

The Six Protective Exercises With Their Etheric Powers

by RUDOLF STEINER
Two Formulations
From the "Esoteric School," 1906-1907

THESE ARE THE
TWO AUTHENTIC VERSIONS
AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH.

Rudolf Steiner gave these exercises many times, in written and spoken form, as prerequisite for all esoteric work. But only two formulations seem to exist of the "etheric streams" connected with these exercises; and only one in English, in Guidance in Esoteric Training. The English is unclear in some key passages (including an error in one of the etheric streams).

Christiane Buchinger Marks has translated both formulations for the Newsletter from Anweisungen für eine esoterische Schulung. Aus den Inhalten der "Esoterischen Schule," 1968. Bibl. Survey #42/245.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS OF ESOTERIC DEVELOPMENT

WHAT EVERY STUDENT OF THE ESOTERIC MUST DEMAND OF HIMSELF

Written October 1906 and mimeographed for members of the "Esoteric School"

The following pages describe the conditions on which esoteric development must be based. No one should think that progress will come through any means, inner or outer, if these conditions are not met. All exercises—whether in meditation, concentration, or anything else—will be worthless, even in a certain sense actually harmful, if life is not regulated according to these conditions. No powers can be given you; it is only possible to bring to development the powers already within you. They do not develop by themselves because of outer and inner impediments. The outer impediments are removed through these rules for living; the inner ones, through special instructions regarding meditation, concentration, and so on.

The first requirement is the acquisition of thinking that is entirely clear. For this purpose, free yourself of all aimless, will-o'-the-wisp thoughts. Do this daily, even if only for a short time, about five minutes (the longer, the better). You must become master in the world of your thoughts. You are not master if outer circumstances, your job, some tradition, social relationships—even your nationality, the time of day, or certain obligations, and so forth—generate a particular thought or determine how it is followed to its conclusion. Therefore during this brief time, you must of your own free will empty your soul of the ordinary, everyday thought sequences, and your own initiative must place a thought in the center of your soul. Do not assume that this need be an outstanding or interesting thought; in fact, for esoteric development it is better initially to choose a thought as uninteresting and insignificant as possible. This will best stimulate the self-active forces in thinking, which is precisely the aim of this

exercise, whereas an interesting thought simply pulls your thinking along with it. It is better to work on this requirement of thought control focusing on a pin than on Napoleon the Great.

Tell yourself: "I will start with this thought and join to it through my own inner initiative everything factually connected with it." At the end of this period, this thought should stand before your soul just as colorfully and vividly as at the beginning. Do this exercise day after day for at least one month; you may use a new thought every day, or the same thought several days in a row. Conclude such an exercise by trying to raise to full consciousness the inner feeling of firmness and certainty that, closely observing your soul, you will soon notice. Then end by focusing your thinking upon your head and the middle part of your spine (brain and spinal marrow) as if pouring that feeling into this part of your body.

Having practiced this exercise for about a month, add a second requirement: Try to think of some action that in the ordinary course of your life you certainly would not be likely to perform. Make this action your daily duty, taking care to choose one that can be performed every day for as long a period as possible. Again, it is better to begin with a trivial action you have to force yourself to. For example, daily at a certain hour, determine to water a flower you have bought. After a time, a second, similar action should be added to the first, and later a third, and so on—as many as you can perform while maintaining all your other obligations.

This exercise should also be done for one month. But in the second month, too, you should practice the first exercise as often as possible, though it is a less paramount obligation than in the first month. It must not be neglected, otherwise you would soon notice you are losing the first month's fruits, and that the slovenliness of uncontrolled thinking begins again. You must, in fact, take great care that once you have won these fruits, you never again lose them. On completing such an initiative-strengthening action of the second exercise, with subtle attentiveness, you become aware of the feeling of an inner impulse of activity within the soul; pour this feeling into your body, letting it stream down from your head over your heart.

In the third month, center your life on this new exercise, the cultivation of a certain equanimity toward the fluctuations of pleasure and sorrow, joy and pain; "rejoicing to the heavens, sorrowful unto death" should be deliberately replaced by a steadier mood. Make sure that no joy will carry you away, no sorrow depress you, no experience lead to immoderate anger or vexation, no expectation fill you with anxiety or fear, no situation rob you of your composure, and so on. Do not worry that such an exercise might make you unfeeling or impoverish your emotional life; on the contrary, through this exercise you will soon notice, in place of the former experiences, purer qualities of soul; most important, observing closely you will one day be able to notice an inner calm; pour this

feeling into your body, as you did in the two previous cases. Let it radiate from your heart to your hands, your feet, and finally to your head. This naturally cannot be done at the conclusion of each single exercise, for here it is not a matter of a single exercise but of a sustained attentiveness to your inner life of soul.

At least once every day you should call up this inner calm before your soul, and then perform the exercise of letting this calm stream outward from the heart. Continue with the first and second months' exercises as you did in the second month with the first month's exercise.

In the fourth month as a new exercise take up what is called "a positive attitude." It consists in always seeking the good, the praiseworthy, the beautiful, and so on, in all experiences, all beings, all things. This attribute of soul is best characterized by a Persian legend about Christ Jesus: As He was once walking with His disciples, they saw a dead dog lying by the roadside in a state of advanced decomposition. All the disciples turned away from this ugly sight. Christ Jesus alone stopped and, observing the animal thoughtfully, said, "What beautiful teeth the animal has!" Where the others had only seen the repulsive, the unpleasant, He looked for the beautiful. So must the esoteric pupil strive to seek the positive in every phenomenon and in every being. He will soon notice that under the mask of something ugly there is hidden beauty, that even under the mask of a criminal there is a hidden good, that under the mask of a lunatic the divine soul is somehow hidden.

In a certain respect this exercise is related to what is called "abstention from criticism." You must not conceive of this as calling black white and white black. But there is a difference between a judgment that, proceeding merely from your personality, is colored with your personal sympathy and antipathy, and an attitude that enters lovingly into the alien phenomenon or being, always asking, "How has this other being come to be like this or act like this?" Such an attitude will by its very nature strive more to help what is imperfect than simply to find fault and to criticize.

The objection that the very circumstances of their lives require many people to criticize and judge is not valid here. For this simply means, the life circumstances are such that the person in question cannot pursue a genuine esoteric schooling. There are indeed many life circumstances that preclude the full pursuit of such esoteric schooling. Persons leading such lives should not impatiently demand progress that can be made only under certain conditions.

By concentrating for a month on the positive aspects of all you encounter, you will gradually notice a feeling stealing over you as if your skin were becoming porous on all sides and your soul were opening wide to all kinds of secret and subtle processes in your environment, processes that completely eluded you before. That is just the point of this exercise: to combat the prevalent inattention to such subtleties. Having once noticed that the feeling

described arises in your soul as a kind of bliss, try in thought to direct this feeling toward your heart, from there let it stream into your eyes, and thence out into the space in front of and around you. You will notice that you thereby gain an intimate relationship to the space around you. You seem to grow beyond yourself. You learn to consider a part of your environment an actual part of yourself. A great deal of concentration is necessary for this exercise, and, above all, a recognition of the fact that all tempestuous feelings, all passions and emotions destroy totally the mood indicated. In repeating the earlier months' exercises, again follow the suggestions given earlier.

In the fifth month, try to cultivate the feeling of total openness in confronting every new experience. The esoteric pupil must break completely with an attitude that causes those hearing or seeing anything new to exclaim, "I've never heard this, or I've never seen this before; I don't believe it—it's an illusion!" He must be ready at every moment to accept a totally new experience. What he has hitherto recognized as being in accordance with natural law, or what has appeared possible to him, must not be a shackle preventing acceptance of a new truth. Although radically expressed, this illustration is quite to the point: Should someone approach the esoteric pupil saying, "Listen—ever since last night, the tower of church X has been tilted," the esotericist must leave a back door open to the possible belief that his previous knowledge of natural law might still be augmented by such a seemingly impossible fact.

If, during the fifth month, you concentrate on acquiring this attitude, you will notice a feeling quietly filling your soul as if something were coming alive in the space referred to in connection with the fourth month's exercise, as if something were stirring. This feeling is exceedingly delicate and subtle. You must try to be attentive to this delicate vibrating in your environment and to let it stream in as it were, through all five of your senses, specifically your eyes, ears, and through your skin, insofar as your skin contains the sense of warmth. At this stage of esoteric development less attention is paid to the impressions these stimuli make on the lower senses of taste, smell, and touch. At this stage it is still not possible to distinguish the numerous negative influences mixed with the good in this sphere; the pupil therefore leaves this for a later stage of development.

During the sixth month, try to repeat again and again all five exercises, systematically and in regular rotation. This will gradually develop a beautiful equilibrium in your soul. You will notice, specifically, that previous dissatisfactions with certain phenomena and beings in the world completely disappear. A mood reconciling all experiences spreads in your soul, a mood that is by no means one of indifference but, on the contrary, will enable you to work in the world for its improvement and progress. You develop a serene understanding of things hitherto completely closed to your soul. Even your gait and

gestures change under the influence of such exercises, and when one day you observe that your handwriting has taken on another character, you may say to yourself that you are about to reach the first rung of the upward path. But again, two facts must be stressed:

First, the six exercises described will paralyze the possible harmful influence of other esoteric exercises, leaving only the benefits. Second, they alone can assure the positive result of meditation and concentration efforts. The esotericist must not be satisfied with fulfilling the demands of conventional morality, no matter how conscientiously, because this kind of morality becomes very egotistical if you say, "I want to be good so I will be thought good by others." The esotericist does not do what is good because he wants to be thought good, but because he gradually recognizes that the good alone furthers evolution, and that evil and foolishness and ugliness lay obstacles in its path.

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The following are notes of the Esoteric Class given in Munich on June 6, 1907. They were written in longhand by a participant of the Class.

These six supplementary exercises function as a kind of preparation for the actual esoteric exercises. If you devote yourself to them with the proper seriousness and diligence, they will create in your soul the basic disposition necessary for reaping the fruits of the esoteric exercises.

1. Control of Thoughts: Free yourself for at least five minutes every day and concentrate on one thought only. It should be an insignificant thought and in itself uninteresting to you. Concentrate on it by logically joining to it everything else that can be thought about it. It is important that the object be insignificant because it is the effort thus needed to stay focused on it that awakens the soul's slumbering faculties. After a time you will notice in your soul a feeling of firmness and certainty. But do not imagine that this feeling will violently bowl you over; no, it is a very delicate, subtle feeling you have to watch for. Those who declare themselves totally unable to experience this feeling, resemble those who set out to find among many other objects a tiny, delicate one. They do look, yet only superficially, and thus cannot find the tiny object but overlook it. Very quietly you must direct your attention inward, and you will experience this feeling, primarily in the frontal part of your head. On sensing it there, imagine yourself pouring it into your brain and spinal marrow. Gradually you will seem to feel rays extending from the frontal part of your head, all the way into your spinal marrow.

2. Initiative of Action: For this, you must pick an action you have thought of *yourself*. If, for instance, you followed the example given in the instruction and watered a flower for your activity exercise, that would be totally useless. This

action must originate in your own initiative, and therefore you must think of it yourself. In practicing it, you will soon notice a feeling that could be put into these words: "I can accomplish things." "I can do more than I could earlier." "I feel the need to be active." Actually, you feel this in the entire upper part of your body. Next, try to let this feeling flow to your heart.

3. *Being Above Pleasure and Pain:* You may, for example, one day feel like crying. That is a good opportunity to practice this exercise. Force yourself, using all your powers, simply not to cry this time. This holds good for laughing, too: Try, when you feel like laughing, not to laugh but to stay calm. Not that you shouldn't laugh anymore, but you must be able to keep yourself in hand, to master the urge to laugh and to cry. Having succeeded a few times, you will soon notice a feeling of calm and equanimity. Cause this feeling to flow through your entire body, pouring it from your heart first to your arms and hands so that it may radiate through your hands into your actions. Then send it toward your feet, and finally toward your head. This exercise demands strict self-observation, which should be carried out for at least 15 minutes every day.

4. *Positive Attitude:* You should know how to find in all that is evil a grain of good, in all that is ugly some beauty, and even in every criminal the little spark of the divine. Then you will feel as if you were expanding beyond your skin. This sense of expanding is similar to that of the etheric body after death. When you notice this feeling of expansion, send it outward to radiate through your eyes, your ears, and your entire skin—but mainly your eyes.

5. *Openness:* You must stay flexible, always able to take in new experiences. When someone tells you anything you consider improbable, make sure to save a little corner of your heart with which to say, "He could be right, after all." This need not make you credulous, for you can check up on the facts. Then you will come to feel as if something were streaming into you from the outside. Absorb it through your eyes, your ears, and your entire skin surface.

6. *Equilibrium:* The five preceding feeling experiences must now be brought into harmony with each other, all receiving equal attention.

These exercises need not necessarily be done each for one month. That is only a suggestion. But they must be practiced in this particular order. If you do the second exercise before the first, you will not benefit from it at all, because the sequence is essential. Some people even think they should begin with the sixth, the harmonizing exercise. But how can they harmonize what as yet does not exist? Unless you practice these exercises in their proper order, they will be of no use to you at all. Imagine someone having to cross a footbridge in six steps, determined to

take the sixth step first. That is how foolish it would be to begin with the sixth exercise.
