

# *A Way of Seeing – developing imagination*

## *1. Attending to Attentiveness*

Attend [ME from OF *atendre*, from L *attendere* ‘stretch towards’]

Attach [ME from OF *atachier*, from *a-* + OF *tache* ‘nail’]

Detach [F *détacher*, from *de-* + OF *tache* ‘nail’]

Present [ME, from OF, from L *praesens* ‘being before (one, the other)’]

Discussing the themes of stories during a course I once gave called ‘True Stories’, one of the participants commented that so many stories imply we have to learn the Buddhist quality of *detachment*. I responded at the time that I thought we have to learn simultaneous detachment *and* attachment, and then tried to explain what I meant. On my way home I thought further about it. Later I went to my dictionary.

I now ascribe what I wanted to mean that evening to the word *attentiveness*. I am convinced that attentiveness has just one fundamental prerequisite: to be *present*. Only by ‘being before’ someone or something can you be attentive. First to be here, and then to ‘stretch towards’...

Simultaneous detachment and attachment means not being stuck (‘nailed’) yet still being right on the spot, a being before and a stretching towards which requires a considerable inner mobility. This does not mean being all over the place, but rather achieving a dynamic poise in which there is potential for every movement.

It is so easy to wander off. Think of the occasions when you have been asked, challenged probably, to be fully present. What *is* your attention-span, the length of time *you* can attend, to be there and stretch out? It is a fact that usually we go out towards things just briefly, and then withdraw. Rudolf Steiner has characterised this as a polarity of *sympathy* and *antipathy*, and states that we are continually oscillating between the two. If we were only to stretch out in sympathy, we would lose ourselves — if we remained within ourselves, we would lose the world. So there is this continual attaching and detaching taking place.

Attentiveness is not only about registering the external phenomena; it is also importantly about observing internal phenomena. There is an aphorism by the German Romantic poet Novalis, to which I shall return: ‘The seat of the soul is where the inner world and the outer world meet. Where they overlap, it is in every part of the overlap.’ Attentiveness is about being present in these phenomena of the soul, where the inner world and the outer world meet, and in particular where these two worlds overlap.

Consciousness arises at the boundaries of the soul. I begin to be conscious of myself in encountering the world, and conscious of the world because I experience a self. This meeting point of inner and outer is like a two-way mirror; I both see through it and am reflected in it. Just think about this for a moment. In waking up each morning, there is a more-or-less simultaneous recognition — out there the world is, and in here I am. This is an act of

remembering, out of the dissolution of the night when for a while I lose sight of both world and self. In the morning I re-member, I re-collect, not only the world, but also myself. If there is dissonance between my inner state and that of the world, I will readily notice it. I feel bad, or I feel good; the world seems bad, or it seems good. If there is a warm resonance between the two, then I rise like a lark into the morning.

The first state, of feeling bad, experiencing some dissonance with the world, is a meeting. It is an essentially antipathetic encounter, and we observe that in this meeting, the reflection in the mirror awakens memory, and also our conceptual life. I would go so far as to suggest that at this meeting-point we are awakened, even pained, into what Jungian psychologists have called *focused consciousness*, the basis of a Classical, Apollonian orientation towards the world.

The second state, of sympathetic resonance, is experienced in the overlap; and when we are present in this overlap we tend to live in a kind of *diffuse awareness*. In her book 'Knowing Woman', the Jungian analyst Irene Claremont de Castillejo refers to diffuse awareness as a state in which individuals may experience 'the wholeness of nature, where everything is linked with everything else and they feel themselves to be part of an individual whole'. I think we can readily identify this as a more Dionysian, more Romantic notion.

Can we *actually* be both here and there? Or do we become, with practice, simply more adept at switching rapidly between the two modes? At the meeting-point of inner and outer, we do indeed find there is a 'toggle-switch', the experience of sympathy / antipathy. However, it seems to me that there is another experience where we can be simultaneously here and there, and that is in the place Novalis calls the overlap. Here we do not 'toggle' but rather dissolve our normal subject / object consciousness in that specific state of diffuse awareness which is the activity and domain of *Imagination*.

While it is relatively straightforward to experience the meeting-point of the inner world and the outer world, what exactly is this place where they overlap? The American poet Robert Bly, introducing the poems 'Silence in the Snowy Fields' in his 'Selected Poems', writes that:

*at certain moments, particularly moments alone, we can pass into a deep well of the mind, and at this instant we may pass as well into a tree or a hill, as when the dreamer travelling to some far place finds himself not farther from the soul but nearer to it, and wakes with the sweet sensation of friendship from other worlds.*

A 'deep well of the mind'... Where, and what, is that? Through quite specific meditative exercising, we can experience an initial loosening, a kind of dis-membering within the body, along with a sensation of hovering in flight, or of being adrift in an ocean... These are two characteristic experiences accompanying the development of *Imagination*, as outlined by Rudolf Steiner in his lectures. This meditative inwardness is Bly's 'deep well of the mind'. In this place we discover that everything is continually in a process of becoming something else — it is a world of transformations, of a kind of constant 'morphing'. Here, we can experience that, just because something in us becomes inwardly *detached*, so in this condition it can become *attached* elsewhere, or rather it can be *in touch* with other things. This is in fact what happens when our 'body' of formative forces (which maintains and sustains the life of our

body, and provides the medium for our thinking) becomes inwardly freed from its normally tight bond with the physical body. In this loosened state, this 'life body' is highly susceptible to impressions from the surrounding world, and is able to register them empathetically. It actually is *in-formed* by them. It then becomes part of the ebb and flow, the surge and the shifts of the forces embodied in all existence. In being attentive to such experiences, we are indwelling the overlap.

The most compelling evidence that there *is* indeed an overlap is the initial problem of identification when in such a state; we know we are experiencing something, but do not know what. Nor do we know at first whether this something is an inner or outer reality. In this respect the pictures we experience as Imaginations are similar to the kind of dream in which inner organic sensations may present themselves as external phenomena. So we only know we are experiencing something, and must then clothe it with images of the familiar. Consequently this world of Imaginations can be very confusing, and we may be prone to error in interpreting our experiences.

In order to find our orientation then in such a state we must develop that quality which the Romantic poet John Keats called *Negative Capability*: to be 'capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason'. That is, we must refrain from leaping to fixed conclusions, and learn to live faithfully in the presence of the phenomena. To our focused consciousness, the overlap presents itself as a gap, a lacuna in knowledge; it is thus an alarming void for the rationalist.

However, it seems easily avoided. It can be stepped over, and it slips from view, below the threshold of consciousness once more, avoided through our absorption into the demands of materialistic culture. Go out, go out, go out, the ceaseless chatter of the mind exclaims, be endlessly busy. But when we return, in the moment we pause, it is waiting there. Again it can be avoided, through alcohol and any other chemical means, through television, through flooding the senses with impressions...

At what cost? Rudolf Steiner commented that during the twentieth century, humanity would unconsciously cross a threshold. This is where the overlap exists. The clear boundaries have softened, and we can either choose to inhabit the overlap, or be inhabited by spectres. These ghosts are real beings, not just abstract shadows; they comprise everything we are not aware of and yet which influence us. If we are attentive to this, 'without any irritable reaching after fact and reason', then we become aware of what is present. We must first learn to practise *presence*. It is important, however, to realise that diffuse awareness is not vague awareness; it requires a rigorous 'work-out' in *being here*.

If I went along to a gym, I could test my physical fitness; various types of apparatus could be adjusted to exercise particular muscles, and I could 'work-out' against them. The interesting thing about 'working-out' is our 'love-hate' relationship to these machines. They function essentially through the effects of various weights, springs, and friction mechanisms: too much resistance, and we are defeated; too little, and nothing is achieved. They are set up to be mirrors for our capabilities. Spiritual exercising, the inward activity I call 'working-out in the soul-gym', is subject to similar rules. We need a comprehensive programme. We need to

have just the right resistance. We need to sweat a little in learning to 'be here'. But to begin with we might need some relatively straightforward exercises.

To further establish what exercising 'being here' might mean, another aphorism by Novalis is instructive: after commenting on the dual nature of self-expression he goes on to say that 'the first step is introspection — exclusive contemplation of the self. But whoever stops there goes only half way. The second step must be genuine observation outward — spontaneous, sober observation of the external world.' This is similar to Rudolf Steiner's approach to development, in suggesting that the deliberate exercising of focused consciousness back and forth across the boundaries of the soul is the 'work-out' prerequisite to indwelling the overlap.

In his book 'Knowledge of the Higher Worlds' Rudolf Steiner asks us to create moments of inner tranquility in which to 'contemplate and judge our own actions and experiences, as though they applied not to ourselves but to some other person'. We are thus to form an objective view of ourselves, to identify the essential and non-essential elements in our lives. We can identify this as the first step in being here, a self-knowledge based on what Novalis has called 'exclusive contemplation of the self'.

The second step is taken when we develop what Novalis then refers to as 'spontaneous, sober observation of the external world'. In 'Knowledge of the Higher Worlds', Steiner goes on to state that in aspiring to be students of the spirit we must learn to 'look out on the world with keen, healthy senses, and quickened power of observation, and then give ourselves up to the feeling that arises within us. We should not try to make out, through intellectual speculation, what the things mean, but rather allow the things themselves to tell us.'

This requires an attitude of surrender, out of our stilled inner world, to those things we observe about us. As such it is a gesture of humility in being here, of a reverence which, says Rudolf Steiner, 'awakens a sympathetic power through which we attract qualities in the beings around us, which would otherwise remain concealed'. Perhaps here we can sense what Robert Bly means in writing of 'some deep well of the mind' where he 'finds himself not farther from the soul but nearer to it, and wakes with the sweet sensation of friendship from other worlds'.

This is where attentiveness can lead us. First, a truly focused consciousness is asked for, directed methodically towards both the inner world and the outer world; and then a giving ourselves up through a diffuse awareness to the feeling that arises within us. Where? In the overlap, in that deep well of the mind in which we have become capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. It is here, just here, that we can attend to attentiveness — to that aspect of our soul-spiritual activity which just touches on things, yet stays in touch.

## 2. *Experiencing Poise*

In learning to walk, talk, and think during the first three years of its life, the human being is preparing itself not only for its physical existence, but also for spiritual development. The 'stretching towards' life which each one of these capacities articulates can only be effectively achieved through some degree of 'presence', that simultaneous 'attachment / detachment' constituting what I would call 'poise'.

In order to consider what poise might mean in spiritual development, I want to introduce some concepts from the Italian Renaissance — from Baldassare Castiglione's 'Book of the Courtier', which I have found has served me well in understanding the art of teaching, amongst other things. In this little best-seller Castiglione instructs the aspiring courtier in the art of living as a true Renaissance Man. In every aspect of life, whether one is learning to play the lute, to write a sonnet, to dance, or to conduct oneself in one's affairs (in every sense of this phrase!), he says essentially there are always three stages: *decorum*, *sprezzatura*, and *grazia*. One must develop the first two; but the third stage, that of grace, is bestowed upon one if the other two are achieved in balance.

In referring to *decorum*, Castiglione means everything we still understand by that word: formal committee procedures, for instance, or formal expectations of behaviour. But it also means the technical aspects of an art: finger-exercises and scales in music, the structure of a sonnet, the steps to a dance, etiquette or manners in regard to social conduct. It is thus the formal skill-basis for all human activity.

To really understand *sprezzatura* I believe it would be helpful to hear the word pronounced by an Italian. It was rendered in Shakespeare's time as 'noble negligence' or 'nonchalance' and indicated that almost casual quality of being able to just 'toss something off'. Bob Dylan does it occasionally in concert when he throws off a nifty little guitar phrase, as if just incidentally. We can appreciate therefore that *sprezzatura* is stylish, even a little flamboyant.

We can also recognise that in practising *decorum* we are attaching ourselves; we are forging a tight relationship between focused consciousness and a specific technique. Once attached, however, something else is called for, and we can see that *sprezzatura* is obviously a state of detachment, a loosening, a casting off.

Castiglione says that whoever achieves these two stages makes possible the third stage: *grazia* — grace — that divine gift of radiance which brings joy to the heart. We cannot *develop* grace; by definition it is *bestowed* upon us. However, I believe we can prepare ourselves for the possibility of the event. Castiglione also makes it clear that each of the earlier stages is incomplete; we could say that *decorum* alone is mere substance without finesse, while *sprezzatura* alone is mere style without content.

In these characterisations we may see a tendency towards two polarities. And in the state of *grazia*, we may recognise a principle of balance in which the spirit of true development may be present. I think these concepts can be useful in all sorts of ways for evaluating our experience. Here we want just to consider the implications for what we could perhaps call 'right poise' and 'right movement' in soul-spiritual life.

*Decorum* suggests we must consciously practise *everything* — everything, including our meditations, in detailed drills, again and again, as a formative, active discipline. We could characterise this as Apollonian. But if we persist only in this, and for too long, we will become ‘control-freaks’, both in relation to ourselves and to others. *Sprezzatura* however implies forgetting the rules and just doing it, as a spontaneous and Dionysian act. Now, this is risky, and in some situations sheer lunacy, but if the discipline has been previously well-instilled, something fair and good might result.

I am suggesting here that truly human existence requires us to develop a capability for *creative play*. We could just as readily use the concepts presented in his ‘Aesthetic Letters’ by Friedrich Schiller, of the *impulse to play* as a quality of poised mobility between the *impulse to form* and the *impulse to substance*. Novalis is clearly thinking along similar lines when he writes:

*True speech is pure word-play. One can only wonder at the comical error people make when they think that they are speaking about things. No one knows precisely what is most distinctive about language, that it is concerned solely with itself. This is why it is so marvellous and fruitful a mystery that when someone speaks simply in order to speak he utters the most magnificent and original truths.*

This is not as anarchic as it might seem if considered out of context. After all, we have already noted that Novalis said that:

*Self-expression is the source of all abasement, just as, contrariwise, it is the basis for all true elevation. The first step is introspection — exclusive contemplation of the self. But whoever stops there goes only half way. The second step must be genuine observation outward — spontaneous, sober observation of the external world.*

I would suggest that these are directions towards preparatory, decorous exercises in attentiveness, which need to be practised before attempting ‘true elevation’ in self-expression — where ‘true speech is pure word-play’. Here again we find ourselves considering balance as a point of poised mobility between polarities. And this seems to resonate with the Buddha’s teaching in introducing the Eightfold Path:

*There are two extremes, O monks, which should not be followed: the habitual practice, on one hand, of those things whose attraction depends upon the passions, and especially of sensuality; and the habitual practice, on the other hand, of asceticism. Both ways are painful, unworthy, and unprofitable.*

*There is a middle way, O monks, avoiding these two extremes: it is the noble Eightfold Path...*

The essential thing is this finding of balance, and balance is never fixity, but rather a dynamic equilibrium, a playfulness in the field of our activity. Nor is it something we can achieve once and for all. We might well ‘lose it’, maybe repeatedly, but when we do so, we also might well refrain from judgment and simply observe, ‘Oh, I’ve lost it, let’s try again’. I recall someone once suggesting that the ancient Greeks had no concept of ‘sin’ in the sense we usually understand it; rather, in the manner of an archer aiming at a target, one simply

'missed the mark' and therefore had to draw another arrow. I believe we need not feel guilty or anxious about failure, but see it in the sense of 'missing the mark' and therefore having an attendant responsibility towards the consequences. And one of the consequences then is the practice of more *decorum*, but also some more *sprezzatura* in its time and place. No art or skill can be effectively carried out when we are anxious.

*Decorum* therefore suggests a serious intent; *sprezzatura* suggests a lightness of touch. Balance in our lives implies allowing a breathing-process to occur between the two. There will be necessarily chaotic moments, as an accepted part of the process. We learn discernment through encountering and dealing with these. Perhaps I am saying nothing here that is not already understood, except for my adaptation of Castiglione's instruction to his ideal courtier. But in the light of this formulation, I would say that spiritual practice involves moments not only of inward solemnity, but importantly also moments of ecstatic joy. The intention always is to awaken our consciousness in poise and movement. This can occur only through preparing, then giving oneself to activity, and then finding a reflection, in that oscillation between *decorum* and *sprezzatura*. In finding the right balance, perhaps into the creative space may come that moment of grace.

In reflecting now on our first statement regarding the processes through which the human being learns to walk, talk and think, we could rename them respectively 'grace in the body, grace in the soul, and grace in the spirit'.

Through learning to walk we learn to orientate ourselves in space. 'To learn to walk is to learn to experience the principles of statics and dynamics in one's own inner being and to relate them to the whole cosmos,' said Rudolf Steiner in 1923. By this he means, amongst other things, that the child grasps the relationship of equilibrium and movement, first in the legs, in every step, and then in the free possibilities offered the hands. In these principles of 'statics and dynamics' we may discern the intimate relationship between the senses of balance and of movement, active in this first great task, the body's deed in establishing itself. In finding this poise, we are enabled to stretch towards the physical world.

Steiner then points out the relationship between hand movement and the speech centre in Broca's region (for a right-handed person, in the left hemisphere of the brain). Speech is arrested movement. The child stops, gestures, and then declares something, it utters forth. 'Statics and dynamics' in language, in listening and in speaking, and also in their underlying gestures, is the soul's equivalent of the body's experience of equilibrium and movement. Through speaking and listening — through relationship — we can say that the human being learns to orientate itself in 'soul-space'. In finding this poise, we are enabled to stretch towards the soul world.

Similarly, when thinking arises inwardly as a reflection of the outer world and all its processes, we can see that this also is an experience of the relationship of equilibrium and movement, this time in our consciousness. Thinking is speech turned inward through the encounter with the world, to form reflexive images of its experience. We then become aware simultaneously of 'self' and 'other'; but in this very duality lies the seeds in our thinking of achieving a higher synthesis, as Steiner has established in his 'Philosophy of Freedom'. Thus, through this ability to mirror experience, the human being learns to orientate itself as a spirit

in 'spirit-space'. And in finding this poise, we are enabled to stretch towards the spiritual world.

So, having been granted these capabilities in our first three years, and then building upon them in the first three seven-year periods of life, we will find them available for spiritual development. We must then learn ways in which the whole constitution can be kept *lively*, yet *in-formed*. Especially in understanding how poise and movement work within a field of life, not as poise *upon* but as poise *amidst*, and not as movement *about* but as movement *throughout* — we can support this further development.

For instance, we may undertake a number of exercises in observing a particular rose for some time, seeing it as a physical object, as a growing organism, and as a symbol. Then, in our mind we can try to 'ungrow' it; to make it withdraw from bloom into bud, into leaf and stem, down into its roots. In reflecting upon our inner experience while doing this, in imaginatively 'pushing life upstream', we may become aware of an extraordinary quality of 'aliveness' in our consciousness.

Or an equilateral triangle is drawn on a blackboard, and we cut a triangular 'window' in a piece of cardboard — any triangle other than equilateral. Then we move about the room, each peering through our window while keeping it perpendicular, until the window-space conforms to the image on the board. Can it be done? Next, we place ourselves in a fixed relationship to the blackboard, and move our windows until they conform to the image of the equilateral triangle. Can it be done? What do we experience then in our consciousness? In practising this, we may be acutely conscious of the quality of 'triangleness' projected as moving planes in an imaginative space.

Practising such exercises as the above enlivens and heightens our consciousness, through which we then can work formatively into the Imaginative world. Increasingly we are being asked to work sensitively into the physical space, the soul space, the spiritual space we encounter. These challenges require creative solutions, which may be found only through first developing the kind of active poise and mobility we have considered here. Spiritual development is always creative development. We must follow such a path; otherwise we are likely to merely impose a fixity of form, upon our thinking, upon our feeling, upon our action, as was indicated by the poet-philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge:

*The form is mechanic when on any given material we impress a pre-determined form. The organic form, on the other hand, is innate; it shapes as it develops itself from within.*

The meaning of poise and movement, therefore, in body, soul and spirit, is something to understand more thoroughly. It is much more than a metaphor when we talk of 'inner mobility of feeling', of 'flexibility in thinking'. I think the significant thing is the *relationship between equilibrium and movement*. We can use the word 'poise' for that quality of equilibrium in which the potential for movement is ever present. This is where we may work spiritually, and effective working in this realm is indeed a state of *grazia*.



### 3. *Developing Imagination*

Rudolf Steiner has described three stages in spiritual development: Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition. However, in what he called Imagination we find there are elements of ‘small i’ imagination, inspiration, and intuition. We begin to develop this faculty through exercises such as those described by Steiner in his books. The first of these are preparatory, intended to develop an objectified consciousness: the work of attending to attentiveness.

Attentiveness to anything is of value, but particularly observing the movement of clouds (especially cumulus and cirrus), of weather patterns in general, of bird-flight (especially flocks of birds), or the growth of a plant through the seasonal cycle — each and all of these provide excellent daily practice. We might keep a journal of such observations, from which we can later distil the essential from the non-essential, and begin to recognise the patterns present in the world and in ourselves.

Wolfgang Johann von Goethe’s ‘Italian Journey’ is one inspiring example. The notebooks and journals of the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins are an exemplary record of ‘spontaneous, sober observation of the external world’, which led him to those powerful imaginative experiences expressed in his mature poems. The notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci reveal how thoroughly he undertook such observation; amongst his many drawings of clouds and water moving, of birds in flight, we come across this celebrated passage:

*if you look at any wall spotted with various stains or with a mixture of different kinds of stones, if you are about to create some scene you will be able to see in it a resemblance to various different landscapes adorned with mountains, rivers, rocks, trees, plains, wide valleys and various groups of hills. You will also be able to see diverse combats and figures in quick movement, and strange expressions of faces, and outlandish costumes, and an infinite number of things which you can then reduce into separate and well-conceived forms. With such walls and blends of different stones it may come about as it does with the sound of bells, in whose clangour you may discover every name and word that you can imagine.*

This is an exercise in attentiveness; it is not in the first place what Rudolf Steiner means by Imagination, but rather the kind of reflective fantasy or reverie, evoked by exact observation, that strengthens the mind in seeing images. In his last sentence, however, Leonardo seems to be saying something further — suggesting a going-beyond this active fantasy to experience something that appears to arise from within the phenomena.

Then there are specific exercises of an image-nature (for instance, some of the meditations given by Steiner, such as the Rose Cross exercise given in ‘Esoteric Science’) through which we can develop and sensitise our imagination. These are intended to separate out a sense-free image-making capability from the usual sense-derived mental pictures of our ordinary daylight-consciousness. These pictorial exercises are given as verbal instructions, and it is a strenuous activity in the first place to visualise and maintain such images in the mind. But as we persevere with them, we begin to notice that they take on a life of their own. The images we form in this way seem to become alive. And the activity of picturing in general becomes more vivid.

The result may first become apparent in the character of our sleep-life. We may feel we are in another world during sleep, or have some awareness upon waking of having been immersed in images of another existence. There is this awareness, which can be quite different from the usual dreams we have, because the impressions from this state do not clothe themselves so readily in sense-derived pictures. Or the images, if we can see them clearly, seem less directly related to our daily lives. We cannot quite grasp them, it seems, yet they feel so significant; such impressions seem strangely compelling, and we want to see what they are. We might, for instance, experience a sensation of flooding colours which do not assume recognisable shapes. The pattern of sleep also may become disturbed for a time, but will soon settle down. We may even feel we have been 'awake' all night, yet nevertheless be rested in the morning, and during the day notice a greater alertness towards the things around us.

Gradually, in daylight consciousness we may have a sensation of an expansion at the temporal lobes, and a web-like activity extending from there around in front of the forehead. This sensation is exactly opposite to the pressure of an acute headache or of depression. There may be a slight tingling at the temples and across the frontal area of the cranium, and an accompanying feeling of mild bliss. Afterwards, we may feel refreshed, as though having just catnapped.

These first sensations could be called *putting on the winged helmet of the gods*; there is the sense of expansion from the temporal region, the slightly euphoric mood, a feeling even of being exalted. However, the impressions gained in such moments are initially pale and shadowy, as though we are soaring in mist, seeing fleeting forms continually moving and evaporating around us. The nature of our lives can be such that we do not even notice them.

This is a particular description of the first stage in developing Imagination. If we now reflect on it, it may perhaps help us identify and orientate ourselves within our own experiences. One thing becomes obvious: considerable inner strength is necessary to achieve any clarity in this initial stage. We can therefore undertake more exercises to help develop this strength, especially those in which we visualise transformations of structures and forms. Any activity of imagining progressive movement is effective. For instance, we might picture some geometric form that we continually shift through variations of itself (like those fascinating screen-savers on computers). Or we can mentally construct a drawing in strict perspective, and then move the vanishing-points, allowing everything to move in accord with the laws of such constructions. Another interesting exercise is to imagine the movement of the shadows cast by the sun throughout the day. All these efforts can be rewarding and playful practice (and frustrating too, as these images can be so evanescent).

The next step requires courage, however, for we cannot depend for our security on the impressions gained in this way. It is as though we have pressed ourselves assertively towards them, yet we will always notice how they flit away before our concentrated gaze. A mood of loneliness, of desolation, may arise at this point, unless we learn another way of existing in this experience.

In themselves these first fleeting and shadowy impressions offer little that is useful. We must now become receptive, renouncing any desire to force our way into this world. We have to

hover, as it were, in a potential nothingness. We erase the images. This can be fearful. We let go of the images, of our wish to find ourselves in relation to them, and simply rest in this sense-free state. We must be courageous when finding ourselves so suddenly 'all at sea'. If we cannot find equilibrium in this state, we can become disoriented. A feeling of nausea may accompany this experience.

If we do find balance, then something comes towards us. It may be of a vivid image-nature, but we have the feeling we have not created it ourselves. Rather, it seems to weave itself out of the substance of our activity, forming itself in response to our effort. And it has tonal depth, a quality of inner resonance. We might even experience words, intoning, that seem to articulate some essence of this experience. This is not actual Inspiration as a developed faculty, but rather an inspired element within the faculty of Imagination. This is the second level of Imaginative consciousness.

One thing we can do preparatory to such experiences is to develop our attentiveness to the nature of sound. In undertaking 'spontaneous, sober observation of the external world', we are not only to look, but to attend in each of our senses; thus, we can direct our focussed consciousness towards specific sounds in our environment, listening to their qualities and tonalities. We can learn to discern distinctions between organic and inorganic sounds, for instance between bird-calls and bells ringing, or water falling, the tones of various metals and woods, between animal and human sounds. Then, as Rudolf Steiner suggests, we give ourselves up to the feeling that arises in response to each particular sound. We will learn the difference between cries and calls in the natural world: how one is given to the environment in general, is in fact an expression of the environment, while the other is directed towards a sentient hearer. We might notice how church bells sensitise our hearing, and surmise their purpose in calling congregations to hear the Word. We can choose also to contemplate a word, to place it at the centre of our consciousness for a few minutes every day, sounding it, letting it resonate within us, examining its etymology, and allowing it to speak.

Such attentiveness is usefully practised in listening to a waterfall, or surf, or wind moving through trees. When we immerse our hearing in such experiences, we find ourselves entering into an active soundscape. It envelops us in surging and resounding waves, in which we may seem to be drifting awash. We learn to inhabit such listening sensations first in our focused consciousness, in order to prepare for the feeling of being all at sea when we enter what Novalis called the 'overlap' with our diffuse awareness; for the overwhelming experience of the Imaginative world is of its continuous movement and transformations, and especially so at this second level of consciousness. Here we are in a magic-show; we are immersed in the flux of the elements, and everything is constantly becoming something else. This quality of movement is not movement *about*, but rather movement *throughout*. Hence, the feeling of nausea, of vertigo, the sense of finding no firm ground beneath our feet. This resembles our experience sometimes of movement in dreams, for instance, when we are trying to escape some terror.

This experience can be so enlivened, so vital in its essence, that we grasp it with real vigour, riding as it were like a surfer amid the motion and noise of stupendous waves. And herein lies another danger, if we remain too self-obsessed in our development. The experiences of the Imaginative realm are always permeated with our personal soul-nature. They are not

wholly objective. If we have not become to some extent objective towards our soul processes, then at this point our egotism is actually enhanced, and suddenly it arouses in us a strong feeling of dread. A huge reaction occurs. We feel threatened with annihilation. A monstrous shadow seems about to engulf us, rising up out of the oceanic depths of our lower nature.

If, however, we come to this point in our development, having worked at our self-knowledge, then this third level of consciousness has another quality. We merge with the experience as though it were something familiar. We recognise it as belonging somehow to ourselves. It may appear as a momentary realisation, a flash of lightning with the specific atmospheric clarity resulting from it. A sense of blissful union. Or it may be experienced as a stream of light, pouring like a waterfall through the flow-form of our upper vertebrae. Or a bright spike of radiance illumines us. Then we know something. This is the more intuitional element within the faculty of Imagination.

The tingling sensation, the sense of drifting free of the body, of flying or hovering, of being adrift in a stormy ocean, of a shadowy assailant, or of being irradiated with light — these are experiences arising from the fact that in imaginative activity what we have called our 'life body' becomes inwardly detached from the physical body and to some degree is increasingly independent of it. It is even more so as we develop this faculty. This has consequences when we return to ordinary consciousness, for these forces have to permeate and unite with the body again, and a distinct sensation of exhaustion, accompanied by awareness of the physical body's sheer heaviness, may arouse a mood of depression. However, in accepting the inevitability of this mood, we may find its transformation, and ourselves enlivened, for our life creative forces will in fact have become more activated.

All this represents an initial development in the faculty of Imagination. With practice and cultivation it can become more and more filled with content, permeated with pictures of supersensible reality. They are only *pictures* of reality, but they are increasingly resonant and luminous. As we *live into* these imaginative pictures, we begin to find a new and compelling relationship to our own existence, and to the world around us. This is quite different from what is usually experienced as fantasy, which, proceeding from *desire*, has a definite aim in mind. In imaginative activity, we do not 'try to make out, through intellectual speculation, what the things mean, but rather allow the things themselves to tell us.' The truth of the world thus begins to declare itself.