

Working with the Life Processes

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~ Theme and Variations ~

Theme

In 1910 Rudolf Steiner began to outline his understanding of the seven life processes active in the human organism: *breathing, warming, nourishing, secreting, maintaining, growing, and generating*. These processes are prerequisites for all life: even in plants a kind of breathing occurs; and warming, whether inwardly possessed as in mammals and birds, or as in the case of plants and insects — and also reptiles, amphibians, fish — directly due to the sun's warmth, is clearly evident. Similarly, each of the other processes is integral to life — indeed, life is unimaginable without each of them being active in the organism. Significantly, we can observe that activities such as *movement* and *sensation* are found in animals and humans but not plants, and therefore must be soul processes. Such a contrast helps us understand *life*.

The life processes are also *time* processes. But it would be an error, however, to think of them working only sequentially. While some linear relationships seem apparent — for instance, between nourishing and secreting — and in the following 'variations', I will consider them in sequence, we must try to imagine all these processes inter-permeating, inter-weaving, and overlapping in time.

These seven life processes have cosmological origins — for instance, we find in the ancient Indian text, the 'Rig Veda':

There was neither death nor immortality then. No signs were there of night or day. The ONE was breathing by its own power, in infinite peace. Only the ONE was; there was nothing beyond.

Darkness was hidden in darkness. The All was fluid and formless. Therein, within the void, by the fire of its fervour arose the ONE.

Here we read of the processes of *breathing* and *warming* as the preconditions for all further creation. Through breathing, a rhythmical relationship is established between what is inner and outer — a space is opened up within space. This space, really no more than a kind of pulsating differentiation, is then permeated by warmth, a warming which inhabits the space, thus forming a kind of content, and establishing a basis for presence. In the further stages, the *nourishing* process begins to draw inward all that is necessary to give shape to this formative space.

Secreting, in a wonderful way, is a central point. A sifting and sorting process takes place, retaining what is essential, rejecting the inessential — an alchemical process through which form is given substance. At this point, creation is manifest.

The existence of any entity must then be regulated and moderated, through a process of constant *maintaining*. This would only keep things as they are, however, were it not for the process of *growing* that underlies all development. Organisms develop, from juvenile forms to maturity; this is a process which fills us with wonder and awe when we perceive it in any living thing. Finally, there is a process through which replicative or reproductive capacities appear at some level in the organism, *generating* its own kind, creating something new.

All these processes operate below the level of ordinary consciousness, and we generally become aware of their existence only when their normal healthy activity is disturbed; then we might notice, through the inward monitor of our *life sense*, that something is not in its usual equilibrium. However, their relationship to the processes of the soul, and especially to our *consciousness in time*, is of interest. We learn that these subliminal life processes underpin the processing of events in consciousness. As parents, then, we could consider how to create a supportive environment for our baby or toddler. And teachers could ask themselves: in terms of the life processes, what is the right relationship between teaching and learning? Both teachers and parents could ask: how might I then work more effectively in managing behaviour, through processes that enable the child to find a true relationship to conscience? And every adult human being could ask: how are the life processes present in all encounters and their transformation, as relationship processes to which we can be more attentive? And how might any one of us undertake a meditative or contemplative path that enables greater awareness in the fields of life? The following is a set of variations on this theme of working with the life processes.

First Variation

If we want to work with understanding into the life of a baby or toddler, what is relevant? The answer is simple and thus complex: everything, for they partake in everything around them, responding as an open sense-being to their environment. Therefore, everything we do will be either a support or hindrance in their development.

In considering babies and little children, we need to be mindful that while we can work in accord with the life processes, we must not interfere directly, or intervene in their workings. That is always a medical matter. We support their healthy functioning. The body has its own wisdom, and we would be wise in deciding not to obstruct the play of its wisdom.

If we observe a baby's breathing, we notice how irregular it is, and how easily affected it is by sudden events — any unexpected change is a shock, and it registers in the breathing. This irregular breathing — laboured at times, and almost suspended at others — can be a source of anxiety in a parent, and that is exactly what is not needed. Breathing is easily polluted, and not only from physical causes. A baby breathes most easily in a calm environment, one which is free of any nervous or emotional intensity and flurries of abrupt activity.

Breathing is a metaphor for all steady rhythmic processes and transitions, as steady and rhythmic as the tides of the ocean and their turning. As we live into this, we will find its reality in the seasons of the year, the 'seasons' of each day, in waking and sleeping. And we will notice further that our sense impressions, our awareness of inner and outer realities, also

have an oscillation. Two phrases from Jungian psychology seem relevant here — *focussed consciousness* and *diffuse awareness*. Can we observe that even consciousness has its polarities, between breathing in and breathing out?

Thus we are not so much concerned directly with the baby's actual breathing, as with all that 'breathes' around it: with all that opens or closes, with our awareness for the spaciousness of the physical and soul environment in which the baby is enveloped.

So, too, we can consider *warming* in the first place as an environmental influence. It is easy for us to conceive of loving as a warming activity. Warmth is love. We know the baby does not have a conscious relationship to its own warmth, so we have to ensure that the physical surroundings are right, that the baby's head is covered against heat and cold, for instance, especially in those first years when the fontanels are still open.

And there is the warming love we direct towards the child. There is a lot of research to show that touch is the most direct way of giving expression to this love — touched babies thrive. Therefore, holding, embracing, caressing, stroking, massaging, are acts of love, the natural actions of a loving caregiver. Love wants to be demonstrated in the world — it is never abstract and cold.

Here we might pause and consider for a moment the over-effusive 'love' that can smother a child. Can we grasp that breathing and warming are to be understood together? Breathing opens a space, and warming fills it. Because this breathing continues, the mood-atmosphere does not become too humid, too over-heated. The effect is like mild, fresh springtime air. So we see that both breathing and warming are evident forms of love, especially when they are in proportion.

Then there is all we can understand of *nourishing*. Physically, this process is more tangible, as babies have to be fed, and they demonstrate quite strong metabolic responses! So we can talk about nourishment in terms of the quality of their food, and we reflect that organic or biodynamic food is to be preferred. We can consider the nature of root, leaf, flower and fruit, and their nourishing qualities — and how we need to balance them for the constitution of our particular baby.

We will be concerned for the context, the setting, for a meal — for we are really nourished through our senses. Everything a baby takes in is nourishment or malnourishment. So again we look at the whole environment of the child, seeing it as food for the senses. Are we 'force-feeding' or 'starving' the baby? What do we mean by 'wholesome'? And again we come to love — just to think about these things is already loving, but our deeds are so nourishing. We know how a baby 'devours' our attentiveness, flourishing in our devoted gaze.

Secreting is a secret process, a mysterious activity through which the human organism sifts and sorts the essential from the non-essential. Thus it involves both retaining and letting go. The undisturbed wisdom of the body will effectively process most physical substances. The miracle of secretion is this complete transformation of substances, so that nothing remains as it was, and everything has its place — or is excreted.

Secreting, as the fourth life process, is thus right at the centre of things. We can see how specific capacities are secreted out of transformational experiences — just think how walking remains, but the frustrations of the struggle seem to be discarded in the celebratory event of accomplishing it. Is there not a comparable activity at the basis of all soul life? This ability to transform our experiences — to not get stuck, to not remain obsessed with some mental or emotional blockage, to digest and retain our learnings but not the pain of the lessons — this is an active power in the life environment of a baby.

At this point we might pause again and reflect that Rudolf Steiner referred to a *Pedagogical Law*: our activity at a higher level affects the child at a more fundamental level. Therefore, for instance, our soul experiences will directly impinge upon a child's life forces. Mothers especially may have observed that if they are emotionally distressed, the baby's health can be affected. Each of these life processes can be affected by our mental and emotional state of being, and any behaviour originating from that. Why should we have to deal with our own 'stuff', through a work-out in the 'soul-gym'? Apart from our own needs, in order to keep the life-realm of the child fresh and clean.

The process of *maintaining* is a further miracle. Why am I still me, despite the fact that not one cell of the child I was has remained? What maintains my form? I am like the axe that has had several new handles and a new axe-head but is still the 'same old axe'. I am not thinking here of my spiritual identity, but simply of my status as entity. Life is characterised by this maintenance of form — and when I die, the form will dissolve.

Health and safety consciousness is one aspect of maintenance in the life environment of a baby, a vigilance that attends to all possibilities. Seeing that each day is sufficient — that our activity of nurture suffices — is another. Maintaining implies a steadfastness that is difficult amidst the forces of contemporary life. To just keeping on going. This constancy is a vital element in a child's life — a reassuring constancy and dependability that can be relied on. This is not a desperate bid for survival, nor resignation to circumstances, but rather a calm and solemn 'yes-saying' to all that comes. This implies a capacity for equanimity, which often has to be worked for amidst great adversity.

The life process of *growing* is obvious in a child. We never grow so much as in the womb, and then never again so much as in the first months, the first years... This process of quantitative growing is gradually supplanted by qualitative growing in soul qualities though the process of dying. The physical basis of growth is in cell division and development, and we see here an intimate relationship between growing and maintaining. But the crucial difference is that maintaining keeps things as they are, whereas growing advances things. Stasis and change. Form follows process — process follows form. One is the precursor for the other.

How do we allow for growth? How do we promote it? The capacity for wonder is the essential quality we look at here — openness towards what will come, a positive looking for it, without preconditioning its nature through imposed attitudes. This propensity for growth in a child tends to be faster than any consciousness on our part — we comprehend it only retrospectively. And so — we must wonder. To marvel at the rate of change, the kinds of change, the unexpected aspects of it all...

Finally, we are faced with many questions when we ponder what we might see in a baby as an underlying process of *generating*. We usually think of generation in terms of sexual reproduction, and clearly these forces become active only around puberty. The generative organs are of course already formed in the womb, and we can note their development, showing that this life process is present from that time onward.

However, there is another aspect of this generating process that dominates the first three years of a child's development. It is a succession of deeds that seem to rise up through the child, first lifting it from its helplessly prone position to accomplish the extraordinary freedom of walking; then to find utterance; and ultimately to think and to remember. These three accomplishments — walking, talking, and thinking — are the foundations of creative freedom. Each one generates active presence in a world. Walking provides an orientation in a world of physical space; talking forms a basis for orientation in a world of soul; and thinking orientates the child in a spiritual world. At the age of three the child can *conceive* thoughts. Then, in the following years, in the child's remarkable capacity for imitation, we witness the replicative, reproductive aspect of generating present as a learning tool.

Witnessing this journey, and accompanying the child upon it, is an extraordinary experience. Wonder, reverence, our sense for the wisdom-filled harmony of each of these processes, and a gesture of devotional self-surrender to this sacred procession of accomplishments — these soul qualities constitute the mood in which a parent can watch their child develop. We support the life processes by providing an environment that nurtures their activity. And as the steward of that environment we realise that we have to work at our personal development.

Second Variation

I now want to consider how teachers could monitor learning through taking account of these processes that take place beneath the level of consciousness. What might be relevant, for instance, in teaching a Main Lesson?

First, we need to be aware of the *breathing* process, in every sense of the phrase. How do we introduce the lesson? Can the child see his or her way into the lesson? Is there sufficient 'lightness of touch' to allow the child some breathing space, or do we cramp the breathing through too much content, too many impressions, brought too soon? Is there an expansion / contraction principle present in our lessons? Is it a steady rhythmic quality of relaxation and concentration, in which the child breathes freely between sleeping and waking?

Warming to the lesson is critical. Do we overheat the situation through excessive enthusiasm for the subject, or for the idea of teaching; or do the facts, or perhaps our disinterest, leave the child cold? Does our interest extend right into the child's world, into the way the child experiences things? Having warmed to our task, do we allow the child to enter into a learning space and engender their own interest?

We must allow time for the child to digest information, to absorb new skills. Is all this data actually *nourishing* the child? Can the child digest it? Is it sufficient? What of the pictorial

element? There can be both under-nourishment or over-nourishment; do we starve or bloat the child? Then, there also can be mal-nourishment. Does the content of the lesson give the child indigestion? Does the child get to grips with the content? How long is required in general terms for digestion to take place?

The child has to sift and sort experiences in learning. What is the essential point? What can be discarded as useless? Or is it inappropriate? Does he or she get the point? What needs to be forgotten? What remains within the sieve of the child's consciousness? How do the facts become faculties? Does the result of the child's *secreting* process correspond with what we have conceived to be the desired learning outcome?

Learning must be maintained. Practice is necessary. Does the child remember what was taught? What is the most effective way of *maintaining* learning? Are there specific rhythms (daily, three-daily, monthly) for practice? Do we actually *know* the relationship of rhythm to the maintenance of knowledge or skilled capacities? What supplementary exercises reinforce learning? What is the real purpose of homework?

The process of *growing* what has been learnt is more sophisticated. Once knowledge has been instilled, a skill has been established, or a level of facility has been formed, how does the child develop new skills or understandings based on this learning? Is there a *growing down* into capability? How do we teachers create opportunities for extension? Are we aware of what can happen between one main lesson, for instance, and our subsequent return to that subject area? Sensing this, can we more conscientiously facilitate the growth of capacities?

Finally we must be interested in what the child is *generating* in response to the lessons. What do we ask them to reproduce? When? In setting out learning outcomes, do we distinguish between replication and genuine creativity? When do we expect more than mere replication? How do we enable creative responses? Through all this, can we find a right relation to time, in such a way that the intersecting of our personal creative consciousness with the classroom process awakens the possible future in the child? Such would be a special moment in the child's becoming.

Third Variation

In looking for ways through which behaviour management might become, especially from the child's twelfth year on, a form of behavioural self-management, we can experience the importance of processes as they are developing in time. Noticing how emotions — both ours and theirs — can become somewhat too involved in situations, caught up in denial, anger, and bargaining, we may work consciously to calm the tendency of these forces in the soul to inflate reactions and occupy all the available space.

It is helpful to regard all challenging behaviour as Rudolf Steiner has suggested we should deal with a choleric child's outbursts. In the first place it is necessary to observe the incident: 'Oh, look at what's happened, the desk has some writing on it. We shall have to have a look at that, and have a talk about it, let's say, tomorrow before school.' Then we discuss the issue on the following morning.

Or a parent can respond to a situation: 'Oh, look, there's crayon marks on the walls in the hallway. Now I wonder how that happened?' No moralistic tone, just a reflective comment... And later, the necessary follow-up.

This first response initiates a kind of *breathing* process: perception of the event, and just an awareness of something to follow. Through this open gesture — what I've already called 'lightness of touch' — and through our *warming* interest in the child, a space is established in which the child's conscience may become active. Rudolf Steiner also recommends we tell morally *nourishing* stories, as food for the conscience. This helps a child digest the situation: both the actual event, and the possible consequences. The teacher or parent simply does not get involved in those reactions of denial, anger, or bargaining which so easily rise up in the immediate situation. In the first place the child will be relieved at this, while still aware that the conversation is to come.

We now let sleep have its say. All three processes are involved in carrying the event forward — breathing, warming, nourishing. Another life process, *secreting*, is activated during the precious period of sleep. Each night the child unconsciously sifts and sorts through the various elements of the previous day; for many of us the *guardian angel* is a counselling reality in this process. In the morning the voice of conscience can murmur to the child about responsibility — that need for *response-ability*.

So, the following day we approach the matter. Trusting the above processes, we try not to force the issue. Again, we establish a breathing / warming gesture of openness, reassuring the child that we are looking together for the best resolution, before asking what he or she might be able to tell us to help us understand the issue. We let them bring forward whatever they may have digested and secreted, always keeping the focus on the narrative of the event. Any excuses and justifications are unnecessary. Usually the child can 'own' his or her responsibility in such circumstances. And then the consequences, whatever they might be, can be effectively taken towards further sleep, so that the child might live fully with them.

Then it becomes a matter of what behavioural learning can take place. What has now been secreted as the essential lesson? And *maintaining* — how shall we consolidate behavioural learning? This is an activity requiring guidance and support; and then definitely monitoring the further journey to ensure the lesson is reinforced.

Effective guidance in behavioural self-management can lead to an extension of the learning into other situations. The *growing* process may bear a new facility into social consciousness in such a way that the child can support others in a similar situation (eg in dealing with bullying). For instance, I have experienced a thirteen-year-old girl help to guide a class-mate through behavioural change, having found out previously that increased awareness, self-esteem, and a free conscience had been outcomes for her.

This comes towards a *generating* process. We could hope that the child will become able to find creative solutions to situations in life. Can he or she develop a genuine social initiative? That has to be entrusted to time, and ultimately to all those future intersections of the eternal spirit — the child's *daimon* — with events in time.

Fourth Variation

Then, there are our adult relationships, including those we also encounter in our work. Here we find all sorts of interesting dynamics. Many difficulties often occur because we do not acknowledge our own tendencies, let alone those of others. A mature relationship is one in which awareness and respect of one another always means that clear processes, in which each person can live, will be sought and established. The need to undertake this as social hygiene is increasingly apparent — just reflect for a moment how frequently we observe ourselves caught up in a series of events or reactions, how we feel it is not going as well as we would wish. Some understanding of the seven life processes can support a more conscious approach to the ways we interact.

First, we can say that there needs to be some rhythmic balance between taking in and letting go — a *breathing* process must permeate a relationship. We must learn to live in a two-way continuum of time between what carries through from the past and what streams towards us from the future. Another aspect of breathing is about expectations — pressure makes us ‘tighten up’, but too much space allows us to be too ‘laid back’. Such rhythms of expansion / contraction will in each case be modified by the nature of each person, the relationship dynamics, and a sense of timing.

There is again an implicit ‘lightness of touch’ in this breathing process. Through it we are ‘sensing the field’, becoming aware of the whole situation — of the questions and challenges becoming perceptible in the relationship. Any doubts might be allayed if there is sufficient spaciousness to come to terms with issues. There is also the sensing of the other within this field. Becoming aware of this, we can develop an open gesture of wonder towards the inter-breathing.

Warming to another person is a glorious experience. We call it ‘love’. And we have to ‘warm’ to what we receive, if we are to incorporate it — otherwise the event will inevitably ‘leave us cold’. Warmth suffuses, penetrates, welcomes. Hatred and cynicism freeze the soul. On the other hand, someone’s ‘heated’ viewpoint will make us want to ‘cool off’ or ‘chill out’.

Warmth also involves surrender — absorbing the viewpoint of another person without any prejudice. This warmth allows us to take in every challenge, without feeling threatened by differences. Then, because there is a sacrificial quality in warmth, we offer our contribution, just putting it, letting it stand, allowing the other person to form a relationship with it. We do not force the matter. Really, this reciprocal warmth element of relationship, generating trust, and compassionate regard, can permeate the whole process.

We have to ‘digest’ every experience, each situation, chewing it over, turning it over in our minds. In order to grasp what is involved, to find what is *nourishing*, some real effort might be necessary — this is an obligation for each individual, to conscientiously work at it. We might even need to ask some questions, to take in a little more food for thought.

Digestion proceeds in stages. Usually we have to break down an event into its constituent parts, and work our way through these. Everyone’s digestive processes are different: some are more carnivorous, tearing into the meat of it; while others are ruminants. They digest at a

different rate; if forced, indigestion might be the result. That lump in the belly can be fear and dread. We must ensure at this stage not only that everyone has a meal-ticket to the same table, but also is allowed to work through the menu in his or her own way. There is intense work at this stage. Interest in each other's meal is important. We cannot force others to eat what we like, but we might try to understand their tastes.

These first three processes are prerequisites for the central phase in any relationship: *secreting*. We secrete what truly serves the relationship, and excrete the useless. But in dysfunctional relating, we lose the ability to sort things out together. This stage then is often where people think it really begins; somehow it is just a matter of persuading the other of the validity of one's own *a priori* viewpoint. But the earlier stages are in fact necessary; without them, the relationship can stall in conflict.

Only now, all one's experiences are to be examined methodically, sifted, sorted, and then given a value in the context of the relationship. A whole range of possibilities and limitations will begin to emerge. Establishing what is actually in the field and what is outside it, through prioritising the range, may involve some effort. Here, the forces of sympathy and antipathy come fully into play, but they need to be objectified through repeated reflection: what is important, what is less important? Without real interest — which is a form of love — antipathy easily can become hostility, while sympathy can become submissiveness.

We know that relationships cannot continue indefinitely without a lot of effort. *Maintaining* is a conscious task. We need to bear the relationship towards its future becoming. What has been acknowledged between us? Who is responsible for carrying it further? How does each event set the stage for the next meeting? The event in memory, and the act of forbearance, of letting things change, are important elements in this. We need to keep the relationship in mind, holding it truly in our consciousness. In this regard, Rudolf Steiner has given a meditative picture for faithfulness:

Create for yourself a new, indomitable perception of faithfulness. What is usually called faithfulness passes so quickly. Let this be your faithfulness:

You will experience moments — fleeting moments — with the other person. The human being will appear to you then as if filled, irradiated with a spiritual archetype.

And then there may be — indeed, will be — other moments, long periods of time when human beings are darkened. But you will learn to say to yourself at such times: 'the spirit makes me strong. I remember the archetype. I saw it once. No illusion, no deception shall rob me of it'.

Always struggle for the image you saw. This struggle is faithfulness. Striving thus for faithfulness, we shall be close to one another, as if endowed with the protective power of angels.

Growing the relationship is a conscientious extension of this bearing-in-mind towards ever greater facility. This is a maturing stage. We look for growth, for learning, for change. The

details of what is needed must be worked out. Where are the review points, when progress is to be evaluated? What has to change in the face of practical experience in the course of life? Who decides on what changes?

Throughout this stage, the life processes of breathing, warming, digesting, secreting, and maintaining remain active. They sustain and support one another — this is the nature of life, after all — and thus are to be seen as continuous, interweaving processes rather than sequential ones. At last, the realisation or fulfilment of ourselves — our selves — implies a truly creative stage where something new is generated, freshly born from all that has gone before.

Generating is what results from the work we do in relationships — an unimagined future that arises out of what has been called ‘devotion to the destiny of the beloved’. It blossoms into a new world of possibilities. The decisive moments in relationships are not a function of the life processes — they are indeed gracious events. But they are always well prepared-for through developing awareness of these processes, which are *already taking place in us* — we are simply considering here how we might cooperate with the functional basis of our own lives.

Fifth Variation - Fugue

Ultimately, in considering what kind of consciousness is best attuned to the healthy nurturing of the life processes, we could find a clear direction in the *seven conditions* for development presented by Rudolf Steiner in his book *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*, and more recently elaborated by Dr Michaela Glöckler who has related each condition to one of the members of the seven-fold human being. I have here brought their indications into association with some aphorisms by Dag Hammarskjöld, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations who died — most likely murdered — in a plane crash in central Africa in 1961. Through his posthumously-published journal, *Markings*, he can be a mentor for us.

We must attend to our bodily and spiritual health, in such a way that our physical, emotional, and mental faculties are fit instruments for life. In every way imaginable, this is about promoting the right basis for *breathing*. We all know how our bodily and spiritual health affects our own breathing; this is not a promotion of yoga either as a health exercise or as spiritual practice, but of developing awareness and hygienic practices in the whole of life.

The aim is not either asceticism or indulgence, but to note the healthful effects of balance and moderation, that practical work-place between the *too-much* and the *too-little*. While there will be times when our difficult obligations mean that our health is affected (think of those sleepless nights caring for a sick child), yet we should not be negligent of our well-being. We must live in such a way so as ‘not to encumber the earth,’ says Dag Hammarskjöld, ‘just this: not to encumber the earth’ — as much as is realistically possible.

We need to develop a sense of being connected with the whole of life, so that we do not feel alienated or remote from what we find in the world. Contemporary society is in danger of becoming dissociated — each group from every other group, each person from the other, each person

in themselves... This is a chilling experience. In *warming* to existence, we remind ourselves that everything *out there* is relevant, a part of our own lives. We do not get closer to anyone else or the world simply through watching images on television, or by 'surfing the net'. What is needed is contemplative regard, a *living into* and *living with* the phenomena and events.

An elementary exercise — both easier and harder than contemplating human affairs — that can support this sense of connectedness is to spend a few moments observing the same plant in the garden daily, or maybe observing weather conditions; and then to quietly reflect on the inner mood that arises in association with this. Hammarskjöld: 'At the point of rest at the centre of our being, we encounter a world where all things are at rest in the same way. Then a tree becomes a mystery, a cloud, a revelation, each man a cosmos of whose riches we can only catch glimpses.'

We must learn that thoughts and feelings are as potent as actions, and have their consequences, for which we are wholly responsible. We know that the old incantation, 'Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me' is not really true, but a kind of desperate spell to ward off the inevitable effects of any sensitivity. Yet even unspoken thoughts and feelings have their effect. 'What happens during the unspoken dialogue between two people can never be put right by anything they say — not even if, with mutual insight into what has occurred, they should make a joint attempt at reparation,' we read in *Markings*.

Our attitudes, positive and negative, *are* perceptible; and the environment we create through our thoughts, feelings, and actions will be *nourishing* or otherwise likely to cause poisoning, malnourishment or indigestion. For instance, that dread we can experience in a pressured situation has physical symptoms in the stomach. In the presence of understanding, however, we feel nourished. With such a person we share *companionship* (Latin *com*, with, together + *panis*, bread).

We must understand that the essence of every human being lies in an inner space, which requires nurturing, and which must not be violated in others. The spirit indeed is continually *secreting* the essential self within the human organism. We call this the process of *incarnation*. 'At every moment you choose yourself. But do you choose *your* self?' asks Dag Hammarskjöld. 'Body and soul contain a thousand possibilities out of which you can build many *I*'s. But in only one of them is there a congruence of the elector and the elected.' Noting that there are misleading images of the ego or 'I' polluting the true one, he continues: 'Only one — which you will never find out until you have excluded all those superficial and fleeting possibilities of being and doing with which you toy, out of curiosity or wonder or greed, and which hinder you still from casting anchor in the experience of the mystery of life, and the consciousness of the talent entrusted to you which is your *I*.'

We respect this inner being whenever we recognise the human being as not merely a product of heredity and environment, that old quarrel about nature and nurture; whenever we distinguish between the individual and their behaviour; between the essential and non-essential; between whatever is asked for in the encounter and what we might desire. Hammarskjöld frequently refers to a heightened sense of social presence we can experience — for instance: 'Suddenly I saw he was more real to himself than I am to myself, and that

what was required of me was to experience this reality of his not as an object but as a subject — and *more* real than mine.'

We need to develop steadfastness in carrying out a resolution, and to continue to cherish it as an ideal even if it becomes outwardly impossible. This is the process of *maintaining*, an absolute necessity in every sphere of life. Increasingly, as the poet W.B. Yeats wrote, 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.' Stemming the tide, keeping things going, and the sacrifice needed to do so, is a challenge.

'To say Yes to life is at one and the same time to say Yes to oneself,' says Dag Hammarskjöld. 'Yes — even to that element in one which is most unwilling to let itself be transformed from a temptation to a strength.' At the point of giving up, in that very moment and circumstance lies the potential and the forces for transformation. Still it may become impossible, and at that limit, 'Life only demands from you the strength you possess. Only one feat is possible — not to have run away.'

We must develop a mood of thankfulness for whatever comes to us as an experience, whether gracious or challenging. Hammarskjöld writes, 'For all that has been, thanks. For all that will be, yes.' This expansive openness is a necessary attitude towards the mystery that underlies all the processes of *growing* — of reverence and gratitude for whatever is given us. It is the sunlit atmosphere in which all growth occurs and is not stunted.

Rather than flourishing, children observably wilt in a negative climate of doubt, cynicism, and put-downs; we have the responsibility to develop instead a positive attitude to life, even towards the suffering we must endure. In a late poem beginning 'Tired / And lonely, / So tired / The heart aches', Dag Hammarskjöld tells himself, 'Weep / If you can, / Weep, / But do not complain. / The way chose you — / And you must be thankful.'

We need to live fully and constantly in all of the above conditions, so that they become integrated into our consciousness. To the extent that we can commit ourselves to these seven conditions so that they become a basis for conscious living and being, we might unfold the *generating*, creative, transformative power of the human spirit. We can thus find new solutions to old problems. Hammarskjöld: 'The more faithfully you listen to the voice within you, the better you will hear what is sounding outside. And only he who listens can speak. Is this the staring-point of the road towards the union of your two dreams — to be allowed, in clarity of mind to mirror life, and in purity of heart to mould it?'

At this stage of development, personal goals become identical with objective needs. Shortly before his death, he wrote: 'I don't know Who — or what — put the question, I don't know when it was put. I don't even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer *Yes* to Someone — or Something — and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful, and that therefore my life, in self-surrender, had a goal.'

The biography of Dag Hammarskjöld is an example of a life lived according to these seven conditions. They represent a path for development that seems fully consonant with the life-processes. Michaela Glöckler has suggested that they can be sufficient in themselves as a developmental path; and in his *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds* Rudolf Steiner comments that

while they may initially seem superficial, they are a prerequisite for any balanced spiritual development, concluding that:

No doubt it is the spirit that really matters, and not the form; but just as form without spirit is null and void, so also would spirit remain inactive if it did not create for itself a form.

We could reflect upon experience, and perhaps discover that such a conscious approach to living that takes account of the life-processes is effective soul hygiene. It becomes a form in which the spirit can be active.

~ John Allison 2006