

Perception as a Bridge to the Spiritual World

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By Douglas Gabriel

"Oh man, know thyself and you will know the world and the gods."

Delphic Oracle

Perception is the key to your personal experience of heaven or hell in the here and now.

Each individual is responsible for creating his own world by bringing what is inside of him (his combined world of concepts) to the perception of what is outside of him, and then determining his relationship to those perceptions for good or ill. Finding the bridge between the inner world of a thinker and the outer world of perception is the key to philosophy and the science of knowing. Perception gives us a chance to "know" something about the world and our relationship to it. But the real question is: What can the observer know?

Is the outer world of perception a dream as some philosophies believe?

Are we sure that we can actually "know" our personal self or the outer world?

What is the relationship of human thinking to the outer world of perception?

Can we change the perception of the outside world through our own personal thinking?

Do we project our personal world of concepts, memories, expectations and thinking upon the world and thereby color our perception or even change it altogether?

Modern science or philosophy will not help us much with the questions above. Scientists who study perception offer little help in finding answers to the big questions of: What is perception? What is matter? What is thought and how is it produced? What does thinking have to do with perception?

The study of perception is broken down by modern scientists into organization, identification, interpretation, nerve impulses, chemical stimulation, pressure waves, learning, memory, expectation, attention, sensory input, object recognition, concepts, knowledge, selective mechanisms, conscious awareness, experimental psychology, psychophysics, sensory neuroscience, sensory brain mechanisms, computational perceptual systems, philosophy of

cognition, objective reality, illusions, ambiguous images, making sense of perceptual input, modular brain processing, and sensory mapping, among others. In the end, science does not actually address the question of what “stands behind” perception. The philosophical question of what exactly sense perception offers to *knowing* is also left unanswered. The human being’s relationship to the object of perception remains a mystery, and science seems to focus only on the mechanisms of perception, forgetting that the seminal question of “What is matter?” is glaringly left unaddressed.

Science will take us through all of the details of perception except for the first question of philosophy: “Does the ‘thing in itself’ have independent existence outside of human perception?”

Modern materialistic science seldom answers these questions and leads the thinker to believe such a thing as a “percept” exists as information coming from the outside that somehow changes the perceiver through the action of perception. Science gives no independent “life” or “existence” to the *object* of perception. Science tries to convince us, by avoiding philosophy altogether, that percepts are real and independent components of perception, not seeming to notice that the *thinking* used to ask the question was left out of the equation. This “percept” of science comes into the observer through physical mechanisms of nerves, sense organs and brain functions that correlate with concepts that might bring knowledge to the observer through referencing other concepts that have already been formed. In the science of perception, the inherent independent beingness of the perceived object, known as the “thing in itself,” doesn’t exist for a modern materialistic scientist. Thinking, also, is an unnoticed aspect of perception for modern scientists.

•our spirit•

Modern scientific approaches to perception are often unfulfilling because they do not relate to reality. Much like particle physics, perception is simply theoretical to a scientist as the object being perceived can change because the observer is observing. Thus, light can be seen as a particle or a wave, depending on who is observing. Scientists leave the nebulous world of *perception* and *knowing* to the psychologists. Science knows that optical illusions, ambiguous imagining, perception confusion and distortion happen frequently and cannot be explained by their mechanisms of sense perception. Science will often defer to religion on issues of human perception because scientific mechanisms only work in limited situations.

The human being seems to be able to perceive more than the limited five senses that materialistic science recognizes. Religion insinuates that there is something behind sense perception that can help the observer transcend the physical and find the living beings who create matter. Religion finds the commonality of *beingness* in both the object and subject of perception. In fact, some religions say that object and subject are made of the same substances and that human beings look out upon the world to “find themselves” looking back. The divine is within and the divine is without.

Other religions indicate that when the observer looks out upon the world he sees only illusion, maya, delusion and the source of suffering. Only suffering comes from the outside world in some Eastern beliefs. It is, in fact, the job of aspiring spiritual students to renounce the outside world of sensory delusion and find the sources of perception within the human being's soul and spirit. For other spiritual aspirants, it is thinking itself that is the bridge that can span the abyss between the inner world of the human being and the outer world of sense perception. Some religions, in whole or part, deny the outer world, while other religions totally embrace it and try to perfect the aspirant by transforming the world.

Meditation is often cited by scientists and spiritual aspirants as a way to “change” the observer's perspective of what she is perceiving from the outside world. By focusing on inner perception of human consciousness, the meditator somehow changes herself and thereby also changes her relationship to sense perception of the outside world. A spiritual aspirant might suffer great austerities to bring about a change of consciousness that might ultimately change what the aspirant “perceives” in the outside world. No longer did desires of the outside world affect the peaceful inner world of the aspirant who had renounced outer pleasure. The outside world changes dramatically as it no longer has the same effects of “luring” the aspirant into indulgences of the material world.

Aspirants go through renunciations and purifications from sense perceptible pleasures to hopefully gain wisdom and insight from both the inner and outer worlds. Great sacrifices are made by these aspirants in search of wisdom and spiritual experience. The author is reminded of the words of William Blake (or contemporarily known through the lyrics of Van Morrison) who spoke of the sacrifices one must make to gain wisdom and experience in his poem, *The Four Zoas*:

“What is the price of Experience? Do men buy it for a song?
Or wisdom for a dance in the street? No, it is bought with the price
Of all that a man hath, his house, his wife, his children
Wisdom is sold in the desolate market where none come to buy
And in the wither'd field where the farmer ploughs for bread in vain.”

The pursuit of wisdom is a common theme in religion and philosophy. Wisdom, often pictured as a woman, is sought in the outside world and seldom found. Wisdom is seen as the being behind Mother Nature who reveals Her hidden ways to the aspirant who has searched long and hard to hear the words of the Mother of Creation. Every religion and tradition has a name for Wisdom and usually the mission is to love Her with all your heart and then She shows you the paths of Wisdom which lead to spiritual development and fulfillment – enlightenment, if you will. The sum total of sense perception is seen as the “cloak” of the being of Wisdom. She is sometimes called Isis, of whom the aspirant is told: “Isis is the past, the present and the future. No one has lifted Her veil and lived.”

This veil is the mysterious divide between observer and observed, perceiver and perceived. It is the Wisdom behind Nature that is found when the aspirant is successful at lifting the veil, the cloak. But there still looms a threshold between the physical and spiritual worlds that stands between the aspirant and the embrace of the Being of Wisdom. This goal and revelation is a common thread that is found throughout the world religions and among other aspirants seeking truth and sound spiritual training.

Let us look at what some of the great thinkers have said about perception and see if we can find a common thread that runs through their ideas.

Great Thinkers on Perception

We do not see things as they are. We see them as we are.

The Talmud

If you wish to gain understanding of knowledge and the understanding of freedom from suffering, then you should look to your body as the doorway to understanding this.

Tonpa Shenrab Miwoche

The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness.

Ecclesiastes 2:14

There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.

William Shakespeare

If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.

William Blake

The world is full of magic things, patiently waiting for our senses to grow sharper.

W.B. Yeats

Every man takes the limits of his own field of vision for the limits of the world.

Arthur Schopenhauer

What you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing; it also depends on what sort of person you are.

C.S. Lewis

There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception.

Aldous Huxley

The perception of beauty is a moral test.

Henry David Thoreau

Let us, therefore, accept the conditions and address ourselves with wonder, with awe, with love to that being in whom we move. Life is one; nature is living; the surface is a veil tremulous with light – lifting that veil sages of old went outwards into the vast and looked on the original. All that they beheld they once were, and it was again their heritage, for in essence they were one with it – children of Deity.

George W. Russell (A. E.)

People only see what they are prepared to see.

Ralph W. Emerson

It all depends on how we look at things, and not how they are in themselves.

Carl Jung

So if you get rid of the fear and the desire and get into the posture of ecstasy, of aesthetic arrest, the world will sing.

Joseph Campbell

These profound insights point at the mystery of perception and give credence to the idea that perception is reality, or at least a key to reality that each perceiver carries within his individual self. The world and the I (ego) of the perceiver seem to melt together as consciousness arises and defines what we perceive. Each idea of a great thinker offered above points to the hidden bridge that connects the inner life of the human being with the outer life of beings who are there to tell us about our own personal inner nature through revealing the wisdom in outer nature. What one perceives when looking upon the outer world seems to be incumbent upon the perceiver and the world of ideas, concepts, thoughts, and memories the perceiver relates to the percept. The entire world of collected concepts of the perceiver can define and shape the perception of the outer

world and color it with the limits of this “world of concepts.” We can call this world of concepts, the cosmology of the thinker or “world-view.” Basically, the cosmology of the thinker interacts with perception and defines what the perceiver can know of the world. Through experience, the perceiver comes to believe what her cosmology (worldview) tells her she is perceiving. A Christian sees God working in the world, whereas a Buddhist sees the delusionary forces of Maya (or Mara) working in the illusion of the senses. Or, as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said, “We only see what we know.”

One of the greatest thinkers, Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg, known by his pen-name Novalis, had tremendous insight into what the human being experiences in the world. His words have inspired many philosophers and thinkers, especially the German Romantic Movement. Rudolf Steiner once said that the ideas of Novalis were important in the creation of his own philosophy that he called anthroposophy. Many of the seminal ideas of Steiner’s anthroposophy can be found in Novalis’ thoughts.

Novalis has succeeded in turning the use of words into an art of revelation. His ideas are worth pondering and meditating for a life-time. With little or no jargon of religion, Novalis can take a reader to experiences not of this world. Novalis can make the things of this world lose their density and they begin to ascend. Simple objects of perception became revelations before Novalis’ ability to see spirit working behind matter. With Novalis’ ideas, the reader can experience the words on the page dissolve into light as their wisdom and insight illumine the mind and give wing to the soul. Novalis’ words unite thinking and perception into one simultaneous activity of beingness. Through his ideas we can sense the possibility of transcendence of the material world and ascension into a world of living thinking where we learn a new language. Object and subject become one as the sense perceptible object becomes illuminated by a mystical light that shines forth from the “thing in itself.”

Novalis on Perception

Each day Novalis wrote down a “significant thought” which he collected over his life and were published in a work called *Schriften*. He called these thoughts “pollen and fragments.” The selections below are some of these thoughts that relate to the concept of perception and its central role in human development.

To romanticize the world is to make us aware of the magic, mystery and wonder of the world; it is to educate the senses to see the ordinary as extraordinary, the familiar as strange, the mundane as sacred, the finite as infinite.

Perceptibility is a kind of attentiveness.

Everything that we experience is a communication. In fact, so is the world too a communication -- the revelation of spirit. The time is gone when the spirit of God was comprehensible to us. The meaning of the world has been lost to us. We have seen only its letters. We have lost that which is appearing behind the appearance.

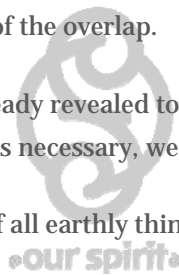
The world must be romanticized. Only in that way will one rediscover its original senses. Romanticization is nothing less than a qualitative raising of the power of a thing . . . I romanticize something when I give the commonplace a higher meaning, the known the dignity of the unknown, and the finite the appearance of the infinite.

How can a person have a sense of something if he does not have the germ of it within himself. What I am to understand must develop organically within me-- and what I seem to learn is only nourishment--stimulation of the organism.

The seat of the soul is where the inner world and the outer world meet. Where they overlap, it is in every point of the overlap.

The spiritual world is indeed already revealed to us – it is always manifest. If we suddenly became as elastic as was necessary, we would see ourselves in its midst.

Faith is the boundless capacity of all earthly things to be the bread and wine of eternal life.



Once Novalis has spoken, silence might be an appropriate response to the insight that bursts forth from the words. Novalis' *Hymns to the Night* speak frankly about the further mysteries of night's power to digest and give back anew the gifts of perception collected throughout the day. The quotations above are a sampling of the ideas of Novalis on the transcendence of reality through refined perception. The serious aspirant can find a strong foundation in Novalis' thoughts that create a "schooling of the senses" and an enhancement of one's cosmology. Each sentence can be a door of perception that is opened by simply reading and contemplating the living ideas and archetypes that he describes so beautifully. Just as Goethe could "see" the archetypal plant and called it the *urpflanze*, so, too, Novalis could *see* archetypes of many kinds in the world of nature and spirit. This new type of sense perception can reach into worlds that require super-sensible organs of perception that can be developed through meditation upon Novalis' writings.

Rudolf Steiner's Spiritual Science

Rudolf Steiner was a student of Novalis' archetypes and he developed many such archetypes himself in his teachings which comprise over 350 books in the collected edition. Steiner gave

indications about perception that span philosophy, education, medicine, agriculture, religion, and the arts. What is presented here, from his all-encompassing philosophy *Anthroposophy*, is only an introduction to his wide-ranging thoughts on perception and what stands behind the “thing in itself.” Anthroposophy explains the genesis of matter and the spiritual hierarchies who created matter and maintain its cycles of growth and decay.

Rudolf Steiner’s principle philosophical work that most thoroughly explains his views on perception and its workings is *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*. This work carefully takes the reader through a dialectic process of philosophical considerations concerning all aspects of perception, thought, concept formative, mental imaging, knowing, imagination, inspiration and intuition. Through a methodical consideration of many philosophical viewpoints, Rudolf Steiner shows the direct path to the higher merging of percept and concept through the activity of thinking itself which resides in both the subject and object. He shows that the structured wisdom (lawfulness) of thinking is found in both the perceiver and the perceived. Intuition, or knowing, arises through the use of thinking that is found in natural, mathematical lawfulness. Nature is found to be inhabited by entities or beings upon many levels working to produce what humans experience as perception.

At the end of this essay, Rudolf Steiner’s *The Philosophy of Freedom* has been abridged and summarized to highlight some of its content concerning perception. The point of the summary, just as the selections below, is to use Rudolf Steiner’s own words to describe this delicate and important considerations of perception. The exactness of Steiner’s words cannot, in the author’s opinion, be taken out of context or out of order without losing some of the building blocks that make up the foundation of the issue. Steiner builds up a logical characterization of perception and thinking that words are limited to express. There are no simple definitions, just characterizations that lead the reader to archetypal ideas but still leaves him free in his thinking. The selections below will hopefully take the reader on a step-by-step ascent up the mountain of perception to attain a view from the summit of Steiner’s insights.

The thoroughness of Rudolf Steiner’s understanding of perception goes back to the beginning of time and space when the Beings of Will donated what later, after three subsequent cycles, became what we call *sense perceptible matter*. Matter is the left over offerings of the Beings of Will. This will-power still surges through matter, and perception hides the fact that matter is still coming into existence all the time as spirit “shatters” into physical existence. Some parts of matter die while others retain some of the life of the spirit that shattered into matter. We call this type of shattered matter, life. The surging will-power of the Beings of Will bring forth physical matter, material substance, that we perceive as the substance of all created matter in the world. One could call this spiritual will-power of the hierarchy of the Beings of Will (also called Thrones) a form of warmth, or fire. When we “see behind the veil of nature” we can find higher hierarchical beings if we bring the concepts of the hierarchies with us when we look out upon the world.

The aspirant who uses Steiner's anthroposophy to define the world finds living beings everywhere and throughout all cycles of time. The different cycles of time gave each of the ten hierarchy an opportunity to express their true selves and their expressions still exist in our world as our sense perceptible world. Warmth, light, sound, life and all of their expressions have been donated by hierarchical beings so that humans might come to birth and use the world around them as a tool to awaken self-conscious thinking. Humans comprise the tenth hierarchy who are striving to ascend to the next level where humans become angels over the course of spiritual evolution. All hierarchies evolve and give loving gifts to those below them to help feed and nourish their personal growth and evolution into higher beings.

Sense perceptible matter is an open secret that reveals many layers of time and space all rolled up in the present moment when human beings have a perception. If what Goethe said was true, that we can only see what we know, then we should study to know the beings who stand behind sense perceptible matter. We need to bridge the gap between the outer world being a revelation of beings, and the inner cosmology. Once our cosmology includes these beings, we can begin to perceive them with the inner organs of spiritual perception that arise through enhanced thinking and Steiner's indications on ways to develop the ability to see into higher worlds. Steiner calls this new inner-seeing, Imagination, which can be a bridge across the abyss of "inner and outer" by knowing the very beings who create matter. Imagination is a new form of living thinking that links our cosmology to the world, thinking to perception.

To approach the world of the spirit through the world of human perception, three soul moods must be developed. Wonder, reverence, and harmony create the right mood of soul that allows the onrush of spirit after the human being has surrendered to the will of the world. These three moods of soul are necessary prerequisites before one tries to hold the "grand perception" of the beings standing behind the outside world.

Sense Perceptible Matter According to Rudolf Steiner

The selections below are taken from lectures that Steiner gave to members of the Anthroposophical Society in an effort to illuminate the path of spiritual development. Note that the bold emphasis in these selections, throughout this essay, are made by the author in order to call out the significant phrases that characterize sense perception.

The World of the Senses and the World of the Spirit, Rudolf Steiner, Six Lecture given in Hanover, December 27th, 1911 to January 1, 1912, GA 134.

Wonder, reverence, wisdom-filled harmony with the phenomena of the world, surrender to the course of the world – these are the stages through which we have to pass and which must always run parallel with thinking,

never deserting it; otherwise thinking arrives at what is merely correct and not at what is true. If such a thinking be not able then to rise still further and enter the region we have described as a condition of surrender, it cannot come to reality.

Surrender is a state of mind which does not seek to investigate truth from out of itself, but which looks for truth to come from the revelation that flows out of the things, and can wait until it is ripe to receive the revelation.

We have already indicated yesterday the right attitude of mind, when we said that we ought to let the things speak, **let the things themselves tell their secrets**. We have to learn to adopt a passive attitude to the thing of the world, and let them speak out their own secrets.

Everything is the world of senses is will, strong and powerful currents of will, a sea of infinitely differentiated will. We begin to look behind the surface of things, we begin to hear behind the surface of things – and what we see and hear is will, flowing will. We can feel ourselves in true correspondence with the objects observed. And so, when we confront the world of the senses we are looking into the world of arising and passing away; and what lies behind is Ruling Wisdom. **Behind Ruling Will is Wisdom.**

Not only we ourselves but all outer objects that come to meet us, and of which we are aware in the outer world by means of our senses, are nothing less than **an external expression of an inner spiritual reality. Behind every external material thing in space we have to look for something similar in kind to what lives in our own soul.**

When certain forms, created under the influence of the Spirits of Form, have developed up to a certain point, then they break to pieces. And if you now fix your mind upon these shattered forms, if you think of something that arises through the breaking up of forms that are still super-sensible – then **you have the transition from the super-sensible to the sensible and spatial. Broken-up form is matter.** Matter, as it occurs in the universe, is for the occultist nothing more than form broken, shattered and split asunder.

Matter is spirit that has developed as far as form and then burst and broken into pieces and fallen together in itself; it is a heap of ruins of the spirit. Matter is, therefore, in reality spirit, but shattered spirit. Matter everywhere can be called broken spirituality. Matter is indeed nothing else than

spirit, but spirit in a broken-up condition. Space is, therefore, nothing else than something that originates together with matter when spirit is shattered and thereby goes over into material existence.

In the act of assuming form, it is in movement; for movement precedes form. There is not anything anywhere but is permeated by the deeds of the Spirits of Movement. And this movement, this form, arrives at last at a point where it becomes, so to say, exhausted and splits asunder in itself. We must so grasp it that we have, to begin with, something streaming out which is entirely soul and spirit. Its impetus is limited, it comes, as it were, to the end of its energy, is thrown back upon itself and thus breaks to pieces. So wherever we see matter we can say: **Behind this matter lies a super-sensible, which has come to the limit of its activity and there split up.** But before it split up it still had — inwardly and spiritually — form. **And when it shattered the spiritual form went on working in the separate scattered ruins.**

We have to look upon matter always and everywhere as spirit that is splitting up and scattering, but that there can also be something already there which opposes the breaking spirit. And according as this or that meets it, the spirit will spray out into something different; and thus arise the various configurations of matter — matter that composes nerves, muscles, plants, etc.

If spirit breaks into a void, then mineral matter results.

If spirit breaks into an etheric body, plant matter originates.

Spirit breaking into etheric corporality that is outweighed by physical corporality gives rise to nerve matter.

When spirit rushes into an astral body which is outweighed by an etheric body, then we have muscle matter.

When spirit rushes into ego-ness that outweighs the astral body, the result is bony matter.

None of these different substances — muscle, nerve, etc. — could have come into existence without the Luciferic influence. Man as he meets us externally is simply and solely a result of the Luciferic influence. For **unless the Luciferic influence had been there he would have had no nerves, no muscles, no bones in the present-day sense of the words.** Materialism describes nothing but what Lucifer has made of man. **Materialism is thus in the most**

eminent degree discipleship of Lucifer; it rejects all else. Matter is thus something with which we are filled but which does not belong to us. We bear it in us, this matter, and because we bear it in us we must die a physical death.

For inasmuch as man has left his spiritual condition he lives here in physical existence only until matter gains the victory over what holds it together. **For the nature of matter is such that it is perpetually trying to break up and go to pieces.** As soon as the matter in the bones, muscles and nerves gains the upper hand over Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition and is able to break asunder, in that moment must man lay down his physical body. There you have the connection between physical death and the Luciferic influence.

We must conceive of matter as broken spiritual forms — pulverized spiritual forms. **It was through Luciferic influence that we as men of earth received our various sense perceptions. Nourishment and digestion, gland secretion, sense perception are all to be attributed to the influence of Lucifer.**

What we call nerve substance is again due to Luciferic influence, and similarly muscle substance and bone substance. This has caused there to be two men inside of the human being: the man of senses, glands and digestion, and on the other hand, and the man of nerves, muscle and bone.

Sense perception as such has no eternal value, for sense impression comes and goes. Sense perceptions are often very beautiful and bring delight to the life of man in their immediate experience and observation, they have nevertheless no value for eternity.

Sense perception is scattering form that is breaking and scattering and dispersing. When shattered form sprays into these activities, that is to say matter, is driven into the organism it brings about sense activity, gland secretion and metabolic activity. Hence it is evident that in these activities we have to do with breaking form, with a form that breaks to pieces. **It is nothing more than special manifestations of the destruction process in form that meets us in sense activity, gland secretion and the activity of digestion.** They are particular processes of what we can describe in general as the destruction process in form, or as the shooting of form into matter.

As man bears this system of nerves through the world it is really so that in the places **where the nerves are situated in the human organism there is**

always Intuition, and this Intuition rays out a spirituality which man has perpetually around him like a of kind radiating aura. A constant steaming out takes place which can only be perceived by means of Intuition. So that we may say spiritual substance — a substance that is perceptible to Intuition — is perpetually raying out from man in proportion as his physical nerve system goes to pieces.

For from the present time onwards it will be the case that **those who do not develop understanding for the spirit behind the senses**, for the world of the spirit behind the world of the senses, **will be like men whose breathing system is so injured that they cannot take in air** and they suffer from difficulty in breathing.

And now we stand at a kind of end; and philosophy as such, philosophy as a science of ideas, is at an end. Ideas and thoughts belong only to the physical plane, and **man must learn to lift himself up to what lies beyond ideas and thought, that is, beyond the world of the physical plane. To begin with he will lift himself up to Imaginations**. That will bring about a new fructification of the spiritual in mankind.

To find the beings of the hierarchy we must cross the threshold of death that exists between the physical and spiritual worlds with an awakened consciousness. This deed takes fearless courage and self-dedication to accomplish. At the threshold to the spiritual world, no matter if we do this as individuals or as a larger form of community and humanity, we encounter evil images of ourselves that are created by our unconscious ignorance and our fear, doubt and hatred. The worldly evils of the Seven Deadly Sins cannot cross the threshold into the spiritual world because evil has no place there.

Only courageous warriors of the spirit who are willing to look their own personal evil in the face and conquer it may maintain conscious awareness while crossing the threshold between the physical and spiritual worlds. Once this is accomplished, the outer and inner world of the aspirant becomes filled with spiritual beings who participate in the aspirant's life in manifold ways. These communications with the hierarchy are the very wisdom the aspirant is seeking - wisdom about the human self and the world.

Courage to Face What is Behind Sense Perception

The following selections come from *The Case for Anthroposophy*, Rudolf Steiner, Rudolf Steiner Press, London, 1970, GA 21.

It is only for the dominion of the senses that the abyss is bottomless; if we do not halt before it, but make up our minds to risk going ahead with thought, beyond the point at which it has to jettison all that the senses have furnished to it, then **in the “bottomless abyss” we find the realities of spirit.**

In the process of perception, man must subdue his vital continuity with the outer world down to those abstract concepts that are the foundation whereon his self-consciousness grows and increases. That this is the case becomes evident to the mind, once it has developed its organs of spirit. By this means the living continuity with a spiritual reality lying outside the individual is reconstituted. But, unless self-consciousness had been purchased in the first place from ordinary-level consciousness, it could not be **amplified to intuitive consciousness.** Normal and everyday consciousness has to accompany an intuitive consciousness at every single moment.

Thinking and Sense Perception

The following Steiner selections are from *The Science of Knowing Outline of an Epistemology Implicit in the Goethean World View with Particular Reference to Schiller*, Mercury Press, New York, GA 2

Thinking is an organ of the human being that is called upon to observe something higher than what the senses offer. **Thinking is not there to rehash the sense-perceptible but rather to penetrate what is hidden to the senses.** Sense perception provides only one side of reality. The other side is a thinking apprehension of the world. Now **thinking confronts us at first as something altogether foreign to perception.** The perception forces itself in upon us from outside; thinking works itself up out of our inner being. The content of this thinking appears to us as an organism inwardly complete in itself; everything is in strictest interconnection. The individual parts of the thought-system determine each other; **every single concept ultimately has its roots in the wholeness of our edifice of thoughts.** Perception affords a kind of specialization of the statements made by thoughts, a possibility left open by these statements themselves. **Perception needs to be complemented by the spirit, for it is not at all something definitive, ultimate, complete.**

In all cognitive treatment of reality, the process is as follows. **We approach the concrete perception. It stands before us as a riddle.** Within us the urge makes itself felt to investigate the actual what, the essential being, of the

perception, which this perception itself does not express. This urge is nothing else than a concept working its way up out of the darkness of our consciousness. We then hold fast to this concept while sense perception goes along parallel with this thought-process. **The mute perception suddenly speaks a language comprehensible to us; we recognize that the concept we have grasped is what we sought as the essential being of the perception.** If we therefore wish to grasp what we perceive, the perception must be prefigured in us as a definite concept. **Our thinking is the translator that interprets for us the gestures of experience.**

The fact that a person with a rich soul life sees a thousand things that are a blank to someone spiritually poor proves, clear as day, that **the content of reality is only the mirror-image of the content of our spirit** and that we receive only the empty form from outside. We must, to be sure, have the strength in us **to recognize ourselves as the begetters of this content**; otherwise we see only the mirror image and never our spirit that is mirrored.

All sense perception dissolves ultimately, as far as its essential being is concerned, into ideal content. Only then does it appear to us as transparent and clear.

There is no third element given us in addition to sense perception and thinking. And we cannot accept any part of sense perception as the core of the world, because, to closer scrutiny, all its components show that as such they do not contain their essential being. The essential being can therefore be sought simply and solely in thinking.

With intuition a truth is not imposed upon us from outside, it is a direct being-within, a penetrating into the truth that gives us everything that pertains to it at all; its inner lawfulness.

The overcoming of the sense-perceptible by the spirit is the goal of art and science. Science overcomes the sense perceptible by dissolving it entirely into spirit; art does so by implanting spirit into the sense-perceptible.

Intuition for Rudolf Steiner is the surging Will of Worlds, the Beings of Will that live in the processes of human thinking and in the mathematical lawfulness of the outer world. Intuition created the human nerves and the nerves are the seat of thinking. The Beings of Will created living thinking that is filled with Wisdom, Movement, Form, Light, Sound and Life. Human thinking is the bridge to contact hierarchical beings, both in personal human thinking and the

thinking that created the wisdom in the world of nature – the sense perceptible world of matter. Matter is spirit slowed down, a type of shadow of spirit that shows wisdom-filled lawfulness in its working. Intuition is the thinking that creates lawfulness and also adds love as its ultimate gift. Besides Beings of Will, there are also Beings of Harmony and Love who work above the Beings of Will.

We can see that Steiner's philosophy includes many supersensible ideas and beings that are not normally associated with philosophy. But, we should remember that philosophy is – philo sophia – the love of wisdom.

Intuition and Perception

The following selections, which address how intuition impacts perception, come from *Anthroposophy and Science Observation, Experiment, Mathematics*, Rudolf Steiner, Eight Lectures from March 16-21, 1921, given in Stuttgart.

We can see that what lives in **our nerve organism** is permeated by the same force as are the sense organs, but that it is in the process of becoming. It is really **one large sense organ in the process of becoming. The different senses as they open outward and continue inward in the nerve organism are organized by the power we have come to know in imagination.**

The attainment of imaginative knowledge is based on a clear methodically-exercised meditation. Easily pictured mental images are required, and preferably symbolic images, for these are most easily viewed as a whole. The important thing is what we experience in our soul through these images. Through the further development of the memory capacity, we form the imaginative power of the soul.

We even enter into the physical-mineral world with a certain power of love — that world which if approached only mathematically leaves us indifferent. We feel clearly the difference between penetrating the world with just our weak power of mental imaging, and penetrating it with a developed power of love. **The world will only give us its all if we approach it with a power of love that strengthens the mind's mental activity.** Nature will reveal herself only if we permeate our mental powers with the forces of love.

By practicing self-discipline, which gives us a greater capacity for love, we are able to experience an enhanced faculty of forgetting, just as surely a part of our volition as the enhanced faculty of remembering. **When we have come this**

far, it is as if we had crossed an abyss within ourselves and reached a region of experience through which a new existence flows toward us.

Just as through our senses we perceive one side of life, the physical-sensible side, so **we learn to look toward the other side and become aware of a spiritual reality flowing into the images of imaginative life.** In fact, **our sensory organization can only be fully understood when this capacity of imaginative cognition has been acquired by us.** What we are given in imaginative cognition (which combines the sense system and nervous system) is in fact enhanced when we penetrate the rhythmic system through inspiration.

When we apprehend each separate sense with imaginative cognition and not just intellectually, we arrive at their true individual forms. **We see that each separate sense is built into the human being from certain entities, certain qualities of the outer world.**

The nerve-sense system, however, is a kind of external physical image of mental life. **The conscious life is in the nerve-sense system, in the form of the sum total of one's mentally-viewed images.** The nervous system is formed out of our soul-spiritual powers.

Real intuition is a kind of knowing, a condition of the soul that is just as suffused with clarity of consciousness as is mathematical thinking. This intuition is reached through a continuation of what I have called exercises for the attainment of forgetting. These exercises must be continued in such a way that one really forgets oneself. When these exercises have been carried on in a precise and systematic way, then arises what the spiritual investigator calls intuition in the higher sense. **This is the natural form of cognition into which inspired imaginations flow.**

When we come to self-knowledge through intuition, it proves inevitably to be unfinished. We understand this now, for we see that here on the other side we have the reverse relationship to that of the sense organs. The senses are “gulfs” into which the outer world flows. On the other hand, **we discover that the entire human being, becoming a sense organ in intuition, now reaches into the spiritual world. On the one hand, the outer world reaches into the human being; on the other, the human being reaches into the spiritual “outer world.”**

Just as through the senses the external sense world projects inward, through intuition one consciously places oneself in the spiritual world. In this conscious projection into the spiritual world through intuition, the human being has a similar feeling to the feeling he has toward the outer world through perception. But this intuition is suffused with bright clarity.

Thus you can realize that perception is just one side of our human relation to the outer world. In perception we have something indefinite, something that first must be inwardly worked upon. As perception is worked upon by our intellect and we discover laws at work in this perception, there is at the same time something corresponding to this that initially has just as indefinite a relation to us as does perception. It must be penetrated by inner knowledge that has been achieved, in the same way that perceptions must be penetrated by mathematical thinking. In short, **our ordinary experience must be penetrated by our inwardly achieved knowledge.**

In ordinary experience we call this kind of intuition belief or faith. **Just as the human being faces the outer sense world and has the experience of perception, so, participating in a dim way in the spiritual world, he has the experience of belief.** And just as perception can be illumined by the intellect or reason, so the content of this indefinite dim experience of belief can be illumined by our steadily increasing knowledge. **This dim experience of faith becomes one of scientific knowledge just as perception attains scientific value through the addition of the intellect.** What I am describing to you is truly a progression through inner spiritual work **to transform the ordinary experience of faith into an experience of clear knowledge.** When we rise into these regions, transforming faith into an experience of knowledge, we find this similar to the process of subjecting our perceptions to what has been worked out mathematically or logically.

We can see that the ultimate goal is that the human being become one sense organ of Intuition – love. This is not the usual philosophical approach to perception, that love is the object of perception that is attained with the active tool of Intuition – love itself. Therefore, perception is basically comprised of love – it is all love. Perception is also a form of nourishment that is as essential as eating and necessary as love. Perception is a form of eating what the hierarchies have donated for your use. If you are thankful and grateful for this nourishment, the gifts and donations of the hierarchies can return back to their home from whence they came. The hierarchies feed us through perception with love. Through the digestion of perception, we offer the hierarchies food from our higher forms of thinking, feeling and willing – Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition.

Perception as a Breathing Process

Selections from *The Boundaries of Natural Science*, Lecture VIII, Rudolf Steiner, GA 322, October 03, 1920.

What, in fact, is the process of **perception**? It is nothing but a **modified process of inhalation**. As we breathe in, the air presses upon our diaphragm and upon the whole of our being. Cerebral fluid is forced up through the spinal column into the brain. In this way a connection is established between breathing and cerebral activity. And **the part of the breathing that can be discerned as active within the brain works upon our sense activity as perception. Perception is thus a kind of branch of inhalation**. In exhalation, on the other hand, cerebral fluid descends and exerts pressure on the circulation of the blood. The descent of cerebral fluid is bound up with the activity of the will and also of exhalation. Anybody who really studies *The Philosophy of Freedom*, however, will discover that when we achieve pure thinking, thinking and willing coincide. Pure thinking is fundamentally an expression of will. Thus pure thinking turns out to be related to what the Oriental experienced in the process of exhalation. **Pure thinking is related to exhalation just as perception is related to inhalation**. We have to go through the same process as the yogi but in a way that is, so to speak, pushed back more into the inner life. Yoga depends upon a regulation of the breathing, both inhalation and exhalation, and in this way comes into contact with the eternal in man. What can Western man do? **He can raise into clear soul experiences perception on the one hand and thinking on the other. He can unite in his inner experience perception and thinking**, which are otherwise united only abstractly, formally, and passively, so that inwardly, in his soul-spirit, he has the same experience as he has physically in breathing in and out. Inhalation and exhalation are physical experiences: **when they are harmonized, one consciously experiences the eternal**. In everyday life we experience thinking and perception.

By bringing mobility into the life of the soul, one experiences the pendulum, the rhythm, **the continual interpenetrating vibration of perception and thinking**. A higher reality evolves for the Oriental in the process of inhalation and exhalation; the Westerner achieves **a kind of breathing of the soul-spirit** in place of the physical breathing of the yogi. **He achieves this by developing within himself the living process of modified inhalation in perception and modified exhalation in pure thinking, by weaving together concept, thinking, and perceiving**. And gradually, by means of

this rhythmic pulse, by means of this rhythmic breathing process in perception and thinking, he struggles to rise up to spiritual reality in Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition. And when I indicated in my book The Philosophy of Freedom, at first only philosophically, that **reality arises out of the interpenetration of perception and thinking**, I intended, because the book was meant as a schooling for the soul, to show what Western man can do in order to enter the spiritual world itself. The Oriental says: systole, diastole; inhalation, exhalation. In place of these the Westerner must put perception and thinking. Where the Oriental speaks of the development of physical breathing, we in the West say: **development of a breathing of the soul-spirit within the cognitional process through perception and thinking.**

We in the West can allow perception and thinking to resound through one another in the soul-spirit, through which we can rise to something more than a merely abstract science. **It opens the way to a living science**, which is the only kind of science that enables us to dwell within the element of truth. After all the failures of the Kantian, Schellingian, and Hegelian philosophies, we need a philosophy that, by revealing the way of the spirit, can show the real relationship between truth and science, a spiritualized science, in which truth can really live to the great benefit of future human evolution.

We inhale perception and exhale thinking, and when the two consciously meet we create nourishment for ourselves and the hierarchy. Steiner calls this process the “earthly and cosmic nutrition stream.” This process is explained by Steiner even more thoroughly in the courses he gave to doctors because it is a central component of health and illness. Perception can heal or cause illness.

Just as we heard about the Beings of Will, so, too, the Beings of Wisdom donated gifts that have become a part of our current sense perceptible world. In fact, the very mathematical lawfulness of the outer world is a gift of the Beings of Wisdom, who take the surging will power of the Beings of Will and structure and organize it with the Wisdom found everywhere in the cosmos.

We Perceive Crystallized Wisdom

In the lecture *Easter*, by Rudolf Steiner (Berlin, April 12, 1906, GA 54), we learn that the entire world is the crystalized wisdom of hierarchical beings.

When we look out upon the entire outer world we perceive crystallized wisdom. And if we would penetrate all the laws of our surrounding world with our perceptive faculties and then look back upon man,

we see concentrated in him the whole of nature, as a microcosm in a macrocosm. It is by means that we marvel at the construction of the human body — that the soul can direct her eye upon her environment. **Through the senses the psychic man observes the world around him, seeking slowly and laboriously to fathom the wisdom by which it has been built.**

The Spirits behind Sense Perception

In *The Spiritual Hierarchies, Their Reflection in the Physical World*, Lecture 2, Dusseldorf, April 1909, GA 10, Rudolf Steiner writes:

How are those spiritual, divine beings who surround us able to produce solid matter as it is on our planet — to produce liquids, and air substances? They send down their elemental spirits, those which live in the fire: they imprison them in air, in water and in earth. These are the emissaries, the elemental emissaries of the spiritual, creative, building beings. The elemental spirits first enter into fire. In fire they still feel comfortable — if we care to express it by images — and then they are condemned to a life of bewitchment. We can say looking around us: **‘These beings, whom we have to thank for all the things that surround us, had to come down out of the fire-element; they are bewitched in those things.’**

Can we as men do anything to help those elemental spirits? Can we do anything to release, to redeem, all that is here, bewitched? Yes! We can help them. Because what we men do here in the physical world is nothing else than an outward expression of spiritual processes. All we do is also of importance for the spiritual world. Let us consider the following. A man stands in front of a crystal, or a lump of gold, or anything of that kind. He looks at it. What happens when a man simply gazes, simply stares with his physical eye upon some outer object? **A continual interplay occurs between the man and the bewitched elemental spirits.** The man and that which is bewitched in the substance have something to do with each other. Let us suppose that the man only stares at the object and takes in only what is impressed on his physical eye. Something is always passing from the elemental being into the man. **Something from those bewitched elementals passes continually into the man, from morning till night.** While you are thus regarding objects, hosts of these elemental beings, who were and are being continually bewitched through the world-processes of condensation, are continually entering from your surroundings into you.

Let us take it that the man staring at the objects has no inclination whatever to think about those objects, no inclination to let the spirit of things live in his soul. He lives comfortably, merely passes through the world, but he does not work on it spiritually, with his ideas or feelings or in any such way. He remains simply a spectator of the material things he meets with in the world. Then these elemental spirits pass into him and remain there, having gained nothing from the world's process, but the fact of having passed from the outer world into man. Let us take another kind of man, one who works spiritually on the impressions he receives from the outer world, who with his understanding and ideas forms conceptions regarding the spiritual foundations of the world, one who does not simply stare at a metal, but ponders over its nature and feels the beauty which inspires and spiritualizes his impressions. What does such a man do? **Through his own spiritual process, he releases the elemental being which has streamed into him from the outer world; he raises it to what it was before, he frees the elemental from its state of enchantment.**

Thus, **through our own spiritual life, we can, without changing them, either imprison within us those spirits which are bewitched in air, water and earth, or else through our own increasing spirituality, free them and lead them back to their own element.** During the whole of his earthly life, man lets those elemental spirits stream into him from the outer world. In the same measure in which he only stares at things, in the same measure in which he simply lets the spirit dwell in him without transforming them, so, in like measure **as he tries with his ideas, conceptions and feeling for beauty to work out spiritually what he sees in the outer world, does he release and redeem those spiritual elemental beings.**

Now what happens to those elemental beings which, having come out of things, enter into man? They remain at first within him. Also those which are released at first remain, but they stay only until his death. **When the man passes through death a differentiation takes place between those elemental beings which have simply passed into him and which he had not led back to their higher element, and those whom he has through his own spiritualization led back to their former condition.** Those whom the man has not changed have not gained anything from their passage from the outer world into him, but **others have gained the possibility of returning to their own original world with the man's death.** During his life man is a place of transition for these elemental beings. When he has passed through the spiritual world and returns to earth in his next incarnation, all the elemental

beings which he has not released during his former life flock into him again when he passes through the portals of his new birth, they return with him into the physical world; but those he has released he does not bring back with him for they have returned into their original element.

Thus we see how man has it in his power, by the way he acts and feels towards outer nature, either to release those elemental spirits which have been necessarily bewitched through the coming into existence of our earth, or to bind them to the earth still more strongly than they were before.

There is a great deal at stake for the spiritual world concerning human perception. A type of battle for what kind of perception humans will use is being waged against the spiritual world. A spiritual person disenchants the elemental spirits that have been bewitched into matter, but a materialist enchants the elementals back into matter until the person can one day resolve the *mis-perception* that led to ignorance and more suffering - karma. There are beings battling for the human soul who wish to convince humans that the material world is the only world and that materialism is the only correct belief.

Steiner names two sets of beings who work against human free thinking - Lucifer and Ahriman. Both Lucifer and Ahriman fight for humans to turn their thoughts away from the true and progressive spiritual evolution of humanity to a false belief that the world of matter is the only reality – that the world of spirit does not exist. These lies imprison human thoughts in grey shadowy thinking, or delusional thinking that destroys the bridge that thinking can create to free perception and thus free the perceiver and the perceived.

The Development of Perception

Selections from *Inner Impulses of Evolution, The Mexican Mysteries, The Knights Templar*, Rudolf Steiner, Dornach, Seven Lectures, September 16 – October 1, 1916, Anthroposophic Press, NY, 1984:

The Greeks still possessed fantasy but, as we have seen, after fantasy and imagination had taken possession of humanity, as it did of the Greeks, it then became necessary for men to develop the faculty to see the world of external nature without the illumination of a vision standing behind it. We need not imagine that such a vision has to be a materialistic one. That point of view is itself an **ahrimanically perverted perception of sense reality**.

One can only get to know nature when one knows in its true form what works and lives behind sense perception. Men will have to direct

their gaze quite selflessly to the outer world to work in it and to gain knowledge of it. On the other, by powerful application of their personalities, they will have to bring it all into inner movement in order to find the imaginations for outer activity and outer knowledge. Gradually, the consciousness soul and its culture will achieve this transformation.

The entire aim in the work of lucerific and ahrimanic powers in the fifth post-Atlantean age, concerning both **the perception of the primal phenomenon and the development of free imaginations**, is to hinder these forces from arising in man. Free imaginations were to be changed into old, visionary imaginations. Every effort was to be made to lull the soul of man to sleep in a dim and dreamy experience of imaginations instead of a free experience filled through and through with clear understanding. With the help of the special forces that had been preserved from Atlantis, it was the intended purpose to carry on influence into the West that would make its culture visionary.

America had to be discovered so that man might be brought to grow closer to the earth, to grow more and more materialistic. Man needed weight and heaviness to counterbalance the spiritualization that was the aim of the descendants of the "Great Spirit."

Entering with love into the individualities of other people, which is at times united with a deep experience of the tragedy of life, **is what can bring us to self-knowledge.** The self-knowledge we seek through delving into ourselves will never be true. We deepen our own inner nature by meeting other people with full interest.

We never gain a true knowledge of the outer world if we do not resolve to examine the universally human in ourselves and learn to know it. We deepen our own inner nature by meeting other people with full interest.

We find the inner through the outer, the outer through the inner. **The without should kindle self-knowledge; the within should teach knowledge of the world.** In these two statements, or rather in their realization in the world, lies true spiritual insight into existence and the impulse to real human love, to a love filled with insight.

Whereas the Greek life of fantasy, and the egoism of Rome were to develop in the fourth post-Atlantean epoch, **the task of the fifth epoch was to develop the**

gift of material perception. I have characterized this by calling the ideal of material perception, in the sense of Goethe's "primal phenomenon," the pure perception, the pure beholding of external reality. This faculty could not operate in earlier times because then the perception of material reality was invariably mingled with what came from atavistic clairvoyance. Men did not see the pure phenomenon, and they did not see pure external, material existence as such. They saw external existence veiled in the fantasmagoria of visionary clairvoyance. **This faculty of the fifth epoch**, which lasts from the beginning of the fifteenth century until the fourth millennium, **consists in the development of the gift of free imagination; imagination that arises in complete inner freedom.** On the one side, the primal phenomenon; on the other free imagination.

The gifts of Imagination become a type of nourishment for the aspirant and the spiritual world of the hierarchies. The development of higher thinking, Imagination, gives life to every percept and frees the human being to act in accordance with the spiritual world. Perception becomes revelation of the spirit as thinking connects the hierarchies that work within the human being and the outer world. When the aspirant's cosmology begins to unite with clear perception, a new language is formed that requires thinking, as a living force, to translate. Perception becomes symbols or letters in a spiritual language that connects heaven to earth. Then, all of nature begins to speak the language of the spirit as wisdom is found in every percept as it connects to an organized cosmology that places humanity at the center of the cosmos.

our spirit

The Mystery of Perception

Selections from *The Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World Conception, Thought and Perception*, Chapter XI, Rudolf Steiner. GA 2:

Knowledge permeates perceived reality with the concepts apprehended and worked through by our thinking. It supplements and deepens that which is passively received by means of what our mind through its own activity has lifted out of the darkness of the merely potential into the light of reality. This presupposes that **perception needs to be supplemented by the mind; that perception is not in itself something definitive, final, conclusive.** The fundamental fallacy of modern science consists in the fact that it looks upon sense-perception as something conclusive, complete.

If we should wish to lay hold upon pure experience, we should have to empty ourselves completely of our thinking. To deny to thinking the capacity for perceiving in itself entities which are inaccessible to the senses is a

degradation of thought. Apart from the factor of sensible qualities, there must be within reality a factor which is apprehended by thought. Thinking is an organ of man ordained to observe something higher than is afforded by the senses. **To thinking is accessible that side of reality of which a mere sense-being could never become aware.** What thought exists for is not merely to repeat the sensible, but **to penetrate into what is concealed from the senses.** **The sense-percept gives us only one side of reality. The other side is the apprehending of the world through thinking.** At first appearance, thought seems to us something quite alien to perception; for perception enters into us from without, while thinking works from within outward. The content of thought appears to us as an inwardly complete organism; all is in the closest interrelationship. The individual members of the thought system mutually determine one another; **each single concept has its ultimate roots in the totality of our thought structure.**

In all working over of reality through cognition, the process is as follows: We meet with a concrete percept. It confronts us as a riddle. Within us the impulse manifests itself to investigate its “What?” — its real nature — which the percept itself does not express. This impulse is nothing but the upward working of a concept out of the darkness of our consciousness. We then hold this concept firmly while the sense percept moves on a parallel line with this thought-process. **The mute percept suddenly speaks a language intelligible to us; we know that the concept which we have taken hold of is that real nature of the percept for which we have been seeking.**

What has here come about is a judgment. It is different from that form of judgment which unites two concepts without reference to percepts. The constituents of judgment are concepts not given to me in perception. Upon such judgments rests the inner unity of our thought. The **judgment** which we now consider **has for its subject a percept and for predicate a concept.** “This animal before me is a dog.” In such a judgment, a percept is injected into my thought system at a determinate place. Let us call such a judgment a **perceptual judgment.** By means of the perceptual judgment we cognize that a determinate sensible object corresponds by nature with a determinate concept. If we are to comprehend what we perceive, the percept must have been formed within us beforehand as a determinate concept.

Indeed, I bring forth thought-characterizations out of the thought-world. Nothing whatever flows from the sensible object into this content. I simply recognize in the sensible object the thought which I draw forth

from within myself. **This object** induces me, to be sure, to call forth at a certain moment from the unity of all potential thoughts just this one thought-content, but it **does not by any means furnish me the material for constructing the thought. This I must draw from within myself.**

When we cause our thinking to become active, only then does reality attain to true characterizations. Previously mute, it now speaks a clear language. **Our thinking is the interpreter that explains the dumb show of experience.**

The truth is entirely overlooked that mere **beholding is the emptiest thing imaginable and that it receives content only from thinking.** The sole truth in regard to **the object** is that it **holds the constant flux of thought in a determinate form without our having to cooperate actively** in thus holding it. When one who has a rich mental life sees a thousand things which are nothing to the mentally poor, this shows as clearly as sunlight that **the content of reality is only the reflection of the content of our minds** and that we receive from without merely the empty form. Of course, **we must possess the inner power to recognize ourselves as the creator of this content;** otherwise we shall forever see only the reflection and never our own mind which is reflected. Indeed, one who perceives himself in an actual mirror must know himself as a personality in order to recognize himself in the reflected image.

All sense-perception finally resolves itself, as to its essential nature, into ideal content. Only then does it appear to us transparent and clear. All sciences should be permeated by the conviction that their content is solely a thought-content and that they sustain no other relationship to perception than that they see in the perceptual object a specialized form of the concept.

Thinking is found to be the key to understanding what we perceive. The more thinking develops into Imagination, the more we see other beings who work and weave in our environment. Those beings work together with the Beings of Will, Wisdom, and Movement. The beings who gave humans the capacity for thought are called the Beings of Form, the Exusiai or Elohim. These Beings of Form work not only into human thinking but also into the formative forces of nature inside and outside of the human body. Steiner gives many details about these beings but we can only address the aspects of these beings that touch on the world of thinking, concept formation, and ideas.

The Perception of Thought

In *The Inner Nature of Music and the Experience of Tone*, Lecture V, March 7, 1923, GA 283, Rudolf Steiner lectures:

It is a prejudice of contemporary, so-called enlightened human beings to believe that their thoughts are confined only to their heads. **Indeed, thoughts are spread out all through the world. Thoughts are forces that dwell in all things. Our organ of thinking is simply something that partakes of the cosmic reservoir of thought forces, absorbing thoughts of itself.** We therefore cannot speak of thoughts as if they were the possession only of the human being. Instead, we must be aware that **thoughts are world-dominating forces, spread out everywhere in the cosmos.** These thoughts, however, do not freely float about, as it were, but are always borne and worked upon by some beings; and, most important, they are not always borne by the same beings.

When we make use of the super-sensible world, we find through super-sensible research that, up into the fourth century A.D., **the thoughts with which human beings made the world comprehensible to themselves were borne outside in the cosmos,** that these thoughts were borne or flowed from those hierarchical beings that we designate as the Exusiai or beings of form.

If, out of the science of the mysteries, an ancient Greek wished to give an account of how he actually had acquired his thoughts, he would have had to do it in the following way. He would have said, **“I turn my spiritual sight up toward those beings who, through the science of the mysteries, have been revealed to me as the beings of form, the forces or beings of form. They are the bearers of cosmic intelligence; they are the bearers of cosmic thoughts.** They let thoughts stream through all the world events, and they bestow these human thoughts upon the world so that it can experience them consciously.” A person who, through a special initiation, had gained access to the super-sensible world in those ancient Greek times and had come to experience and behold these form beings, would, in order to form a correct picture, a true imagination of them, have had to attribute to them the thoughts that stream and radiate through the world. As an ancient Greek

he beheld how, from their limbs, as it were, these form beings let stream forth radiant thought forces which then entered the world processes and there continued to be effective as the world-creative powers of intelligence.

He thus could say that in the cosmos, the universe, the Exusiai, the forces of form, have the task of pouring thoughts into all the world processes. A material science describes human deeds by noting what people do individually or together. In focusing on the activity of the form forces of that particular age, a super-sensible science would have to describe how these super-sensible beings let the thought forces stream from one to the other, how they received them from one another, and how, in this streaming and receiving, **the world processes are incorporated that appear outwardly to man as natural phenomena.**

The evolution of humanity now approached the fourth century A.D. In the super-sensible world, thought brought about an extremely significant event; namely, the Exusiai — the forces or beings of form — gave their thought forces up to the Archai, to the primal forces or primal beginnings. The primal beginnings, or Archai, took over the task formerly executed by the Exusiai. Such things happen in the super-sensible world. This was a particularly sublime and significant cosmic event. **From that time on, the Exusiai, the form beings, retained only the task of regulating the outer sense perceptions, therefore ruling with the particular cosmic forces over everything existing in the world of colors, tones, and so forth.** Concerning the age that now dawned after the fourth century A.D. a person who can discern these matters must say that he beholds how the world-dominating thoughts are passed on to the Archai, the primal beginnings, how what eyes see and what ears hear, the manifold world phenomena engaged in perpetual metamorphosis, are the tapestry woven by the **Exusiai. They formerly bestowed the thoughts on human beings; they now give human beings their sense impressions, while the primal beginnings bestow the thoughts on human beings.**

This fact of **the super-sensible world was mirrored below in the sense world.** In the ancient age in which lived the Greek, for example, **thoughts were objectively perceived in all things.** Just as today we believe that we perceive the color red or blue streaming forth from an

object, so the ancient Greek found not only that he grasped a thought with his brain but that **the thought streamed forth out of the things**, just as red or blue streams forth.

This is also the point of time in humanity's evolution when the view of the super-sensible world began to vanish completely for man. The consciousness of the soul ceased to see supersensibly, to perceive, because this human soul surrendered itself to the earth.

As the world of thoughts passes from the form beings to the primal beginnings, from the Exusiai to the Archai, man increasingly senses the thoughts in his own being, because the Archai live one level nearer man than the Exusiai. Now, when man begins to see supersensibly, he has the following impression. He realizes that this is the world that he perceives as the sense world. One side is turned toward his senses, the other is already hidden from the senses. Ordinary consciousness knows nothing of the relationships that are to be considered here. **Supersensible consciousness, on the other hand, has the impression that between man and the sense impressions there are the Angeloi, Archangeloi, and Archai; they are really on this side of the sense world.** Though one does not see them with ordinary eyes, they actually are situated between man and the whole tapestry of sense impressions. **The Exusiai, Dynamis, and Kyriotetes are actually located beyond this realm; they are concealed by the tapestry of sense impressions.**

A human being having super-sensible consciousness senses that the thoughts are coming closer to him since having been given over to the Archai. He senses them as being located more in his world, whereas formerly they were located behind the appearance of things; they approached man, as it were, through the red or blue color, or the tone of c-sharp or g. **Since this transference of thoughts, man feels a freer association with the world of thoughts. This also gives rise to the illusion that man himself produces the thoughts.**

Thought is the unseen aspect of perception ignored by modern science. Percepts are also given a primary role in perception but then are relegated to being called inconsequential information that has no life of its own, and its origins are not addressed at all. Perception is studied like pieces in a puzzle that are never fit together to make a clear picture. Through

Steiner's cosmology and understanding of perception, we find living beings both in the outside world and in the perceptual mechanisms found in the human body. Then, Steiner adds the key role of thinking as a cosmic and human process that is the link between the inner and outer. We come to find that what we perceive is basically who we are in our own cosmology as we take in information (will, love, form, movement) to create a full picture of ourselves. We are both spirit and matter, and perception teaches us that reality.

Physical reality is a complex matrix of the gifts of many spirits over long spans of time. Matter is not fixed and limited but actually comes into existence and passes out of existence through organic cycles of time that are led by higher hierarchies. Thinking is a cosmic force that is replicated in the human being's physical constitution and in the very processes of thinking. Humans believe, at this stage of history, that their thoughts are their own and that they create them out of their own nature. This is a naïve assumption that was necessary to develop so that humans could evolve into thinking beings who have freedom to choose between right and wrong, good and bad, ugly and beautiful. Without the illusion that thinking arises in the human head and is independent of the world of thoughts that make up the outside world, freedom could never have been developed. Humans needed to become a singular being who is seemingly in control of his or her own thinking and fate. This isolated view of the world gives the possibility for the individual to make free decisions that can arise out of the love in their heart. This stage of spiritual development is one that presents a major challenge in the thinking life of the human being.

Thinking and Perception



In these selections from *The Science of Knowing, Thinking and Perception, GA 2*, Rudolf Steiner tells us how we can develop a language of perception that helps reveal the true nature of the world.

Science permeates perceived reality with the concepts grasped and worked through by our thinking. Through what our spirit, by its activity, has raised out of the darkness of mere potentiality into the light of reality, science complements and deepens what has been taken up passively. **This presupposes that perception needs to be complemented by the spirit, that it is not at all something definitive, ultimate, complete.**

The fundamental error of modern science is that it regards sense perceptions as something already complete and finished. It therefore sets itself the task of simply photographing this existence complete in itself. We would have to renounce our thinking entirely if we wanted to keep to pure

experience. One disparages thinking if one takes away from it the possibility of **perceiving in itself entities inaccessible to the senses.**

In addition to sense qualities there must be yet another factor within reality that is grasped by thinking. **Thinking is an organ of the human being that is called upon to observe something higher than what the senses offer.** The side of reality accessible to thinking is one about which a mere sense being would never experience anything. Thinking is not there to rehash the sense-perceptible but rather **to penetrate what is hidden to the senses.** **Sense perception provides only one side of reality. The other side is a thinking apprehension of the world.**

Thinking confronts us at first as something altogether foreign to perception. The perception forces itself in upon us from outside; thinking works itself up out of our inner being. **The content of this thinking appears to us as an organism inwardly complete in itself;** everything is in strictest interconnection. The individual parts of the thought-system determine each other; every single concept ultimately has its roots in the wholeness of our edifice of thoughts.

At first glance it seems as though the inner consistency of thinking, its self-sufficiency, would make any transition to perception impossible. The statements of thinking are such that they can be fulfilled in manifold ways. **Perception affords a kind of specialization of the statements made by thoughts, a possibility left open by these statements themselves.**

We approach the concrete perception. It stands before us as a riddle. Within us the urge makes itself felt to investigate the actual what, the essential being, of the perception, which this perception itself does not express. This urge is nothing else than a concept working its way up out of the darkness of our consciousness. We then hold fast to this concept while sense perception goes along parallel with this thought-process. **The mute perception suddenly speaks a language comprehensible to us; we recognize that the concept we have grasped is what we sought as the essential being of the perception.**

What has taken place here is a judgment. It is different from the form of judgment that joins two concepts without taking perception into account at all. When I say that inner freedom is the self-determination of a being, from out of itself, I have also made a judgment. The parts of this judgment are concepts,

which have not been given to me in perception. **The inner unity of our thinking rests upon judgments** such as these.

The judgment under consideration here has a perception as its subject and a concept as its predicate. The particular animal in front of me is a dog. In this kind of judgment, a perception is inserted into my thought-system at a particular place. Let us call such a judgment a perception-judgment. **Through a perception-judgment, one recognizes that a particular sense-perceptible object, in accordance with its being, coincides with a particular concept.** If we therefore wish to grasp what we perceive, the perception must be prefigured in us as a definite concept. We would go right by an object for which this is not the case without its being comprehensible to us.

The best proof that this is so is provided by the fact that **people who lead a richer spiritual life also penetrate more deeply into the world of experience than do others** for whom this is not the case. I only recognize again, within the sense object, the thought I drew up from within my inner being. This object does in fact move me at a particular moment to bring forth precisely this thought-content out of the unity of all possible thoughts, but it does not in any way provide me with the building stones for these thoughts. These I must draw out of myself.

Only when we allow our thinking to work does reality first acquire true characterization. Reality, which before was mute, now speaks a clear language. **Our thinking is the translator that interprets for us the gestures of experience.**

We are so used to seeing the world of concepts as empty and without content, and so used to contrasting perception with it as something full of content and altogether definite, that it will be difficult to establish for the world of concepts the position it deserves in the true scheme of things. We miss the fact entirely that mere looking is the emptiest thing imaginable, and that only from thinking does it first receive any content at all. The only thing true about the above view is that looking does hold the ever-fluid thought in one particular form, without our having to work along actively with this holding. The fact that a person with a rich soul life sees a thousand things that are a blank to someone spiritually poor proves, clear as day, that **the content of reality is only the mirror-image of the content of our spirit and that we receive only the empty form from outside.** We must, to be sure, have the strength in us to recognize ourselves as the begetters of this content; otherwise we see only the mirror image and never

our spirit that is mirrored. Even a person who sees himself in a real mirror must in fact know himself as a personality in order to know himself again in this image.

All sense perception dissolves ultimately, as far as its essential being is concerned, into ideal content. Only then does it appear to us as transparent and clear.

The conviction should permeate all the sciences that their content is purely thought-content and that they stand in no other connection to perception than that they see, in the object of perception, a particular form of the concept.

The world of the senses can act like a mirror for thinking so that the thinker can begin to know who they are through clear perception of the outside world, especially through interactions with other people. Sense perception is not complete until humans interact with this matrix of hierarchical donations and “find themselves” in the process of thinking that creates mental images and memories of perceptions. The sense world is incomplete without humans waking up to the wisdom it is trying to communicate to the observer. We find out who we really are by our interpretation and translation of the world of perception, both within and without. What we bring to the outside world as our cosmology is our personal response in a continuing conversation with the beings who stand behind sense perception.

The Connection of Perception to Thought

In an article entitled *Supersensible Knowledge, Its Secrecy in the Past and Publication in our Time*, GA 35, Rudolf Steiner emphasizes the need for a spiritual path of development that leads to new supersensible organs of perception

Man, perceiving, imagines that the perception alone is vouching for the correctness of what he apprehends by an activity of soul where **thought and perception in reality always flow together.** And when he lives in thought alone, abstracted from perceptions, it is but an activity of thought which finds its supports in memory. In this abstracted thought the physical organism is cooperative. For the every-day consciousness, an activity of thought unsubjected to the bodily organism is only present while man is in the act of sense-perception. Sense-perception itself depends upon the organism. But the **thinking activity**, contained in and co-operating with it, **is a purely supersensible element in which the bodily organism has no share. In it the human soul rises out of the bodily organism. As soon as man becomes distinctly, separately conscious of this thinking in the act of**

perception, he knows by direct experience that he is himself a living soul, quite independent of the bodily nature.

This is man's first experience of himself as a supersensible soul-being, arising out of an evolved self-knowledge. The same experience is there unconsciously in every act of perception. We need only sharpen our self-observation so as to observe the fact: **in the act of perception a supersensible element reveals itself.** Once it is thus revealed, this first, faint suggestion of an experience of the soul within the supersensible can be evolved, as follows: In living, meditative practice, man unfolds a thinking wherein two activities of the soul flow together, namely that which lives in the ordinary consciousness in sense-perception, and that which is active in ordinary thought. **The meditative life thus becomes an intensified activity of thought, receiving into itself the force that is otherwise spent in perception.**

Our thinking in itself must grow so strong, that it works with the same vivid quality which is otherwise only there in sense-perception. Without perception by the senses we must call to life a thinking which, unsupported by memories of the past, experiences in the immediate present a content of its own, such as we otherwise only can derive from sense-perception.

From the thinking that co-operates in perception, this meditative action of the soul derives its free and conscious quality, its inherent certainty that it receives no visionary content raying into the soul from unconscious organic regions. A visionary life of whatsoever kind is the very antithesis of what is here intended. By self-observation we must become thoroughly and clearly familiar with the condition of soul in which we are in the act of perception through any one of the senses. In this state of soul, fully aware that the content of our ideation does not arise out of the activity of the bodily organism, **we must learn to experience ideas which are called forth in consciousness without external perceptions,** just as are those of which we are conscious in ordinary life when engaged in reflective thought, abstracted from the enter world.

Equally as important as understanding the perceptions of the outside world is the understanding of the perceptions that happen within human consciousness hidden from outer sense perception. Mental images, concepts, thinking, imagination, ideas, archetypes and other such inner perceptions also hold great wisdom, both in content and process. Analyzing inner perception helps place all that we have as memory and our store of knowledge gained through concepts into perspective. As we spiritually evolve, our cosmology and worldview grow and begin to encompass

a wider perspective that allows us to realize that “what we think becomes what we perceive” both in the inner world and outer world. Our cosmology is consciously or unconsciously projected into the outer world as we try to find meaning but unwittingly create our reality based upon the limitations of our worldview. Thus, we see what we “expect” to see and that is determined by our personal worldview.

Meditation develops the ability to objectively analyze our process of thinking which is a key to enhancing our abilities to perceive more effectively and find the beings behind sense perception and develop a language to communicate the wisdom found in perception. Meditation can be a form of “thinking about thinking” that leads us to the independent and self-regenerative processes of thinking. The cosmos thought the world into existence, and we use our thoughts to create our own world. The path of spiritual development requires that the aspirant become one who meditates at least twice a day, before going to sleep and upon awakening. It is through meditation that the spiritual beings who are supporting your evolution work into your personal thinking helping it to become cosmic thinking.

Sense Perception and Memory

Relevant passages from The Michael Mystery, Men’s Freedom and the Michael Age, Lecture XXII, Rudolf Steiner, GA 26:

One must look at this power of remembrance in the proper light. **When Man to-day, in the present age of cosmic evolution, perceives through his senses, this ‘perceiving’ is a momentary lighting-up in consciousness of world-images.** The lighting-up comes when the sense is directed upon the outer world; it illumines the field of consciousness, and disappears when the sense ceases to be turned upon the outer world. But what here lights up in the human soul, can have no duration. For unless man could dismiss it promptly from his consciousness, he would become merged in this content of his consciousness, and lose himself. He would no longer be himself. Only for a brief time — in the so-called after-images, which so much interested Goethe — may this lighting-up from a sense-perception have life in the consciousness. Neither must this content of consciousness become set, or harden into real existence; it must remain image.

Sense-perception of the outer world is, then, an inward painting of the human soul. A painting without paints; a painting in spirit-waxing and spirit-waning. As in Nature the rainbow comes and goes again and

leaves no trace behind, so too all sense-perception comes and passes away, without itself — of its own nature — leaving any memory behind.

But with every perception, there is at the same time another process transacted between the human soul and the world outside. It is a process that goes on in the background, in remoter parts of the soul's life — there, where the forces of growth, the life-impulses are at work. And in this part of the soul's life, not a transitory image merely, but **a real and lasting reproduction is imprinted with each act of perception.** This man can bear, for it is a real world-content, playing in part in man's existence. It can take place without his losing himself, any more than he loses himself when without his own full consciousness, he grows, or is nourished by his food.

When man now calls up his memories from the inner depths, it is an internal perception of what was permanently left by this second process that accompanies the external perception. Again the soul paints; but now she paints the Past that is living in her own human inner being. And again with this painting, no lasting reality must be formed within the consciousness, but only an image that comes and goes.

Such is the connection, in the human soul, between the forming of mental conceptions — mental images — in the moment of perception, and remembrance. For these forces of remembrance are remnants of the past in man's evolution, and as such they fall under the dominion of Lucifer. **It is Lucifer's endeavor to give substance in man to the impressions of the outer world and to condense them, so that they may continue to shine on as lasting mental conceptions in his conscious life.** This endeavor of Lucifer's would be crowned with success, were it not released by the **Michael-forces.** These **will not let what is painted in the mind's inner light harden into real existence, but keep it coming and going as a fleeting picture.**

Just below the Thinking organism, in the region where sense-perception, fancy, memory-picturing are going on, there the divine spirit-world is living in and with the life of man. The divine spirit-world may be said to live in man's waking state in the evolution of memory. For the two other functions, **sense-perception and fancy, are only modifications of this forming of inner memory-pictures. In sense-perception we**

have the formation of the mind's memory-contents in the nascent state; in fancy's contents we have, lighting up in the soul, what lives on of these memory-contents in the soul's inner life.

Memory is formed in the nerves-and-senses organism. Conscience is formed — though as a process purely of the soul and spirit — within the metabolic and limb organism. Between the two lies the rhythmic organism. **Conscience** is formed — though as a process purely of the soul and spirit — within the metabolic and limb organism. This is developed in two directions, so that each side is polar in relation to the other. **As Breathing rhythm, it is intimately associated with sense-perception and with thinking.** In lung-breathing, the process is at its coarsest. It becomes more delicate, and as refined and sublimated breathing becomes sense-perceiving and thinking. Still quite close to breathing — only **a breathing through the sense-organs**, not through the lungs — **is sense-perception.**

More remote from lung-breathing and having for its support the thinking organism, is the forming of mental conceptions, thinking as such. And already bordering on the other side upon the rhythm of the blood-circulation — beginning to be an inward breathing that combines with the metabolic and limb organism — is the function which manifests itself in the play of fancy. This extends then, as a soul-function, down into the sphere of the will, even as the circulatory rhythm extends into the metabolic and limb organism.

We remember and forget as a healthy process of digestion of our experiences through a breathing process involving perception and thinking. Through this process memory is created and imprinted into the human body and can be called up again as a new sense perception within the conscious human mind. What we perceive becomes soul nourishment and lasting memory that builds our personal I, or ego. Our collected memories are, in a sense, who we believe we are, our personal identity. Once we realize that perception can be changed by projecting our personal higher forms of thought onto the outer world, we become aware that our memories are self-created and that all that we previously believed to be destined, can actually become opportunities to express true freedom through love.

We arrive at the ability to project a positive worldview through meditation and the growth and development of our combined concepts (world of thoughts-worldview). The more experienced and wise we become, the greater our worldview becomes and perception reveals itself as a mirror showing us our true nature that is generally invisible.

Supersensible organs of perception may be developed which can perceive the spiritual world standing behind the physical world and shows us our true nature and destiny coming to us from the outside world.

Beyond Sense Perception

In *Fruits of Anthroposophy, From Sense Perception to Spirit Imaging*, Lecture 5, Stuttgart, September 2, 1921, GA 78, Rudolf Steiner tells us about the different types of perception of the spiritual world:

The spiritual science of anthroposophy aims **to go beyond sensory perception, towards perception of things spiritual**. It aims to progress from the intellectual approach — which we have to use in everyday life and in science as we know it — to other forms of soul activity, activities that permit insights to be gained into worlds that, while they are in evidence in the realm of the senses, nevertheless are not immediately accessible to the senses and to the intellect. Such inner soul activities are alive in what I have referred to in my written works as Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition.

Sensory perception brings us into relationship with the outside world. **Visionary, hallucinatory activity takes this relationship down to a lower level of awareness, reducing to the level of subjectivity what in sensory perception definitely takes a purer, more objective form**. The content of experience gained at this lower level has arisen in an unhealthy way out of the organism itself. It pervades our sensory perception and in case of illness drives them out altogether, replacing them with something that is pathological.

It is reflection on our own Self, on the I, which raises sensory perception above the level of mere visionary, hallucinatory, dreamlike experience. Having grasped this, we can also see why the spiritual scientist insists on the necessity, if cognitive Imagination is to be achieved, of doing specific exercises.

For moments of perception when imaginative perception is to be the capacity used, one does in a sense become another person, in so far as one is now not merely living in the present with a certain sense of egoity but is living within time, having completely taken time into one's experience.

If the soul has prepared itself in the way I have described, it will have achieved a state where **suddenly there will arise before it the insight needed to experience, in perception, how the movement of the sun through the Zodiac**, something normally regarded as merely a physical, mechanical process, is indeed a living, cosmic, organic process.

In a very real way, the world is an illusion or even a delusion because it does not indicate its true nature through the five human senses. Spirit hides behind every flower or stately tree, but many cannot see it. We need to develop new organs of perception that can see the invisible forces of life and study the patterns found throughout the cosmos and within our thinking. Certain visible processes of lawfulness indicate that what we think may be chaotic and unknowable is really ordered and full of wisdom. The dying aspects of nature hide the living ones just as the chaos hides the order. Entropy often obscures extropy while death hides life and gravity obscures levity. Once living thinking, Imagination, starts to fill perception with life, the tables turn and perception becomes a language to communicate with the sources of life, the very beings who are intimately concerned with our personal spiritual development.

Thinking as Living Beings

In *Perception of the Elemental World* (Munich, August 26, 1913, GA 147), Rudolf Steiner tells us about the true nature of matter being a shadow of spirit.

What is thinking like in our ordinary world? Observe it as you follow its movement. A person is aware of thoughts in his soul; he knows that he is grasping, spinning out, connecting and separating these thoughts. Inwardly he feels himself to be the master of his thoughts, which seem rather passive; they allow themselves to be connected and separated, to be formed and then dismissed. This life of thought must develop in the elemental world a step further. There a person is not in a position to deal with thoughts that are passive. **If someone really succeeds in entering that world with his clairvoyant soul, it seems as though his thoughts were not things over which he has any command: they are living beings.**

Only imagine how it is when you cannot form and connect and separate your thoughts but, instead, each one of them in your consciousness **begins to have a life of its own, a life as an entity in itself**. You thrust your consciousness into a place, it seems, where you do not find thoughts that are like those in the physical world but where they are **living beings**.

I can only use a grotesque picture which will help us somehow to realize how different our thinking must become from what it is here. Imagine sticking your head into an anthill, while your thinking comes to a stop — you would have ants in your head instead of thoughts! It is just like that, when your soul dips down into the elemental world; your thoughts become so alive that **they themselves join each other, separate from each other and lead a life of their own.** We truly need a stronger power of soul to confront these living thought-beings with our consciousness than we do with the passive thoughts of the physical world, which allow themselves to be formed at will, to be connected and separated not only sensibly but often even quite foolishly. They are patient things, these thoughts of our ordinary world; they let the human soul do anything it likes with them. But it is quite different when we thrust our soul into the elemental world, where our thoughts will lead an independent life. A human being must hold his own with his soul life and assert his will in confronting these active, lively, no longer passive thoughts.

From my description you will have been able to learn that **what we know as thinking in the physical sense world is really only the external shadow imprint, called up by the physical body, of the thinking that, lying in occult depths, can be called a true living force.** As soon as we enter the elemental world and move with our etheric body, thoughts become — one can say — denser, more alive, more independent, more true to their own nature. What we experience as thought in the physical body relates to this truer element of thinking as a shadow on the wall relates to the objects casting it. As a matter of fact, it is the shadow of the elemental thought-life thrown into the physical sense world through the instrumentality of the physical body. **When we think, our thinking lies more or less in the shadow of thought beings.** Here clairvoyant spiritual knowledge throws new light on the true nature of thinking. No philosophy, no external science, however ingenious, can determine anything of the real nature of thinking; only a knowledge based on clairvoyant consciousness can recognize what it is.

Spiritual beings cast shadows into this world and they become our minerals, plants, animals and even parts of our own human nature. Nerves are a hollow space where thinking comes to rest, where spirit dwells as Intuition, thinking and love when we surrender to higher spiritual beings. The processes of the physical and the spiritual come together in the blood which is the carrier of warmth, nutrition and sense perception. All three are forms of nourishment that come to us from the outside world and connect us to essential components of our existence that help create consciousness. Though blood is fluid inside the body, it quickly dries and hardens outside of the

body. Blood is much like thinking in that regard and it shows that it has all three capacities of mercury, salt and sulphur – fluid, solid and gas. Blood is a physical substance that quickly reveals its spiritual nature. Through the diverse capacities of blood, the human I, or ego, can come to reside in the warmth of the blood that moves continually throughout the body.

Perception and the Blood

Steiner's view on the nature of perception and blood can be found in *An Occult Physiology, The Conscious Life of Man*, Lecture 7, Rudolf Steiner, March 27, 1911, GA 128:

Now exactly the same process takes place within our organism when we think. This corresponding process of thinking is **a salt-depositing process**, so to speak, which is caused by **a certain activity in our blood and which irritates and reacts upon our nerve-system**, a process, that is, which goes on on the "frontiers" between our blood- and nerve-systems. And just as we can look at the water in the glass and observe the formation of the salt as it separates and crystallizes, so we may see, when we observe a human being exercising thought, that just such a process, supersensibly perceptible in all its exactness to the clairvoyant eye, actually does take place.

Thus we have here brought before our minds the physical correlative of the process of thought.

At this point we may ask what is the nature of the corresponding correlative of feeling? Here we do not have to do with a depositing of solidifying salt, which is the opposite of the process of solution; but we find that within our organism what we may call refined processes take place which are somewhat like that of **a fluid becoming semi-solid**. Let us imagine, for instance, a fluid which is just solid enough to take on form — about as much form as there is in very thick albumen: a coagulation, that is, or the thickening of a fluid. Whereas, in the case of thought-processes, we have to do with the direct production of a salt-substance which is deposited out of a fluid, in everything pertaining to **feeling** we have to do with **a transition from an inwardly more fluid state to a semi-fluid one**. The substance is here transformed into a somewhat denser condition which, with clairvoyant sight, may be identified as the formation of small flakes.

When we go on to what we may call the cherishing of a will-impulse in the soul, we find that the physical correlative of this again is different. It is, moreover, even easier to grasp; in fact, we come here to that aspect in which the physical is considerably more manifest. **The physical correlative of what conforms to**

will-impulse is a sort of warming-process, a process, indeed, which in some way or other produces certain degrees of heightened temperature within the organism, a becoming hot, in a certain sense. Now we may also conclude from this, since this becoming warm is **connected with the whole pulsation of our blood**, that it is precisely and altogether with this that the impulses of will are connected.

Our organism as a whole is thus a texture woven of those processes which we must describe as belonging in **part to our conscious life and in part to the unconscious**. It is an extraordinarily significant fact that our organism actually does represent a union formed out of two polaric extremes: that processes of coarser nature take place in such a way that they radiate into the organism, as it were, out of the macrocosm; and that, on the other hand, there are processes of a finer sort which arise out of our conscious life.

You need consider only the **blood, the most vitally active and finest element. In this element you may perceive a stimulator of the salt-forming process, the process of condensation of a fluid, and the warming process**. The blood is thus something which shields inwardly, in the highest degree, all its processes, something that carries on its processes in the greatest measure independently of the outer world.

But we have already indicated that this **blood is like a tablet which is equally exposed on its two sides, exposed, that is, to impressions coming from both directions**. It is turned on the one side to the subconscious processes in the deeper regions of the human organism, where the nutritive substances, after going through filtering processes, come up and force their way to the blood. The influence of everything occurring there is diminished by the sympathetic nervous system, so that it does not reach our consciousness. And the other side of the tablet must be turned by the blood to the experiences of the conscious life of the soul. Not only the unconscious activities of the ego, which work up from the bony system, but also **the conscious soul-activities, belonging to the other ego, must penetrate into the blood**. They must be able to metamorphose themselves by the time they reach the blood, in order that they then may become the expression of what we have about us in our environment as physical-sensible world; for of course that which is woven into the plant world as ether-body, for example, is not visible to normal consciousness.

It is the physical world, first of all, that we have around us; and, for the normal consciousness, we ourselves belong only to the physical world. Thus **we expose this other side of our “blood-tablet” to the physical-sensible world which then becomes the content of our consciousness. The entire soul-life, as it is stimulated into thought through the impressions of the physical-sensible world and as it flames into feelings and is stirred into impulses of will, must find its instrument in the blood-system in so far as it is conscious ego-life.**

Not only are we able to have in our blood that into which the nutritive substances have been changed, when they have been driven upward from the subconscious and filtered to the point where they may lead a life of their own in the blood, shielded from all macrocosmic laws; but also that **there must be inscribed on the other side of the tablet of the blood all that occurs in the physical-sensible realm**, in the lifeless matter of the physical-sensible world, which is known to us through sense-impressions and appears to our consciousness, at first, in the form of everything that can make impressions. For whatever goes to make up life can become known to the normal consciousness only through combinations of physical sense-impressions. In reality it becomes known only through the next higher super-sensible member, the ether-body. Thus the **blood must be capable of being also related to the physical-sensible world just as this immediately surrounds us.**

•our spirit•

We may, accordingly, expect to find that something is incorporated into the blood which, we might say, does not manifest itself there as if it were due to the influence of processes working up from the lower depths of our nature, but rather as if it were due to the influence of external macrocosmic laws and vital activities. We must have in our blood, therefore, something that is similar in character and action to direct external processes, which take their course outside of us in the same way in which they gradually come later to take their course within our organism. That is, **there must be physical, chemical, inorganic processes which take their course within our blood, which are necessary to enable our ego to take part in the physical world.** Thus we shall have to seek in the blood for processes wherein substances can act through their physical-sensible character, in accordance with what they are in the macrocosm. And this we do find, as a matter of fact, in that something is presented to us in the red corpuscles which shows us that it is just beginning to live, and is at the point where it passes over to the state of lifelessness. **And from the other side of the tablet something is incorporated into the blood which we may call**

a process easily comparable to an external process of combustion. In short we have in the blood, disposed on the other side, and recognizable even physically, everything that makes man a physical-sensible being through the fact that **in the blood he has an instrument for his ego which is living in this physical-sensible world.**

In other words, the finest and highest processes which are stimulated out of the depths of our organism unite, within the circuit of our blood, with the other, the physical chemical processes, which obey the laws of the external world. **In no other substance does the physical-sensible world come into such direct contact, as does the blood, with something of an entirely different character which, for its very existence, presupposes the activity of super-sensible systems of force.** In fact, this blood is something in which the lowliest that man can see in processes around him is blended with the loftiest that can take on organic form within his nature.

If the blood-organism, because it evokes those delicate **processes of salt forming, liquefaction and warmth** under the influence of external impressions, is thereby predetermined from without in its physical chemical course by the soul-processes themselves, we may ask how this process as a blood-process is determined from within. We must distinguish the function belonging to the blood by reason of the fact that it is blood; but we must also understand that it needs to be nourished just like any other organ: we must consider it in the same way as any other organ that **needs to be nourished.** And on the other hand we must also recognize it as the organ standing at the highest stage of organic activity. With regard to this activity we must consider especially what we call the inner support of human life. The blood, which is the opposite extreme, so to speak, from the bony system, must be most of all protected in order that in our thinking it may create, as the instrument of thought in so far as this thought has ego-consciousness — that it may be able to create the process we have called salification. This protection must proceed from the blood itself; therefore, **the blood must above everything be capable of calling forth, spiritually as it were, a spiritual bony system, must be able itself to cause the process of salt-forming.**

Just as **the blood-system manifests the greatest quickening of inner activity, in so far as it constitutes the thought-system,** so it takes on an activity that manifests a connection with our life of feeling, in the way we described when we said that in the process of condensation, of inner liquefaction, the blood-system is supported by what radiates from our inner cosmic system.

The blood is left almost entirely to itself in so far as it is the instrument of the element of thought in us; it is stimulated by what radiates upward, by that in which the organs of the inner cosmic system participate, through their own action.

The Warmth of the Blood

In *The Influence of Spiritual Beings on Man*, Lecture V, Rudolf Steiner, March 16, 1908, GA 102 Steiner speaks of the warmth of blood:

If you consider this brief sketch which I have given you of the ancient earth-evolution you will see that present man actually took his starting point as earthly being from the heart outwards. The heart was of course not such an organ as it is today; that only developed much later, but the rudiments of **the heart proceeded from the fire-element. Then were added the breathing system born of the air, the nerve-system born of the light. Then came the protoplasmic material which inserted itself into the organs and formed the whole to living matter through the cosmic tones congealing the fluid substances.** In the final period, when the moon substance was still present in the earth, densification to the condition of earthy solidness came about.

Think for a moment of the beginning of Earth-evolution. What did the warmth-matter do there? It gave you for your bodily nature that which now pulsates in your blood. You must not think that when we speak of the earliest warmth condition of the Earth we are speaking of such a warmth as arises when you strike a match. That is mineral-fire and mineral-warmth. We are speaking of **the fire and warmth that pulsates in your blood; that is living warmth.** In fact there is not only the mineral warmth that arises externally in space, but there is a very different one, a living warmth which you have in yourselves. That was present at the beginning of the Earth and from it were formed the first rudiments of man. But even this living warmth gradually became lifeless with the continuous densification. And through the combustion process, formerly not there at all, a substance was separated off within the earth-mass which is described in occultism as "ash." When you burn something it gives rise to ash. Think of the whole Earth and its beings as yet without mineral substance — and then by a combustion process the deposit of ash, ash of the most varied mineral substances. In the human beings, therefore, which up to then had in fact only arrived at a glutinous density, ash constituents became embedded in every direction.

We have seen that originally there was fire and the rudiments of the heart were formed from it. Then the rudimentary stage of breathing was produced by the air, light entered and formed the rudiments of the nerves. Then came sound and produced the living substance by causing the materials to dance. But what caused the ash-element, the mineral, to stream into this substance?

What pressed ash into the human bodies was now henceforth thought, which made the sound, the tone, into the word.

Even in Atlantean times, when everything was immersed in mist, what the human being spoke was not the only articulated language, but man understood the speech of the rustling trees, the rippling springs and founts. All that today is articulated language and all that was expressed in it, formed the dance; tone, the musical element in it, formed the materials into living substance. **The sense, the significance, of the word pressed into this living substance the ash that formed out of the combustion process.** And to the degree in which the bony system gradually condensed towards the end of the Atlantean Age man was penetrated by thoughts, by self-consciousness. His intellect dawned and he became increasingly a self-conscious being. The things that exist in us are created from outside: First, the rudiments which develop into the **human heart**; second, our **nervous system** with the rudiments of breathing; third, the **glandular organs**, arising out of the living; fourth, the **bony structure**, permeated by ash; finally, man becomes a self-conscious being. Such was the course of evolution within our own Earth-embodiment.

You see now that the actual mission of earthly evolution, that in which Love comes to expression in man, was laid down first in what we possessed as warmth organ, which emerged the first of all. Before anything organic, Spirit was there in the form of lines of force, then came the incorporation of the organic under the wonder-working of world music. Then only was the whole impregnated with mineral substance, solid matter, through the Word or thought. **The densest arises the latest.** Man develops out of the Spirit, and this is seen too if we study the course of earthly evolution. Man has his origin and primal state — as every genuine study of the universe has always shown — not in matter but in Spirit. **Matter embedded itself in the human being later than the spiritual forces.**

The “mind” of the human being is not found in the head where modern science imagines thinking is centered. Consciousness in the human being resides in the human heart and from there thoughts stream up into the head where they are reflected as cold images that

must be “warmed up” by the heart. Consciousness and perception first arise in the human being as a feeling responding to the rushing of blood out of the human heart. Blood controls metabolic processes and mitigates nerve processes. What is often overlooked is that the human heart is a major sense organ that perceives thoughts and feelings and can react without thinking and before cognition can inform the heart to react, as in blushing. The human heart is the center of the cosmos and the rhythms of the cosmos are found in the pulse of the heart as it receives perception and responds accordingly with warmed-up thoughts that can reveal the world.

The Human Heart’s Relationship to Perception

In the lecture series *Spiritual Science and Medicine*, Lecture II, March 22, 1920, GA 312, Rudolf Steiner tells us about the human heart’s central role as a supersensible organ of perception.

The most important fact about the heart is that its activity is not a cause but an effect. You will understand this if you consider the polarity between all the organic activities centering round nutrition, digestion, absorption into the blood, and so on: passing upwards through the human frame, the process of digestion up to the interaction between the blood that has absorbed the food, and the breathing that receives air. An unbiased observation will show a certain contrast and opposition between the process of respiration and the process of digestion. **The heart originates as a “damming up” organ between the lower activities of the organism, the intake and working up of food, and the upper activities, the lowest of which is the respiratory.** A damming up organ is inserted and its action is therefore a product of the interplay between the liquefied foodstuffs and the air absorbed from the outside.

For what is **the heart** after all? It is a **sense organ**, and even if its sensory function is not directly present in the consciousness, if its processes are subconscious, nevertheless it serves to enable the “upper” activities to feel and perceive the “lower.” As you perceive external colors through your eyes, so do you perceive, dimly and subconsciously through your heart, what goes on in the lower abdomen. **The heart is an organ for inner perception.**

The polarity in man is only comprehensible if we know that his structure is a dual one and that the upper portion perceives the lower. The following too must be considered: the lower functions — one pole of the whole human

being — are considered through the study of nutrition and digestion in the widest sense, up to their interaction with respiration. The interaction goes on in a rhythmic activity. But linked up with and belonging to the respiratory activity there is the sensory and nervous activity, which includes all that appertains to external perception and its continuation and its being worked up in the nervous activity.

Thus, **respiration and sensory and nervous activity form one pole of the human organism. Nutrition, digestion, and metabolism in its usual sense, form the other pole of our organization.** The heart is primarily that organ whose perceptible motion expresses the equilibrium between the upper and lower processes; in relation to the soul (or perhaps more accurately in the sub-conscious) it is the perceptive organ that mediates between these two poles of the total human organization.

All that is saline in its process tends to saline formation, leading our internal processes in to the realm of gravity. Those who study the medical works of the past would do well to keep in mind, wherever they find references to the **“salification” of substances**, that by this process the substance in question is **subjected to the force of gravity, and by the opposite process, the light process, it is liberated from gravity; that is, the imponderables are so liberated.** Accordingly, if we accept light as the representative of all other imponderable forces, we must conceive the whole of external nature as involved in the struggle between light and gravity, between the force that strives towards the extra-terrestrial and the force that makes earth's substances tend towards the center. **We have here the polarity between light and gravity;** and in between, that which perpetually seeks the balance between the two and manifests mercurially, for the mercurial element is simply something that continually seeks to maintain a state of equilibrium between light and gravity.

We have to visualize the place and office of the imponderables working between the saline, the phosphoric, and the mercurial elements in the whole cosmic scheme, i.e., in gravity, in the light forces, and in that whichever seeks an equilibrium midway between them. Now into the very center of these mighty forces and tensions is placed in a remarkable way the whole activity of our human heart. But in truth, man with his organic system is inserted into the whole process of the universe, and **the human heart is not merely an organ pertaining to his organism, but belongs to the whole world process.** That tension of opposite forces which we have traced in the plant, that alternation

and interplay of super-solar and infra-solar forces, is also manifest in man in the movements of the heart. The heart movements are not only an imprint of what takes place in man, they are also an imprint of extra-human conditions. **For in the human heart you may see reflected as in a mirror, the whole process of the universe.** Man is individualized merely as a being of soul and spirit. In other aspects of being, he is inserted into the universal process, so that, for instance, **the beats of his heart are not only an expression of what takes place within man, but also of that contest between light and gravity that fills the whole cosmic stage.**

If we consider them separately and in detail, we must identify the external operation of **oxygen** with the internal operation of the **kidney** and urinary system. What is done in the outer world, by the formative forces of **carbon**, we must identify internally with the pulmonary system: not regarding the **lungs** however as organs of respiration, but as possessing particular formative forces. We must identify **nitrogen** with the **liver** system, **hydrogen** with the **cardiac** system. Hydrogen is made ready by the heart, and then serves as carrier for the preparation of the apparatus of thought.

The five sense are totally inadequate to inform us of the true nature of reality. Most of the forces of nature are invisible, such as gravity, light, warmth, sound, and levity. It takes supersensible organs to perceive spiritual beings or the elementals that do their bidding. New sense organs are being developed through higher forms of thinking, feeling, and willing. Each organ of the body also has a higher function as a sense organ **once it has become activated.** The kidney has become the organ from which the sense of conscience is developed. During Greek times, these forces of conscience were outside of the human body and were perceived as the Furies who hounded men that were guilty, or had a guilty conscience. The heart will one day become a supersensible organ that can work with moral forces as they manifest in the will. Development of these organs into new sense organs is a major part of the spiritual path.

Perception and Sense Organs

Selections from *Man and Cosmos*, Lecture by Rudolf Steiner, Dornach, January 7, 1923, GA 220:

All these impressions are subconscious and they do not appear in the general feelings that live in the human being. You may therefore say: **The perceptions coming from the earth's environment follow a horizontal direction and are met from within by the thinking or representing power;** from below come the perceptions of metals — above all, of metals — and they are met by feeling, in the same way in which ordinary perceptions are met by the thinking capacity. This process, however, remains chaotic and unreal to the human beings

of the present time. From these impressions they only derive a general life of feeling.

If the human being on earth had the gift of imagination, he would know that his nature is also connected with the metals in the earth. In reality, **every human organ is a sense organ**, and although we use it for another purpose, or apparently do so, it is nevertheless a sense organ. During our earthly life, we simply use our organs for other purposes. For we really perceive something with each organ. The human being is in every way a great sense organ, and as such, he has differentiated, specified sense organs in the single organs of his body.

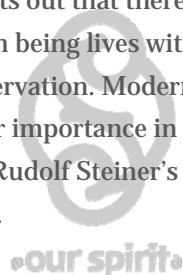
You therefore see that from below, **the human being obtains perceptions of metals and that he has a life of feeling corresponding to these perceptions**. Our feelings exist in contrast to everything coming to us from the earth's metals, even as **our thinking or representing power exists in contrast to everything which penetrates into our sense perceptions from the earth's environment**.

But in the same way in which the influences of the metals reach us from below, so we are influenced from above by the movements and forms of the celestial bodies in the world's spaces. **We have sense perceptions in our environment, and similarly we have a consciousness which would manifest itself as inspired consciousness, as inspirations coming from every planetary movement and from every constellation of fixed stars**. Even as our thinking capacity streams towards our ordinary sense perceptions, so we send out to the movements of the celestial bodies a force which is opposed to the impressions derived from the stars, and this force is our will. What lies in our will power, would be perceived as inspiration, if we were able to use the inspired state of consciousness.

During our ordinary, earthly state of consciousness, we are completely awake only in this life of sensory perceptions and thoughts. Our feeling life, on the other hand, only exists in a dreaming state. We dream in our feelings and we sleep in our will. But the will which sleeps in our ordinary consciousness responds to the impressions coming from the stars, in the same way in which **our thoughts respond to the sense impressions of ordinary consciousness**. And what we dream in our feelings is the counter-activity which meets the influences coming from the metals of the earth.

In our present waking life on earth, we perceive the objects around us. Our thinking capacity counteracts. For this we need our physical and etheric body. Without the physical and etheric body we could not develop the forces which work in a horizontal direction — the perceptive and thinking forces. If we imagine this schematically we might say: **As far as our daytime consciousness is concerned, the physical and etheric bodies become filled with sense impressions and with our thinking activity.** When the human being is asleep, his astral body and his Ego organization are outside. They receive the impressions which come from below and from above. The Ego and the astral body really sleep in the metal streams rising up from the earth, if I may use this expression, and in the streams descending from the planetary movements and the constellations of fixed stars. What thus arises in the earth's environment exercises no influence in a horizontal direction, but exists in form of forces which descend from above, and in the night we live in them.

Only Rudolf Steiner teaches us about the full spectrum of senses that are available to human beings at this point of evolution. He points out that there are twelve senses that can perceive the outside and inside worlds that the human being lives within. All of the twelve senses can easily be found by rational thinking and clear observation. Modern science is aware of the mechanisms of these extra seven senses but ignores their importance in human consciousness. Understanding the twelve senses is a key component of Rudolf Steiner's cosmology that opens up our capacities to heighten our ability to perceive reality.



The Twelve Senses

The following selection is from *Man as a Being of Sense and Perception, Twelve Senses in Man*, Lecture 1, Rudolf Steiner, GA 206 in which Steiner describes the twelve senses.

Now when we really analyze the whole range of those external experiences of which we become aware in the same way as we become aware, let us say, of the experiences of sight or touch or warmth, **we get twelve senses, clearly distinguishable one from another.** On earlier occasions I have enumerated them as follows: First, the ego-sense (see diagram below) which, as I have said, is to be distinguished from the consciousness of our own ego. By the ego-sense we mean nothing more than the capacity to perceive the ego of another man. The second sense is the sense of thought, the third the word-sense, the fourth the sense of hearing, the fifth the sense of warmth, the sixth the sense of sight, the seventh the sense of taste, the eighth the sense of smell, the ninth the sense of balance. Anyone who is able to make distinctions in the realm of the senses knows that, just as there is a clearly defined realm of sight, so there is a clearly

defined realm from which we receive simply a sensation of standing as man in a certain state of balance. Without a sense to convey this state of standing balanced, or of being poised, or of dancing in balance, we should be entirely unable to develop full consciousness. Next comes the sense of movement. This is the perception of whether we are at rest or in movement. We must experience this within ourselves, just as we experience the sense of sight. The eleventh sense is the sense of life, and the twelfth the sense of touch.

The Twelve Senses

Related to Thinking - Specifically outer senses

Ego Sense

Thought Sense

Word Sense

Sense of Hearing

Related to Feeling - Senses both inner and outer

Warmth Sense

Sense of Sight

Sense of Taste

Sense of Smell

Related to Willing - Specifically inner senses

Sense of Balance

Sense of Movement

Sense of Life

Sense of Touch



The selections above paint a grand picture of the history and evolution of perception, showing the beings and forces that are involved. A true path of knowledge can be derived from Rudolf Steiner's insights that create a cosmology that is comprehensive and inspiring. Viewing the many perspectives of Steiner's teachings enables the aspirant to build and grow an evolving worldview that eventually puts the perceiver in direct contact with the beings behind perception. The world becomes alive and active with beingness and the individual's part in this cosmic dance becomes evident and primary.

Sense perception is one way that the hierarchies feed and nourish human beings. In the process, we find out that we can become the eyes and ears of the spiritual world in the Earth realm. Spiritual beings cannot physically come into this realm because it belongs to humans who often think they are the only ones here. Knowing the genesis of matter and the intent of the hierarchies immediately changes the way we perceive the world. We soon find that we are the children of the divine, held warmly in the arms of our parents who hope that one day we will evolve into gods like themselves.

We approached the question of perception from the 50,000-foot view to begin with; now we need to build up our understanding of perception from a strong foundation of philosophical thinking. We need to logically build a structure from the ground up that can hold percepts, concepts, and the processes of thinking in a sacred space of meditative contemplation. No other philosophical work does that so well as Rudolf Steiner's *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*, which is summarized in an abridged form below:



The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity and Perception

All selections below are from *A Philosophy of Freedom - Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path*, Rudolf Steiner, Anthroposophic Press, NY, 1995.

Thinkers seek the laws of phenomena, striving to penetrate in thinking what they experience through observation. **Only when we have made the world content into our thought content do we rediscover the connection from which we have sundered ourselves.**

When we direct our cognition to the "I," we initially perceive the activity of this "I" in the development of a world of ideas unfolded through thought. It is we who separate ourselves from the native ground of nature and place ourselves as "I" in opposition to the "world."

It is true that we have estranged ourselves from nature; but it is just as true that we feel we are in her and belong to her. It can only be her activity that lives in us. **We must find the way back to her again. We must seek out this natural being within ourselves, and then we shall also rediscover the connection to her. We can only find nature outside us if we first know her within us. What is akin to her within us will be our guide.** Our way is thus mapped out for us.

The purpose of my thinking is to form concepts about the process I observe. It is through observation that we first become aware of anything entering the circle of our experience. **The content of sensations, perceptions, views, feelings, acts of will, dream and fantasy constructions, representations, concepts and ideas, illusions and hallucinations—the content of all of these is given to us through observation.** Thinking differs essentially, as an object of observation, from all other things. **The observation of thinking is a kind of exceptional state.**

It is part of the peculiar nature of thinking that it is an activity directed only to the observed object, and not to the thinker. The thinker forgets thinking while doing it. What concerns the thinker is not thinking, but the observed object of thinking. **Thinking is the unobserved element in our normal spiritual life.** When I think, I do not look at my thinking, which I myself am producing, but at the object of thinking, which I am not producing.

I can observe my present thinking only in two separate acts. The thinking to be observed is never the one currently active, but a different one. These two are therefore incompatible: active production and contemplative confrontation. As an object of world content thinking eludes normal observation. **The observation of thinking is the most important observation that can be made. Before anything else can be understood, thinking must be understood.**

Concepts and ideas arise through thinking. Words cannot say what a concept is. Words can only make us notice that we have concepts. When we see a tree, our thinking reacts to our observation, a conceptual counterpart joins the object, and we consider the object and the conceptual counterpart as belonging together. Individual concepts link together into a closed conceptual system, in which each has its particular place. **Ideas are not qualitatively different from concepts. They are only concepts with more content, more saturated, and more inclusive.** Concepts and ideas already presuppose thinking.

Concepts cannot be won by observation. **Concepts are added onto observation.** Observation calls forth thinking, and it is only the latter that shows me how to link one isolated experience with another. **For thinking, by its very nature, goes over and above what has been observed. Human consciousness is the stage where concept and observation meet and are connected to one another.** It is the mediator between thinking and observation.

To the extent that human beings think, they experience themselves as active. They regard things as objects, and themselves as thinking subjects. **Because they direct their thinking to what they observe, they are conscious of objects; because they direct their thinking to themselves, they are conscious of themselves, they have self-consciousness.** Human consciousness must necessarily at the same time also be self-consciousness, because it is a thinking consciousness. For when thinking directs its gaze toward its own activity, it has before it as its object its very own being, that is, its subject.

Thinking is beyond subject and object. Thus, thinking is an element that leads me beyond myself and unites me with objects. But it separates me from them at the same time, by setting me over against them as subject. Just this establishes the dual nature of the human being: we think, and our thinking embraces ourselves along with the rest of the world; but at the same time we must also, by means of thinking, define ourselves as individuals standing over against things.

We can call thinking, as it first appears to our consciousness, a percept. Every extension in the sphere of my percepts makes me correct my image of the world. The percept is partly determined by the organization of the subject. It is only because I perceive my self and notice that with every percept the content of my self also changes, that I find myself compelled to connect the observation of the object with my own changed state, and to speak of my mental picture. **I perceive mental pictures in my self in the same way that I perceive colors, sounds, and so forth in other objects.**

Our whole being functions in such a way that for everything in reality, the elements flow to us from two sides—from the side of perceiving and from the side of thinking. **The divide between perceiving and thinking comes into being only at the instant that I, the observer, come over against things.**

Our thinking, unlike our sensing and feeling, is not individual. It is universal. Only because it is related to the individual's feeling and sensing does it receive an individual stamp in each separate human being. **Human beings differentiate**

themselves from one another through these particular colorations of universal thinking.

In thinking, we are given the element that unites our particular individuality with the whole of the cosmos. When we sense, feel (and also perceive) we are separate; when we think, we are the all-one being that penetrates all.

The urge for knowledge arises in us because **thinking in us reaches out beyond our separateness and relates itself to universal world existence.**

For thinking beings, a concept arises from the encounter with an external thing. The concept is that part of a thing that we do not receive from without, but from within. **Knowledge, cognition is meant to accomplish the balance or union of the two elements, inner and outer. A percept, then, is not something finished or closed off. It is one side of the total reality. The other side is the concept. The act of knowing (cognition) is the synthesis of percept and concept.** Only percept and concept together make up the whole thing.

We shall call the form in which thought-content first arises intuition. Intuition is to thinking as observation is to perception. **Intuition and observation are the sources of our knowledge.**

Intuition supplies us with the piece of reality missing from the percept. What meets us in observation as separate details is linked, item by item, through **the coherent, unitary world of our intuitions.** Through thinking we join together into one everything that we separated through perceiving.

The segment of the world that I perceive as my subject is run through by the stream of the universal world process. With regard to my perception, I am at first confined within the boundary of my skin. But what is contained within this skin belongs to the cosmos as a whole. Therefore, **for a relationship to exist between my organism and an object outside me, it is not at all necessary for something of the object to slip into me or to impress itself on my mind** like a signet ring on wax.

The forces acting within my skin are the same as those existing outside it. Therefore, I really am the things: to be sure, not "I" as a perceived subject, but "I" as a part of the universal world process. The percept of the tree lies with my I in the same whole. The universal world process calls forth equally the percept of the tree there, and the percept of my I here. Were I a world-creator, not a world-knower, then object and

subject (percept and I) would arise in one act. For they determine each other mutually. As world knower, I can find the common element of the two, as two sides of being that belong together, only through thinking, which relates them to each other through concepts. **Nothing is given to us directly except through thinking and perceiving.**

The moment a percept emerges on the horizon of my observation, thinking, too, is activated in me. **An element of my thought-system—a specific intuition, a concept— unites with the percept.** Then, when the percept disappears from my field of vision, what remains? What remains is my intuition, with its relationship to the specific percept that formed in the moment of perceiving.

A mental picture is nothing but an intuition related to a specific percept. It is a concept, once linked to a percept, for which the relation to that percept has remained. A mental picture, then, is an individualized concept. Making mental pictures already gives our conceptual life an individual stamp.

The full reality of a thing is revealed to us in the moment of observation, out of the merging of a concept and a percept. Through a percept, the concept receives an individualized form, a relationship to that specific percept. The concept survives in us in this individual form, with its characteristic relationship to the percept, and forms the mental picture of the corresponding thing.

A mental picture stands between a percept and a concept. A mental picture is the specific concept that points to the percept. Reality reveals itself to us as percepts and concepts; the subjective representation of that reality reveals itself as mental pictures.

Thinking is the element through which we participate in the universal process of the cosmos; feeling is the element through which we can withdraw into the confines of our own being. Our thinking unites us with the world; our feeling leads us back into ourselves and makes us individuals. Feeling is the means by which concepts first gain concrete life.

Our concepts connect themselves to our percepts. We think universal concepts in our own special way. This characteristic quality is a result of our standpoint in the world, of the sphere of perception connected to our place in life. A natural law, after all, is nothing other than a conceptual expression for the connection between certain percepts.

The elements needed to explain reality are to be drawn from the two spheres of perceiving and thinking. To experience the essence of thinking—that is, actively to

elaborate the conceptual world—is something completely different from the experience of something perceptible through the senses. Whatever senses human beings might have, not one could give us reality if our thinking did not permeate what is perceived through them with concepts. **However constituted, any sense permeated by concepts in this way offers human beings the possibility of living in reality.**

We must realize that every perceptual picture takes its form from the organization of the perceiving entity, but that the perceptual picture permeated by an actually experienced thinking contemplation leads us into reality. The insight that every percept gives only a part of the reality hidden within it, and that it thus directs us away from its own reality. This insight is then joined by another—that **thinking leads us into the part of the percept's reality that was hidden by the percept itself.**

The deepening of cognition depends on the forces of intuition that live in thinking. In the experience of thinking, such intuition can immerse itself either more or less deeply in reality. The essence of the human is determined not only by the kind of immediate perception with which we confront ourselves through our organization, but also by our excluding other things from this immediate perception. Just as both the conscious waking state and the unconscious state of sleep are necessary for life, so **both the sphere of sense percepts and a (much greater) sphere of elements that are not sense-perceptible, in the field from which sense percepts originate, are necessary for human self-experience.**

•our spirit•

It should also be kept in mind that the idea of the percept must not be confused with that of external sense perception, which is only a special case of it. Everything both sensory and spiritual that meets a human being is here taken to be a “percept” until it is grasped by the actively elaborated concept. “Senses” of the kind normally meant by the word are not necessary to have percepts of soul or spirit.

The world comes to meet me as a multiplicity, a sum of separate details. As a human being, I am myself one of these details, an entity among other entities. We call this form of the world simply the given and—insofar as we do not develop it through conscious activity but find it ready-made—we call it percept. **Within the world of percepts, we perceive ourselves. But if something did not emerge out of this self-percept that proved capable of linking both percepts in general and also the sum of all other percepts with the percept of our self, our self-percept would remain simply one among many.**

This emerging something, however, is no longer a mere percept; nor is it, like percepts, simply present. It is produced through activity and initially appears linked to what we perceive as our self, but its inner meaning reaches beyond the self. It adds conceptual determinates to individual percepts, but these conceptual determinates relate to one another and are grounded in a whole. **It determines conceptually what is achieved through self-perception conceptually, just as it determines all other percepts. It places this as the subject or “I” over against objects. This “something” is thinking, and the conceptual determinates are concepts and ideas.** Thus, thinking first expresses itself in the percept of the self, but it is not merely subjective, for the self characterizes itself as subject only with the help of thinking. Such self-reference in thought is one way that we determine our personality in life. Through it, we lead a purely conceptual existence. Through it, we feel ourselves as thinking beings.

Feeling, like perceiving, always appears before cognizing. First, we merely feel ourselves as existing; and, in the course of our gradual development, we reach the point at which, out of our own dimly felt existence, the self concept dawns upon us. But what emerges for us only later is originally inseparably united with feeling.

Feeling is a purely individual act. It is a relationship of the outer world to our subject, insofar as that relationship finds expression in a purely subjective experience. Feeling and willing warm the human soul even when we look back and recollect their original state, while thinking all too easily leaves us cold. It seems to dry out the life of the soul. Yet this is only the sharply contoured shadow of the reality of thinking—a reality interwoven with light, dipping down warmly into the phenomena of the world. **This dipping down occurs with a power that flows forth in the activity of thinking itself— the power of love in spiritual form.**

For whoever turns toward essential thinking finds within it both feeling and will, and both of these in the depths of their reality. Whoever turns aside from thinking toward “pure” feeling and willing loses the true reality of feeling and willing. If we experience thinking intuitively, we also do justice to the experience of feeling and will.

For cognition, the concept of a tree is determined by the percept of a tree. Faced with a specific percept, I can **select** only a very specific concept **out of the general conceptual system.** The connection between a concept and a percept is indirectly and objectively determined by thinking about the percept. The percept’s connection with its concept is recognized after the act of perception; but their belonging together is determined by the situation itself.

Thinking can be beheld directly as a self-enclosed entity. To observe thinking is to live, during the observation, immediately within the weaving of a self-supporting spiritual entity. We could even say that whoever wants to **grasp the essence of the spirit** in the form in which it first presents itself to human beings can do so in the self-sustaining activity of thinking.

In examining thinking itself, two things coincide that otherwise must always appear as separated: concepts and percepts. Only one part of reality is present in the percept and that we experience the other part—which belongs to it and is necessary for it to appear as full reality—in the permeation of the percept by thinking. We shall then see, in **what appears in consciousness as thinking**, not a shadowy copy of reality, but a **spiritual essence that sustains itself**. Of this spiritual essence we can say that it becomes present to our consciousness through intuition. **Intuition is the conscious experience, within what is purely spiritual, of a purely spiritual content. The essence of thinking can be grasped only through intuition.**

For our organization has no effect on the essence of thinking but rather retreats when the activity of thinking appears. Our organization suspends its own activity—it makes room—and, in the space that has been made free, thinking appears. The effective essence in thinking has a double function. First, it represses the human organization's own activity and, second, it replaces that activity with itself.

The highest stage of individual life is conceptual thinking without reference to a specific perceptual content. We determine the content of a concept out of the conceptual sphere through pure intuition. Such a concept initially contains no reference to specific percepts.

Indeed, we are only truly human to the extent that we are free. As human beings, we must each unite our own concept with the percept of “human” through our own activity. Concept and percept coincide here only if we ourselves make them coincide. But we can only do so if we have discovered the concept of the free spirit, which is our own concept. In the objective world, the percept is divided from the concept by the way we are organized; in cognition we overcome this division. Nature makes human beings merely natural creatures; society makes them law-abiding actors; **but they can only make themselves into free beings.**

Only through the experience of intuitive thinking can we can find our total, self-contained existence within the universe. Thinking destroys the illusion of perceiving and integrates our individual existence into the life of the cosmos. The unity of the conceptual world,

which contains objective percepts, also includes the content of our subjective personality. Thinking gives us the true form of reality, as a unity enclosed within itself, while **the multiplicity of percepts is only an illusion** conditioned by our organization.

Thinking simultaneously encompasses the subjective and the objective, and that full reality is conveyed in the union of percept with concept. Only as long as we regard the laws that permeate and determine percepts in the form of abstract concepts are we dealing with something purely subjective. The content of a concept, joined to a percept by thinking, is not subjective. For the content of this concept is taken not from the subject, but from reality. It is the part of reality that perceiving cannot reach. It is experience, but not experience transmitted by perceiving.

Percepts are the part of reality that is given objectively, concepts are the part that is given subjectively through intuition. Our mental organization tears reality into these two factors. One factor is apparent to perceiving; the other to intuition. Only the union of the two—the percept integrating itself lawfully into the universe—is full reality. **If we consider mere perception alone, we do not have reality, only disconnected chaos;** if, on the other hand, we consider only the lawfulness of percepts, we are dealing merely with abstract concepts. Abstract concepts contain no reality. **Reality lies in thinking observation that does not one-sidedly examine either concepts or percepts by themselves, but rather considers the union of both.**

Monism, in contrast, shows that **thinking is neither subjective nor objective, but a principle that spans both sides of reality.** When we observe with thinking, we execute a process that itself belongs to the order of real events. **Through thinking, we overcome, in experience itself, the one-sidedness of mere perceiving.** Monism shows that, in cognizing, we grasp reality in its true form, not in a subjective picture that interposes itself between ourselves and reality. **Monism finds this universal divine life in reality itself.**

Thinking leads all perceptual subjects to the common conceptual unity within all multiplicity. The unitary world of ideas expresses itself in them as in a multiplicity of individuals. As long as we understand ourselves merely through self-perception, we see ourselves as the separate human beings that we are; as soon as we notice the world of ideas that lights up in us, embracing everything separate, we see what is absolutely real light up livingly within us.

The conceptual content of another human being is also my own conceptual content, and I see the other as other only as long as I am perceiving, and not once I am thinking. Each

person's thinking embraces only a part of the total world of ideas and, to that extent, individuals also differ through the actual content of their thinking. But **the contents exist within a self-enclosed whole that contains the thought contents of all human beings. The universal, primordial Being permeating all humanity thus takes hold of us through our thinking. Life within reality, filled with thought content, is at the same time life in God.**

In truth, the human spirit never moves beyond the reality in which we live. Nor does it need to, for **everything needed to explain the world lies within it.** We can think only the concepts of reality; to find reality itself, we also need to perceive.

Intuitive thinking can be experienced purely spiritually, and through which every percept is placed within reality during the act of cognition. The only question is **whether we can**, from the viewpoint of intuitively experienced thinking alone, **await perception not only of what is sensory, but also of what is spiritual?** We can indeed wait for this. For even if, on one hand, intuitively experienced **thinking is an active process performed within the human spirit**, on the other hand, **it is also a spiritual percept grasped with no sensory organ.** It is a percept in which the perceiver himself or herself is active; and it is an activity of one's self that is simultaneously perceived. **In intuitive thinking, human beings are also transferred into a spiritual world as perceivers.** What approaches us in that world as a percept, in the same way as the spiritual world of our own thinking, we recognize as the world of spiritual perception.

•our spirit•

As soon as we experience it, the spiritual perceptual world cannot be anything strange to us as human beings, because we already have in intuitive thinking an experience of a purely spiritual character. **The experience of thinking, properly understood, is already an experience of spirit.** But a living grasp of what is meant in this book by intuitive thinking will naturally lead onward to a living entry into the world of spiritual perception.

Sensory phenomenon reveals something else that it is indirectly. Its presentation before me is, at the same time, its extinguishing as a mere sense phenomenon. But what it manifests during that extinguishing compels me, as a thinking being, to extinguish my own thinking for the period of its activity and to replace it with its thinking. I grasp this other thinking in my own thinking as an experience, as I do with my own. **I have really perceived the thinking of the other person.**

One must lift oneself into the ethereal realm of concepts if one is to experience every aspect of existence. We must be able to confront an idea while experiencing it; otherwise,

we fall into its bondage. We can take possession of the world of ideas to use them for our human goals. **Ideas become powers of life. Then we not merely know about things, but have made knowing into a real, self-governing organism.**

Perception as a Path of Spiritual Transcendence

Perception is a bridge to the spiritual world and the beings who live there. Once a human being has refined his thinking, it becomes evident that thought is the bridge to the hierarchical beings and connects the work they do in this world and the spiritual world. In a very real way, our thinking colors our perception so much that it is fair to say that thinking creates our world, both inner and outer. What we believe we are seeing in perception is what we then see and find in the outer world. The mind-state of the perceiver is the key factor controlling perception. The free thinker can either see heaven or hell in her environment; it all depends on her worldview or cosmology. If your cosmology espouses that the outer world of matter is illusion and suffering, then that is what you will find. If your cosmology encompasses the belief that you are a divine being, a god or goddess in the becoming, then the world can present itself to you as a part of a divine order that leads you to Shambhala. Heaven or hell, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.

It is well known from common experience that even though an optimist and a pessimist may live next door to one another, they can actually live in entirely different worlds. They may receive the same perceptual stimuli, yet their personal **worldview translates the percept** to a common concept in their respective worldview. A rainy day may ruin the pessimist's day as he views the weather as dismal and inconvenient. The optimistic gardener, however, might perceive the rain, on the parched earth, as a blessing from heaven.

Ideally, the aspirant should be able to enfold and appreciate all twelve worldviews that Rudolf Steiner attributed to the twelve senses and the twelve signs of the Zodiac. Each perspective can be seen as perfectly valid, even though one perspective may sound quite different from the other eleven points of view. No *one* perception is ever perfectly correct or final. Perceptions are alive and filled with infinite possibilities to make sure that every human being can experience a shared percept in entirely different ways. Hence, it is always a good practice in thinking to reserve judgment and make sure to walk around the question and view it from at least twelve points of view before deciding you have "perceived" something. A good worldview is one that does not limit its perceptions to just one vantage point.

Perception handles the content of consciousness in different manners and evolves over time as the experience of the observer grows. The more the observer can objectively surrender to the content of perception and create an empty space within himself to hold the full activity of perception, the more the spiritual world will pour living perceptions into his soul and spirit. This

give and take of perception and thinking is a type of “breathing of the spirit” that brings living substance into the heart and blood of the aspirant and gives life to what seemingly looks like dead matter. Once perception is trained to hear and understand the language of the spirit with new supersensible organs of spiritual perception, heaven can appear all around us.



For initiates ready to step beyond ordinary time and space and conventional intellectual exercises of Anthroposophy, *The Gospel of Sophia* trilogy offers just such an introduction to the Being Sophia, through three biographies that unveil the Mother, Daughter, and Holy Sophia. A path of “labors” takes the aspirant through the twelve archetypes that comprise the Divine Feminine Trinity. In Volume 2, the path of revelation and apocalypse is unfolded to provide the aspirant with the wisdom to interpret the symbols associated with crossing the threshold into the spiritual world through initiation. Volume 3 of *The Gospel of Sophia*, the *Sophia Christos Initiation*, is a spiritual self-initiation that further advances the aspirant’s process of ascension. This self-initiation process is in harmony with sacred rites and rituals of the ancient mystery schools updated with the spectrum of wisdom given by the Divine Feminine Trinity. Through the three volumes of *The Gospel of Sophia*, the aspirant can find new archetypes and spiritual icons that seed the future Sixth Epoch.

The physiological, psychological, theological, philosophical, and scientific description of the Sophia found in the human body and the world create a comprehensive vision of the Eternal Feminine and Her place alongside the Male Trinity and human spiritual development. Thus, the injunction of our age is:

Know Her and you will Know Thyself.

If you received this PDF from a friend, thank them and return the blessing by freely sharing this paper with your spiritual friends and colleagues. These materials are available to readers who receive our newsletter from www.ourspirit.com.

Our website also includes video lectures on Sophia in the section entitled **Our Spirit Talks**.

Our Spirit readers span the globe and together we can awaken the true Isis-Sophia. Be a part of **Our Spirit** and welcome the Satya Yuga, the Age of Light.

