

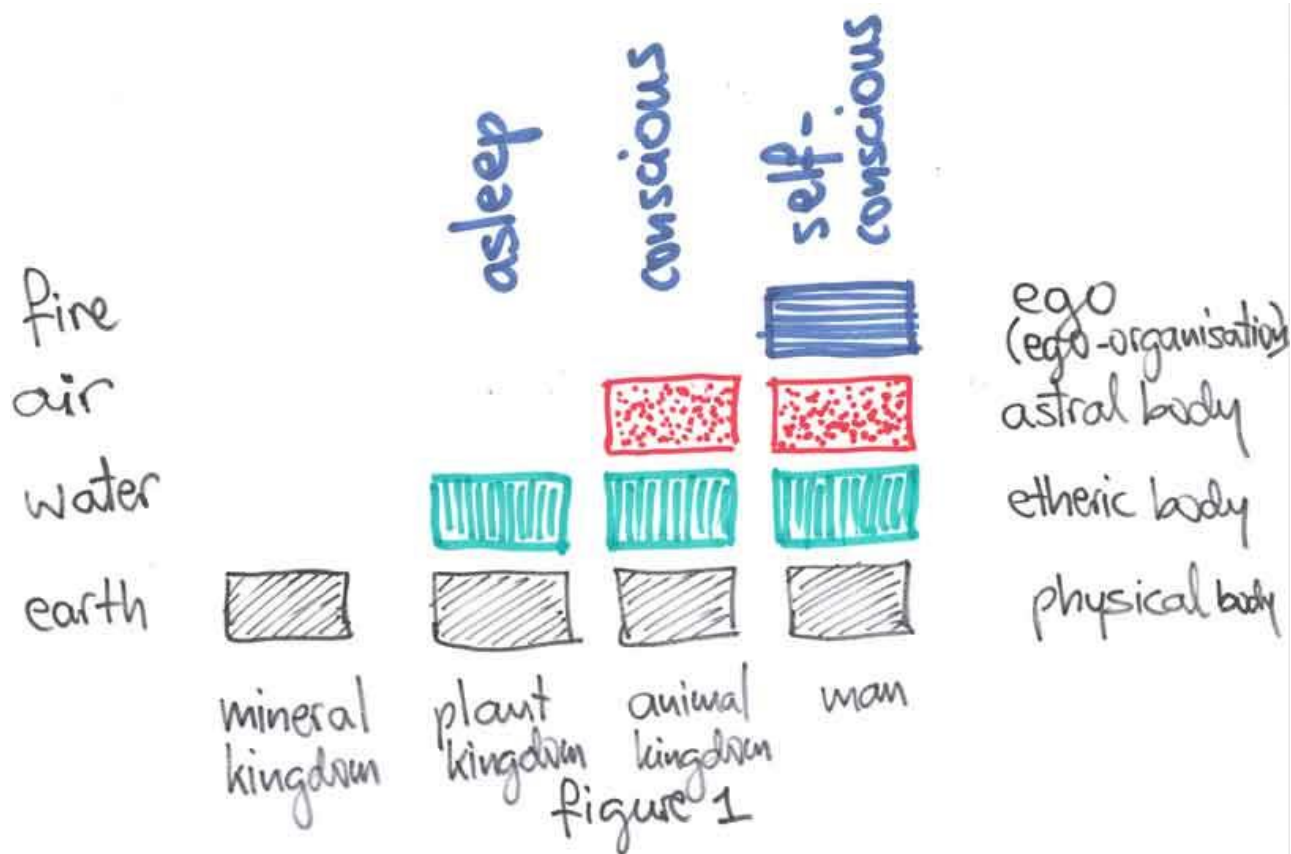
# FOUR-FOLD MAN

In the previous chapters we discussed *three-fold* the human being and now, a discussion of *four-fold man* must follow to obtain a more complete view on Man.

On earth, we are surrounded by, and share nature with three other kingdoms, namely the animal, plant, and mineral kingdoms.

One also finds within and surrounding oneself, four aggregations of matter, the elements earth, water, air and fire (warmth).

When one observes the mineral, the plant, the animal kingdoms in relation to humans, one will find that they share a physical presence, or common existence with the three other kingdoms. One finds, in principle, all the elements of the mineral kingdom in the plant, the animal and in the human being: the inorganic substances like calcium, iron, carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, magnesium, potassium, sodium, etc. Thus, one "shares" the same inorganic substances with the mineral, plant and animal kingdoms. The human body is built up of the same substances one finds in the mineral world. This body is called the **physical body**. Thus, all four kingdoms have a physical body (see figure 1).



But the primary characteristic of the mineral world is that it is *dead*, not alive. What does it mean to "*be alive*"? Life, as one knows it, is inseparably connected with life cycles, with rhythm, with *time*.

Life is captured by time. All manifestations of life are expressed in time, in Rhythm, in Life Cycles. When one observes a plant, one sees it develop over time. The plant, as an idea, as a being, has been there all the time, but one can only see it develop through the various stages of its existence over time. When one observes the beautiful amethyst crystal in front of one on his desk, one knows it has been formed hundreds of millions of years ago. It has not really changed at all. If one does not do anything to it, it would stay the same for another millions of years. Time seems to go "around" it and does not affect it. Thus, there is an abyss between the lifeless, dead mineral kingdom, and the three other kingdoms which are alive (and must follow the laws of life cycles).

The three living kingdoms have life forces, etheric forces in common. These life forces need the watery element to take hold of the physical, the mineral. That is why all living organisms need the element of water as an absolute prerequisite for life.

Depending on age and nutritional status, about 70% to 75% of the total human body consists of water. That is why all three living kingdoms have in common a body of life-forces, an **etheric body** (see figure 1). Life is only possible in the presence of water. If we want to preserve food, for instance, we can dry it. We extract the water, and the food is no longer accessible to the etheric forces, and therefore no longer perishable. We have taken it out of its life cycle, and in a sense we have "mineralized" it; we have turned it into the element earth.

The etheric body is connected with thousands of very fine "anchors", which are channels through which the life forces penetrate the physical body and elevate it into a living organism. These energy streams run through the etheric body (and the physical body as well) in a pattern, which resembles the course of the meridians of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). But one must imagine a very vivid, lively pulsating etheric body, which is more deeply connected (incarnated) into the physical in winter and more loosely in summer. That is also why in TCM, the acupuncture needles have to be stuck deeper into the physical body during winter.

The etheric body is particularly active during the embryonic stage of development, when the human form arises out of a plate of cells called the embryonic disc. It is also particularly active in the processes of nutrition, in which food is used both for growth and continual renewal of the physical body. This anabolic, constantly upbuilding quality of the etheric body is most dramatically expressed in plants which, in conjunction with sunlight, transform water and carbon dioxide into the sugars and complex carbohydrates without which none of the other substances of living organisms could be created. The physical bodies of plants are thus the primary source of nutrition for human and animal life.

The laws of the etheric world are in many ways the inverse of those applying in the physical world. For example, physics describes gravitational fields in terms of forces which emanate from points and radiate in all directions towards an infinite periphery. But, while they radiate out from a point, their effect is to pull objects in towards the center. The etheric world is characterized by forces which emanate from the periphery and radiate in towards a point, while their effect is from the point back to the periphery. This opposite direction of action of the etheric forces can be seen in the physical world where, for example, plants oppose gravity by growing up out of the soil towards the sun (sunlight).

This polarity between physical forces, which center on finite points, and etheric forces, which have a planar quality, is illustrated mathematically in projective geometry by describing sets of law for both realms. ("Physical and Ethereal Spaces" by George Adams, Rudolf Steiner Press).

The nature of the etheric world is such that it can only be described in physical terminology as infinite space. The etheric body originates in this boundless realm but, when it connects with the physical body at conception, it takes on a bounded quality which relates to the finite nature of the physical world. Goethe described this finite quality as a limited store of creative potential. If organisms had a "limited budget" of "creative capital", as he puts it, what had been used up in the development of a particular specialization would no longer be available for other creative possibilities. He cited as an example his observation that some animals have horns or antlers, while others have large canine teeth. He thought they could develop one or the other but not both. This is not strictly true: some species do have both. But, on closer examination, it can be seen that the larger the antlers, the smaller the canine teeth and vice versa, in an approximately inverse relationship.

This suggests that Goethe was correct to assume that a relationship exists between canine teeth and antlers, but that it is more subtle than he thought. This principle, known as biological compensation, also shows itself in some of the problems associated with the breeding of animals. Usually, whenever a particular quality is achieved, other problems arise, e.g. cows bred to produce very high milk yields have been found to be far more vulnerable to disease and require more frequent courses of antibiotics.

The principle of biological compensation can also be applied to the various parts of a single organism, including the human body.

In the highly developed frontal part of the human brain, the two large hemispheres with which our thinking is associated, are an example of advanced physical development. Other parts of the body, however, show evidence of retardation. From the embryological, developmental point of view, the limbs (particularly the arms and hands) are structurally very primitive and correspond to an early stage of development. If we compare the human arm and hand with the front limb of a horse or dog, we find that the horse and dog embryos initially go through a stage when their limbs have five radiating appendages, which correspond to the human hand and finger bones. In

the case of the horse, the central one of these develops extensively, its bones fusing together to form the lower part of the leg and hoof. In the dog, the bones corresponding to those in the human palm of the hand form the lower leg, and its paw develops from four of the five sets of bones corresponding to the human fingers. If we ignore the functional value of the human hand for the moment, and we consider it purely in structural terms, it is actually far more primitive than the hoof and the paw developments, which are further specializations of the earlier embryonic stage. In terms of morphology (the study of organic forms), the very high development of the human nervous system, and particularly the of brain, is "compensated for" by the relative retardation in the development of the limbs.

The description of the human hand as primitive is valid in the structural terms outlined above but, of course, the hand is able to perform a far greater number of different functions than hooves or paws. The hoof and paw are structurally more highly developed, but also more specialized, so they are less able to fulfill a diversity of requirements. Similarly, the forearm of a mole is superbly developed to function as a spade but this specialization makes the animal less able to do other things, such as run at great speed.

The etheric body can be seen as a body of formative forces which builds up the physical body and supplies a rich but not limitless supply of creative potential. In less differentiated tissues, such as the metabolic- and nutritive organs, the creative potential remains available for growth and regeneration. But in highly specialized, differentiated tissues, like the brain and the nervous system, once a certain degree of maturity has been reached, the capacity for growth and regeneration is significantly limited and, in accordance with the principles of biological compensation, etheric forces are released to be used in some other way. They become forces of thought and mental energy, serving the higher functions of consciousness, and are then associated with the soul element rather than the life element ("death forces").

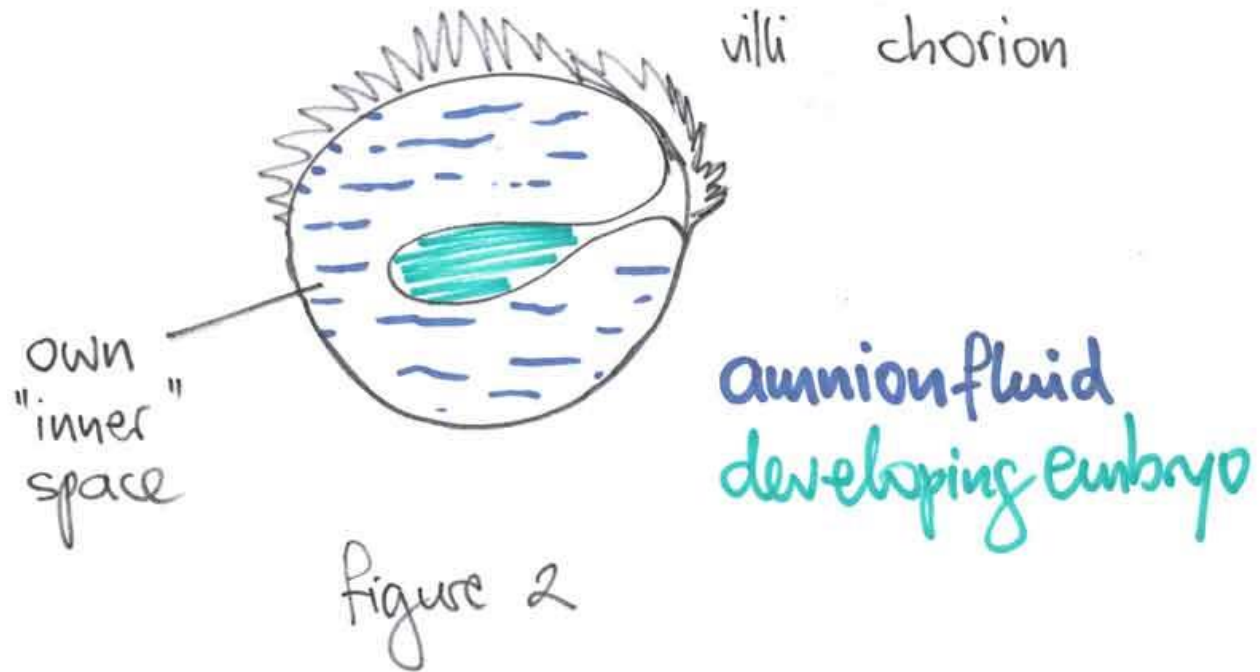
The qualities of the etheric realm are in many ways the opposite of those of the physical world, where order degenerates into disorder (such as at death). Wherever the etheric principle enters the physical world, it brings about order and form out of disorder and chaos. In the dead, physical realm, it makes sense to gain an understanding of an object in terms of its constituent parts. Where physical matter is brought to life by the etheric body of a plant, animal or human being, the parts of the organism are better understood in terms of their *relationship within the whole*.

As a matter of fact, everyone has had an experience of the etheric body being active in the physical body in the following way. Because of the way one sits, the blood flow in one's leg could be interrupted for a little while. Whilst the blood flow is interrupted, the very beginning of the dying process takes place, so that if it carried on too long, death of the tissue of the leg, distal of the location of strangulation, would occur. When one moves one's position the blood flow is restored. One first experiences how the leg feels numb, almost painful. Then one has a sensation of flowing warmth in that area of the leg. And finally one has that characteristic sensation of tingling, as if hundreds of pins or needles were pricking one in that area. These "pin pricks" or "needle pricks" are an experience of the etheric body "re-entering", of "incarnating" more deeply, of bringing back life forces into the leg (physical body).

This sensation of pins pricking one is an expression of the thousands of smaller and larger channels, of the little anchors by means of which the etheric body is connected to the physical body.

Thus, plants, animals and human beings have an etheric, or life-forces body.

When we study animals and human beings, we can observe that animals and human beings are sentient beings, that they can move around on the surface of the earth. They are, in a certain way, separated from the earth and can therefore move on (above) its surface. Because of this separation, they have an inner world and an outer world. Already in the embryonic development one can observe that, in contrast to the development of plants, the development of the animal- and human embryo takes place within a space, a vacuole, which develops in the very early stages of development (blastula stage). The animal and human embryos separate themselves from their environment and build their own space for the further development of a physical body with *inner organs* (see figure 2).



Thus, for animals and humans there exists an inner and an outer world. They react to the outer world because they are sentient, conscious beings. They bear a consciousness and are sentient beings because they have an **astral body**.

In plants, this is quite different, and one can observe this easily in how a seed sprouts. First, there appears the senker (central root), which is always directed toward the center of the earth. Then, the first set of leaves appear. One cannot observe the formation of an "inner space" as in the embryological development in animal and man (see figure 3).

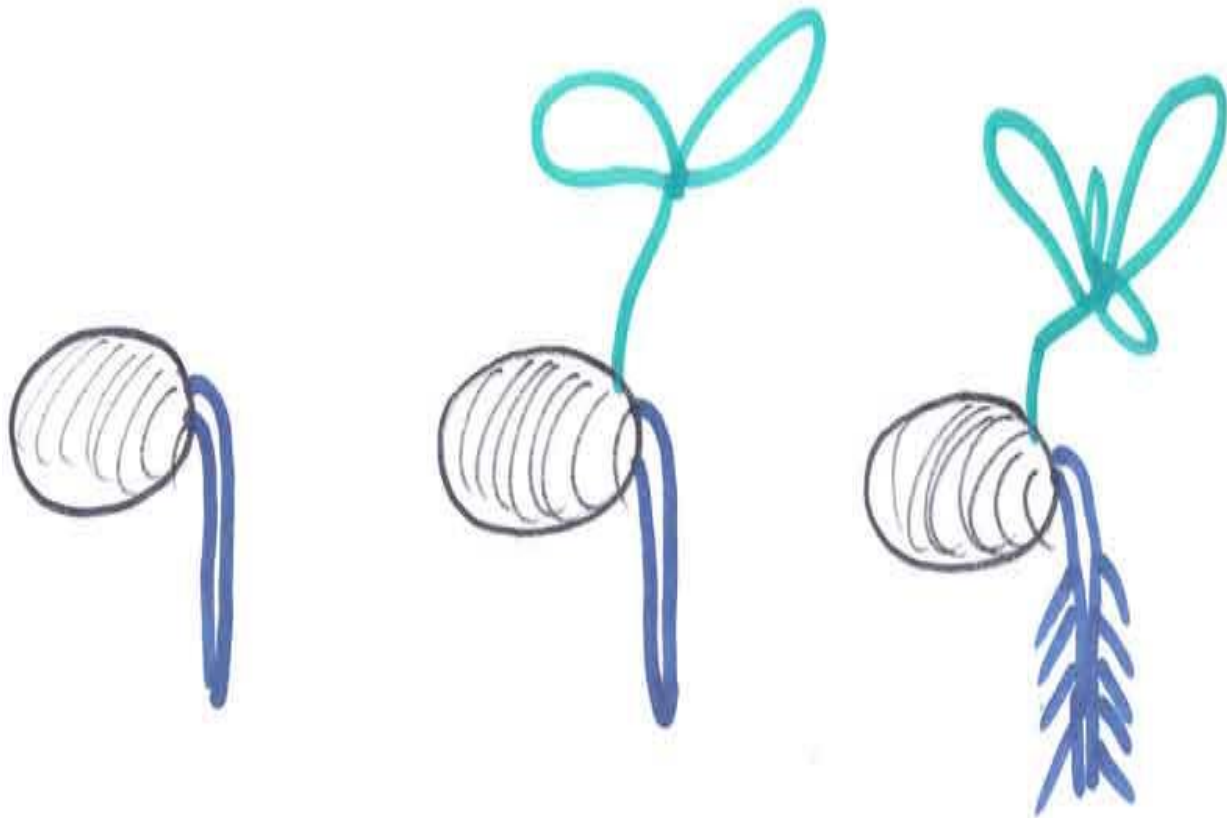


Figure 3

The astral forces live in the element of air. Through the element of air astral forces take hold of the physical world, and therefore of the physical body. Thus, all sentient beings breathe and have some form of breathing system, such as lungs.

The archetypal expression of the astral body within the physical body is *contraction* and *expansion*. The astral brings about tension and relaxation, usually in a rhythmic fashion. In order to do this, muscular movement is necessary. Therefore all sentient beings have muscles. The functioning of the heart muscle is a perfect expression of this faculty of



the astral body, namely the systole and the diastole.

Another expression of the astral within the physical body is *secretion and excretion*, initiating and overcoming *resistance*. The etheric body brings about the production of liquids, like saliva, gastric acid, etc. But the secretion of these liquids is done by the astral body. Also, *reabsorption* is an activity of the astral.

In the sentient soul we find another expression of the astral, namely the instinctive life with its animal drives (present to a certain extent also in the human being).

A more inner working of the astral is expressed in the feelings of *sympathy* and *antipathy*, which is another aspect of what is expressed in relaxation and contraction, of diastole and systole.

Humans and animals "share" a physical, etheric and astral body, and both are aware of the physical world. They are able to experience pleasure and pain, joy and anger, etc., because they have astral bodies. However, there is a significant difference in consciousness between the human being and animal. There is an additional level of consciousness which is lacking in animals: **self-consciousness**.

Humans are aware that they are independent conscious beings and, through this self-consciousness, are able to distinguish themselves from, and reflect on, the rest of the world. Thinking about the world brings with it the possibility of going beyond the animal's instinctive reaction to events. Humans are able to refrain from instinctive behavior if their thoughts lead them to consider that it might be better to act in some other way. This is also the basis of all *social life*: the necessity to refrain from instinctive reactions if the well-being of others is at risk. While animals act out of instinct modified by external conditioning – think of the domestication of certain animals – humans are able to form mental pictures of the consequences of their actions in relation to other considerations, and allow these to influence their decisions.

Anthroposophical medicine describes this extra dimension of consciousness as the activity of that fourth element of the human, the **spirit, self, ego**, or the "I". It is the person's inner core, the identity of the self, around which thoughts and feelings revolve.

The ego has a dual effect on the physical body. It works with the astral body in the breaking-

down processes through the nerve-sense system, and also with the etheric body in the building-up, nutritive processes through the metabolic system. It is particularly involved in thinking, in reflection, and, in that capacity, has a destructive effect within the physical body, particularly in the nerve-sense system, the so-called "death" process. It is also associated with the *will*, and the way in which volition is expressed through the physical body in movement. For example, the ability to stand up and walk on two legs is a specifically human attribute.

The ego also bestows a sense of continuity and permanence from one hour, day or year to the next, which is made possible by the faculty of *memory*. Only humans have truly individual memory. When one wakes up, one remembers what happened the day before and what one intended to do on the new day. One remembers who one is where one lives, and these retained concepts, these memory-pictures, preserves a sense of identity. When, for whatever reason, one loses one's memory, the sense for who one is, one's identity, is lost. External circumstances can trigger a kind of recollection of similar previous situations, but these circumstances have no power in themselves to recall events which are not mirrored in the subjects immediate surroundings or external circumstances. Human beings are easily able to recall past events *at will*, irrespective of their external circumstances. This is in contrast with animals, who have at best a "collective" memory. In animals instincts determine to a very high degree their behavior. An animal can be trained to acquire or abandon certain patterns of behavior. This process usually takes place when one domesticates an animal. But how does one domesticate an animal? First of all, one should start when the animal is very young. Adult animals can usually no longer be trained. Secondly, one trains an animal through *punishment* and *reward*. By means of repeated punishment and reward, one can condition an animal to understand what brings about pleasure, or discomfort. The instinctive life of an animal is thus trained to adjust to its environment; to our manipulation and to our will. A dog at home will never say: "through my sincere consideration I have decided not to eat this juicy steak on the kitchen table", but it does not eat the steak because it was punished several times when it did.

The "*locus*" of memory is the *etheric body*. Later in the course we will go into more detail on how the process of memory, the actual "storage" of memory, takes place (also in relation to the immune system).

People's ability to think for themselves can free them from instinctive behavior. In so far as

freedom is achieved, it is the ego which makes it possible. Only humans can make a choice between types of behavior, based essentially on the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain and discomfort, as well as higher motives, such as concern for the well-being of others. The ability to choose cannot be separated from responsibility for the consequences of the chosen action. However, not only does the ego give people the ability to think for themselves, it also makes it possible for them to transform their own natures. The human being searches for a meaning in life. In other words, humans are *moral* beings, who can "improve", have a *conscience*, have a basic perception of what is right and wrong, which is fundamental to our social life and our civilization (see the chapter on Philosophy of Spiritual Activity).

Since the early Greek philosophers the question about whether human freedom exists, has been a very dominant issue. In Western civilization there have essentially been two opposing philosophical traditions through the centuries: those who deny and those who accept human freedom as a reality. We will see that Anthroposophical medicine embraces both views, seeing the human being as unfree at birth but, through learning, through trial and error, through many (but not an endless number of) earth incarnations, being on the path to gaining complete freedom (see chapter on Philosophy of Spiritual Activity).

Some psychological traditions acknowledge that freedom is a human characteristic. They generally see the childhood environment as a powerful influence, but assume that people are able to modify their behavior through their awareness of what they learned whilst they were still young. Thus, psychological theories which include a theme of conscious self-development imply the existence of human freedom. Some go even further and introduce a concept of spirit. For example the psychiatrist **Victor Emil Frankl** (1905-1997) described the spirit as that part of the person that searches for, and is able to perceive truth and meaning. The soul, he said, might be ill with a neurosis, such as severe depression, and yet the spirit may still be capable of perceiving a situation and grasping the truth.

Frankl was an influential Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist as well as a Holocaust survivor. Frankl was the founder of logotherapy, which is a form of existential analysis, the "Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy". His best-selling book *Man's Search for Meaning* (published under a different title in 1959: *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*, and originally published in 1946 as *Trotzdem Ja Zum Leben Sagen: Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager*, meaning

Nevertheless, *Say "Yes" to Life: A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp*) chronicles his experiences as a concentration camp inmate which led him to discover the importance of finding meaning in all forms of existence, even the most sordid ones, and thus, a reason to continue living. Frankl became one of the key figures in existential therapy and a prominent source of inspiration for humanistic psychologists.

Frankl said the doctor's role went beyond the care of body and soul, and included helping patients to find out what was *meaningful* for them in what they were going through. He quoted an aphorism by Goethe which he recommended as a maxim for psychotherapy; "*if we take people as they are, we make them worse. If we treat them as if they were what they ought to be, we help them to become what they are capable of becoming.*"

By contrast, traditions of thought which emphasize the animal-like aspect of human behavior tend to deny the existence of human freedom. For example in the *Naked Ape*, Desmond Morris makes the case that human behavior which appears to be for the benefit of others is actually nothing more than a subtle refinement of instinctive drives, such as survival and sexuality. This reduces the human being to the level of the animal and, if all actions are deemed to be derived from these urges, freedom and the spirit are denied.

Anthroposophical medicine sees true freedom as a goal which is being worked towards rather than as a fully developed, already given endowment. The ego, the spirit, acts as the agent of transformation, of metamorphosis, in the process of personal development. It exists before birth and after death. It stimulates a departure from the "straightjacket" of learned, habitual and instinctive forms of behavior, replacing them with free and conscious acts. This process of personal development is not limited to one lifetime. As has been discussed, the physical body is constantly prone to decay, and remains alive only as long as it is maintained by the etheric body. When it dies, the spirit retains the developmental progress made in that lifetime and remains active in the spiritual world while preparing for the next incarnation (the concept of reincarnation should not be confused with the teachings of some ancient religions which suggest that humans can reincarnate as animals or insects, etc. The human spirit is involved in the development of the human form as a vehicle through which it can act in the physical realm. Animals do not have such individual egos – one might say they have a *group soul* – and their bodily organizations are not developed to support them).

The independent element of **warmth** acts as the physical medium through which the ego works into the physical body, creating *self-awareness* and *self-consciousness*. The gaseous element air (particularly oxygen) is the physical medium for astral activity in the body, which brings about *consciousness*.

Thus, human beings have an ego, a spirit or "I", which lives in the element warmth, and which gives the human being self-consciousness. The spirit is that part of the human being which makes him eternal. The ego reincarnates and obtains freedom through the lessons learnt during many earth incarnations.

So, to summarize, the human being is born *unfree*, but develops freedom through a process of many earth incarnations. Only on earth has the opportunity and the environment been created to obtain that freedom.

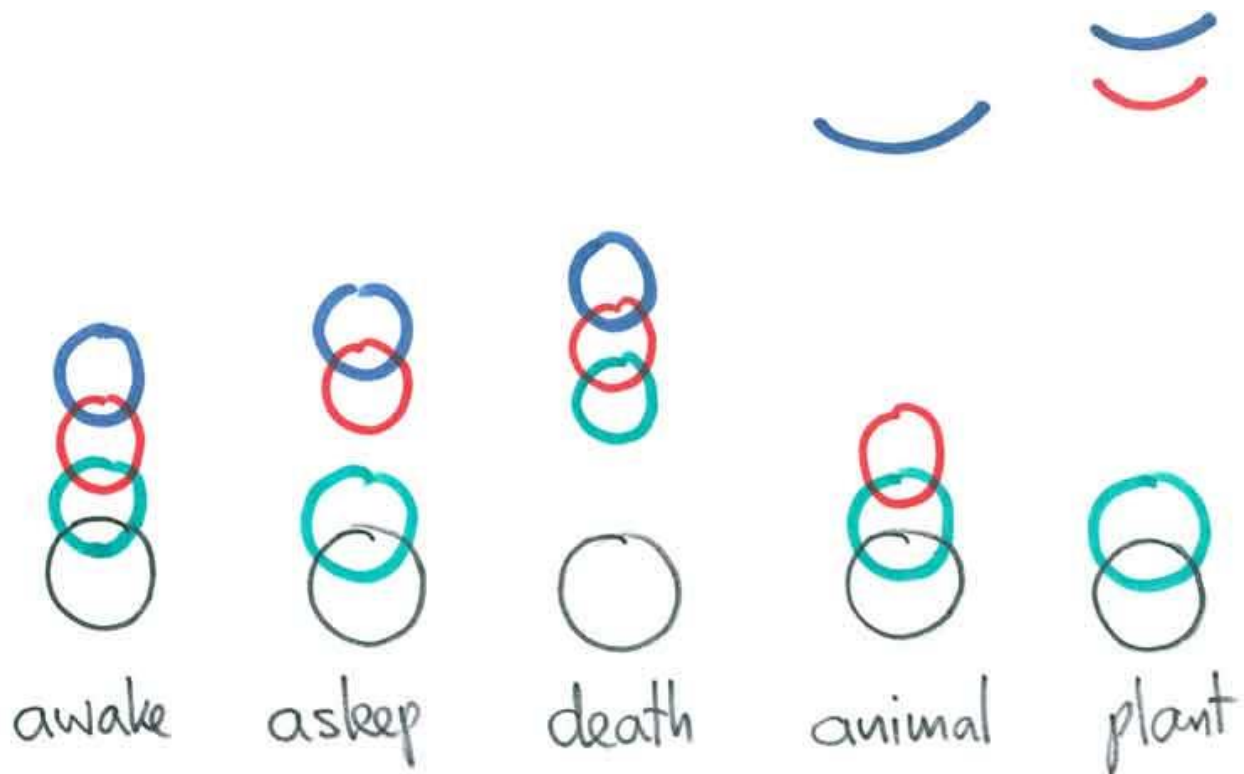


Figure 4

In figure 4, the correlation between the four bodies of man have been pictured in a very schematic way. Awake, the human being has all four bodies incarnated into each other. During deep sleep, the ego and astral body have separated themselves from the physical and etheric bodies. At moment of death, all three higher bodies leave the physical body and the physical body returns to the mineral kingdom: "dust to dust".

The animal has no ego incarnated and the plant, only the etheric and physical body are connected to each other. In a certain way, one could say, that the ego of the animal, and the ego and the astral body of the plant, never incarnate but stay far away out in the cosmos. If the astral world touches upon the plant, it becomes poisonous. A good example of this effect in the plant world is the Belladonna (Nightshade).

## CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses the four bodies of man (*physical-, etheric- and the astral body and the ego-organization*), and their relationship to the four elements (*earth, water, air and fire*). The interaction between the four bodies during daytime and night time and at the moment of death is explained. In addition, the four bodies of animals and of plants are discussed.

The human being is the only living being, which carries in itself a spiritual principle, the individual *Ego*. The Ego is that in man, which generates self-consciousness and which incarnates again and again (but not endlessly). For each new incarnation, the Ego builds up a new astral-, a new etheric-, and a new physical body.