

# THREE-FOLDNESS OF THE HUMAN SOUL (MIND)

## CHAPTER OUTLINE AND STUDENT OBJECTIVES.

- 1) Describe in your own words the threefold notion of man.
- 2) Explain how the soul can be considered the mediator between the physical body and spirit.
- 3) Explain how the correlation is between the threefold notion of the human being and the concept of karma and reincarnation.
- 4) Explain how the notion of threefoldness was lost and how the notion of duality spread through Europe, and, eventually, through the rest of the world.
- 5) Explain how current dualistic world conception (objective versus subjective) is rooted in the notion of man, consisting of body and soul (with the soul having some eternal qualities).
- 6) Explain, in your own words, the three qualities of the human soul, namely thinking, feeling and willing.
- 7) Characterize, in your own words, the qualities of thinking, and how it is rooted within the functioning of the Nerve-Sense System.
- 8) Characterize, in your own words, the qualities of willing, and how it is rooted within the functioning of the Metabolic-Limb System.
- 9) Characterize, in your own words, the qualities of feeling, and how it is rooted within the functioning of the Rhythmic System.
- 10) Substantiate, in your own words, how the three stages of regular consciousness (being awake, dreaming and being asleep) relate to thinking, feeling and willing.
- 11) Explain how the ego (ego organization) unites these three soul qualities, thinking, feeling and willing.
- 12) Give your own examples of how thinking, feeling and willing collaborate in daily life.

13) Explain how mental disease can be understood out of a weakened Ego Organization, or ego.

14) Differentiate between ego and ego organization.

### THREE-FOLDNESS OF THE HUMAN SOUL (MIND)

In Anthroposophy, the soul (or mind, or personality) is placed between the living physical body and the spirit (or "ego", or "I"). The soul is the mediator, the bridge between the "I" and the physical body. During many earthly incarnations and under the guiding influence of the "I", the soul is transformed and made into a perfect instrument of the spiritual. This is the basis for the Western concepts of karma and re-incarnation. Later in this course, we will investigate in detail how these concepts could be understood and applied.

The notion of three-fold man, consisting of body, soul and spirit, remained widely prevalent at the beginning of Christianity. Everywhere in the gospels, in the letters of Paul, and in early writings of leading Church fathers, one finds the three concepts of body, mind and soul, and reference to the spirit as that part in us which is eternal. In 869, during the Council of Constantinople, the concept of three-fold man was abolished. Thereafter, it became an official dogma of the Catholic Church that man consisted only of two parts, i.e. body and soul. The soul was acknowledged to have some eternal aspects, but the notion of the spirit, as an independent entity, was discarded. Thus, for occidental consciousness, the notion of reincarnation was gradually lost, and the basis for *dualism* was established. Currently, when one is asked: "What is the difference between soul and spirit?", most people in the West would answer: "They are two words for the same thing !".

But when one observes the *functioning* of the human soul, or mind, one can distinguish three qualities: **thinking**, **feeling** and **willing**.

A pre-requisite of **thinking** is the integrity and functioning of the **nerve-sense system**.

Rudolf Steiner stated:

"Through thinking, we are led beyond our own personal lives; we acquire something that extends beyond our own souls. We take it as a matter of course that the laws of thinking correspond with the universal order. We can feel at home in the universe because this correspondence exists, and it is a weighty factor in learning to recognize our own essential

nature. We seek the truth in our soul; through this truth, not only the soul but also the things of the world express themselves. Truth recognized through thinking, has an independent significance, which refers to the things of the world and not merely to our own souls. In one's delight in the starry heavens, one is living inside oneself, in one's feelings, but the thoughts that one formulates about the orbits of the heavenly bodies have the same meaning for anyone else's thinking as they have for one's own. It would be senseless to speak of "one's" delight and pleasure if one's self was not present, but it is not at all senseless to talk about one's thoughts without reference to one as a person. The truth one thinks today was also true yesterday and will be true tomorrow, even though it occupies one's mind only for today. (e.g. mathematics or geometry). If understanding something gives one pleasure, this pleasure is meaningful only as long as it is active in that person, but the truth of the understanding has a significance totally independent of one's pleasure. In grasping the truth, the soul links up with something that possess intrinsic value, a value that neither appears nor disappears with the soul's perception of it. The real truth neither comes into being nor passes away; its significance cannot be destroyed.

This in no way contradicts the fact that certain human "truths" are of only temporary value because they are recognized as partial or total errors in due time. We must realize that the truth, in itself, endures, even though our thoughts are only transient manifestations of eternal truths. Even if, like Lessing (1729 - 1781), we say that we are content to strive eternally for the truth since the pure and perfect truth can surely exist only for God, this does not deny the eternal value of the truth, but rather confirms it." ("Theosophy" by Rudolf Steiner, Anthroposophic Press, 1994, ISBN 0-88010-373-6).

In order to think, to reflect, to solve problems, we need to be awake. Normally, *sensory perception*, makes the interaction possible between the outer world, one's inner world, and one's memory: One becomes conscious thereby of the outer world, one's inner world, and of oneself.

When we go to sleep, we eliminate as much sensory perception as possible. We tend to avoid noise, light, extreme temperatures, etc. Usually, only then can we fall asleep. Falling asleep means losing consciousness and self-consciousness. When we are deeply asleep, we are unaware of ourselves and of our surroundings.

On the other hand, if we want to arouse somebody from sleep, we need to apply some form of

sensory stimulation, e.g. make a noise, open the curtains to let light shine upon the person, touch the person, etc. Through sensory perception we wake up and stay awake. However, sensory deprivation also causes disorientation and changes both in consciousness and self-consciousness, which make it easier to manipulate an individual. Sensory deprivation, for instance, has been used in the torture of political prisoners to break down their defense mechanisms and to facilitate easier manipulation.

The process of thinking includes inner quietness, concentration, reflection, contemplation, and exercise or training. One needs to train, to develop the capacity for thinking. That is one reason why we go to school, college, or university.

"When we are contemplating thinking itself, two things must coincide which otherwise *must* always appear apart, namely, concept and percept. Thinking bridges what is perceived through the senses (percept) and what has developed through *education* and *experience* (concept). One could also say that a concept is an "*individualized idea*". There exist the ideas "table" or "chair" or "justice", etc. These are *objective*. But each of us, through upbringing and experience, will have a somewhat different concept of what a table or a chair looks like, what its function is, etc. When we see an object that reminds us of a table or a chair, we will "recognize" it as such. Thinking unites what we see (the perception of the object chair) and the concept we have of a "chair" to form an individualized idea of "chair".

If we fail to see this, we shall be unable to regard the concepts which we have elaborated with respect to percepts, as anything but shadowy copies of these percepts, and we shall take the percepts as presenting to us the true and only reality. But if we recognize what is present in thinking, we shall realize that in the percept we have only one part of the reality and that the other part, which belongs to it, and which first allows the full reality to appear, is *experience* gained in the permeation of the percept by thinking. We shall see in this element that appears in our consciousness as thinking, not a shadowy copy of some reality, but a self-sustaining spiritual essence". ("Philosophy of Spiritual Activity" by Rudolf Steiner, Anthroposophical Press, ISBN 1-85584-000-6)

In summary, one could say that, in order to be able to think, one has to be **awake**, alert; and that thinking is rooted in, and supported by the **nerve-sense system**. Furthermore thinking connects one with the **past**. One can reflect upon the past but cannot change it. Anything which has happened is fixed for ever and has become part of the past, of one's biography. But one is aware of the past, one is awake to one's past, one remembers one's

past.

Now, one should examine the **will**. A pre-requisite for willing is the integrity and functioning of the **metabolic-limb system**. The will of a person becomes apparent, visible, through his deeds, his actions. Actions are only possible through muscle activity.

By undertaking something, one can have an effect upon the future, one shapes the future, one determines the future. One cannot have an effect, one cannot change or determine the past, but one can influence and determine to a certain degree one's future. (One can reflect upon the past, and hopefully learn from the past, so that one may act better next time or at some time in the future!)

To act, one requires voluntary muscles. Voluntary muscles are found in one's limbs. One could generalize and say that without one's limbs one could not act. By acting, by being active, one produces warmth. Warmth is a quality of the metabolic system. Movement and warmth are strongly related to each other. One could say that movement produces warmth, that movement "lives" or "lives" in the metabolic system. Therefore, since will actively lives in warmth, it also "lives" in the metabolic-limb system.

Thus, in one's thinking, one is awake. One is awake to the past. Is one awake to the future? No, one is not awake to the future (yet)! This is very mysterious but true. When one acts one shapes the future. But the effects of one's acts can only be completely known once the act has been carried out. In other words, when one's act, or its effects, have become part of the past. Of course, through experience, education and training one will have expectations of what the effects of a certain act will have upon the future. But one cannot be absolutely sure until it has happened. Thus, one is not yet awake to the future, because one is asleep in one's will.

In summary, we say: the **will** lives in the **metabolic-limb system**, it connects one with the future and one is unaware, **asleep** in one's will.

Now let us examine **feeling**. At the basis of feeling lies the experience of sympathy and antipathy. People oscillate back and forth between sympathy (compassion, surrender, devotion, interest, conversation, warmth), and antipathy (aversion, antagonism, repulsion, withdrawal, coldness) in the soul whenever perception occurs. This may take the form of sensory perceptions of the outer world (for instance, when one listens to music, when one eats or when one smells ), or of inner experiences (for instance conscience, or when one thinks of a dear person or of one's boss, who irritates one all the time).

When one dreams, one is exposed, in a certain sense, to one's feeling life. One can have strong feelings when one dreams; think of a nightmare ! One can also "daydream".

To every act of perception, a feeling adds the basic experience of "like" and "dislike". But one is not aware of this unless one observes one's feelings. That is why it is often very difficult to explain why one likes or dislikes a piece of art, or a person. One is less awake in one's feelings than in one's thinking. One can explain clearly the principles of geometry or algebra, but it is much more difficult to explain how one feels about something.

The rhythm of the heart beat and of breathing is very much affected by what one feels. In extreme cases, as in the case of fear or anger, one's heart rate and respiration can increase dramatically. But also in response to more subtle feelings one's rhythmic system reacts all the time and takes part in one's feeling life.

Thus one's feelings "live" in the **rhythmic system**; one **dreams** in one's feelings, and one's feelings connect one with the **present** (see figure 1).

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In summary, one may say that:

One's **thinking** "lives" in one's nerve-sense system(**NSS**); one is awake in one's thinking; one's thinking connects one to the past.

One's **feelings** live in one's rhythmic system(**RhS**); one is dreaming in one's feelings; one's feelings connect one to the present.

One's **willing** lives in one's metabolic-limb system(**MLS**); One is asleep in one's willing; one's willing connects one to the future.

Thus, average man is a being who lives simultaneously in three stages of consciousness at the same time; he is alert, awake in the past, dreamy, half awake/half asleep in the present and asleep in the future.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT REVIEW QUESTIONS**

- 1) (a) Thinking is rooted within the willing, as one can only think if one concentrates.  
(b) Concentration is a will activity  
(c) The will is correlated to the Metabolic-Limb System.  
(d) Especially striated muscle is necessary for the execution of our will: therefore, the will lives within the Metabolic-Limb System.
- 2) (a) To certain degree, one's thinking, feeling and willing are always active whenever he is awake.  
(b) The functioning of thinking, feeling and willing are integrated by the ego (Ego Organization).  
(c) Thinking is rooted within the Nerve-Sense System.  
(d) One can only feel if someone is awake.
- 3) (a) For daily life, one distinguishes three forms of consciousness: being awake, being fast asleep and an intermediate state, namely dreaming.  
(b) Usually, one experiences time as a continuous flow with the future still ahead, and the past behind oneself.  
(c) One can know things *a priori*.  
(d) If one really tries, one can change events, which have taken place.
- 4) (a) Thinking, feeling and will processes always penetrate each other in daily activities.  
(b) If the processes of thinking, feeling and willing are not coordinated, mental illnesses can become manifest.  
(c) If the ego (Ego Organization) is weakened by extreme fatigue, the coordination of thinking, feeling and willing becomes insufficient, and the person might become disoriented and start to hallucinate.  
(d) At the basis of feeling lays the polarity between sympathy and antipathy.

- (a) Willing is rooted within the Metabolic-Limb System.
- (b) Actions are practically always motivated.
- (c) Since the will is rooted within the Metabolic-Limb System, a paralysed person will have little, or a weakened, will.
- (d) Since thinking is rooted within the Nerve-Sense System, a person, who acquired blindness as an adult, will have great difficulties in thinking.
- 6) (a) Since thinking is rooted within the Nerve-Sense System, it is practically impossible to think about things which cannot be perceived by the sense organs.
- (b) Since feeling is rooted within the Rhythmic System, it is practically impossible to have deep feelings when the Rhythmic System is damaged by, for instance a myocardial infarction, or emphysema.
- (c) Since willing is rooted within the Metabolic-Limb System, a person suffering from the after effects of poliomyelitis will have a weakened will.
- (d) Sympathy and antipathy form the basis of regular feeling life.

(correct answers: 1: (b), (c), (d); 2: (a), (b), (c); 3: (a), (b), (c); 4: (a), (b), (c), (d); 5: (a), (b); 6: (d);)

## CONCLUSION

This chapter explains the threefoldness of the soul and the interactions and relationships between the three qualities in the human soul (*thinking, feeling and willing*) and the threefoldness in the organism (Nerve-Sense System, Rhythmical System and Metabolic-Limb System). In addition, the connection between thinking, feeling and willing with three levels of consciousness (being *awake, dreaming* and being *asleep*) and time (*past, present and future*) are discussed.