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RUDOLF STEINER'S CONCEPTION OF MEDITATION AND SPIRITUALITY

Connecting Divinity and Nature through the Human Being

SUMMARY – The academic study of anthroposophy is a nascent field of research. This article presents an overview of the core features of Rudolf Steiner's conception of meditation and spirituality based on an analysis of Steiner's work. The main aim of this form of meditation is to connect divinity and nature through the human being. This aim is realized through a three-step process of freedom, surrender, and unification. First the human being liberates itself from its dependence on material conditions, then it surrenders and connects with a greater reality beyond it, and finally it brings back the knowledge and capacities gained through the meditative practice to help inform scientific inquiry and to reshape the world. The emphasis on thought, nature, strengthening the self, and sociocultural renewal sets Steiner's conception of meditation apart from other contemplative traditions and current conceptions of meditation, which tend to have a different and even opposite focus. Hence the study of Steiner's conception of meditation provides a novel perspective on the significance of meditation and spiritual practice that challenges how meditation is conceived both traditionally and in contemporary culture and research.

Research on meditation is currently focused on traditions and forms of meditation with an Asian origin, such as mindfulness meditation¹ and its effects.² Hardly any work is done on European traditions. Until this changes, our understanding of meditation will remain incomplete. Though some work has been done on the cultural interaction between Asia and Europe in relation to medita-

¹ Antoine Lutz et al., 'Investigating the phenomenological matrix of mindfulness-related practices from a neurocognitive perspective', in: *American Psychologist* 70 (2015) no.7, 632-658.

² Juliane Eberth & Peter Sedlmeier, 'The effects of mindfulness meditation: A meta-analysis', *Mindfulness*, 3(3), 2012, 174-189.

tion,³ little has been done specifically on forms of meditation with a European origin. Rudolf Steiner's conception of meditation has hardly received any attention at all. One probable reason for this is that, unlike Asian traditions, anthroposophy has not yet become part of mainstream culture. Furthermore, the work of Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), which forms the foundation of anthroposophy, is so extensive that it is hard to even get an initial overview that does justice to the richness, not to say mere quantity, of the textual material (more than 300 volumes). However, the academic research on different aspects of Steiner's work, including anthroposophic meditation, is currently being established. This is evidenced by the publication of a critical edition of Steiner's work⁴ as well as numerous academic books and articles appearing in recent years.⁵ Anthroposophy, and in particular anthroposophic meditation, represents something unique on the global scene of spiritual practice. It connects European spirituality and philosophy, which is characterized by a positive view of the self and of thinking, with various forms of concrete observation, such as introspective observation, the observation of nature, aesthetic observation, and the observation of human interaction. In addition, anthroposophy aims for social and cultural renewal, which has resulted in, to give a few examples, anthroposophic medicine, biodynamic farming, and Waldorf pedagogy.

This article views Steiner's conception of meditation and spirituality in a philosophical perspective that will be set out in the following introduction, relying in particular on Charles Taylor's distinction between the 'porous' and 'buffered' self, and his concept of 'fullness'. Given that the field of anthroposophy is so extensive and that the research is in an early stage, what is presented here is an initial overview Steiner's conception of meditation based on around 60 of Steiner's texts that are either focused on meditation or contain vital information about his view on it. This overview has the benefit of presenting a

³ David L. McMahan, *The making of Buddhist modernism*, 2009; Robert Sharf, 'Buddhist modernism and the rhetoric of meditative experience', in: *Numen*, 42(3), 1995 228-283; Thomas Borchert, 'Worry for the Dai nation: Sipsongpanna, Chinese modernity, and the problems of Buddhist modernism', in: *The Journal of Asian Studies* 67 (2008) no.1, 107-142.

⁴ Rudolf Steiner, *Schriften: Kritische Ausgabe* (SKA), ed. Christian Clement, Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2013.

⁵ E.g. Bo Dahlin, 'On the path towards thinking: Learning from Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Steiner.' in: *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 28(6), 2009, 537–554; Arve Mathisen, 'Rhythms in Education and the Art of Life Lefebvre, Whitehead and Steiner on the Art of Bringing Rhythmical Transformations into Teaching and Learning – Part I', in: *RoSE – Research on Steiner Education*, 6(2), 2015, 1891–6511.; John Paul, 'The Secrets of Koberwitz: The Diffusion of Rudolf Steiner's Agriculture Course and the Founding of Biodynamic Agriculture' in: *Journal of Social Research & Policy*, 2(1), 2011, 51-53; Jonael Schickler Schickler, J. (2005). *Metaphysics as Christology: an odyssey of the self from Kant and Hegel to Steiner. Ashgate new critical thinking in religion, theology, and biblical studies*, 2005; Helmut Zander *Anthroposophie in Deutschland*, 2007.

bird's eye view – it will give an impression of the whole – but many details will be missing. Though my intention is to not miss any essential aspect of Steiner's conception of meditation, there is no guarantee that further investigations into the details will not lead to a change in overall picture.

What I propose, more specifically, is that meditation in the way Steiner conceived it can be made comprehensible by relating the human being, nature, and divinity to freedom, surrender and unification. To unpack this thesis I will start by describing both the cultural context in which anthroposophy arises and the view of history it represents (1). Then I will describe the more concrete aspects of Steiner's conception of meditation that can be subsumed under the headings of freedom, surrender, and unification (2). These three headings can be understood broadly as referring to stages of development in Steiner's conception of meditation; a development that connects the human being to deeper parts of itself, to nature and to divinity. Finally, I will indicate what topics need to be addressed by future research (3). Furthermore, this article is a continuation of earlier work that I have done on Steiner's idea of freedom.⁶ The triad of freedom, surrender, and unification, corresponds to the three main aspects in Steiner's idea of freedom, which focuses on individualism, egolessness, and unity (or, using an expression from Hegel's philosophy, 'being-with-oneself in otherness'). Steiner's conception of meditation and spirituality can hence be seen as a developing out of the philosophical idea of freedom that he developed initially.

1. MAN, NATURE, AND DIVINITY

One of the most significant cultural events that has happened over the last thousand years of human development is the transition from a mythical and group-centred consciousness to one that is intellectual and individualistic. We can describe this, with Charles Taylor (1931–), as a process of secularization.⁷ Whereas in earlier times the existence and authority of divinity was taken for granted, today a religious life is just one among many other possibilities. As Taylor describes it, the self used to be 'porous'; much more open to the world, both divine, natural, and social.⁸ Now the self has become 'buffered'; closed off to the outside world, self-centered, but also self-directed. What happened, I suggest, is that during the course of history divinity is split in two: One part enters the human mind and becomes autonomy; the human being starts to prescribe moral laws to itself rather than receiving them from the outside. An-

⁶ Terje Sparby, 'Rudolf Steiner's idea of freedom', in: *Epoché* 21 (2016) no.1, 173-196.

⁷ Charles Taylor, *A secular age*, Cambridge (MA): Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.

⁸ Taylor, *A secular age*, 27.

other part goes into nature, which then no longer needs an external creator; nature becomes imbued with an inherent creative potential, and is seen as giving rise to biological life and the human mind. Some influential philosophical positions, like naturalism, materialism or physicalism, indeed propose that the human mind is really a creation of natural processes. This view can indeed be seen as a consummation of secularization: The only real creative force lies in nature, which not only brings about the human mind, but also everything that happens *in* the human mind; all ideas of the divine, gods, etc., are seen as being fully dependent on and originating in physical processes. However, certain dualistic positions, like that of Immanuel Kant's philosophy, are still available. These view the human mind itself as in a sense divine (autonomous), but also claim that it is impossible to give an explanation of how the conscious mind, the self, which has the capacity of spontaneity, of thought and self-movement, can relate to a universe that is ruled by natural laws. Hence the self is granted some space, but its connection to nature remains both mysterious and outside of rational understanding. The typical story of the 20th century has been that nature produces the conscious human being, and then the human being projects divinity. In other words, consciousness and divinity arise from nature and can in principle be reduced to it. Still, different forms of dualism, which afford reality to the mind as well as to nature, continue to be real possibilities, as exemplified by, for instance, the 'hard problem of consciousness'.⁹

The upshot of this process is 'man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity',¹⁰ a liberating heroic atheism,¹¹ and modern science. Whereas the ancients watched the acts of the gods through divine intuition¹² – *theoria* – theory is now about watching the 'acts' of nature. However, the process of secularization can also be seen to lead to estrangement; a lack of connection with nature, human community, and divinity. The buffered self is encapsulated. It can only experience things in a partial way; it is cut off from a greater reality or sees itself (and even the sense of estrangement) as an illusion. What is really lacking for the buffered self, as Taylor conceives it, is a sense of fullness:

We all see our lives, and/or the space wherein we live our lives, as having a certain moral/spiritual shape. Somewhere, in some activity, or condition, lies a fullness, a richness: that is, in that place (activity or condition), life is fuller, richer, deeper, more worth while, more admirable, more what it should be. This is per-

⁹ David J. Chalmers, 'Facing up to the problem of consciousness', in: *Journal of Conscious Studies* 2 (1995) no.3, 200-219.

¹⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Political writings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 54.

¹¹ Karen Armstrong, *A history of God: The 4000-year quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, New York: Knopf, 1993, 443.

¹² Georg Picht, 'Der Sinn der Unterscheidung von Theorie und Praxis in der griechischen Philosophie', in: *Evangelische Ethik* 8 (1964), 321-342.

haps a place of power: we often experience this as deeply moving, as inspiring. Perhaps this sense of fullness is something we just catch glimpses of from afar off; we have the powerful intuition of what fullness would be, were we to be in that condition, e.g., of peace or wholeness; or able to act on that level, of integrity or generosity or abandonment or self-forgetfulness. But sometimes there will be moments of experienced fullness, of joy and fulfillment, where we feel ourselves there.¹³

This mode of experience could be called religious. Often the object of religious experience is conceived of as transcendent. It does not have to be. Rather, nature can be experienced as 'a veil before the face of God'.¹⁴ Fullness can contain both immanence (nature) and transcendence (divinity) in one and the same experience. The metaphor of the veil indicates that the relation between the two cannot be adequately cast in terms of, for instance, 'supervenience', where the mental is seen to depend on the physical, while the physical is independent of the mental.¹⁵ If a veil is transparent or touches the veiled object, the shape of the veiled object can be gleaned. Even if the veil is not transparent or touching the object, the veil and the veiled object are nonetheless part of the same reality. And because they are part of the same reality, the veil can be removed to reveal the full nature of that which it was hiding. The experience of fullness can be the ground of a radically altered way of experiencing nature and divinity; a form of experience that can be the foundation of a 'spiritual empiricism' that in principle can be on par with natural or empirical science when it comes to a systematic description and explanation of reality. This is the claim of anthroposophy.

Anthroposophy was described by Steiner as a path of knowledge that seeks to lead the divinity (or the spiritual, 'das Geistige') in man to the divinity of the world at large.¹⁶ In one place, Steiner uses a metaphor that is similar to Taylor's in order to describe the current condition of humanity and its relationship to divinity and the world:

Throughout the centuries the human being of the civilized world has led the life of a mole. However, the reason for this was to bring about human freedom. Everything that is experienced as part of the progression of humanity has meaning. But one must penetrate into this meaning; one must not remain standing at one stage of development, but rather proceed along with the development. And today one must be conscious of this: After humanity has had the experience of

¹³ Taylor, *A secular age*, 5.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ Or more precisely: The mental (including that which appears in the mind as 'divine') cannot be altered in some respect without being altered in some physical respect, while the physical may indeed be altered without something mental being altered. See Donald Davidson, 'Essays on actions and events', in: *Journal of Philosophy* 1 (1980).

¹⁶ Rudolf Steiner, *Anthroposophische Leitsätze (Gesamtausgabe [GA] 26)*, Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1998, 14.

freedom within its earthly mole existence, it must ascend again to a perception of divinity, the spiritual world, not only the mathematical world. [...] What is it that is our task today in relation to these things? It is our task to learn again to look out into the world and see spirit everywhere, not only by becoming absorbed in ourselves, wanting to experience spirit there, but also by being able to experience spirit in all shapes of precisely the external cosmos.¹⁷

The mole-like existence has led to an increase in freedom, but the time has come to re-connect with a spiritual world outside of the human being, which involves seeing spirit in nature.

We can now return to the two options that we are usually presented with today when it comes to understanding the relationship between the human being and nature: We can choose either some form of materialistic monism or some form of dualism. The former sees all creative force as inherent exclusively in nature, while the latter allows for some self-directed moral action, i.e. spontaneity, that is not reducible to interactions of matter. Anthroposophy is dependent upon making sense of the claim that there is a form of divinity that is neither simply identical to nature nor limited to moral autonomy, and that this divinity is both present within the human being as well as outside of it. Confronted with a materialist stance, the anthroposophist has to separate divinity from nature again (without completely disconnecting it); confronted with a dualist, such as Kant, the anthroposophist must show how the divine is not only inside the human being, but also present in the world at large (which includes nature). Furthermore, anthroposophy must show that divinity and nature can be connected in actual experience. This means that it is to be founded upon a real encounter with fullness. This is one of the main tasks of meditation as Steiner conceived it; making the theoretical possibility of spiritual knowledge into an actual practice of attaining such knowledge.

There are many traditions that share the aim of connecting the divinity within the human being with the divinity outside it. Steiner sought to develop a way of realizing this aim in a way that was well suited for our intellectual, individualized, scientific, and secularized age.¹⁸ The culture of Steiner's time had been strongly influenced by Goethe and German idealism, in particular Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. These figures have in common that they treat Kant's formulation of a divine or higher form of knowledge as something that the human being can attain, which Kant denied.¹⁹ The notion of higher knowledge has

¹⁷ Rudolf Steiner, *Menschenfragen und Weltenantworten* (GA 213), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1987, 235-237.

¹⁸ Rudolf Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss* (GA 13), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1989, 395-396.

¹⁹ Eckart Förster, *Die 25 Jahre der Philosophie: Eine systematische Rekonstruktion*, Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 2011.

been part of the history of knowledge since Antiquity, but slowly exited as secularization entered the scene. Steiner defended the notion that higher knowledge is within the reach of the human being whilst idealism was on the decline. This decline gave much more room for atheism and naturalism. Steiner also goes through a period of deism, and possibly even atheism, something which reaches a climax in the article *Der Egoismus in der Philosophie* (later changed to *Individualismus in der Philosophie*).²⁰ In this article God is declared to be a projection of the human self. Around 1900, Steiner had become part of the radical anarchist scene in Berlin and within those circles atheism and naturalism were a common world view. Not long after this Steiner emerged, surprisingly, as a theosophist; as someone who lays a strong claim to higher knowledge, in the form of supersensible perception that reaches far beyond anything claimed by Goethe or the German idealists.

It is contested whether Steiner's turn to theosophy is a matter of continuity or rupture.²¹ Considering this issue in-depth is beyond the scope of this article. However, as Steiner turns to theosophy, the idea of a systematic development of higher knowledge through spiritual practice, such as specific meditation techniques, becomes part of his work. This was lacking in the work of Goethe and the German idealists. The theosophists drew heavily on Asian sources, and as Steiner interacted with theosophy many terms of Asian origin entered into his writings and lectures. This led to a merger of elements from Asian spirituality and European philosophy in Steiner's work. Later, Steiner gradually moved away from using terms from the Asian traditions, opting for such formulations as 'spiritual force of perception' ('geistige Wahrnehmungskraft') instead of 'kundalini'.²² However, words such as 'karma' persist throughout Steiner's later work.

In Steiner's view anthroposophy differs from theosophy in that it centers more around the human perspective.²³ Anthroposophy also contains some ideas that are unique to Steiner, such as the three-fold understanding of the human being,²⁴ which is important in the development of Steiner's conception of meditation and will be briefly outlined. In anthroposophy, the human being is characterized as having three basic mental abilities, thinking, feeling, and willing. The idea of 'transforming consciousness' through a systematic development of these capacities remains fundamental to Steiner's main book on

²⁰ Rudolf Steiner, *Methodische Grundlagen der Anthroposophie 1884-1901* (GA 30), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1989.

²¹ Zander, *Anthroposophie in Deutschland*, 540-542.

²² Christian Clement, 'Einleitung', in: *Schriften zur Erkenntnisbildung* (SKA 7), Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2015, lix (xix-cxxx).

²³ Rudolf Steiner, *Anthroposophie* (GA 45), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2008, 19-20.

²⁴ Rudolf Steiner, *Von Seelenrätseeln* (GA 21), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1983.

meditative practice, *How to Know Higher Worlds*.²⁵ In the so-called subsidiary practices, ‘Nebenübungen’,²⁶ which are thought to both provide grounding for the meditative practitioner and develop the organs of higher perception, thinking, feeling, and willing are developed so as to manifest the virtues of openness, positivity and equanimity.

The starting point of anthroposophy is that there is a divine ground of existence that can be known by the human being.²⁷ This can be seen as a further influence of German idealism. Like the German idealists, Steiner rejects the Kantian limits to knowledge. Even though Goethe spoke of higher senses, something Steiner explicitly refers to,²⁸ systematic meditation probably plays no role in Goethe’s work. For Steiner, it is meditation and spiritual practice in general that makes the divine ground of existence, the spiritual world, perceptually accessible. Here, to a certain extent, anthroposophy differs from traditions that seek knowledge of divinity primarily as part of a path to liberation from the cyclical existence inside the illusory world of samsara.²⁹ Anthroposophy represents a different concept of liberation, or of freedom, focusing on establishing a connection between divinity, the natural world and the human being.³⁰ Spiritual knowledge is seen as prerequisite for realizing such a form of freedom. As part of the meditative development, the practitioners come to know their higher or true self. The knowledge of the true self becomes the foundation of realizing positive freedom, of expressing one’s true identity. However, the knowledge gained from spiritual perception is also to be made use of in order to benefit already existing human practices (pedagogy, religious life, medicine, art, etc.).

We will go further into all of these issues in the following sections. What can be underlined here is that anthroposophy is a response to the potential pitfalls of modern life, such as loss of connection and meaning, self-centeredness, lack of fullness, apathy, nihilism, depression, and so on. Still, these are not only viewed in a negative light. Rather, they are seen as part of a process that enables a greater realization of freedom. However, they can grow too strong and this is to be avoided. In this light, what anthroposophy seeks is a way of balancing and positively interrelating immanence and transcendence, nature and divinity, self and other, through spiritual practice and meditation. In other words, though the negative aspects of modernity are ultimately to be overcome, its achievements, such as autonomy and science, are to be retained and built upon.

²⁵ Clement, ‘Einleitung’, cv.

²⁶ Rudolf Steiner, *Seelenübungen I* (GA 267), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2001, 55-62.

²⁷ Rudolf Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung* (GA 69a), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2007, 38.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁹ Paul Williams, Anthony Tribe, Alexander Wynne, New York: Routledge, 2012, 30-42.

³⁰ Sparby, ‘Rudolf Steiners idea of freedom’.

2. FREEDOM, SURRENDER, AND UNITY

In the following, I suggest that three overarching topics – freedom, surrender, and unity – can be found in Steiner's work on meditation, and that these can serve as a basis for considering more specific topics. For instance, the topic of freedom relates to the topic of being or having a spiritual teacher, in that the freedom is of central concern in the relationship between teacher and student. Furthermore, as it will be shown, freedom, surrender, and unity relate to Steiner's doctrine of the higher states of consciousness, imagination, inspiration, and intuition. It may certainly be possible to find other ways of ordering the relationship between overarching and subordinate topics in Steiner's conception of meditation; the way suggested here primarily has the function of giving an overview.

2.1 Freedom

Freedom is perhaps the most central concept of Steiner's work. His main philosophical work is *The Philosophy of Freedom*, and he repeatedly comes back to the topic of freedom in his later theosophic and anthroposophic period.³¹ Freedom in anthroposophy is inherently connected to intellectual activity and the self. As the mythical world withdraws from human consciousness, the human being's sense of self increases and its intellectual capacities begin to unfold.³² The esoteric doctrines and divine experiences that were imparted in the mystery cultures of Antiquity are relegated to being an undercurrent of European culture (for instance within Christian mysticism). This retreat is understood to be part of the process of individualization of the human being; in order to attain autonomy, the human being must become inwardly active, and this in turn means that it has to be cut off from its surroundings. In fact, Steiner sees the history of philosophy as being more about the development of the human personality than the establishment of truth.³³

However, it is Steiner's view that during this period of history the knowledge and spiritual practices of the mystery traditions, which were available only to a select few, should become publically available.³⁴ We could call this the principle

³¹ Ibidem.

³² Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:25.

³³ Rudolf Steiner, *Die Rätsel der Philosophie* (GA 18), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1985, 594-595.

³⁴ Rudolf Steiner, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis* (GA 12), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1993, 66-67. 'And the initiate that appears publically should never interfere with anyone's free

of disclosure of esoteric theory and practice. This is one of the most important principles in anthroposophic spirituality. What used to take place in esoteric circles should, in Steiner's view, now become part of the public sphere, and there are deep spiritual reasons for this, connected to spiritual beings that guide human evolution.³⁵ However, it is clear that this is just a guideline; in Steiner's view there were still restrictions on what can be made publically available.³⁶ Nonetheless, his general view is that esoteric knowledge and practices should be increasingly made accessible so that people can respond more adequately to the demands of life³⁷ and to satisfy a growing longing for such knowledge.³⁸ In the end, divine law is just as natural as any other law.³⁹ Still, caution is necessary, since esoteric knowledge and meditative practices can destabilize the minds of those who are not ready.⁴⁰ Indeed, Steiner was very aware of certain dangers that are connected with meditative practice and for this reason he believed some instructions should never be made public in their true character. Though the full justification for this can only be understood by the initiate,⁴¹ he also states that some 'secrets' are not to be revealed until the student is ready.⁴² Presumably, this is connected to the potential danger inherent in spiritual practice. In any case, we see that the principle of disclosure has exceptions, and there is still a separation between those who know (the initiates) and those who do not.

In other words, the principle of disclosure of esoteric knowledge has its limits, though the tendency is that Steiner increasingly follows the principle of disclosure throughout his life. On a whole it cannot be said that Steiner's stance is inherently authoritarian; indeed, authoritarianism and dogmatism are explicitly rejected.⁴³ Additionally, Steiner underlines that *everyone* has the potential of

will', Rudolf Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?* (GA 10), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1992, 29.

³⁵ Rudolf Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden I* (GA 266a), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1995, 261.

³⁶ Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss*, GA 13:303.

³⁷ Rudolf Steiner, *Ein Weg zur Selbsterkenntnis des Menschen* (GA 16), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1996, 47.

³⁸ Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden I*, GA 266a:247.

³⁹ Cf. Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:171.

⁴⁰ Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:98-99; Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden I*, GA 266a:246-257, 424-425.

⁴¹ Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:99.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴³ Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:160.

developing the capacity of higher knowledge,⁴⁴ regardless of external life circumstances.⁴⁵

In the meditative traditions it has traditionally been vital to have a spiritual teacher. In Steiner's view, this has changed. Whereas the principle of disclosure increases in importance, the teacher becomes less and less important;⁴⁶ a personal teacher can in principle be dispensed with.⁴⁷ However, it is better to have a teacher,⁴⁸ if only to receive support until definite progress is made⁴⁹ and to ensure advancement within a reasonable amount of time.⁵⁰ Guidance can be crucial during certain stages of development, such as when developing the higher capacity of imagination (more on this below) in a way that makes it useable for spiritual knowledge,⁵¹ but even here the teacher is not afforded any more authority than a teacher within any other area of life.⁵² The teacher needs to weigh the need to let everything be known to the student against the need for certain things to remain hidden temporarily, because of issues such as the danger of mental instability mentioned above.⁵³ Again, the freedom of the individual must be respected,⁵⁴ but freedom is neither diminished by taking advice from someone who is experienced,⁵⁵ nor by the teacher proposing certain conditions for practice.⁵⁶ In any case, what the teacher can offer is really nothing

⁴⁴ Steiner, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*, GA 12:172; Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:10, 16, 41.

⁴⁵ Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:17; Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss*, GA 13:395.

⁴⁶ Clement, 'Einleitung'.

⁴⁷ Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:222-223. At least there is no relation of dependency involved; see Steiner, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*, GA 12:49. It is also possible to receive teachings through non-physical means (Steiner, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*, GA 12:48); and even from spiritual beings (Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden I*, GA 266a:413).

⁴⁸ Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:56.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵⁰ Steiner, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*, GA 12:63-64; Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden I*, GA 266a:215-216.

⁵¹ Steiner, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*, GA 12:44-45, 48.

⁵² Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:14; Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss*, GA 13:304; Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden I*, GA 266a:417.

⁵³ Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:40.

⁵⁴ Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden I*, GA 266a:453. However, trust in the teacher is required, see Steiner, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*, GA 12:48; and Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden I*, GA 266a:535. A questionable practice would be that the teacher influences the meditative development in a way that the student remains unaware of: see Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss*, GA 13:303.

⁵⁵ Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:40.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

more than advice;⁵⁷ a teacher can show the way, but the student must do the walking.⁵⁸

Not only is spiritual perception in principle available to everyone and the instructions for developing it something Steiner believes should be publicly available, anthroposophic practice can also be undertaken by people belonging to any domination and even atheists.⁵⁹ Anthroposophy is not conceived of as a religion, but intends to relate to the particular religions as mathematics relates to different books on mathematics.⁶⁰ There is a strong tendency for pluralism and tolerance, of both accepting that there are differing views as well as that the differences can be integrated within a larger whole.⁶¹ Hence the individualism that anthroposophy represents is not egotistical. Rather, it can be considered to be an extension of the ethical individualism that Steiner developed in his philosophy. This form of individualism affirms, with Nietzsche, personality and personal strength (which includes self-discipline and ‘Bildung’), but differs from Nietzschean individualism in that it does not take any given drive or instinct as fully belonging to the individual if it has not been reflectively investigated.⁶² Hence one could call it a tempered or reflexive individualism.

In anthroposophy, the self is considered a real being,⁶³ and although the theme of selflessness is important, Steiner’s conception of meditation begins with addressing the individual self. The self is most consciously experienced in thinking. A scientific attitude, or at least common sense, is presupposed. Nothing is to be taken on the grounds of belief alone,⁶⁴ and any material that is presented by a teacher or someone else can be taken as hypotheses,⁶⁵ or simply as experiential reports; as something someone has observed, which does not mean

⁵⁷ Ibidem.

⁵⁸ Rudolf Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden II* (GA 266b), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1996, 378.

⁵⁹ Rudolf Steiner, *Zur Geschichte und aus den Inhalten der ersten Abteilung der Esoterischen Schule, 1904-1914* (GA 264), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1996, 71; Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden I*, GA 266a:236.

⁶⁰ Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden I*, GA 266a:107.

⁶¹ Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden I*, GA 266a:116; Rudolf Steiner, *Die Schwelle der geistigen Welt* (GA 17), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1987, 7; Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:144; Rudolf Steiner, *Die Beantwortung von Welt- und Lebensfragen durch Anthroposophie* (GA 108), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1986, 46-47.

⁶² Rudolf Steiner, *Friedrich Nietzsche, ein Kämpfer gegen seine Zeit* (GA 5), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2000, 91.

⁶³ Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:67

⁶⁴ Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden I*, GA 266a:415; Rudolf Steiner, *Theosophie* (GA 9), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1995, 173, 176.

⁶⁵ Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden I*, GA 266a:248-249; Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:52-53.

that it cannot be challenged by arguments or further observation.⁶⁶ Higher knowledge is gained via inner or introspective experimentation that demands *more* diligence, conscientiousness, devotion and methodical thoroughness than other forms of science.⁶⁷ Still, the results of anthroposophy should be in harmony with both the spirit and results of conventional science, though not necessarily with all interpretations of empirical data.⁶⁸ The scientific attitude, with its focus on clear thinking, is the proper starting point because it is imperative that no external influences enter into the meditative mind. Earlier in history, altered states of consciousness were dream-like.⁶⁹ Today all meditative work should start from a clear everyday consciousness,⁷⁰ which continues into the state where supersensible experience takes place.⁷¹ Indeed, the meditator should know the intended effects of the practices undertaken.⁷² Using external means of forcing someone into an altered state would fail to recognize the autonomy of the individual. Furthermore, dream-like states are also unreliable as a source of knowledge;⁷³ they make conceptualization difficult⁷⁴ and they can also potentially be harmful.⁷⁵

Abstract thinking has little content; it does not contain anything more than what the thinker makes available to it and is aware of. In other words, it is easy to establish and maintain full consciousness of what is contained in abstract thinking. It is comparatively difficult to remain conscious of all parts of a sense impression at once. For Steiner it is thinking that brought the human being out of its mythical consciousness. He also understands abstract thinking as working against spiritual perception⁷⁶ and he believes that this form of thinking has limits when it comes to gaining a true understanding of the forces that are at work in the universe.⁷⁷ Though thinking is essential for the autonomy of the human

⁶⁶ Steiner, *Theosophie*, GA9:173; Rudolf Steiner, *Philosophie und Anthroposophie* (GA 35), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1984, 122.

⁶⁷ Rudolf Steiner, *Die Wirklichkeit der höheren Welten* (GA 79), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1988, 31.

⁶⁸ Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:8; Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:268; Steiner, *Die Wirklichkeit der höheren Welten*, GA 79:43-44.

⁶⁹ Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:21.

⁷⁰ Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss*, GA 13:307.

⁷¹ Steiner, *Die Schwelle der geistigen Welt*, GA 17:99.

⁷² Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss*, GA 13:304.

⁷³ Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss*, GA 13:327-329; Steiner, *Die Wirklichkeit der höheren Welten*, GA 79:16.

⁷⁴ Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden II*, GA 266b:123.

⁷⁵ Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:115; Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden II*, GA 266b:340.

⁷⁶ Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:31; Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden I*, GA 266a:24.

⁷⁷ Steiner, *Die Rätsel der Philosophie*, GA 18:32.

being, it lacks a connection to reality. As Steiner says: ‘Inner life would become desolate, if it was only intelligence that was called upon to light up the inner life of the human being’.⁷⁸ A central point in Steiner’s conception of meditation is that thinking can be transformed without losing the strengths of analysis, deduction, wakefulness, and clarity that is characteristic of it. An important stage of the process of transforming thought is the practice of pure or mathematical thinking. Such thinking stands between sense-bound thinking (thinking that gains its content or representations from the physical senses) and higher knowledge. The truth of pure thinking is independent of the physical world.⁷⁹ But such thinking does not by itself bring supersensible reality with it.⁸⁰ Only as we intuit or become aware of the experience of the self, the thinker, are we beginning to enter into a higher reality.⁸¹ This is an important instance where anthroposophy draws on German idealism, in particular Fichte, who proposed that the intellectual intuition of the I presents an instance where thinking and the will, or real existence, are one, and hence a kind of divine knowing.⁸²

However, the capacity of thinking is to be further developed and transformed in anthroposophy through systematic meditative practice.⁸³ This transformation is predicated upon a thorough strengthening of willpower.⁸⁴ Meditation in anthroposophy is far from being a comfortable procedure; it is arduous and lengthy, though healthy and ethical.⁸⁵ The meditator must become inwardly active and acquire a very high degree of concentration. The first state of consciousness that is reached through concentration practice is that of ‘imagination’, a term Steiner uses in a technical sense. We can only consider a few of its characteristics here. Fundamental to the imaginative state is that the meditator is, in a certain sense, sleeping, whilst at the same time being *more awake* than in everyday consciousness.⁸⁶ Something that is supposed to happen in imaginative consciousness is that the meditator is confronted with their true self, the being that has shaped the physical body and which exists beyond the single human life of the meditator.⁸⁷ The form of knowledge in this state is saturated with

⁷⁸ Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:33.

⁷⁹ Steiner, *Theosophie*, GA 9:185; Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:81; Steiner, *Die Wirklichkeit der höheren Welten*, GA 79:46-47.

⁸⁰ Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:82.

⁸¹ Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:83.

⁸² Terje Sparby, *Hegel’s Conception of The Determinate Negation*, Leiden: Brill, 2015, 73-76.

⁸³ Steiner, *Die Wirklichkeit der höheren Welten*, GA 79:15.

⁸⁴ Steiner, *Die Schwelle der geistigen Welt*, GA 17:52, 84, 95; Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:14.

⁸⁵ Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:123; Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss*, GA 13:326.

⁸⁶ Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:115, 264

⁸⁷ Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:83-84.

reality;⁸⁸ it is an experience of the 'fullness' of the individual, but it is also the source of many dangerous illusions, such as grandeur.⁸⁹ At all times, the meditator must retain control of their consciousness while in this state. This means, for instance, that the images that appear do not *force* consciousness in any way⁹⁰ and the meditator must be able to enter⁹¹ and exit the state at any point.⁹² The imaginative consciousness stands between fantasy and dream. Fantasies are contingent, without reality, while (non-lucid) dreams pull the dreamer into their own reality. In fantasy there is too much autonomy; in dreams, there is too little. In the imaginative consciousness autonomy is preserved and a new level of reality is attained, one that is, in a sense, a creation of the meditator, but still potentially reveals deeper aspects of the meditating self. At a later point of development, the imaginative consciousness becomes a source of concrete spiritual knowledge of that which lies beyond the subject.

A condition for entering into the state of imaginative consciousness is that thinking in the normal sense comes to complete rest, that external impressions cease, and that body becomes paralyzed.⁹³ In this sense the state externally resembles sleep. Although thoughts have come to a rest, the capacity of wakeful knowing is still active, which makes this state similar, if not the same as the states known in the Asian traditions as *dhyana*, *jhana* or *samadhi*. In this state, the mind is to a certain extent freed from its dependence on the body, but since the state also depends on regular thought having yielded, it is also a form of *surrender*. This brings us to the next theme.

2.2 Surrender

It might not be immediately obvious, but perception depends on (at least a partial) surrender, or 'Hingabe', as Steiner refers to it in German (which could also be translated as 'devotion'). If the perceiver does not become receptive, what appears would be a form of hallucination; the subject 'perceives' itself rather than something beyond it. A main aspect of developing the dormant capacities for higher perception is being able to let go of oneself and practice devotion and selflessness.⁹⁴ Steiner connects these capacities with a rather elab-

⁸⁸ Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:113.

⁸⁹ Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden II*, GA 266b:395.

⁹⁰ Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:261-262.

⁹¹ Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss*, GA 13:306; Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:171, 181.

⁹² Rudolf Steiner, *Drei Schritte der Anthroposophie: Kosmologie, Religion, Philosophie* (GA 25), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1999, 25; Steiner, *Die Wirklichkeit der höheren Welten*, GA 79:100.

⁹³ Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:206, 212, 257-258.

⁹⁴ Steiner, *Theosophie*, GA 9:177.

orate doctrine of the subtle bodies of the human being, involving ideas such as the *chakras*,⁹⁵ ‘wheels’, or organs that are active and move as they perceive.⁹⁶ The chakras become organs of perception through specific meditations where the practitioners dwell in certain ideas and sensations, as described in Steiner’s main book on meditation, the aforementioned *How to Know Higher Worlds*. Additionally, the imaginative consciousness interacts with the so-called inspirational consciousness. While imagination corresponds to the dream state, inspiration is like the state of dreamless sleep.⁹⁷ In order to reach this state, the meditator has to remove the entire content present in the imaginative state.⁹⁸ Consciousness has to become completely empty.

The inspirative consciousness brings perceptions of an objective spiritual reality.⁹⁹ The practitioner learns to surrender their own self and become open to external influence. This is, to a certain extent, a reversal of the initial emphasis of freedom. Indeed, as inspirations happen, the self of the perceiver is temporarily dampened so that new content can make its way into consciousness.¹⁰⁰ These perceptions are said to happen ‘lightning fast’ and they are difficult to remember and reproduce.¹⁰¹ It is a form of transcendence, of entering the divine, timeless realm. By giving oneself up, one expands, and transforms, temporarily, into something else.¹⁰²

There is a tension here between freedom and surrender that is also characteristic of Steiner’s work in general. Initially, the focus is on freedom and strengthening the personality, and then there is an apparent full turn, where the emphasis is on dissolving the personality. This tension is, I believe, representative of a fundamental dynamic that is part of Steiner’s conception of meditation and spirituality in general. The focus on the self has the significance of becoming strong or independent enough to encounter the spiritual world. For someone who is not properly prepared it might very well be possible to enter into the spiritual world – and, according to Steiner, we do so every night, unconsciously, when we fall asleep¹⁰³ – but we would not be able to perceive anything, since we

⁹⁵ Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10

⁹⁶ Rudolf Steiner, *Vor dem Tore der Theosophie* (GA 95), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1990, 44.

⁹⁷ Hans Erhard Lauer, ‘The riddles of the soul: Depth psychology and anthroposophy’, in: *Jung and Steiner*, Gerhard Wehr, Great Barrington, MA: Anthroposophic Press, 2002; Evan Thompson, *Waking, dreaming, being*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, 262-320.

⁹⁸ Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss*, GA 13:321; Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:110-111.

⁹⁹ Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:210.

¹⁰⁰ Rudolf Steiner, *Okkultes Lesen und okkultes Hören* (GA 156), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2003, 55.

¹⁰¹ Steiner, *Ein Weg zur Selbsterkenntnis des Menschen*, GA 16:88-91.

¹⁰² Steiner, *Die Schwelle der geistigen Welt*, GA 17:54.

¹⁰³ Steiner, *Die Schwelle der geistigen Welt*, GA 17:50.

would simply be one with the environment. Again, there is also the danger of mental instability. Remembering one's physical existence, i.e. one's normal identity, when one enters into the spiritual world is not only something that is challenging, but it also helps maintain independence in relation to one's surroundings within that realm.¹⁰⁴

This is why Steiner says that egotism is justified in the spiritual world, while in the physical world, it puts the human being in shackles.¹⁰⁵ This relates to the topic of asceticism, which is also found in many other spiritual traditions. Though Steiner indeed mentions asceticism occasionally, he does not have much to say about it. He stresses that there is a difference between opening up to the world through pleasure and indulging in pleasure; the latter leads to an encapsulation of consciousness and the dulling of the capacities for higher knowledge.¹⁰⁶ What is important is not so much to restrict one's relation to physical pleasure, but rather to use it as a means of further revelation by restricting further indulgence. Furthermore, at a certain point in the meditative development the physical urges will cease, though this should not be forced; continence will become something one freely tends toward without having to curb desires or chastise oneself.¹⁰⁷ The ideal is that one should come to the spiritual world through earthly life and not through asceticism,¹⁰⁸ by contemplating the magnificence of the sensory world rather than disregarding it.¹⁰⁹ The general tendency is temperance,¹¹⁰ but in his esoteric school, which lasted until the outbreak of the first world war, Steiner prescribes that students drink no alcohol, and vegetarianism is advised.¹¹¹ Still, all forms of renunciation that are unhealthy or lead to a distracted mind are definitely rejected.¹¹² In fact, Steiner is well aware of the problem of subtle egotism that can sneak into spiritual practice. Insofar as asceticism can become a means for seeking spiritual pleasure, it is useless.¹¹³ To a certain extent he sees an increase in egotism as unavoidable for those who do spiritual practice,¹¹⁴ but it is still something that needs to be rooted out.

¹⁰⁴ Steiner, *Die Schwelle der geistigen Welt*, GA 17:57; Steiner, *Okkultes Lesen und okkultes Hören*, GA 156:66-67.

¹⁰⁵ Steiner, *Die Schwelle der geistigen Welt*, GA 17:69-70.

¹⁰⁶ Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:27.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 135-136.

¹⁰⁸ Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden I*, GA 266a:34.

¹⁰⁹ Rudolf Steiner, *Esoterische Unterweisungen für die erste Klasse der Freien Hochschule für Geisteswissenschaft* (GA 270c), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2008, 17-18.

¹¹⁰ Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden I*, GA 266a:559.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 553-563.

¹¹² Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:136.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹¹⁴ Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden II*, GA 266b:145, 297.

Indeed, an essential part of the meditative life is to become more and more aware of one's unconscious desires and egotism. A condition for spiritual perception is that egotism be conquered.¹¹⁵ Initiation into the spiritual world involves a meeting with the so-called guardian of the threshold,¹¹⁶ which brings into view all the hidden and unwelcome sides of oneself.¹¹⁷ Steiner also describes this as experiencing oneself as complete mistake.¹¹⁸ One has separated oneself from the whole, a whole on which one really is dependent; living through the confrontation with all the consequences that this implies, all that one's egotism has led to in one's life and the life of others, can be both very destabilizing and liberating. For Steiner, proper spiritual training cannot happen without such a confrontation. Through it the practitioner learns to remove all that belongs to one's own subjective nature, so that the spiritual world can be revealed objectively.¹¹⁹

Steiner claims that there are indeed cases of natural initiation, where someone achieves the ability of supersensible perception without having undergone meditative training.¹²⁰ However, it is more common that one must take responsibility for one's own spiritual development at a certain point in order for supersensible perception to become available.¹²¹ Meditative training is a way of shortening a development that to a certain extent would happen naturally.¹²² Additionally, meditative training avoids the development going off course.¹²³ Thus Steiner's conception of meditation, together with all systems of spiritual development, can be charged with representing a form of self-initiation, or self-liberation, where the human being makes itself into God. As Steiner states: 'The god that lets us act in a good and noble way is our archetype. Our archetype has made us into what are now. And we must again become an image of our archetype'.¹²⁴ Steiner underlines that development happens through surrender, and that there are indeed higher spiritual beings, such as Christ, which the human being is fully dependent on. As the German mystic Angelus Silesius (1624–

¹¹⁵ Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:262.

¹¹⁶ Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:193.

¹¹⁷ Steiner, *Vor dem Tore der Theosophie*, GA 95:119-120.

¹¹⁸ Steiner, *Ein Weg zur Selbsterkenntnis des Menschen*, GA 16:40-41.

¹¹⁹ Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:153-154; Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:193-194.

¹²⁰ Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss*, GA 13:300-301.

¹²¹ Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss*, GA 13:302; Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden II*, GA 266b:336-337.

¹²² Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden I*, GA 266a:216, 304.

¹²³ Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss*, GA 13:305.

¹²⁴ Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden II*, GA 266b:97-98.

1677) states, and Steiner often quotes,¹²⁵ 'If Christ is born a thousand times in Bethlehem but not in you; you will remain lost forever'.¹²⁶ One can, however, prepare oneself for such events, and that is done through meditation. Whether a response comes 'is a matter of the spiritual world; it has to approach us'.¹²⁷ The commitment to the active perfection of oneself, to do more for knowledge, moral and spiritual development, is what religious devotion consists of in anthroposophy.¹²⁸ And such devotion must be seen as part of the paradox of self-surrender; on the one side, one becomes humble, and, on the other side, one ascends to the spirit – because one surrenders.

Surrendering and suffering are deeply intertwined in the spiritual traditions of the world; they meet in the notion of purification that is common to these traditions. Steiner sees in suffering a potential for development; it is not necessarily something that should be avoided or something that one should ultimately seek to be liberated from.¹²⁹ Just as one can learn from pleasure, one can also learn from pain,¹³⁰ and through pain one is strengthened.¹³¹ This sentiment makes Steiner's conception of meditation different from classical Asian doctrines, like the traditional Buddhist one, which ultimately seeks liberation from suffering. A high point of the initiation process as it is understood in anthroposophy is being offered the possibility of final liberation, of separating oneself completely from earthly development and experiencing eternal bliss.¹³² One can choose, however, to abstain from this and continue to take part in the evolution of the earth. This is implicitly the path of Steiner's conception of meditation and spirituality in general. It can be noted that this bears a strong likeness to the ideas representative of Mahayana Buddhism,¹³³ where the practitioner takes a vow to not reach nirvana, the final liberation through cessation of the ego, before all beings have been liberated.¹³⁴ In any case, the notion that spiritual life

¹²⁵ Rudolf Steiner, *Spirituelle Seelenlehre und Weltbetrachtung* (GA 52), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1986, 85; Steiner, *Okkultes Lesen und okkultes Hören*, GA 156:204.

¹²⁶ Angelus Silesius, *Cherubinischer Wandersman*, Halle: Niemeyer, 1895, 19 (I, 61).

¹²⁷ Steiner, *Okkultes Lesen und okkultes Hören*, GA 156:20; Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:204-206.

¹²⁸ Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:97.

¹²⁹ Rudolf Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden III* (GA 266c), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1998, 103.

¹³⁰ Steiner, *Theosophie*, GA9:180-182.

¹³¹ Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden II*, GA 266b:236-237.

¹³² Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:211-215.

¹³³ Zander, *Anthroposophie in Deutschland*, 591; Rudolf Steiner, *Schriften: Kritische Ausgabe* (SKA 7), ed. Christian Clement, Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2015., 330.

¹³⁴ Possibly there is a link between anthroposophy and Mahayana Buddhism through Blavatsky's 'The Voice of Silence'.

is realized in connection with earthly life, and not in separation from it, brings us to the final topic of unification.

2.3 Unification

In the final chapter of *The Riddles of Philosophy* Steiner describes the transition from philosophy to anthroposophy, from everyday consciousness to supersensible consciousness, as happening through an ‘unlimited intensification’ of the capacity of concentration and loving devotion (surrender).¹³⁵ These capacities become unified as the process of development continues. Love is the experience of the other in one’s own soul, while devotion is the experience of oneself in the other.¹³⁶ In loving devotion then, one’s own soul is no longer distinct from the other. Spiritual perception, which takes place within a world where everything is *a being*¹³⁷, is dependent upon love, since love allows for the perceiver and the perceived to connect and unify.

In the inspirative state, this happens through a dynamic where the self of the perceiver retreats for a short moment, making room for the other being to enter. However, for Steiner there is an even higher state that is possible, where two beings are unified to such a degree that the perceiving self becomes one with the essence of that which is perceived. This is the highest level of knowledge, the state of *intuition*. In contrast to what is commonly understood as ‘intuition’, i.e. something unclear and indefinite, the knowledge achieved in this state is ‘full of the most illuminated clarity and indubitable certainty’;¹³⁸ the knower becomes one with the forces of creation that underlie material existence.¹³⁹ The practices that precede entering into this state relate to the will. For example, one does certain practices in reverse¹⁴⁰ or one attempts to change one’s habits; the more effort it takes, the more effective the practice will be.¹⁴¹ Hence, as Steiner conceives them, imagination, inspiration, and intuition relate to the three capacities of the soul, thinking, feeling, and willing, respectively. As imagination and inspiration correspond to the dream state and the state of dreamless sleep, the intuitive state goes even deeper. As such, these three states can be traced back to the classical Indian doctrine of the states of conscious-

¹³⁵ Steiner, *Die Rätsel der Philosophie*, GA 18:605.

¹³⁶ Steiner, *Die Schwelle der geistigen Welt*, GA 17:58.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹³⁸ Steiner, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*, GA 12:68.

¹³⁹ Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:121.

¹⁴⁰ Steiner, *Drei Schritte der Anthroposophie: Kosmologie, Religion, Philosophie*, GA 25:19.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

ness referred to in the Mandukya Upanishad.¹⁴² For Steiner, however, the three higher states of consciousness are transformations of three lower states of consciousness.¹⁴³ The intuitive consciousness is, for example, a transformation of an omnipresent but trance-like state. What distinguishes the higher and lower states is the level of wakefulness that they involve.

The expansion of consciousness that takes place in meditation does not only go upward towards divinity; it can also proceed downwards in a contracting gesture.¹⁴⁴ Expansion is connected with leaving the body, and also with fear and bliss, while the contraction leads to a perception of one's moral shortcomings and errors, which elicits a sense of shame.¹⁴⁵ 'Higher states of consciousness' can therefore in a sense be properly said to be about going into the depths of the human being; though 'high' and 'deep' may be interchangeable metaphors, they may also be at times misleading when it comes to actual experience.¹⁴⁶

The ultimate aim of practice is unification with the spiritual world,¹⁴⁷ but also, which is equally important, service within the material and human world.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, spiritual practice in general consists of maintaining a connection between immanence and transcendence:

Spirit can be known in the material world. (...) Anthroposophy therefore does not want to be something that leads humans away from the normal world in an ascetic way. Rather, anthroposophy wants to open the roads to spirit, to the supersensible worlds, so that the human being can shape material and practical life again in accordance with spirit.¹⁴⁹

This view also informs anthroposophic meditative practice. An important element of it is that natural objects and phenomena, such as seeds, plants, and animal sounds are used as the starting point of meditation, in particular in *How to Know Higher Worlds*. Such practices are said to lead to the development, for instance, of the ability to perceive the forces of growth and decay that rule in nature.¹⁵⁰ In one place, Steiner states that what is unique to anthroposophy is that it takes sense perception as the model of supersensible perception; both are characterized by an intensity, vibrancy, vitality, wakefulness, objectivity, and

¹⁴² Patrick Olivelle, *The early Upanisads*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, 475.

¹⁴³ Rudolf Steiner, *Kosmogonie* (GA 94), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2001, 95-96.

¹⁴⁴ Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden III*, GA 266c:89.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 89-95.

¹⁴⁶ Here it can also be noted that Steiner states that in the end there is nothing that is 'low' or 'base' ('niedrig'): Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden I*, GA 266a:137; Rudolf Steiner, *Freiheit – Unsterblichkeit – soziales Leben* (GA 72), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1990, 72.

¹⁴⁷ Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:213.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 28; Rudolf Steiner, *Das Sonnenmysterium und das Mysterium von Tod und Auferstehung* (GA 211), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2006, 157.

¹⁴⁹ Steiner, *Die Wirklichkeit der höheren Welten*, GA 79:72.

¹⁵⁰ Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:43-46.

so on.¹⁵¹ Additionally, the spiritual world is understood as being highly differentiated. In order to experience it as such, the capacity of imagination is vital. Without it, the spiritual world is dark, undifferentiated and shadowy.¹⁵² Due to this approach to the spiritual world, specific knowledge is gained that can be applied to practice. The main idea is that there are spiritual forces that rule over certain areas and inhabitants of the physical realm, such as the human being, in quite specific ways. Coming to know these forces lays the foundation of a spiritual understanding of the human being, a spiritual anthropology, which then forms the basis of anthroposophic practices, such as medicine, pedagogy, psychology, and social theory. Furthermore, a spiritual cosmology, which is also based on meditatively acquired knowledge, becomes the foundation of anthroposophic or Biodynamic agriculture, but is also related to anthroposophic medicine, pedagogy, etc., to the extent that these involve aspects of reality beyond the human being – and understanding the relationship between the human being and the cosmos are indeed one of the central tasks of anthroposophy. Finally, spiritual insight becomes the starting point for aesthetic renewal, exemplified by anthroposophic architecture and Eurythmy.

There is an overarching notion that spiritual practice must be relevant for normal, human life, and monasticism is therefore rejected.¹⁵³ Indeed, one of the first results of meditative practice happens within one's everyday life.¹⁵⁴ There needs to be a harmony between one's meditative and normal existence. Slowly, the capacity to move between higher states and everyday consciousness like a pendulum is acquired.¹⁵⁵ The practitioner becomes an inhabitant of two worlds.¹⁵⁶ The human being has the mission¹⁵⁷ of mediating between heavenly and earthly existence, between divinity and nature. This does not necessarily mean that the human being has its purpose outside of itself. Rather, the human being is very much a part of divinity, it carries divinity within itself; but divinity is also outside of it – human life is also one of separateness, which could also be regarded as a separateness from oneself. The human being has forgotten its origin. However, through meditative practice the buffered self can find the way to remembrance. What is experienced on the other side is not some indistinct unification with the source, but a plethora of spiritual beings and realms that constitute the hidden ground of human life and nature. Through correct prepa-

¹⁵¹ Rudolf Steiner, *Die gesunde Entwicklung des Menschenwesens* (GA 303), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1987, 76.

¹⁵² Steiner, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*, GA 12:39, 44-45.

¹⁵³ Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden II*, GA 266b:306-307.

¹⁵⁴ Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:30.

¹⁵⁵ Steiner, *Die Wirklichkeit der höheren Welten*, GA 79:109-111.

¹⁵⁶ Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:223.

¹⁵⁷ Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:98.

ration and communion with this ground, it is possible to bring deep spiritual experience back into the human world and clothe it in concepts that everyone can understand, though such concepts are not always very accurate.¹⁵⁸

In the distant future, the transformed human being is said to ascend and become one of the spiritual hierarchies, standing next to the realm of the Angels, Powers, etc., as a being that unifies freedom and love.¹⁵⁹ The human being is thought to bring freedom into the cosmic order, but this is also a rupture of this order. There is the potential of the buffered self to become increasingly encapsulated and not wanting to have anything to do with the outside world, rejecting all forms of fullness beyond itself. There is a way, however, to unify the self with the world beyond it; in love, the self can equally experience the other within itself as become one with it. The force of love, which comes in addition to freedom, is one that can be accepted or rejected; if accepted, this does not imply that the freedom of the individual has to be given up. Rather, freedom and love can be unified; existence within a cosmic order ultimately does not negate individual freedom, even though at a certain stage of development a tension arises between them.

3. CONCLUSION

Steiner's conception of meditation and spirituality can be understood by relating the concepts of the human being, divinity and nature to freedom, surrender, and unification. As has become evident, love plays a key role in connecting them; love is a merger of freedom and surrender and unifies divinity and nature through the human being. Loving devotion brings out the connection of the spiritual in the human being with the divine, and the knowledge that results is thought to bring inspiration, health, and well-being, as well as social, scientific, and religious renewal. First the mind of the human being is unified in a way that leads to deeper self-knowledge; this is brought about through the practice of concentration meditation. Then the link to divinity in the outside world, including nature, is established through a deepening of the meditative procedure and accompanying development of new organs of perception. This enables a unification with the external world. The buffered self becomes porous again, but retains its intellect and individualized existence, so as to create a bridge between

¹⁵⁸ Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, GA 10:7-8; Steiner, *Ein Weg zur Selbsterkenntnis des Menschen*, GA 16:75-76; Steiner, *Wahrheiten und Irrtümer der Geistesforschung*, GA 69a:134.

¹⁵⁹ Rudolf Steiner, *Geistige Hierarchien und ihre Widerspiegelung in der physischen Welt* (GA 110), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1991, 173.

the spiritual and physical world. This is the basic gesture of Steiner's conception of meditation and spirituality.

The combination of elements that seem to come from a pre-modern form of religiosity, such as a belief in spiritual beings, on the one hand, with individualism, science, and strands of atheism, on the other, may make anthroposophy seem like a strange child of certain parts of European culture around the turn of the 20th century. Even stranger, perhaps, is the lasting social impact of anthroposophy, in particular through the worldwide presence of the Steiner (Waldorf) schools. Little is known about the relation between anthroposophic spiritual practice and the social institutions that grew out of the anthroposophic movement. Future research could address these and related issues. Furthermore, very little is known about the particular effects of the form of meditation Steiner conceived, whether the path of development that Steiner laid out can be followed by others as well or not.

When it comes to the investigation of Steiner's work, it is obvious that much more detailed studies on the areas covered here are necessary. These areas include, among others, the genesis of Steiner's conception of meditation: What are the implicit shifts in emphasis throughout Steiner's life and what might be the reason behind them? Why, for instance, are the practices that use natural objects in *How to Know Higher Worlds* not part of Steiner's later esoteric school? Can these practices be traced back to European or Asian sources? Are they perhaps what is unique to Steiner's work? Additionally, Steiner's conception of meditation cannot be fully understood without situating it within his anthropology and cosmology; though some steps have been taken in this direction here, there are many more that need to be taken. Indeed, an extensive study of the whole of anthroposophy is necessary in order to make sense of the form of meditation it represents. A further issue is the relationship of anthroposophy to other traditions. Contemplative practice plays an essential role in most of the other spiritual traditions, and ascertaining the differences and similarities between these traditions and anthroposophy is also an important area of study. Much care needs to be taken so that such study is sufficiently nuanced. And as it matures, this will possibly raise challenges to the initial overview presented here, which then has to be revisited.