a person whom we have **observed** longing for something, and we direct our attention to this **desire**. It is best to **recall** the moment when the desire was strongest, and we did not yet know whether the person would obtain the object of their desire. Then we surrender ourselves to this picture, completely dedicated to what we can observe in our memory. We create the greatest imaginable inner calm in our souls. We try as far as possible to be deaf and blind to everything else going on around us. Above all, we pay close attention to any feeling that the mental image we have formed awakens in our souls. Then we allow this feeling to rise up within us, like a cloud on an otherwise empty horizon... Eventually, after many attempts, we shall experience in ourselves a feeling corresponding to the **inner soul state** of the individual we are contemplating.” Ibid, p. 62. [My bold]

Further:

“The above exercise may be supplemented by the following complementary one. This time we contemplate a person whose desire or longing has been **fulfilled**. Following the same rules and precautions as before, we attain another, different spiritual perception.” Ibid, p. 64. [My bold]

In this sense, the two exercises are complementary in that it bridges the polarity between **longing** and **fulfilment**.

## A Moral Requirement

As previously noted, Steiner frequently highlighted the significance of the moral in all of his suggestions for the acquisition of knowledge, of whatever kind. As it is often said in contemporary culture: “with knowledge comes power”. Whether this is precisely the case is one question, but it would seem evident that those with knowledge are in a greater position to exercise power than those who do not. With something like that in mind, Steiner wanted to emphasise the significance of the development of the moral capacity in his ideas about self-development so that any knowledge gained would be used for the good of all and not for personal gain and not for the negative:

“One precaution, at all events, is essential, and whoever is unwilling to adopt it had better not proceed in occult science at all. As esoteric students, we must not lose any of our human qualities but must remain noble-minded, good people, sensitive to all aspects of physical reality. In fact, throughout the course of our esoteric training, we must continuously increase our **moral strength, inner integrity, and faculty of observation**. During the basic exercises, for example, we must seek to enlarge not only our **compassion** for the human and animal worlds but also our **sense for the beauty of nature**. If we do not bear this in mind, then both these feelings and our aesthetic sense will be dulled by the exercises. Our heart will become hard, our senses blunted. Clearly, this would have dangerous consequences.” Ibid, p. 52.  
[My bold]

## Exercise

You might like to try some of the exercises from this lecture. Make some notes for yourself including:

- 1) Difficulties in understanding what the actual exercise is,
- 2) Problems with carrying it out.
- 3) Observations of the outcomes of the exercise.

These notes may be of value in your assignment.