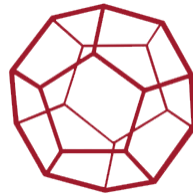


# On the Life of the Soul

GA 36



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by

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## Preface

Exploring dreams, fantasy, memory, and perception, Steiner develops here a remarkable, experiential path to higher knowledge. It is a very concentrated work that can be studied over and over.

The four essays presented here were written during October and November of 1923.



## The Human Soul in the Twilight of Dreams

If, within the limits of ordinary consciousness, the human being wishes to study his soul, it will not suffice for him simply to direct his mind's eye backward, so to speak, in order to discern by introspection his nature as someone who looks out upon the world. He will see nothing new by this means. He will perceive himself in his capacity as a spectator of the world — merely from a different direction. In his waking life man is almost entirely occupied with the external world. He lives by his senses. In their impressions the external world continues to live in his inner life. Thoughts weave into these impressions. The outer world lives in the thoughts as well. Only the force with which the world is grasped in thoughts can be experienced as man's autonomous being. The sensation of this force, however, is of an entirely general and vague character. By means of ordinary consciousness one can differentiate nothing within this sensation. If one had to discern the human soul in it, one would obtain no more about the soul than a vague sensation of self; one would be unable to identify *what* it was.

What is unsatisfying about self-observation along these lines is that the nature of the soul promptly eludes the attempt to grasp it. Because of this drawback, people who seriously strive after knowledge may be driven to despair of it entirely.

Thoughtful people, therefore, have almost always sought knowledge of the human soul in ways other than such self-observation. In the realm of sense perception and ordinary thinking they have felt that the vague sensation of self is surrendered to the body. They have realized that the soul, so long as it remains in this surrender, can learn nothing of its own nature through self-observation.

A realm to which this feeling points is that of the dream. People have become aware that the world of images the dream conjures up has some connection with the vague sensation of self. This appears, as it were, as an empty canvas on which the dream paints its own pictures. And then it is realized that the canvas is really itself the painter painting on and within itself.

Dreaming thus becomes for them the fleeting activity of man's inner life, which fills the soul's vague feeling of self with content. A questionable content — but the only one to be had at the outset. It is a view, lifted out of the brightness of ordinary consciousness and thrust into the twilight of semi-consciousness. Yet this is the only form attainable in everyday life.

Despite this dimness, however, there occurs — not in thinking self-observation to be sure, but in an inward touching of the self — something very significant. A kinship between dreaming and creative fantasy can inwardly be touched [*seelisch ertasten*]. One has the feeling that the airy pictures of a dream are the same as those of creative fantasy, though the latter are controlled by the body from within. And this inner body [*Korper-Innere*] compels the dream-picturing power to desist from its arbitrariness and to transform itself into an activity that emulates, albeit in a free manner, what exists in the world of the senses.

Once one has struggled through to such a touching of the inner world, one soon advances a step further. One becomes aware how the dream-picturing power can form a still closer connection with the body. One sees this foreshadowed in the activity of recollection, of memory. In memory the body compels the dream-picturing power to an even stronger fidelity to the outer world than it does in fantasy.

If this is understood, then there remains but one step to the recognition that the dream-picturing force of the soul also lies at the basis of ordinary thinking and sense perception. It is then *entirely* surrendered to the body, while in fantasy and memory it still reserves something of its own weaving.

This, then, justifies the assumption that in dreaming the soul frees itself from the state of bondage to the body and lives according to its own nature.

Thus the dream has become the field of inquiry for many searchers after the soul.

It relegates man, however, to a quite uncertain province. In surrendering to the body, the human soul becomes harnessed to the laws which govern nature. The body is a part of nature. Insofar as the soul surrenders to the body, it binds itself at the same time to the regularity of nature. The means whereby the soul adapts to the existence of nature is experienced as *logic*. In logical thinking about nature the soul feels secure. But in the power of dream-making it tears itself away from this logical thinking about nature. It

returns to its own sphere. Thereby it abandons, as it were, the well-tended and well-trodden pathways of the inner life and sets forth on the flowing, pathless sea of spiritual existence.

The threshold of the spiritual world seems to have been crossed; after the crossing, however, only the bottomless, directionless spiritual element presents itself. Those who seek to cross the threshold in this way find the exciting but also doubt-riddled domain of the soul life.

It is full of riddles. At one time it weaves the external events of life into airy connections that scorn the regularity of nature; at another it shapes symbols of inner bodily processes and organs. A too violently beating heart appears in the dream as an oven; aching teeth as a fence with pickets in disrepair. What is more, man comes to know himself in a peculiar way. His instinctive life takes shape in the dream in images of reprehensible actions which, in the waking state, he would strongly resist. Those dreams that have a prophetic character arouse special interest among students of the soul, as do those in which the soul dreams up capacities that are entirely absent in the waking state.

The soul appears released from its bondage to bodily and natural activity. It wants to be independent, and it prepares itself for this independence. As soon as it tries to become active, however, the activity of the body and of nature follow it. The soul will have nothing to do with nature's regularity; but the facts of nature appear in dreams as travesties of nature. The soul is interested in the internal bodily organs or bodily activities. It cannot, however, make clear pictures of these organs or bodily activities, but only symbols which bear the character of arbitrariness. Experience of external nature is torn away from the certainty in which sense perception and thinking place it. The inner life of what is human begins; it begins, however, in dim form. Observation of nature is abandoned; observation of the self is not truly achieved. The investigation of the dream does not place man in a position to view the soul in its true form. It is true this is spiritually more nearly comprehensible through dreams than through thinking self-observation; it is, however, something he should actually see but can only grope after as if through a veil.

The following section will speak about the perception of the soul through spirit knowledge.







## 2

# The Human Soul in the Light of Spirit Vision

If one resorts to dream phenomena in order to acquire knowledge of the soul's nature, one ultimately is forced to admit that the object of one's search is wearing a mask. Behind the symbolizations of bodily conditions and processes, behind the fantastically connected memory experiences, one may surmise the soul's activity. It cannot be maintained, however, that one is face to face with the true form of the soul.

On awaking, one realizes how the active part of the dream is interwoven with the function of the body and thereby subject to the external world of nature. Through the backward-directed view of self-observation one sees in the soul life only the images of the external world, not the life of the soul itself. The soul eludes the ordinary consciousness at the very moment one would grasp it cognitively.

By studying dreams one cannot hope to arrive at the reality of the soul element. In order to preserve the soul activity in its innate form one would have to obliterate, through a strong inner activity, the symbolizations of the bodily conditions and processes, along with the memory of past experiences. Then one would have to be able to study that which had been retained. This is impossible. For the dreamer is in a passive state. He cannot undertake any autonomous activity. With the disappearance of the soul's mask, the sensation of one's own self disappears also.

It is different with the waking soul life. There the autonomous activity of the soul can not only be sustained when one erases all one perceives of the external world; it can also be strengthened in itself.

This happens if, while awake in the forming of mental pictures, one makes oneself as independent of the external world of the senses as one is in a dream. One becomes a fully conscious, wakeful imitator of the dream. Thereby, however, the illusory quality of the dream falls away. The dreamer takes his dream pictures for realities. If one is awake one can see through their unreality. No healthy person when awake and imitating the dream will take his dream images for realities. He will remain conscious of the fact that he is living in self-created illusions.

He will not be able to create these illusions, however, if he merely remains at the ordinary level of consciousness. He must see to it that he strengthens this consciousness. He can achieve this by a continually renewed self-kindling of thinking from within. The inner soul activity grows with these repeated kindlings. (I have described in detail the appropriate inner activity in my books *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and its Attainment* and *An Outline of Occult Science*).

In this way the work of the soul during the twilight of dreams can be brought into the clear light of consciousness. One accomplishes thereby the opposite of what happens in suggestion or auto-suggestion. With these, something *out of* the semi-darkness and *within* the semi-darkness is shifted into the soul-life, which is then taken to be reality. In the fully circumspect activity of the soul just described, something is placed before one's inner view in clear consciousness, something that one regards, in the fullest sense of the word, *only* as illusion.

One thus arrives at compelling the dream to manifest itself in the light of consciousness. Ordinarily this occurs only in the diminished half-awake consciousness. It shuns the clarity of consciousness. It disappears in its presence. The strengthened consciousness holds it fast.

In holding the dream fast it does not gain in strength. On the contrary it diminishes in strength. Consciousness, however, is thereby induced to supply its own strength. The same thing happens here in the soul. It is just as it is when, in physical life, one transforms a solid into steam. The solid has its own boundaries on all sides. One can touch these boundaries. They exist in themselves. If one transforms the solid into steam, then one must enclose it within solid boundaries so that it will not escape. Similarly the soul, if it would hold fast the dream while awake, must shape itself, as it were, into a strong container. It must strengthen itself from within.

The soul does not need to effect this strengthening when it perceives the images of the external world. Then the relationship of the body to the external world takes care that the soul is aroused to retain these images. If, however, the waking soul is to dream in sensory unreality, then it must hold fast this sensory unreality by its own strength.

In the fully conscious representation [*Vorstellen*] of sensory unreality one develops the strength to behold the spiritual reality.

In the dream state the autonomous activity of the soul is weak. The fleeting dream content overpowers this autonomous activity. This supremacy of the dream causes the soul to take the dream for reality. In ordinary waking consciousness the autonomous activity experiences itself as reality along with the reality of the sense world. This autonomous activity, however, cannot behold [*anschauen*] itself; its vision is occupied with the images of sense reality. If the autonomous activity learns to maintain itself by consciously filling itself with content unreal to the senses, then, little by little, it also brings to life self-contemplation [*Anschauung*] within itself. Then, it does not simply direct its gaze away from outer observation and back upon itself; it strides as soul activity backward and discovers itself as spiritual entity; this now becomes the content of its vision [*Anschauung*].

While the soul thus discovers itself within itself, the nature of dreaming is even more illumined for it. The soul discerns clearly what before it could only surmise: that dreaming does not cease in the waking state. It continues. The feeble activity of the dream, however, is drowned by the content of sense perception. Behind the brightness of consciousness, filled with the images of sense reality, there glimmers a dream world. And this world, while the soul is awake, is not illusory like the dream world of semi-consciousness. In the waking state man dreams — beneath the threshold of consciousness — about the inner processes of his body. While the external world is seen through the eye and is present in [*vorgestellt*] the soul, there lives in the background the dim dream of inner occurrences. Through the strengthening of the autonomous activity of the soul the vision of the external world is gradually dampened to the dimness of dream, and the vision of the inner world, in its reality, *brightens*.

In its vision of the external world the soul is receptive; it experiences the external world as the creative principle and the soul's own content as created in the image of the external world. In the inner vision, the soul recognizes *itself* to be the creative principle. And one's own body is revealed as created in the image of the soul. Thoughts of the external world are to be felt [*empfunden*] as *images* of the beings and processes of the external world. To the soul's true vision, achieved in the way described, the human body can be felt [*empfunden*] only as the image of the human soul which is spiritual.

In dreams, the soul activity is loosened from its firm union with the body, which it maintains in the ordinary waking state; it still retains, however, the loose relationship that fills it with the symbolic images of bodily senses and

with the memory experiences that also are acquired through the body. In spiritual vision of itself the soul so grows in strength that its own higher reality becomes discernible, and the body becomes recognizable in its character of a reflected image of this reality.



### 3

## The Human Soul on the Path to Self-Observation

In a dream the soul comprehends itself in a fleeting form, which is really a mask. In dreamless sleep it apparently loses itself entirely. In spiritual self-contemplation [*Anschauung*], which is achieved through circumspect reconstruction [*besonnen*] of the dream-state, the soul comes into its own as a creative being, of which the physical body is the reflected image.

A dream, however, arises out of sleep. Whoever undertakes to raise the dream up into the clear light of consciousness must also feel the incentive to go still further. He does this when he tries consciously to experience dreamless sleep.

That seems to be impossible, precisely because in sleep consciousness ceases. The desire consciously to experience unconsciousness seems like folly.

The folly, however, takes on another light when one confronts the memories one can follow from a given point of time *backward* to one's last awakening. To do so one must proceed in such a way as to connect the memory pictures vividly with that which they recall. Then, if one tries — working backward — to proceed to the next conscious memory picture before that, this will be found before the last falling asleep. If one has really made the connection vivid with what is recalled, there arises an inner difficulty. One cannot join up the memory picture after awaking with the one before falling asleep.

Ordinary consciousness gets one over this difficulty by not vividly connecting what is recalled, but simply placing the waking image next to the image one has on falling asleep. The person who has raised his consciousness to a high degree of sensitiveness, however, through conscious imitation of the dream, finds that the two images fall apart from one another [*fallen auseinander*]. For him an abyss lies between them, but because he notices this abyss it already begins to fill itself up. For his self-awareness the dreamless sleep ceases to be an empty passage of time. Out of it there emerges like a memory a spiritual content of the "empty time," like a memory, it is true, of something that ordinary consciousness

had not contained before. Even so this memory points to an experience of one's own soul like an ordinary memory. The soul, however, really looks thereby into that which in ordinary experience — in dreamless sleep — occurred unconsciously.

On this path the soul looks still more deeply within than it does in the condition that arises as a result of the conscious dream imitation. In this condition the soul beholds its own body-forming being. Through the conscious penetration of dreamless sleep, the soul perceives itself in its own being, completely detached from the body.

Now, however, the soul beholds not only the forming of the body but also, beyond that, the formation of its own willing [*Wollen*].

The inner nature of the will remains as unknown to ordinary consciousness as the events of dreamless sleep. One experiences a thought that contains the intention of the will. This thought sinks into the obscure world of the feelings and disappears into the darkness of the bodily processes. It emerges again as the external bodily process of an arm movement that is comprehended anew through a thought. Between the two thought contents there lies something like the sleep between the thoughts before falling asleep and those after waking.

Now as the inner working of the soul upon the body becomes comprehensible to the first level of vision, so does the will over and above the body to the second. The soul can follow the path to behold its inner working upon the body's organic development; and it can take the other path by which it learns to comprehend how the soul works on the body in such a way as to extract the will from it.

And just as dreaming lies between sleeping and waking, so feeling lies between willing and thinking. On the same path that leads to the illumination of the will process lies the illumination of the world of feeling also.

In the first kind of vision the soul's inner working on the organism is revealed. In the second the soul penetrates to the will. But an inner activity must precede the outward manifestation of the will. Before the arm can be raised, the creative current must flow into it so that in its metabolic processes, which run on quietly, processes are inserted that are clearly the result of feeling. Feeling is a willing that remains enclosed within the human being, a willing that is arrested at its inception.

The processes inserted into the body for feeling and willing reveal themselves for the second stage of vision as processes that are in opposition to those that support life. They are destructive processes. In the constructive processes life prospers; but the soul withers in them. The life of the body, which itself is built up by the soul, must be broken down so that the nature and activity of the soul can unfold out of the body.

To spiritual vision the working of the soul on the body is like a memory of something that the soul had first to accomplish before it could exist in its own activity.

Thereby, however, the soul experiences itself as a purely spiritual being that has let the forming of the body take precedence to the soul's own activity in order to have the body become the basis for the soul's inherent, purely spiritual development. The soul first devotes its creative effort to the body so that, after this has been done sufficiently, the soul can manifest itself in free spirituality.

And this development of the soul begins already with thinking that results from the perception of the senses. When one perceives an object, the soul commences its activity. It shapes the corresponding part of the body in such a way that it becomes adapted for developing, in the form of thought, a mirror image of the object. In experiencing this mirror image, the soul beholds the result of its own activity.

One will never find the spiritual nature of the soul by philosophizing about the thoughts that arise before ordinary consciousness. The spiritual activity of the soul does not lie in these thoughts but *behind* them. It is true that the thoughts which the soul experiences are the result of the brain's activity. The brain's activity, however, is first the result of the spiritual activity of the soul. In misunderstanding this fact lies what is unsound in the materialistic world view. This view is right when it demonstrates from every possible scientific presupposition that thoughts are the result of the brain's activity. Any other view that seeks to contradict this will always run up against the claims of materialism. The activity of the brain, however, is the product of the activity of the spirit. To realize this it is not sufficient to look back into the inner being of man. In doing so one encounters thoughts. And these contain only a pictorial reality. *This pictorial reality* is the product of the physical body. In observing retrospectively one must bring to life reinforced and strengthened soul capacities. One must wrest the dreaming soul from the twilight of the dream; then it will not evaporate into fantasies, but rather lay its mask aside so as to appear as a being

active spiritually in the body. One must wrest the sleeping soul from the darkness of sleep; then the soul does not lose sight of itself but faces itself as an actual spiritual entity, which in the act of willing, by means of the bodily organism, creates above and beyond this body.





## 4

# The Human Soul in Courage and Fear

The habits of thinking that have come to be accepted in the modern study of nature [*Naturerkenntnis*] can yield no satisfying results for the study of the soul. What one would grasp with these habits of thinking must either be spread out in repose before the soul or, if the object of knowledge is in movement, the soul must feel itself extricated from this movement. For to participate in the movement of the object of knowledge means to lose oneself in it, to transform oneself, so to speak, into it.

How should the soul grasp *itself*, however, in an act of knowing in which it must lose *itself*? It can expect self-knowledge only in an activity in which, step by step, it *comes into possession* of itself.

This can only be an activity that is creative. Here, however, a cause for uncertainty arises at once for the knower. He believes he will lapse into personal arbitrariness.

It is precisely this arbitrariness that he gives up in the knowledge of nature. He excludes himself and lets nature hold sway. He seeks certainty in a realm which his individual soul being does not reach. In seeking self-knowledge he cannot conduct himself in this way. He must take himself along wherever he seeks to know. He therefore can find no nature on his path to self-knowledge. For where she would encounter him, there he is no longer to be found.

This, however, provides just the experience that is needed with regard to the spirit. One cannot expect other than to find the spirit when, through one's own activity, nature, as it were, melts away; that is, when one experiences oneself ever more strongly in proportion to one's feeling this melting away.

If one fills the soul with something that afterward proves to be like a dream in its illusory character, and one experiences the illusory in its true nature, then one becomes stronger in one's own experience of self. In confronting a dream, one's thinking corrects the belief one has in the dream's reality while dreaming. Concerning the activity of fantasy, this correction is not needed because one did not have this belief. Concerning

the meditative soul activity, to which one devotes oneself for spirit-knowledge, one cannot be satisfied with mere thought correction. One must correct by *experiencing*. One must first create the illusory thinking with one's activity and then extinguish it by a different, equally strong, activity.

In this act of extinguishing, another activity awakens, the spirit-knowing activity. For if the extinguishing is real, then the force for it must come from an entirely different direction than from nature. With the experienced illusion one has dispersed what nature can give; what inwardly arises during the dispersion is no longer nature.

With this activity something is needed that does not come into consideration in the study of nature: inner courage. With it one must take hold of what inwardly arises. In the study of nature one needs to hold nothing inwardly. One lets oneself be held by what is external. Inner courage is not needed here. One forgets it. This forgetting then causes anxiety when the spiritual is to enter the sphere of knowledge. Fear is felt because one might grope in a void if one no longer could hold onto nature.

This fear meets one at the threshold to spirit knowledge. And fear causes one to recoil from this knowledge. One now becomes creative in recoiling instead of in pressing forward. One does not allow the spirit to shape creative knowledge in oneself; one invents for oneself a sham logic for disputing the justification of spirit knowledge. Every possible sham reason is brought forward to spare one from acknowledging the spiritual, because one retreats trembling in fear of it.

Instead of spirit knowledge, then, there arises out of the creative force that which now appears in the soul when it draws back from nature, the enemy of spirit knowledge: first, as doubt concerning all knowledge that extends beyond nature; and then, as the fear grows, as an anti-logic that would banish all spirit knowledge to the realm of the fantastic.

Whoever has learned to move cognitively in the spirit often sees in the refutations of this knowledge its strongest evidence; for it becomes clear to him how in the soul, step by step, the refuter chokes down his fear of the spirit, and how in choking it he creates this sham logic. With such a refuter there is no point in arguing, for the fear befalling him arises in the subconscious. The consciousness tries to rescue itself from this fear. It feels at first that should this anxiety arise, it would inundate the whole inner experience with weakness. It is true, the soul cannot escape from

this weakness, for one feels it rising up from within. If one ran away it would follow one everywhere. He who proceeds further in the knowledge of nature and, in his dedication to it feels obliged to preserve his own self, never escapes from this fear if he cannot acknowledge the spirit. Fear will accompany him, unless he is willing to give up the knowledge of nature along with spirit knowledge. He must somehow rid himself of this fear in his pursuit of the science of nature. In reality he cannot do so. The fear is produced in the subconscious during the study of nature. It continually attempts to rise up out of the subconscious into consciousness. Therefore one *refutes* in the thought world what one cannot remove from the reality of soul experience.

And this refutation is an illusory layer of thought covering the subconscious fear. The refuter has not found the courage to come to grips with the illusory, just as in the meditative life he has to obliterate illusion in order to attain spiritual reality. For this reason he interposes the false arguments of his refutation into that region of the life of the soul that now arises. They soothe his consciousness; he ceases to feel the fear that, all the same, remains in his subconscious.

The denial of the spiritual world is a desire to run away from one's own soul. This, however, represents an impossibility. One *must* remain with oneself. And because one may run away but not escape from *oneself*, one takes care that in running one loses sight of oneself. It is the same with the entire human being in the soul realm, however, as it is with the eye with a cataract. The eye can then no longer see. It is darkened within itself.

So, too, the denier of spirit knowledge darkens his soul. He causes its darkening through sham reasoning born of fear. He avoids healthy clarification of the soul; he creates for himself an unhealthy soul darkening. The denial of spirit knowledge has its origin in a cataract affliction of the soul.

Thus one is ultimately led to the inner spiritual strength of the soul when one is willing to see the justification of spirit knowledge. And the way to such a knowledge can be had only through the strengthening of the soul. The meditative activity, preparing the soul for spirit knowledge, is a gradual conquest of the soul's "fear of the void." This void, however, is only a "void of nature," in which the "fullness of the spirit" can manifest itself if one wishes to take hold of it. Nor does the soul enter this "fullness of the spirit" with the arbitrariness it has when acting through the body in natural life;

the soul enters this fullness at the moment when the spirit reveals to the soul the creative will, before which the arbitrariness, existing only in natural life, dissolves in the same way as nature herself dissolves.



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