

The Dark Abyss of Freedom: Yoga in Works of Rudolf Steiner

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Abstract: *The lifework of Rudolf Steiner was under a strong influence of eastern philosophies. In the context of this fact, the paper discusses the position of yoga philosophy, mainly the one structured by Patanjali, in Steiner's works. Particularly accentuated is Steiner's idea of freedom, such as it was presented in An Outline of Esoteric Science and Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and its Attainment. Through an earlier concept of "ethical individualism", Steiner developed an idea that a strong moral, mental and physical, as well as "spiritual" discipline, leads to further development of one's senses, of one's "sentient being" beyond the perceptual limits, achieving psychical and existential deconditioning – absolute freedom – which appears in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras as the supreme achievement of being, samadhi.*

Key words: *yoga, "esoteric science", freedom, samadhi, being.*

The world is maya, or illusion, as we have often heard. The truth, the reality of the outside world, has to be reached gradually.¹

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the urge for silence and inner calm has changed from needed to necessary. Noise, especially the one we do not even notice anymore, is a permanent and inescapable part of the modern man's life. Noisy cars, loud social events, a constant background cacophony of cities – as if the sharp and unpleasant sounds form the very tissue of today's overpopulated urban core. It seems as if this situation was new, as if it was us, today, who were in the epicenter of accelerated development and exaggerated, disturbing and fragmented being. However, the urban environment we know, this busy, seething and boisterous crossroad of people and technology, is older – even couple of centuries older. Starting from the nineteenth century, through the advance of

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¹ Rudolf Štajner, "Čovečni moral (Moralne vrline prema metamorfozi duše, predavanje III)", Antropozofija 2 (1991), 35.

technology and industry, through the Industrial Revolution and always new inventions for suspension of the aching being in the western world, one is submerged in a seductive, vast world of impressions, in a world of information that does not end with the squeaking of automobile tires or tram tracks. From the moment he awakens – even during the sleep that he considers an unconscious state of mind and an escape from senses – the contemporary man is riddled with sounds, images, scents and flavors which, as an inexhaustible torrent, roll over his physical senses. Adds, billboards, shop windows, supermarkets, television programs, music and a constant clamor of people, scents of the city – sometimes warm and pleasant, sometimes irritable and painful – give themselves to the eye, offer themselves to the ear, penetrate the nostril creating a cornucopia of images and impressions, permanently settling themselves within our subconscious. The mind loses nothing, it forgets nothing; everything gets stored in the dark cellar of the unconscious. Through time, this cellar becomes so heavy and congested, so dark and burdensome, that we find it difficult to unearth the impressions and memories we truly need, those we really care about, impressions that we can deepen and use for personal growth and development.

It becomes clear that, with the sheer diversification of impressions that offer themselves openly to our senses, everything the contemporary man does is running from one to another, never fully experiencing any one of them. In his book *Tyranny of the Moment*, Thomas Hylland Eriksen sharply criticizes and deconstructs contemporary informational society where life turns into “a hysterical series of saturated moments without a ‘before’ and ‘after’”. In his view, “even ‘here and now’ is threatened since the next moment comes so quickly that it becomes difficult to live in the present”.² Adjusting Eriksen’s perspective to the avalanche of impressions informational society carries along, we realize that in such an age one essentially lives *outwardly*, in the impressions themselves. For, is there a depth in an individual who spends their whole life focused on what they receive from the environment exclusively, never producing anything from within themselves? Is there an interiority and fullness in a life spent always in new images, always in new thoughts, without even occasional stillness, without a journey *inwards*? Of course there is, but that interiority does not surrender itself openly, it is not ready for consuming, and it is not easy to achieve. A vivified interior of being demands awakening, consciousness and effort to earn it. Everybody can turn their eye inwards. Everybody can escape the prison of everyday impressions, look into themselves and create their inner clam and silence. The silence is always already there, it perpetually summons us to come back to it, but it is hard to hear and recognize its voice from all the noise of the external life.

² Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Tyranny of the Moment: Fast and Slow Time in the Informational Age* (London and Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2001), 2-3.

In order to turn to the inner calm, in order to look into the still core of our being, into that which is constant and unchangeable, which is truly ours, we need to realize that this core *exists*. We, and when I say “we” I mean this generic image of the contemporary individual I have been talking about, with all the noise and fog in which we live are positively ignorant of the mess in our minds. Then we try to meditate: we close our eyes for a moment and we try “not to think about anything”, only to realize that we are showered by a torrent of images and voices, that we are being carried away by a flood of thoughts that rarely pauses. If we try to stop it – it accelerates; if we order ourselves to focus on a single thing – a pleiad of images rushes into our mind. Slowly, but steadily, we realize that we have no control over our train of thoughts, and then nether over our life as a whole.

In everyday situations we imagine we are the one deciding what we were to think, say, wish or do, not seeing how passively we move in the hands of the external influences. We wish to do one thing, but we end up doing another; we decide to be candid and compassionate, but we become agitated and angry; our whole being reaches a decision to leave cigarettes, but as much as tomorrow we are at it again; we want to tell the truth, but we lie; we want to lie, but we tell the truth. If we cared to look inside ourselves, if we managed to shift our point of view a little and be impartial to our behavior, we would be soon appalled by how chained and inhibited we were, how unfree, guided and conditioned by forces which we knew little about, or concerning which we did not know what to do. And there, in that moment, in the very second of cognition that there is a whole set of family, social, cultural, political, ideological and natural forces organizing our lives, the first step to freedom emerges, the first blaze of awakening transpires. If we were to have any chance at freedom, we need to come to terms with our inner slavery first.

Rudolf Steiner and the philosophy of yoga

The issue we have turned to, the question of inner calm and individual freedom, is at the core of the yoga discipline. It is not a coincidence that the twentieth century witnessed a sharp increase of interest in eastern philosophies, yoga having a central place among them. Especially from the 60s on, the western hemisphere has been flooded by literature and ideas that, directly or indirectly, deal with yoga. There were individuals, to be sure, who had even before the 60s grasped the magnitude and depth of yogic practices, methods and concepts, weaving them into their own thinking about man, existence, being and freedom. The Austrian thinker Rudolf Steiner is one such individual, and it is the intention of this paper to show how are the yogic concepts and practices incorporated into Steiner’s ideas. Certain of his works resonate with the philosophy of yoga so intensely, that it is possible to use the as textbooks for inner growth and interpretation of the original yogic texts to the western mind.

The figure of Rudolf Steiner is very difficult to cover with a short introduction of nature expected here, if for no other reason that for the sheer magnitude of his

interests. During sixty four years of his life, Steiner thought and created within fields of philosophy, literary criticism, economy, pedagogy, dramaturgy, architecture, agriculture – to name only the most important ones. His ideas, sometimes very rationally analytical as in *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (*The Philosophy of Freedom*) (1894) and *Einleitung zu Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften* (*Goethe's Science*) (1883), and sometimes highly occult and hardly acceptable from the western scientific point of view as in *Aus der Akasha-Chronik* (*Atlantis and Lemuria*) (1904), have been uniting hordes of fans, interpreters and critics.³ Some of his followers, such as Hans Erhard Lauer, even saw Steiner's historical emergence as the "revelation of [Hrist's] consciousness in our time."⁴ Still, Steiner remains remembered the most by establishing "anthroposophy", a philosophical current of thought which he developed while working with thinkers of the "theosophical" society, such as Annie Besant and Henry Still Olcott. Unlike theosophy ("divine wisdom", θεός (god) + σοφία (wisdom)), which, in outline, consider existence and freedom of the world from the perspective of understanding the nature of the divine, anthroposophy ("human wisdom", ἄνθρωπος (man) + σοφία (wisdom)) approaches one's being from the perspective of his or her inner strength and potentials. Anthroposophy, as a philosophical as well as historical system, is best described in a collection of Steiner's lectures under the same name, and it discusses, among other things, the one's possibility of freedom from inner and outer limitations by an intensive inner self-improvement.⁵ Since anthroposophy is quite a broad term and since it covers many different issues starting from the concept of freedom, through the idea of life after death, historical reincarnation of souls, to the role of Christianity in the spiritual history of the world etc., this paper is written with a smaller scope in mind. The main issue we are interested in here is the one which is of the crucial importance for us today, in this moment of exaggerated *outward* being: how to reach freedom *within*? This seemingly naive question carries with it a handful of others, with answers sometimes simple, but rarely easy. How to realize yourself in the surrounding? How to build inner capacities for an individual growth? How to stop the train of thoughts harassing us behind closed eyelids whenever we are in need of silence? Or, as Steiner says: how can one "go back to oneself, living

³ Rudolf Steiner, *Die Philosophie der Freiheit: Grundzüge einer modernen Weltanschauung* (Rudolf Steiner Online Archive, 2010), eBook; *Einleitung zu Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Novalis, 1949); *Aus der Akasha-Chronik* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner-Nachlassverwaltung, 1969).

⁴ Hans Erhard Lauer, „Rudolf Štajner kao historijska pojava“, *Antropozofija* 2 (1991), 45; my translation.

⁵ Rudolf Štajner, *Antropozofija: uvod u antropozofski svetonazor* (Zagreb: Antropozofsko društvo "Marija Sofija", 2002).

quietly within and in the best that one possesses?”⁶ What does it mean to be free anyway?

Considering Steiner’s ideas regarding these questions, as well as his enormous debt to the philosophy of yoga, we shall be led by those Steiner’s works that are directly pertinent for the issues mentioned. In the first place, we will discuss his 1904 book *Wie Erlangt Man Erkenntnisse der Hoheren Welten?* (*Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and its Attainment*), then 1909 *Die Geheimwissenschaft Im Umriss* (*An Outline of Esoteric Science*), as well as the series of three lectures on the ethics of spiritual science, held at Norrköping, Sweden in 1912. The reason for discussing these works instead of *The Philosophy of Freedom* that epitomized our topic is that in the heart of these titles lies the concept of “esoteric science”, which is the science of self-improvement and could be called, in its many aspects, the philosophy of yoga. The main premise is that by a rigorous ethical, physical and emotional discipline, that in *The Philosophy of Freedom* Steiner calls the “ethical individualism” (*ethischen Individualismus*), an individual learns how to master his/her own mind, emotions, will and “soul”, and all this with the aim of attaining freedom which transcends the corporeal.⁷ As Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutras*, Steiner teaches us that only the one who looks sternly into him/herself with a sublime preparedness and strength, and subject him/herself to a rigorous discipline of mind, can hope for freedom from external influences and corporeal existence.⁸ The “esoteric science” is, the same as yoga, a long, arduous and rewarding journey through one’s own core towards the oneness existence.

The path of yoga – “ashtanga”

In order to grasp the essential connection between yoga and Steiner’s “esoteric science”, we shall first turn to yoga principles, parse yoga “limbs” (or steps) and consider them in the way Patanjali did.⁹ The very word “yoga” means to “unite”, to “merge”, but also to “yoke”, then “method” and “methodical effort”: thus, the word points us to the idea of a conscious methodical effort for achieving the unity and indivisibility taken as the essence of one’s, we could say cosmic,

⁶ Rudolf Štajner, “Čovečni moral (Predhrišćanski moral, predavanje I)“, Antropozofija 2 (1991), 5; my translation.

⁷ Steiner, *Die Philosophie der Freiheit*, 118.

⁸ “Their control is by practice and non-attachment. Continuous struggle to keep them (the Vrttis) perfectly restrained is practice. Its ground becomes firm by long, constant efforts with great love (for the end to be attained). That effort, which comes to those who have given up their thirst after objects either seen or heard, and which wills to control the objects, is non-attachment.” (Patanjali, *Yoga Sutras*, Sanskrit text with Transliteration, Translation & Commentary by Swami Vivekananda, eBook, I, 12-15).

⁹ “Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyaha, Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi, are the limbs of Yoga” (Ibid., II, 29).

existence.¹⁰ All steps of yoga, all its “limbs” (*ashtanga*) lead to the last of them, to *samadhi* (*samādhi*) as a state of pure consciousness and to breaking free from the conditionality of material and psychic existence. This last step is a transcendental state in which consciousness of the world as separate from the individual evanesces, where binary opposition between the subject and the object disappears, and the yogi achieves a state of bliss which as its source has no outside stimulus but only itself. *Samadhi* is an experiential intellection of unity of all things, and understanding that “as is above so is below” (since “above” and “below” are one and the same). In the psychoanalytical sense, *samadhi* means transcending one’s subconscious (in Freudian terms), or transcending one’s split within language (in Lacanian terms). In other words, the aim of yoga is overcoming of a never-ending circle of desire that binds us to the transience of material existence. As long as one lives at the level of everyday consciousness, without insight in his/her inner processes, the individual is fast asleep not realizing that every desire, intention, fear and plan, like a thousand tentacles, chains him/her to the corporeal world. This is the essential human conditionality, and the aim of yoga in *samadhi* is breaking free and attaining an absolute freedom. However, this freedom can emerge only from within, the individual (yogi) has to conquer it by a strong mental, physical and emotional discipline. As we can see, issues and aims of Patanjali’s yoga and Steiner’s “esoteric science” melt into each other.

Patanjali’s yoga contains eight steps, starting with the ethical foundation (*yama* and *niyama*), through physical and breathing exercises (*asana* and *pranayama*), continuing through the “upper” steps of detachment from sensory perception (*pratyahara*), concentration (*dharana*) and meditation (*dhyana*), which are all of a mental character. *Samadhi*, as we have already said, is the pinnacle of the yoga achievement – oneness, indivisibility and permanence of existence. These eight steps are always depicted as consecutive, because there is a clear interdependence between them. The foundation of the yogic discipline is a distinctive and firm ethical code: *yama* and *niyama* enable this code, teaching the yogi that non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, restrain, non-coveting, cleanliness, satisfaction and introspection are premises of a strong and purified mind. It is not possible to attain oneness in yoga if at least a fragment of these characteristics has not flourished within the practitioner. *Asana* prepare the practitioner that has mastered the ethical code for a long stay in meditative postures, where he is to practice breathing and concentration. *Pranayama* is possible only if the practitioner already feels relaxed in the *asana*, and through them a slow control over the train of thought and energy begins. After the control over the energy flow has commenced, the yogi dedicates himself to the control over sensory perception, learning how to differentiate between impressions, and then to finally detach himself from them creating a mental silence necessary for concentration. After he developed the

¹⁰ On the main interpretations of the word “yoga”, see Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy II* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1948), 337.

mental silence detaching himself from the environment, the yogi is capable of focusing intensely on a single object for a long period (meditation). First, he learns to identify with the object completely, with it creating a mental bond in which everything vanishes but the object of meditation, the meditator and the consciousness of the relationship between them (*samadhi* with support – *samprajnata samādhi*).¹¹ Finally, through the immersion in the object the yogi achieves the highest level of submergence into himself where the consciousness of the difference between him and the object of meditation disappears (*samadhi* without support – *asamprajnata samādhi*).¹² The yogi attains the insight into the “one”, the unity of existence.

All these steps are actually stages of the yogi’s growth through the discipline of yoga, meaning growth of his inner “I”, his “higher” will which slowly takes control over his physical, mental and emotional being. As much as they are successively introduced, most of the steps have to be overcome simultaneously: a long stay in the *asana* and mind/energy control with the *pranayama* allows for an easier and more advantageous foundation of the *yama* and *niyama*; stronger concentration allows for an easier control over the train of thought, while meditative experience and detachment from the senses allows for a longer stay in yoga postures, easier application of the ethical code, stronger concentration and mind control. All the steps are mutually interconnected, and after he establishes inside himself contours of the ethical code, the yogi works on all the other subsequent steps more or less simultaneously.

In order to make it clear that Steiner’s “esoteric science” follows exactly the same steps as Patanjali’s systematization of yoga, this short survey of yoga “limbs” was necessary. Steiner calls them differently, but, at the practical level, they are identical.

The path of the “soul” – “esoteric science”

The one who decides to walk the path of “esoteric science”, does not do that accidentally. If he has come so far as to search the world for answers that “esoteric science” can offer, the individual is already entitled to become a student. The one who seeks the right answers had to know the right questions in the first place, and the very consciousness of the questions says plenty about the individual’s possibility at awakening. In this respect, the teacher of “esoteric science” never seeks the student, but the student always finds him instead. Something has already

¹¹ “The concentration called right know-ledge is that which is followed by reasoning, discrimination, bliss, unqualified ego [samprajnata]” (Patanjali, Yoga Sutras, I, 17).

¹² “There is another Samadhi which is attained by the constant practice of cessation of all mental activity, in which the Chitta retains only the unmanifested impressions [asamprajnata]” (Ibid., I, 18).

formed inside of him – we may call it an echo of the “higher” consciousness – something that impels the student to search: a desire for knowledge, a sense that there is something to be cognized beyond material existence, beyond sensory world. That “something” beyond corporeality and senses, that “something” transcendental which yoga calls *samadhi* and various monistic philosophies the “one”, Steiner calls the “higher worlds” – being at a refined level of consciousness. Although the term “higher worlds” sounds rather obscure, bordering with science fiction, in Steiner’s philosophical framework it is very exact and definite. In order to appreciate it fully, especially in order to appreciate the depth of Steiner’s thought, it is necessary to leave the analytical mind that considers consciousness as always one and constant. According to that frame of mind, consciousness is in every awake person the same, in every mentally healthy individual everywhere. Yoga works under a different assumption, and so does Steiner’s “esoteric science”: consciousness is not always and everywhere the same, it can be refined and tuned, by it a finer matter can be perceived, the one not available to narrowness of our senses. Everywhere around us the world keeps unfolding and complexifying, above and beyond limits of our sensory perception, and in order to reach this infinite complexity we need to develop a new sensory organ. As our “external” senses register external impression, so these finer impressions are grasped by our “inner” sense. How can this “sense” be made?

Practicing yoga and various meditative techniques widens our perceptive field. During meditation, the meditator plunges in himself and becomes intensely aware of the internal ongoing of his being: he becomes aware of his thoughts, feelings, of his wanting. The very awareness of these inner fluctuations allows the meditator to understand the difference between himself (his consciousness, his core) and these fluctuations. The mediator learns not to adhere to them, not to identify with them.¹³ That way, thoughts and feelings come into his mind and go, leaving gradually a mental silence instead. The stronger the silence emerging within the meditator, the stronger his “feeling” of the world around him. Noise, the one we talked about in the introduction, that never-ending torrent of voices and images in our mind, makes “feeling” the world around us impossible. As soon as the noise is gone, the meditator begins descending (or ascending, which is the same here) into a state of consciousness in which the world begins to unravel itself “sensitively”.

In order to describe this phenomenon more easily, we shall imagine that we are spending hours with an exceptionally *negative* person: after only couple of hours we feel exhausted, sometimes we even feel the aggressiveness and negativity of the other’s behavior as “pain”. Now let us imagine an opposite situation, where we are

¹³ “Yoga is restraining the mind-stuff (Chitta) from taking various forms (Vrttis). At that time (the time of concentration) the seer (the Purusa) rests in his own (unmodified) state. At other times (other than that of concentration) the seer is identified with the modifications” (Ibid., I, 2-4).

spending hours with an exceptionally *positive* person: we feel the other “bathing” us in positive energy and we leave cheerful and empowered. Although we cannot put our finger on it, it is true that our being reacts to energy others spread through the environment, we react to invisible vibrations in space. Intensive delving into ourselves in meditation, brings the possibility of elevating this exchange of energy, namely this perception of fine energy currents, to a conscious level. Delving into ourselves we strengthen our “sentient being”, we empower the state of mind which yoga calls “mind awareness” (*buddhi*). In his book *Scientia Sacra*, Béla Hamvas gives a perfect definition of this state: “Awareness is a metaphysical sensitivity of being. *Μετὰ τὰ φυσικά* means: above nature. Supernatural sensitivity that watches and sees and knows even that which is not available to senses. Aware is the one who sees above senses, mind, emotions, passions.”¹⁴ Steiner calls this sense simply: “sentient soul that puts people in the position to feel the world of things.”¹⁵

In Steiner, the “soul”, “awareness”, “sentient being” has to be understood not as an abstract concept, as a construct of thought devoid of fullness and organic existence, but as a living, sophisticated organ needed to be taken care of. The soul feeds on positive emotions, it grows on love, compassion, devotion, respect, and dies away from hate, selfishness, greed and egotism. In other words, the student who is walking the path of “esoteric science”, wishing to know the supersensory reality of the indivisible “one”, to (in Steiner’s words) develop a possibility of an “intuitive cognition”, as a base of his studying takes a strict moral code.¹⁶ He understands that awakening of pleasant, warm and positive emotions enriches his being, empowers his “soul” and makes “feeling” of subtle energy threads possible. On the other hand, every negative emotion he nurtures and feeds weakens his sensitivity and degrades him. The student finds in himself the strength to battle with the negative emotions by intensifying the positive ones (thus the name “ethical individualism”). “But man is interwoven with these [creative and destructive] forces”, says Steiner, “and with this destiny [which is governed by these forces]. His own soul reveals itself to the seer as undisguisedly as the other objects.”¹⁷ The only way to fight the dark is finding a way to turn the light on.

By nurturing his “soul”, by keeping his “sentient being” “aware”, the student starts to “feel” the world around him, thus the door to knowing of the “higher worlds” and to the existence above and beyond limits of sensory perception, opens. There is

¹⁴ Bela Hamvas, *Scientia Sacra* I/1, prev. Sava Babić (Beograd: Dereta, 1999), 26; my translation.

¹⁵ Štajner, “Čovečni moral“, 25; my translation.

¹⁶ Rudolf Steiner, *An Outline of Esoteric Science*, trans. Chaterine E. Creeger (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1997), 349.

¹⁷ Rudolf Steiner, *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and its Attainment* (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1944), 29.

some things needed to be mentioned here. It can seem that yoga and Steiner say the following: all that is required is to create an inner peace and heighten your sensory field – it is the simplest thing only if you knew how. The discipline of yoga and Steiner are both very specific on this matter: the path to *samadhi*, to enlightenment, to supersensory perception, to indivisible being, to transcending of the subconscious is long, complicated and hard. Even more, it never ends. In order to widen his sensory field the student needs to learn to look into himself and then gain access to everything that dwells there. And there, in our basement that needs to be cleaned, live numerous fears, pains and traumas from our whole life (Steiner would say from our past lives too) that drag us back with a titanic strength, towards materiality, towards drowsiness, towards the hardened shell of being, because these are the spaces they can exist in. There are reasons for those fears and traumas being hidden in the dark, there are mental mechanisms shielding us from pain. The student's task is, thus, not only to simply "create an inner peace", as in contemporary *new age* bestsellers where the main advice is always just to "love yourself". His task is to find all these buried upsetting emotions, and to bring them to the surface where he will either accept them, or deal with them, in order for his sensory field to spread over these new liberated spaces. The path of yoga and of "esoteric science" is an incessant struggle with oneself. This is a task of colossal proportions and to some it will take months to achieve it, to some years, and to some even the whole lifetime will not be enough.

From the moment he steps on the path of "esoteric science", or from the moment he dedicates himself to yoga, the student begins to live two parallel lives. The first life is the *everyday* one, and it is of vital importance nothing to be neglected in it. Moreover, it is expected from the student to lead it even better now, since with the beginnings of individual independence comes a new responsibility also. The other life is the *inward* one, to which the student withdraws as much as his *outward* life allows. In these moments of solitude he surrenders himself to physical exercises (*asana*), breathing (*pranayama*), meditation and he works on vivifying his "soul". These two worlds will be inseparable from now on, because growing of the inward life, and of the "soul", rests on utilizing impressions coming from the outward one. The difference is in the way the student now confronts these impressions: instead of running from impression to impression, with an eternal thirst for always new pleasures, the student develops observation and immersion in the impressions that he *himself chooses* this time, and in them he finds completely new dimensions of feelings that nurture his "sentient being". "If he blunts himself to enjoyment," concludes Steiner, "he becomes as a plant which cannot any longer draw nourishment from its environment. Yet if he stops short at the enjoyment, he shuts himself up within himself."¹⁸ The main task, the struggle that will last the rest of

¹⁸ Steiner, Knowledge of Higher Worlds, 9; "You have to find the middle, so that in your actions you do not lose the world, and that the world does not lose you" (Stajner, „Čovečni moral“, 24).

the life, is balancing between these extreme opposites and finding the “harmony and equilibrium of spiritual forces.”¹⁹ The deeper he delves into impressions from the environment, the deeper student delves into himself, forming an ability of introspection which leads to development of an inner compass. In Hermann Hesse’s *Siddhartha* the eponymous hero says: there are few men that are “like stars, they go on a fixed course, no wind reaches them, in themselves they have their law and their course.”²⁰ Steiner’s words come as an echo of Siddhartha’s: “The waves of outward life press in upon the inner man from all sides, if, instead of mastering this outward life, he is mastered by it.”²¹ The student becomes responsible for his own actions, because their source he gradually finds *within himself*, and not in the environment. By finishing this probation period, the student (yogi) realizes the importance of his physical and psychical health; he comprehends the importance of thoughts and feelings, since a reckless behavior towards them damages his “soul” “as the effect wrought by a bullet fired at random, upon the physical objects it hits”²²; he apprehends the wholeness of life, because his “soul” connects him to the surrounding ever more strongly; he develops gratitude, respect and love for the environment; he becomes stalwart and tenacious, because he sees that the path he walks is long and strenuous; and, finally, the student understands that the essence is in the inward, in his “soul”, in the state of “awareness” he is plunging into, in his “sentient being”. In short, the student gradually perceives what it means to be free.

The higher worlds of spiritual existence

After he has become aware of the need for attainment of “higher” spheres of existence, namely of “higher” levels of consciousness, and sowed the seed of the “soul” or “sentient being” that can perceive these spheres, the rest of the student’s schooling rests on deepening sensory perception and intensifying the sensitivity of his being. In that purpose, the student (yogi) starts with a number of meditative exercises. From this perspective, the first six steps of yoga, from the ethical foundation to concentration, are only a preparation for intensive meditative practices which will heighten the practitioner’s sensitivity. Without them, without a strict discipline that subjugates feelings (through *yama* and *niyama*), body (through *asana* and *pranayama*) and mind (through *pratyahara* and *dharana*) it is impossible to advance. The control over the inner life is a prerequisite for perceiving and orienting in “higher worlds”. When he has already arrived at this point, the follower of the “esoteric science” (yogi) begins with a series of mental exercises which, each in its own way, impel the student to “feel” the world and its

¹⁹ Steiner, *Esoteric Science*, 344; „Čovečni moral“, 23.

²⁰ Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha* (Feedbooks: eBook, 2000), 53.

²¹ Steiner, *Knowledge of Higher Worlds*, 13.

²² *Ibid.*, 18.

energy manifestations stronger and more precisely. Now he listens to the environment in a different way: not in order to create a judgement about it, nor to decide if he likes what he hears or not, but in order to read the messages coming from the sounds, in order to comprehend the sounds as they give themselves to his ear. By such a profound listening, the student distinguishes between different sentient and emotional nuances of sounds, he realizes that people bring subtle information in their speech that betray them far more than what they are actually saying. Like Siddhartha who listens to the river hearing in it a clamor of everything “which had not been suffered and resolved up to its end” as well as a handful of messages speaking to his soul, the student listens to his surrounding and recognizes its words.²³ His sensitivity gradually reaches the level when a language made of the world’s sentient vibrations will be revealed to him, a language meant only for him and his growth. In order to understand, one must learn to listen, one must suppress the constant need for forming opinions on everything – intellectual egotism – and allow impressions to penetrate directly into one’s “soul”. The same thing happens with all the other senses until the student begins perceiving the world by their unanimous, unified sensitivity. At that point, some students develop the ability to “see” subtly currents of energy, to “see” that which is generally known as human “aura”. The verb “see” does not really do justice to this action, because the “higher world” cannot be “seen” literally, by naked eye, but by one’s “sentient being”. If the meditator, the practitioner, the yogi, the student “sees” blue color, he actually “sees” it by his “soul”, a feeling emerges within him as if he saw blue color by his regular eyesight. This is the main reason why it is incredibly difficult to talk about, or to write about, supersensory perception: our language lacks capacities to fully express what comes from beyond senses. This is also the reason why Steiner’s works are so complicated to interpret and translate.

When the necessary preconditions for perceiving the supersensory are fulfilled, its practicing begins. The student looks at organic and inorganic forms around him, by his “sentient being” immersing himself in them and realizing that every material form radiates a different kind of energy, a different color. It becomes clear that the world of energy keeps complexifying long after the limits of what can be touched, seen, heard or tasted. The human body radiates a different “feeling” than the animal’s, as the animal’s does in comparison to a stone. A human being that desires fiercely leaves a different “feeling” from the one whose desire has been satiated. This observing of material forms in order to recognize their emotional imprints, Steiner calls “imaginative” or “object cognition”: by deep delving into images of things, concrete spiritual forms, or impressions, rise within the student’s “soul”.²⁴ “It is not intended arbitrarily to create visions,” says Steiner, “but to allow senses, that which Hamvas calls the domain of “awareness”, is exact and precise,

²³ Hesse, Siddhartha, 94.

²⁴ Steiner, Esoteric Science, 297-298.

reality to create them within oneself”.²⁵ Steiner emphasizes that the reality beyond and that the imaginative abilities allow the student only to reach it, and that the previous probation period was intended to help the student distinguishing between the impressions being created within him from the “higher worlds” from his own fantasies.²⁶

Simultaneously with the perceptual, other changes occur in the student as well. These are the most pertinent for the issue in question. For us, namely for the topic of this paper, for the question that guides us – which is how to achieve inner freedom – the possibility of “seeing” the human aura is secondary. What is of vital importance is the psychologically-experiential change within the student (yogi). With a deep delving into himself and reaching a true inner silence, the individual changes drastically, since the intensity of his inner life surpasses the intensity of impressions from the external world. The yogi gains a priceless insight: *the essence of being is in the inward*. After this recognition, many of the things he has been doing, wanting or which he has been striving for, lose their significance and meaning, because the yogi realizes that reasons behind them are naught. He sees that many of his deeds so far originated in vanity, and “all vanity is [utterly futile] for the seer”.²⁷ With this insight, the student is considered awake. From now on, he can doze off occasionally, he can neglect the true source of his actions temporarily, but he can never fully fall asleep again. With awakening, the center of gravity moves from the exterior world of impressions into the inner world of the “soul” and the one who has ever experienced this shift has a sufficiently inner strength to walk firmly towards his freedom.

By “awareness”, the philosophy of yoga considers the state of pure consciousness, indivisibility of being, the state of transcendental subjectivity, samadhi.²⁸ For Steiner, awareness is just the first step towards further improvement. After he has awoken, namely after he has developed his “soul”, the student passes three trials on the following path: the “fire”, “water” and “air” trials. Steiner discusses them from the perspective of “higher worlds”, but all three trials are actually psychological in nature, and can be experienced even by those who never formally stepped on the path of “esoteric science” or yoga.

The “fire trial” is a process of fear combustion that reveals to the individual the “true state of things”. In everyday life, these are the moments of great confrontations: a terminal illness, death of the closest, an intense pain and suffering out of which an individual comes firmer, stronger and purified, looking at

²⁵ Steiner, Knowledge of Higher Worlds, 26.

²⁶ Steiner, Esoteric Science, 341.

²⁷ Steiner, Knowledge of Higher Worlds, 29.

²⁸ “By making Samyama on the Sattva, to him who has discriminated between the intellect and the Purusa comes omnipresence and omniscience” (Patanjali, Yoga Sutras, III, 50).

life in new ways. According to Steiner, a “certain writing-system” is announced to the sufferer and he begins “reading” the world around him.²⁹ What is actually happening is that to the individual, to his “soul” or sensitivity, is annunciated “the true state of things”. By the “true state of things” we mean that the individual now easily distinguishes between the important and the unimportant, and many things that previously burdened his mind loses importance in his life. He begins to experience the meaningfulness of the world he lives in and to apprehend that meaning, anticipating what should be he be doing and what is his life’s goal. In other words, due to the “spiritual process of combustion” a crystallization of insight emerges and the individual passes the trial rewarded with a new understanding of himself and of his inner strength.³⁰

The “trial by water” produces the inner strength in the individual that helps him sustain his will without external stimuli, without the ground beneath his feet (thus the trial by “water”). The individual learns to break free from the external motivation and to find his inner strength. Since he has successfully passed the “trial by fire” and he “knows” who he is, where he is going to and what is to be done, the individual learns to follow his inner impulses: he does what he “feels” it should be done, his self-perception is strong enough to prevent desires, needs and wishes from entering his will. In everyday life, this inner sentiment is usually call “intuition”, but Steiner calls it “self-control”.³¹

The last trial is “trial by air” and its goal is for the individual to finally develop his “higher I”, his utter and total awareness, to fully develop his “soul”, his “sentient being” which “knows” by itself. Steiner says that this trial develops the “absolute presence of mind”: during the trial, everything is left to the individual and the stimuli come neither from him nor from external reality – the center of gravity completely disappears (thus the trial by “air”).³² Previously, the student had been urged from the environment, from the *outside*; then, finding the center of gravity within himself, he was urged from within himself, from the *inside*; now, the individual acts without stimuli at all and his will works fast, harmoniously, in the moment, without thinking, without motivation, without delay. The individual who has passed this trial has finally dealt with the mess in his subconscious. There is nothing in his cellar anymore, but luminosity and ease; his fears, desires and needs have been burned through trials, through the intensive inner work and struggle with himself. His actions are light, unhindered, clear and fruitful. He knows exactly who he is, his life path shines brightly in front of him, his will – and not his wishes and desires – rule over his deeds. He feels harmony with life and all the living beings;

²⁹ Steiner, Knowledge of Higher Worlds, 31.

³⁰ Ibid., 30.

³¹ Ibid., 33.

³² Ibid., 34.

for him there is no fragmentation nor boundaries; his “soul” looks into the immeasurable and indivisible “one”. He is free.

The endless darkness of freedom

Described in this way, a bit romanticized and fairly simplified, the inner freedom seems as a goal in itself. Once attained, this freedom leads nowhere, but to itself. A question arises: where to from here? Is there anything more on the path of the indivisible “one”, of *samadhi*, enlightenment, transcendence, awareness? Theoretically, the inner freedom, as a concept that collapses upon itself, that is defined exclusively in relation to itself, is a totality of thought and a dialectical (as well as libidinal) death. However, this freedom is just a beginning, according to Steiner, it is just an initial awakening. The ones that have not liberated themselves, the ones still conditioned – whose thoughts still guide their feelings, feelings their wants and wants their thoughts – they are still asleep and their actions rarely (if ever) go beyond them. The person asleep, the one living outwardly, thinks that he acts and that he changes, but his every action carries him within itself, shutting down in front of that obstacle, never waking the person from an illusion, from *maya* (*māyā*). Unlike the sleeping man, unlike the enslaved one, the awakened free man does not identify with his body, thoughts and feelings, he does not identify with his deeds either, thus his actions lead not back to him, but to the environment directly.³³ Only the one who has awoken has the power to help others to do the same, to change anything, to make the world a better place for does yet to see.

The awakened has precisely this power: to change. But, in order to earn it, he has to get to know himself, to purify himself, change and set free. The first step he had taken when he entered the “higher worlds”, namely when he developed his “higher I” that took control over his thoughts, feelings and wanting. On that occasion, according to Steiner, the awakened meets the “lesser guardian of the threshold”, a being that reveals itself to the “soul” of the awakened as a reflection of all his former deeds.³⁴ The purer his previous deeds, the brighter, prettier and more luminous the “keeper”, and from that moment on the “keeper” stays forever with the awakened. Steiner paints this encounter as a captivating monologue by way of which the “keeper” introduces the awakened into his future liberated existence. The awakened learns that there were higher forcer taking care of him up until now, and that everything he did has been weighed from the outside: for bad deeds he has been punished, and rewarded for good ones. But now, since he has moved the center of his being from the outside towards the inside, since he found the center of gravity within himself, he became responsible for himself too. There will be no more help from the side, and in front of the awakened spreads the absolute *darkness* of freedom. The only light that still shines upon this abyss of being is the

³³ Steiner, *Esoteric Science*, 355-356.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 361; Steiner, *Knowledge of Higher Worlds*, 77-82.

light coming from the “lesser guardian of the threshold”. And everything the awakened does from now on will be directly visible on the “guardian”: everything good will make it more splendid and ravishing and it will light the path through freedom better, but everything bad will make it more grotesque, uglier and tenebrous.

Steiner introduces us to a conditional freedom through this interesting allegory, but if we look for a moment beyond plasticity and inadequacy of words, what is revealed to us is the unconditioning of the karmic laws. According to Steiner, as well as according to numerous eastern philosophies, the awakened individual leaves the circle of cause and consequence, he leaves the karmic conditioning. He begins dwelling in a “conditional” fullness where there are no external influences, where “as is above so is below”, in a totality of mind where there is yet only the individual consciousness of the relationship between the individual and the object of his action. In Steiner’s allegory, karmic forces move from the outside towards the inside, into the individual himself, and his future deeds are the only ones to lighten his path in the darkness of freedom. By the encounter with the “lesser guardian of the threshold” at the gates of the “higher worlds”, all those not ready to access the higher consciousness, those who cannot bear the ponderous darkness of freedom, are denied the entrance.³⁵ On this level, for the individual there is nothing but himself alone, goal of his actions and their mutual relationship – the state of mind Patanjali calls *samadhi* without support.

Breaking free from karmic forces, namely moving the center of gravity into himself, leaves the awakened in the dark. And here, in this stygian abyss, the awakened makes his final decision: to stay forever in bliss of the inner life, or to do something for the outside world. According to Steiner, the answer to this dilemma comes as an encounter with the “greater guardian of the threshold” and the path taken appears either as “black” or “white”: the awakened can finally surrender to the highest egotism possible and continue an uninterrupted being in the inner world that he has developed to its fullness, or he can come back to the outside world, the everyday world, and help others awake as well.³⁶ This dilemma represents the pinnacle of control over the individual consciousness. All up until this moment, even if he had understood and experienced the indivisible unity of life, the awakened has still been supported by the object of his actions. His actions has still remained, in a sense, *individual*. The encounter with the “greater guardian of the threshold” confronts the awakened with overcoming of the last remnant of support and with developing consciousness in the domain of *supra-individual*. In this domain the awakened achieves unity with the object of his actions, the consciousness of the difference between them vanishes, and for him there is only

³⁵ Steiner, *Esoteric Science*, 368-369.

³⁶ Steiner, *Knowledge of Higher Worlds*, 82-86.

yet the consciousness of the action itself. The awakened reaches *samadhi* without support. Assuming that he has chosen this path, the awakened develops love not only for unity of life and for *his own freedom*, but love for the indivisible being and for *general freedom*: he finally realizes that he has the power to act outwardly and to enable others to return to the infinite being.

The darkness of freedom, thus, presents itself, as the final center of the individual "I", and the only real source of true change in the world. Everything else is an illusion, an endless streaming of manifested social, ideological, political and cultural form into each other, into always new forms of thought. While we sleep, we constantly change things in our dreams, but these changes never stick after the awakening, the reality of totality never grows from illusions and dreams. Comparing to the waking dream of everyday life, the path of inner growth, of silence and never-ending struggle with oneself presents itself, at least theoretically, as a stygian bliss of fullness that only the bravest and the most tenacious can walk. The abyss of inner freedom is an excruciating and effulgent cry of an awakened consciousness perceiving its self at last.

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