

The Healing Power of Lively Thought

by

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The training of thought and memory

We need only look around a living room and it is soon clear that for all of the perceptible objects, from the table and chairs to the simplest things used on a daily basis, we owe our thanks to the creative activities of human hands. However, their work would not have been possible without a hidden inner activity. It points us to the mental-spiritual place where human thinking happens and we see that it is a wellspring of all outer creativity. The purposeful order in someone's kitchen is thanks to the power of thinking just as much as the answer to the question of why the oven quit or the construction of a bridge over a river. People try, with their thinking, to penetrate the atomic structure of a grain of sand. Through thinking, one is placed within the polarity between the sense world and the extrasensory world. Within this expanse one tries to justify one's inner standpoint in the same way that one stands with both feet on the ground in the sense world. Thinking imparts to people a consciousness that goes beyond mere self awareness. It is the gift of reason that first allowed human beings to take a personal stand in the world; to find their world view.

Thinking is a prerequisite for every human encounter because it is the source for understanding, trust, and common activity. We should ask ourselves once: Are we really conscious enough of the importance of thought to our humanity and our way of life? Some people get a clear message that the shining light of the power of thought is not something to be taken for granted – when they meet a mentally handicapped child or an old senile person whose thinking capacity has become severely limited and dulled. What a chasm opens up between us when, for whatever reason, someone is not able to follow our words with their own thought processes. What an uplifting feeling comes over us when we feel we are understood.

The way in which each person masters his/her thought life is an important measure for the degree of development and maturity of his/her personality. Thinking must also develop. It must be learned and practiced. And, since one can only educate oneself through thinking, this training must be seen as an important duty. Every advance in creative thought of an individual brings about a corresponding advance in all of humanity.

Is there a connection between thinking and health?

This connection is really very deep. Clear, concentrated, logical, and yet flexible thinking is one of the most necessary qualities, a prerequisite even, for one's mental-spiritual health. The opposite is apparent in the mental retardation of a child who is brain damaged by encephalitis, the loss of thinking ability of a sclerotic, or the insanity of a schizophrenic. All of these things show how important thinking is to our physical instrument. In an earlier article in this Waldorf Journal Project it was pointed out that the widespread condition of overstimulation so apparent today also attacks our thinking. The personality may become weakened in the center of its being. The individual who exhibits a lack of concentration and nervous, jumpy thinking is obviously no longer capable of assuming large responsibilities at work. He may also become more insecure and less capable of carrying on healthy personal relationships.

Inflexible and one-sided thinking not only limits one's horizons, but it also carries the danger of early hardening of the thinking instrument, even brain sclerosis. People who work in highly specialized, technical, or abstract fields are at risk for this, especially if there are other developmental challenges: if one started school too early, experienced a one-sided intellectual training, or been given high doses of vitamin D in childhood to prevent rickets. Blurry, unclear, and fantasy-filled thinking also bring other problems and dangers that affect one's mental and physical health.

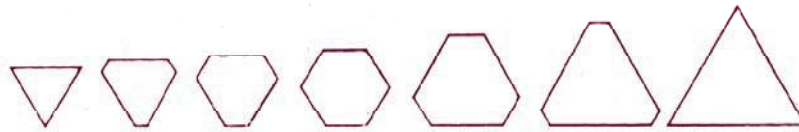
The following shows how every person can care for his or her thinking ability through concrete exercises which awaken one to activity and school one in gaining conclusiveness and clarity of thought.

Concentration exercises

Today the waning of the ability to concentrate and remember is so widespread that more and more people are seeking help for this problem. It is a fact that accurate retrieval of a memory and unerring retention are requirements for right thinking. Without the ability to concentrate, we lose our train of thought and it will, in time, become erratic, imprecise, and inconsequential. Therefore, we begin with a simple exercise that will help us to take the inner reins in hand. For such exercises it is recommended that one have inner and outer quiet, sit in a relaxed position, and shield oneself from outer sense impressions.

We start by imagining an equilateral triangle and begin to equally blunt the three corners with three straight lines which we push further and further to the inside. We now have a continually changing hexagon that goes through a stage of being a symmetrical hexagon and finally transforms into a small triangle standing on its point. We can repeat the process with this new triangle over and over until the form shrinks into infinity. If anyone is disturbed by the triangle becoming smaller, then he can just enlarge the end triangle until it is a comfortable size to begin again. The same exercise, although more difficult, can be undertaken using a square or a pentagram. Or, we give

ourselves the task of finding all the possible diagonals in a square, pentagram, hexagon, etc. that is inside a circle. Whatever the imagined figures, they must be brought clearly into our consciousness.



A different challenge is presented by using spatial figures. Think of a figure made of four equilateral triangles (tetragon) or six squares (dice). Connect the center points of the planes within the figure using straight lines. Inside the tetragon a new, smaller tetragonal appears and in the cube, a new figure with eight sides, the octahedron. One can repeat this process with the octahedron until the cube “disappears,” whereby within the same a second, smaller die appears. When we take the same and stretch it out to the size of the starting figure, we can continue the exercise in rhythmic repetitions for a few minutes. The important thing is that we keep all other thoughts from our minds and concentrate only on the imagery of the lines.

Another concentration exercise consists of retrieving certain images from our memory, something like on different days the forms of different flowers or trees that we have actually seen. We allow our inner gaze to rest for a few minutes upon a particular oak tree, the next day a beech tree, the day after that a poplar or a pine tree. The next step can be directing our inner gaze to a well-known plant, perhaps a marigold, and letting it sprout from seed and grow into bloom. After one week of this exercise, we can start with the fully bloomed plant and follow it through all the stages of wilting. In the third phase of this exercise we let both processes flow into each other. After we have practiced these concentration exercises, we can go on to actual thinking exercises.

Training objective and logical thought

We differentiate between objective or nonobjective, logical or illogical thought processes and the corresponding clear or unclear, well-defined or blurred thoughts. Not only scientists, but every person in everyday life needs objectivity of thought for acquiring real knowledge and reality-based, sensible behavior.

To school our thinking in objectivity, clarity, and logical consistency, Rudolf Steiner recommended making use of a simple, everyday object such as a pencil. One could also use a match, a nail, a pair of scissors, or anything similar. First of all, we describe to ourselves the material used to make this object, the size, form and color. Then we make a clear connection of these qualities with the use and function of the object. Third, we try to imagine where and from what this comes and how it is produced. We may find that

our lack of knowledge prevents us from going any further with our thoughts on the object. Perhaps we do not know enough about the production of this object and that could be an impetus to look into it further. We can “think about” the same object over a period of several days or we can take related objects in a series such as a safety pin, a knitting needle, an injection needle, and a crochet hook. Here again, we must avoid all distracting thoughts and concentrate on developing only those thoughts that have to do with the objects.

Working puzzles is a thinking sport. Solving puzzles stimulates concentration, sharpness of thought, imagination. It would be wonderful if once a week or once a month the television was turned off in favor of working on a puzzle.

Crossword puzzles, however, often have a corrupting influence on logically consistent thought. Searching out words that have no innate connection and pressing them into an abstract graphic scheme while consciously shutting out their content of thought, represents the opposite of a meaningful train of thought and a mutilation of the words. Certain destructive tendencies in the mind are thereby encouraged. Instead there are many examples of meaningful, imaginative, challenging, enjoyable and humorous puzzles.

Cultivating attentiveness

Human thought starts with perception and goes through the senses. These deliver the various raw materials that, stored in memory, can be processed by thought and which we will want to penetrate with the light of knowledge. In a manufacturing plant substandard raw materials make processing more difficult or devalue the product. This metaphor can be applied to the mind. That is why we should pay careful attention to the quality of our sense perceptions through exact visual observations and alert listening. Here, also, we can proceed with exercises. During a walk we try to observe all the nuances of green in a leaf. Another time we look at the forms of different leaves in all their variety, or we listen to the birds and consciously differentiate between all the different songs. On the street we can unobtrusively make ourselves aware of all the different clothing, eye colors, or ear forms of the people that we see. Such attentiveness during observation is good for our thinking because it requires the same power of mind that we use internally to follow a train of thought. Within this bridging connection between perception and thinking is also the explanation of superficial perceptions will eventually dull our thinking.

Because of the conditions of today’s civilization, it is a challenge for people to enliven their sensory impressions with attentiveness, awe, or interest. How often one must close one’s ears to the cacophony of a big city, or one’s eyes to the plethora of media images. To achieve a healing balance to this situation one must make opportunities for quiet observation and listening. In this way, meaningful, concentrated thought can be cultivated.

One should become aware of the wisdom of nature that is inherent in the formation of a crystal, or a plant, in the movement of an animal, or a planet!

If Tycho Brahe had not retained the thousands of single precise observations of the movement of Mars in its orbit, Kepler's thoughts on this material could not have resulted in his discovery of the three great laws that rule our planetary system. We must encounter the things of the world with a sense of trust that they are wisely formed and that, while practicing attentive observation, our unconscious mind is meeting this wisdom which then steps into the light of consciousness by our thoughts.

For this reason we should not try to quickly understand or analyze a sense perception, but rather through repeated, relaxed observation, cultivate this sense of trust. Rudolf Steiner recommended the daily observation of the sunset with all of the accompanying meteorological facts. Practicing withholding judgment about, say, the weather for the coming day, will help form a new, inner sense.

Cultivating memory

The life of our conscious mind is based on the foundation of our memory. Every act of thought is supported by the ability to remember. A dependable and true memory is the central characteristic of spiritual health. The increasing number of complaints about a "bad memory" is a serious symptom of the overstimulation that is threatening our inner existence and may even be at the heart of premature aging.

Memory is not strengthened when one tries to memorize a poem, for example, by "devouring" it ten times over any more than a flower can be brought to bloom by watering it ten times a day. Memory is deeply connected to life activity and the mysterious rhythm of our organism. Reading a poem every morning and evening in quiet devotion for one week will result in the poem suddenly "being there" in one's memory with seemingly no effort.

Experiences that move our soul, in which we take a lively interest, remain more easily in our memory. Strengthening the memory is therefore not only a question of one's intellectual alertness and the ability to concentrate, but, to a high degree, depends upon the ability to be amazed, upon one's strength of devotion; that is, upon the qualities of the heart. The more intensively we take something in with "our whole soul," the more definitely we will own it internally. All of the exercises described above can therefore also be considered good for consciously cultivating the memory. We begin always with careful, practiced, and conscious attentiveness to all of our sense perceptions. Whoever does not allow enough time to mentally connect with their experiences will, in time, spoil their memories. That is why it is so harmful to let the radio blare while doing something else such as writing a letter, or engaging in some other activity while eating, such as reading the newspaper.

To school the memory – and thinking – it is furthermore useful when reading a book to concisely and clearly summarize in one's mind what was read previously before picking up the book again. For those who are unpracticed at this it may help to write out a short summary. Beyond this,

there are two further important basic exercises taken from the *Study of Man* by Rudolf Steiner.

Purposely putting an object away: Every evening before bed put some object (jewelry, a wristwatch, or glasses) in a place where it usually would not be so that you can retrieve it the next morning. Say to yourself while doing this: “I have put this object in this place.” Further, hold the image in mind of where the object is and what the surroundings look like (for instance, parallel and two inches away from the edge of the rug). “This bringing together of the mental-spiritual core of one’s being, as it is referred to with the word ‘I,’ with the imagery, is that which can . . . very effectively sharpen our memory.” (Munich, January 11, 1912). Such an exercise, carried out consistently for years, contributes to a high degree to the consolidation of our being. Through this discipline our “I” will be more “in the picture” about what it does and experiences. Among other things, this exercise prevents the somewhat neurotic behavior characterized by someone having to look twice to make sure they have turned off the lights in the basement or if they have really locked the front door.

Thinking in reverse order: When remembering something the mind turns inward and immerses itself in its own unconscious depths similar to what a pearl diver does in the sea. Our mind is strengthened if we think of something such as a poem, a story, an act in a play, or a walk and then go through it in the reverse order. It is especially useful if every evening before going to sleep we do such an exercise while recalling some event during the day or the course of the day itself. The effort required to turn around all those images and recall them true to memory strengthens the memory capacity.

All of the exercises will only give the desired results if they are done with patience, perseverance, and in rhythmic repetitions over a long period of time. A yearly appointment calendar can make it easier to plan, alternate, review the progress (or lack thereof!), and also increase the degree of difficulty.

The healing power of lively thought

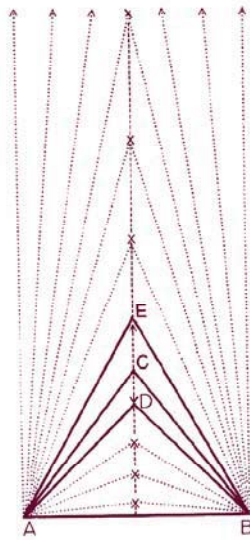
Being blessed with the “heavenly light” of reason is the greatest gift that lifts human beings out of the realm of the animals. Through reason’s activity, human beings have become the most conscious beings in creation allowing them to think about themselves. In the earlier part of this article we discussed the logical objective side of thought. In this second part we will be dealing more with the creative nature of thought in connection with the mental-soul being of all humanity.

Education for flexible thinking

It is imperative that every person during his life have certain fixed tenets in order to draw upon a standpoint in any given situation. How often, however, do we encounter people whose thinking appears to be rigid and unbending, who allow no objections, hold their opinion to be the only true and correct

one, and can not, internally, even make the attempt to meet another person. Here we see the evidence of stubbornness and rigidity of thought, which can result in natural, physiological ailments such as calcification or early mental aging process. How can we remain young and elastic in our thinking?

We must be clear about this in our own minds and try to experience how every thought is capable of countless variations. We must never mistake the often accidental or subjective formation of single thoughts with their ideal, truth-gripping core. An example may help to clarify this. When looking at a house gable we can form in our mind the image of an equilateral triangle.



But nobody would ever think that this triangle is the only correct and possible design for a house gable and that all houses must be built according to this design. Healthy and true thinking teaches us that there are at least two kinds of such triangles; namely, the acute triangle and the obtuse triangle. But if we really think through the idea “equilateral triangle” and try to look at it “from all sides,” then we realize that there is an endless number of such triangles (see drawing).

Our fixed idea of the gable house has now been brought into flux and point C moves up and down on the center perpendicular baseline of AB. The closer point C gets to the baseline the more obtuse will our triangle become. Our thinking can, at any time during this process, halt the flowing form and cause some specific form to crystallize out, perhaps when it has reached a certain stage in its relationship to the other triangles. Perhaps when the right-angled triangle (D) is recognized as the transitional form between the acute and obtuse triangles, or when during the formation of the equilateral triangle (E), the concept of the triangle as an ideal form is illuminated.

When point C reaches the baseline, the base angles of A and B, which are becoming ever more acute, will equal zero and the obtuse angle of C will end at 180 degrees. The triangle stiffens at the limitation of line AB. But by following all the possible acute triangles, point C finally ends up at an enormous distance whereby the acute angle becomes smaller and smaller. When it has reached zero degrees then the two angles of A and B are ninety degrees and the sides of the triangle are parallel. Our triangle has become an open form connected to the infinitely far away periphery of the world.

There is much to be learned from this thinking game. Actually there should be no comprehensively-thinking and contemplative people who do not know the difference between the general idea and specially designed thought forms; that is, between *imagination* and *idea*. This differentiation is of fundamental importance for our thinking. Many people mistake their personal imaginations for the fundamental idea they are based upon. They believe they are in possession of the whole truth thereby actually losing

sight of the truth as a higher-ordered totality, as a source of the creative dynamic. Or, they may believe that a thought is exhausted after considering two or three aspects of it. Then thinking becomes narrow and rigid. The tendency of people to want to come to a clearly defined or conclusive idea as quickly as possible is understandable. It not only meets the tendency to what is most comfortable, but also the desire for a dependable hold and a secure possession. However, the “idea” of something draws away from the well-defined objectivity of the sense world on which our thought capacity is based and leads our thinking into the nebulous unknown. But that is just what energizes our thinking and gives it elasticity and flexibility, its temporary freedom from the “dead” thought form and its inner lifting into the dynamic of the pure idea (to which all individual ideas are subject), and its crossover into the inner stream of ideas as the creative principle from which everything flows. Only by first thoroughly thinking about the equilateral triangle did a deeper understanding open up of the special case of the flat, obtuse triangle (seen in the Greek Parthenon) or for the acute angled quasi infinity-seeking of the triangles in the roof of a Gothic cathedral.

We can certainly not come up with a true-to-life idea of the apple by looking at only one apple. We must get to know the apple as large and small, ripe and unripe, all the different varieties, as a bloom, after it has decayed into seed, and how it compares to other fruits in the same family. In a similar way our idea of the “split-hoofed cud-chewers” must be so rich and lively that it can be changed into a goat on a steep, overhanging cliff, or into a proud elk in the mountain forest, a deer on a grassy meadow at the edge of the woods, or a fat cow grazing the juicy grass of a pasture. We can bring every opinion, every thought, and every judgment into the flow and try to illuminate the problem up for discussion from as many sides as possible, and use thoughts discovered in different situations, before we become fixed on a specific, limited idea.

The courage to rethink something and the readiness to give up one’s thoughts as mental possessions and smelt them in the fire of ideas make us mentally elastic and allow us to grow out of a subjectively colored, all too limited self, towards the truth. Such action makes us feel internally connected to the spirituality of the world, something which many thinkers of the Middle Ages were experiencing when they spoke of ideas as the universal language. They understood it to be and they experienced it as spiritual reality.

Thinking as a source of self control

There are people who can not get some thoughts out of their heads. Their ideas have become quasi independent and press in on the mind like strange, unwelcome guests. This is one of the many forms of compulsive nervous disorders. All neurotic symptoms are, in the final analysis, expressions of a weakened or darkened ‘I,’ which is the central core of our being. Someone who can no longer control his ‘I,’ and therefore himself, is in great danger, as can be seen with all the different kinds of neuroses that have made appearance.

But how do we find the way to our 'I' in its true form? No matter what uplifting experiences may strengthen our self confidence, the only way we can find our true 'I' consciousness is through thought. Mere definitions or philosophical speculations are of little value and possibly even a hindrance. Only one's own experience can be of help.

We want to once again activate our 'I' through thought in order to observe it during this activity. We think of a number of points scattered over a surface and assign one of them the special role of fixed point A (see figure 2). Now all the other points can be arranged so that their distance from point A is equal to the line AB. To do this we must make the points move. Some must be pushed away and other brought closer (see figure 3). Point A becomes the center point of a drawn circle, enclosed in a line upon which, as we soon see, there is place for countless more points that could meet the same conditions (see figure 4).

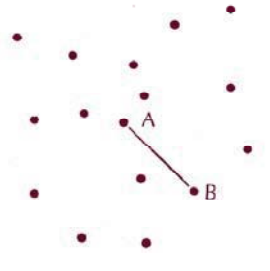


Figure 2

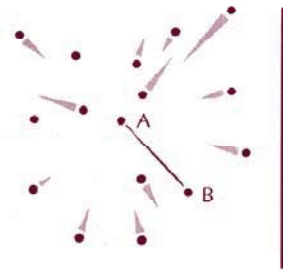


Figure 3

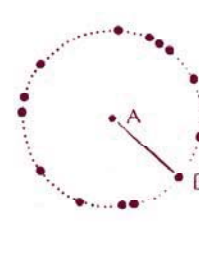


Figure 4

What has happened? We have designated one single point to be the main point and arranged all the other points in a relationship. We discover within ourselves an instance of ordering that turns out to be a controlling, leading element in our mind's realm of thought. This mysterious element shows itself to be an active, organized being in that it brings the points into movement and arranges them into a form. And, the fact that it creates the form (the circle) which was not previously there and understands its nature, this element shows itself to be a creative principle that enriches our minds. It is the same principle that not only ordered and arranged the points, but also is the source of all order in our lives. It connects all thoughts, groups them around itself, gathers or lets fall away, and regulates the thought process. This element that controls the points would like to control everything that happens in the mental realm: perceptions, memories, feelings, drives and urges, and passions. In observing our thinking during our little geometric example we encounter our 'I' as the element that is above all activity, centralized, creative, and master over the mental realm.

One can hardly be too conscious of this 'I' as one's true, central core of being which forms the actual substantial center point of one's personality. With the triangle we had first to work through the limited imagination to the

living idea. In this way everyone can and should leave their habitual and certainly limited view of the 'I' and come to the real idea of the 'I.' One should try to penetrate it from all sides and through this gain a deeper understanding of one's own truth, of one's own being. One will awaken the source of all concentration, be energized for self control, and gain a new, conscious anchoring in one's eternal core of being. To grasp the 'I' in thinking leads to a healthy increase in self confidence that has nothing to do with arrogance but only with real self knowledge. The security in oneself that is created permeates one's entire mental life and protects against many dangers that appear out of our spiritually deprived civilization.

The healing aspect of truth

In thinking through what is in our consciousness, we turn away from the perceptible outside world towards the inside. We leave the outer reality and simply live in images which pale in our thoughts and ideas to thin, unlively abstractions such as the mathematical forms of a natural law, for example. Thinking gives the appearance of withdrawing into the loneliness of one's mind behind the bones in our skull like a snail crawling into its shell. Behind this understanding of thought lies a complete misunderstanding of the true nature of thinking and its function, even a misunderstanding of the human being as a whole. This victory of this kind of understanding has led, in the development of Western civilization, to the belief that ideas themselves have no objective reality. Today it has become a fundamental tenet of ruling materialism that all spiritual facts are mere "ideological exaggerations." With that we stand before a fateful one-sidedness in human thinking, its complete rigor mortis, its mortal sin.

Goethe said: "The intellect is oriented to what has become; reason to what is becoming." The nominalist experiences that his "already become" thoughts are illuminated in his consciousness, that is, created by him. However, he is unable to penetrate to the experience of the idea as the rich source of his thoughts. That is why he is caught in the web of his own intellectual activity. When now this purely abstract way of thinking is turned to the idea of the human 'I,' it has disastrous results for humanity. Since the 'I' in its spiritual nature can never be perceived from the outside but only understood through thinking, to intellectual understanding it pales into a shadow, to a mere "label." According to the nominalist point of view people have no independent core being that can lift them up out of reach of the power of heredity. A human being is merely a member of the species known as higher mammals. The conviction that one is an individuality is rejected by nominalism as mere fantasy.

There are serious consequences of the one-sidedness of such thinking that is lost in materialism, for religion, ethics, and social interactions among human beings. Seen from a physician's perspective, however, it has a sickening effect on the mental life of human beings and finally, also on their physical health. Because it does not recognize, and even denies, the spiritual

core being, it keeps humanity from making full use of its 'I' forces and reason, and robs individuals of the knowledge about the central anchor and point of rest in their being. It carves out one's insides. Materialism, with its 'I' weakening effect, is the actual breeding ground for all kinds of nervousness and mental weaknesses up to and including neuroses and mental illnesses.

For this reason we are especially interested in leading the reader of these pages to an experience of the 'I' in such a way that he/she gets to know the inner source of activity with its dynamic character of reality. An individual who comes upon the real 'I' as the inner principle of becoming, as opposed to the usual, blasé notion, this person has just founded him/herself as a totality. One brings into one's organization a God-given principle without whose intervention in thinking one would remain only half a person. The materialist who believes that he/she must rationally deny the 'I' cuts him/herself from the world spirit and is likewise threatened with sinking down to a subhuman level.

People who make the effort at lively thought can experience the idea of the "I" as an active spirit in humanity. They can also see objective reality in the other ideas that come into their thinking. People do not create truth, but rather they enlighten others when they, through thought, internally overcome the limitations of their being. That is why the Greeks spoke of the ideas as the things that are "viewed." Herein lies the reason of why, for example, the Pythagorean Theorem has not become obsolete, or why, regardless of the differences in the brains of females or males, young or old, white or black, people can concur with each other in thought. The content of our thoughts is based upon the spirituality of the world itself. Those who connect in their thoughts the center points of the hexagon may believe that they have created the idea of the octahedron themselves, but the same octahedron has existed for thousands of years as a structure already in crystals. The ellipse, which we believed "discovered" by our thinking, is the path of the planets' orbits around the Sun. "For those who wish to reach the correct feeling about thinking, I must say: When I can think about things, when I can fathom things through thinking about them, then the thoughts must first be inside the things. The things must be formed according to the thoughts. Only then can I also retrieve thoughts from the things." (Rudolf Steiner)

In thought the mind steps out of the narrowness of subjective limitation into the wide, spiritual horizon. In thought the spirit opens the way out of darkness into the light of truth. In thought the mind, with its own insecurities, encounters the direction-giving powers of the divine foundation of the world. As a thinker, the person steps out of the loneliness of the mind into the universal life of the world and its ideas. This process produces healing energy in our whole life of mind which works against inner insecurity and nervousness, prevents neuroses and schizophrenic symptoms, and drives away depression and anxiety. In the renewal of this original connection of the 'I' to the world spirit lies the prerequisite and foundation for healthy mental-spiritual growth of humanity. "The acceptance of idea as reality is the true communion of humanity." (Rudolf Steiner)

Training the will in thinking

The use of reason as a prerequisite for creative thinking not only challenges the thought capacity of the intellect but also requires the engagement of the whole person. Lively thinking appeals to the feeling for truth and strongly calls to the inner will. Making an effort to achieve clear inner knowledge is a feat of the will. Even in such an insignificant activity as gathering points and rearranging them into a circle we can, at any time experience the will of the human 'I.' Here the will is not active on the outside like when it moves the limbs; it has turned its activity to the inside, to thinking. The thinking-will has removed itself from the body. We experience this when we involuntarily keep the body still while intensively thinking about something. In order to internally understand something we must first "stand still" on the outside. Training of the thinking-will is at the center of all training of thinking and the prerequisite for maintaining and increasing creative energy. This will is called to action in even the simplest concentration exercise. The exercises described here are training for the thinking-will to keep thinking flexible and many-faceted. Rigid or abstract thinking an indication of a weakened thinking-will, one that will not be able to meet today's reality successfully. One who shies away from basic questions such as the meaning of life, weakens himself in the core of their personality.

This will is strengthened when we go through familiar thoughts in reverse order, such as a poem, a song, or an experience. This will is strengthened when we, as often as possible, decide to change a habit. A right-handed person could do one activity with the left hand, a driver could decide to drive only 30 m.p.h. down a stretch of road that is usually traveled at high speed, or one could try to not read the newspaper on a particular day, or not put sugar in the coffee for a few days or a week, or change some other eating habit. Since giving up bad habits has a strengthening effect on the 'I,' it is one of the most satisfying experiences a person can have.

Forming judgments

The ability to form judgments is the highest and most comprehensive function of human thinking. This ability largely determines our attitude about life, our behavior, and our practical activity. For this reason judgments, as well as prejudices, or complete lack of judgment, play a decisive role in human destiny. How difficult can it be to rightly judge a situation, a person, the development of a child, a party, a plan, or a business? It has to do with the fact that judging is a question of thinking but in no way involves only logic or intellectual prowess. The whole person is challenged. We orient ourselves on our experiences accompanied by the uniqueness of our character, and especially our ability to feel. And along with the feeling for truth and truthfulness the ability for intuition must develop so that right judgments and decisions can be made. It all requires exact thinking that clarifies the facts and situations, and, to a certain degree, makes things transparent.

Because of the far reaching effects of our judgments on ourselves as well as on our environment, one should proceed very carefully and avoid making

quick decisions. “But there is nothing in life that does not have a *for* and *against*. It is good when we accustom ourselves to considering not only the *for* or *against* but also the *for and against*. Also as to the things that we do, it is good to consider why, under certain circumstances we would be better off not doing it or . . . to make clear to oneself that there are also reasons against it. This is something that one should not consider uncomfortable.” (Steiner) Our readiness to entertain opposing viewpoints frees us from the subjective, increases our inner flexibility, and strengthens the will.

A further strengthening of the ‘I’ is attained when we withhold our judgment about our fellow human beings and, above all, do not let our personal sympathies and antipathies enter into a judgment. All too often our power of judgment is dimmed and hardens into a prejudice, perhaps because of a flaw in our character, subjective sympathy, or a one-time, accidental experience. “If one was on the receiving end of only one-tenth, let us say, of the judgments he made about the world, if one really experienced them in the soul, it would be more than enough for a lifetime!” (Steiner) We should not judge, out of our feelings of antipathy, others who have perhaps lied to us or made us angry in some way, but rather withhold judgment, wait and observe. Then we can make an objective judgment and maintain our humanity with real presence of spirit.

Is thinking an enemy of the heart?

One can encounter the viewpoint that thinking is some kind of enemy of the soul and that its training represents danger to the development of real feelings. This fear only applies to thinking that is intellectualized, cold, and not truly connected to the reality of life. Actually, just the opposite is true – it is our thoughts that stimulate our feelings. The mere thought of a possible danger releases the feeling of fear.

But thinking is also capable of functioning as a calming, ordering, and transforming force in our feelings and passions. After we have been overrun by an outbreak of feelings, our thinking asks us: How did you come to such a meltdown? What was the reason that this experience affected you so?

With the power of thinking we can objectify our feelings. The fear of a threatening event, like death, for instance, can be transformed by thinking about the immortality of the soul, into feelings of comfort and hope for a higher form of life. There is no feeling that we might have that can not be calmed, explained, stimulated, or impassioned by the light of a new thought.

Those who recognize how important our thoughts are to our life of feeling will proceed all the more carefully with the training and gaining control of their thoughts. Narrow, rigid thinking blunts our experience of feeling. Spiritless thinking is a breeding ground for anxiety. In the expanse of our spiritual horizon and the clarity of lively thinking, our heart also expands.

The reader may realize that the exploration of the theme and the question of self-training raised in this writing are nearly inexhaustible, just like the possibilities for development of the human soul. In conclusion, let it be

emphasized that lively thought is important not only for the mental and physical health of single individuals but can also lead to healing of the social organism. People do not live together as the animals do, ruled by instinct or natural laws. Formation of social life requires creative ideas that are true to life and spirit. Lively thought that is warmed by a heart for truth and given freedom by a genuine quest for knowledge will always open the door to our true, divine-spiritual home.