

THE DOUBLE (DOPPELGÄNGER) IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT



Rudolf Steiner, PhD. (1861-1925)

Edited by Robert Gorter, MD, PhD.

If the student of the spirit ascends upon the path into the higher worlds of knowledge, he notices at a certain stage that the cohesion of the forces of his personality assumes a different form from the one in the physical-sensory world, where the ego effects a uniform co-operation of the soul forces, of thinking, feeling, and willing. These three soul forces stand always in a certain relationship to each other in the conditions of ordinary human life. One sees, for example, a certain object in the outer world. It pleases or displeases the soul. That is to say, of necessity the visualizing of a thing will be followed by a feeling of pleasure or displeasure. One may, perhaps, desire the object or have the impulse to alter it in one way or another. That is, the power of desire and will associate with visualizing and feeling. That this co-ordination takes place is caused by the ego uniting visualizing (thinking), feeling, and willing and in this way bringing order into the forces of the personality. This healthy order would not be interrupted if the ego were to prove powerless in this regard; if, for example, desire should elect to go a different way from feeling or thinking. A human being would not be in a healthy soul condition who might think that this or that is right, but who might want something if which he is convinced that it is not right. The case would be similar if someone did not want what pleases him, but rather what displeases him. The human being now notices that on the path to higher knowledge thinking, feeling, and willing do indeed separate and each assumes a certain independence.

For example, a certain thought has no longer an inward urge toward a certain feeling and willing. The matter is as follows. In thinking something may be perceived correctly, but in order to have any feeling or to come to a resolution of the will, we need again an independent impulse from ourselves. During supersensible perception thinking, feeling, and willing do not remain three forces that radiate from the common ego-center of the personality, but they become three independent entities, three personalities, as it were; one must now make one's own ego all the stronger, for it is not merely a matter of its bringing three forces into order, but of leading and directing three entities. This separation, however, must only exist during supersensible perception. Here again it becomes clear how important it is that the exercises for higher training be accompanied by those that give certainty and firmness to the power of judgment, and to the life of feeling and willing. For the person who does not bring these qualities with him into the higher world will soon see how the ego

proves weak and unable to act as an orderly guide for thinking, feeling, and willing. If this weakness were present, the soul would be as though torn by three personalities in as many directions and its inner unity would cease. If, however, the development of the student proceeds in the right way the described transformation of forces signifies true progress; the ego remains master of the independent entities that now form its soul. - In the further course of this evolution the development continues. Thinking that has become independent stimulates the emergence of a special fourth soul-spirit being that may be described as a direct influx of currents into man, similar to thoughts. The entire cosmos then appears as a thought-structure confronting man as does the plant or animal world in the realm of physical senses. Likewise, feeling and willing that have become independent stimulate two forces in the soul that act in it like independent beings. Still another seventh power and being appears that is similar to one's own ego itself.

This entire experience is connected with yet another. Before his entrance into the supersensible world, man knew thinking, feeling, and willing only as inner soul experiences. As soon as he enters the supersensible world he perceives objects that do not express the physical-sensory, but the psycho-spiritual. Behind these characteristics of the new world now perceived by him stand soul-spirit beings. These now stand before him as an outer world, just as in the physical realm stones, plants, and animals stood before his senses.

The student of the spiritual can now perceive an important difference between the world of soul and spirit that reveals itself to him, and the world that he was accustomed to perceiving through his physical senses. A plant in the world of the senses remains just as it is, whatever the human soul may feel or think about it. With the images of the world of soul and spirit this is, at the outset, not the case. They alter according to what the human being feels or thinks. In this way he gives them form that depends upon his own nature. Let us imagine that a certain picture appears before man in the world of imagination. If, at first, he remains indifferent to it in his soul, it then shows itself in a certain form. At the moment, however, when pleasure or displeasure is felt in regard to the picture, it changes its form. The pictures therefore, in the first instance, express not only what they are, independent of man, but they reflect what man

is himself. They are permeated through and through by his own nature. The latter spreads like a veil over the supersensible beings. Although real beings confront him, he does not see them, but instead, his own creation. Thus he may have something true before him and, nevertheless, see something false. Indeed, this is not only the case in regard to what man notices in himself as his own essential nature, but everything that is in him affects this world. He may have, for example, hidden inclinations that do not come into evidence in life because of his education and character; they affect the world of the soul and spirit, which takes on a particular coloring through the whole being of man, no matter whether he himself knows much about this being or not. - In order to be able to advance further from this stage of development it is necessary that man learn to distinguish between himself and the outer spiritual world. It is necessary that he learn to eliminate all the effects of himself upon his soul-spirit environment. This cannot be done otherwise than by acquiring a knowledge of what he himself carries into the new world. It is therefore important that he first possess true, thoroughly developed self-knowledge, in order to be able to have a clear perception of the surrounding world of soul and spirit. Now, certain facts of human development demand that such self-knowledge must take place quite naturally at the time of the entrance into the higher world. Man develops his ego, his self-consciousness in the everyday physical-sensory world. This ego now acts as a center of attention for everything belonging to man. All his inclinations, sympathies, antipathies, passions, and opinions group themselves, as it were, around his ego, and this ego is also the point of attraction for what may be designated as the karma of man. If this ego were to be seen unconcealed it would show that certain forms of destiny must still be encountered by it in this and in subsequent incarnations, according to the way it has lived in the preceding incarnations and has made this or that its own. Invested with all this, the ego must appear as the first image before the human soul when the latter ascends into the world of soul and spirit. This Doppelgänger (double or twin likeness) of man must, according to a law of the spiritual world, emerge prior to everything else as his first impression of that world. One may easily make the law underlying this fact understandable if one considers the following. In the life of the physical senses man only perceives himself in so far as he experiences himself inwardly in his thinking, feeling, and willing. This, however, is an inner perception; it does not

present itself to the human being like stones, plants, and animals. Also, man learns to know himself only partially through inner perception. He has something in himself that prevents his having more profound self-knowledge. This is an impulse to transform immediately a trait of character if he, as a result of self-knowledge, must admit to and does not wish to deceive himself about himself.

If he does not follow this impulse, if he simply turns his attention away from himself, remaining what he is, then he, naturally, also deprives himself of the possibility of self-knowledge in the point in question. If man, however, penetrates into himself and confronts himself without deception with this or that trait, then he will either be in the position to improve the trait, or he will be incapable of doing so under the present circumstances of his life. In the latter case a feeling will creep over his soul that must be described as a feeling of shame. This is indeed the reaction of healthy human nature: it feels through self-knowledge various kinds of shame. This feeling has even in ordinary life a quite definite effect. The normal thinking human being will take care that what fills him, through himself, with this feeling does not become evident outwardly in effects, does not manifest in outer deeds. Shame is thus a force that impels man to conceal something in his inner being and not allow it to become outwardly perceptible. If we give this due consideration, we shall find it comprehensible that spiritual research ascribes much farther reaching effects to an inner soul experience that is closely related to the feeling of shame. This research finds that there is, concealed in the depths of the soul, a sort of hidden shame of which the human being is not conscious in physical-sensory life. This concealed feeling, however, acts in a similar manner to the feeling of shame in everyday life; it prevents the innermost nature of the human being from appearing before him in a perceptible picture. If this feeling were not present, the human being would perceive before him what he is in truth; his thoughts, feeling, and will would not only be experienced inwardly, but would be perceived outwardly just as stones, animals, and plants are perceived. This feeling is thus the concealer of man from himself, and at the same time it is the concealer of the entire world of soul and spirit. Owing to the fact that his inner nature is concealed from him, he is also not able to perceive that by means of



which he should develop inner organs in order to cognize the world of soul and spirit; he is unable so to transform his nature that it may unfold spiritual organs of perception. - If, however, through correct training man strives to acquire these organs of perception, what he himself is appears to him as first impression. He perceives his Doppelgänger, his double. This self-perception is not at all to be separated from the perception of the rest of the world of soul and spirit. In everyday life of the physical-sensory world, the feeling characterized acts so as constantly to close the door of the world of soul and spirit to the human being. Even the mere attempt to penetrate into this world causes the feeling of shame - which arises immediately, but of which we do not become conscious - to conceal the part of the world of soul and spirit that strives to appear. The exercises characterized open the door to this world. It is a fact, however, that this concealed feeling acts like a great benefactor of man. For all that man acquires of power of judgment, feeling life, and character without spiritual-scientific training does not enable him to bear without further preparation the perception of his own being in its true form. He would lose through this perception all self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-consciousness. That this may not happen, we must take the necessary precautions which we do undertake, alongside the exercises for higher knowledge, in the fostering of a healthy power of judgment, feeling-life, and character. Through this regular training man learns to know so much of spiritual science - as though without intention - and, moreover, so many means for the attainment of self-knowledge and self-observation become clear to him as are necessary in order to encounter his Doppelgänger bravely. The student then only sees in another form, as a picture of the imaginative world, what he has already learned in the physical world. If he has first comprehended the law of karma properly in the physical world through his intellect, he will not be especially shaken when he now sees the beginnings of his destiny engraved in the image of his Doppelgänger. If man has made himself acquainted through his power of judgment with the evolution of the cosmos and mankind and knows how, at a certain point in time of this evolution, the forces of Lucifer have penetrated into the human soul, he will bear it without difficulty when he becomes aware that the Luciferic beings with all their effects are contained within the image of his own nature. - We see from this how necessary it is that man does not demand entrance into the spiritual world before he has

understood, through his ordinary power of judgment developed in the physical + sensory world, certain truths about the spiritual world. The knowledge given in this book prior to the discussion about "Cognition of the Higher Worlds" should have been acquired by the student of spiritual science by means of his ordinary power of thought in the regular course of development, before he has the desire himself to enter into supersensible worlds.



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In a training in which no attention is paid to the certainty and firmness of the power of judgment, of the life of feeling and character, it may happen that the student encounters the higher world before he possesses the necessary inner faculties. In that case the encounter with his Doppelgänger would depress him and lead to error. If, however, the encounter were entirely avoided - something that might indeed be possible - and man nevertheless were led into the supersensible world, he would then be just as little in the position to recognize that world in its true shape. For it would be quite impossible for him to distinguish between what he carries over as projections of himself into things and what they are in reality. This distinction is only possible if one perceives one's own being as an image in itself, and if, as a result of this distinction, everything that flows from one's inner nature becomes detached from the

environment. - For man's life in the physical-sensory world, the Doppelgänger's effect is such that he becomes immediately invisible through the feeling of shame characterized when man approaches the world of soul and spirit. As a result of this, he conceals the entire latter world also. Like a "guardian" he stands there before that world, in order to deny entrance to those who are not truly capable of entering. He may therefore be called the "guardian of the threshold that lies before the world of soul and spirit." - Besides the described encounter with the guardian at the entrance into the supersensible world, man also encounters him when passing through physical death, and in the course of life between death and a new birth the guardian discloses himself by degrees in the evolution of soul and spirit. there, however, the encounter cannot depress the human being, because he then has knowledge of worlds quite different from those he knows in the life between birth and death. If, without encountering the "guardian of the threshold," man were to enter the world of soul and spirit, he might fall prey to deception after deception. For he would never be able to distinguish between what he himself has carried over into that world and what in reality belongs to it. A proper training must lead the student of spiritual science into the realm of truth only, not into the realm of illusion. This training will of itself be of such a nature that the encounter must of necessity take place sometime. For it is one of the precautionary measures, indispensable for the observation of supersensible worlds, against the possibility of falling prey to deception and the fantastic. - It belongs to the most indispensable measures that every student of spiritual science must take, to work carefully on himself in order not to become a fantast, a human being who might succumb to possible deception and self-delusion. Where the advice for spiritual training is correctly followed, the sources that may bring deception are at the same time destroyed. Naturally, we cannot speak at length here of all the numerous details that have to be considered in regard to such precautionary measures. The important points can only be indicated. Deceptions that have to be considered here are derived from two sources. They originate in part from the coloring of reality through one's own soul nature. In ordinary life of the physical-sensory world there is comparatively little danger from this source of deception; for here the outer world continually impresses its own form sharply upon our observation, no matter how the observer wants to color it according to his own wishes and interests. As soon,

however, as man enters the imaginative world, its pictures are transformed through such wishes and interests, and he has before him, like a reality, what he himself has formed, or at least has helped in forming. This source of deception is removed by the student having learned to recognize, through his encounter with the "guardian of the threshold," his own inner nature, which he might thus carry into the world of soul and spirit. The preparation that the student of spiritual science undergoes before his entrance into the world of soul and spirit acts in such a way that he becomes accustomed to disregarding himself even when observing the physical-sensory world and to permitting the objects and processes to speak to him purely out of their own nature. If the student has thus prepared himself sufficiently, he can calmly await the encounter with the "guardian of the threshold." This encounter will be the final test to determine whether he feels himself really in a position to disregard his own nature also when he confronts the world of soul and spirit.

Besides this source of delusion, there is still another. This comes into evidence when one misinterprets an impression made on one. A simple example of this sort of delusion in the physical sense-life is the delusion that arises when a man sits in a railway coach moving in a certain direction and believes the trees and other objects of perception are moving in the opposite direction, while actually it is he himself who is moving with the train. Although there are numerous cases where such delusions in the physical sense-world are more difficult to correct than the simple one quoted, still, it is easy to see that within this world one also finds the means of disposing of such delusions when, with sound judgment, one takes into consideration all that may possibly contribute to an adequate factual explanation. The matter is different, however, as soon as one penetrates into the realms of the supersensible. In the world of the senses facts are not altered as a result of human delusions; therefore it is possible, by means of unprejudiced observation, to rectify the delusion by means of the facts. In the supersensible world this is not immediately possible. If one wants to observe a supersensible process and approaches it with false judgment, one carries this judgment over into the process and it becomes so interwoven with the fact that it is impossible to distinguish the judgment from the fact.

The error is then not within the human being and the correct fact outside him, but the error itself is made a component of the outer fact. It cannot, therefore, be rectified simply by an unbiased observation of the fact. We are here pointing to what may be a superabundant source of delusion and the fantastic for those who approach the supersensible world without proper preparation. - The student of the spiritual, besides acquiring the ability to exclude the delusions that arise through the coloring of supersensible world-phenomena with his own nature, must also acquire the ability to make the second indicated source of delusion ineffective. He can exclude what comes from himself if he has first recognized the image of his own Doppelgänger. He will be able to exclude the second source of delusion if he acquires the ability to recognize, from the inner quality of a supersensible fact, whether it is a reality or delusion. If the delusion were to appear exactly like the actual facts, then a distinction would not be possible. This, however, is not the case. Delusions of the supersensible world have qualities in themselves by which they are to be distinguished from realities, and it is important that the student of the spiritual know by which qualities he can recognize realities. Nothing is more self-evident than the fact that anyone ignorant of spiritual training may ask, "How is it at all possible to protect myself against delusion, when its sources are so numerous? And he may continue to ask, "Is there any proof for the student of the spiritual against the fact that all his professed higher knowledge is not something based on mere delusion and autosuggestion?" Anyone who asks such questions does not realize that in true spiritual training, through the very manner of its occurrence, the sources of delusion are stopped up. In the first place, in preparing himself the true spiritual science student will acquire sufficient knowledge about what may cause delusion and autosuggestion, and thus be in a position to protect himself from them. He has, in this regard, more opportunity than any other human being to make himself prudent and capable of judgment on the path of life. Everything that he experiences causes him to disregard indefinite premonitions and suggestions. This training makes him as careful as possible. Besides this, all correct training leads first to concepts about great cosmic events, and thus to things that make necessary the exertion of sound judgment, which becomes, at the same time, more refined and acute. Only someone who might refuse to go into such distant realms and preferred to abide with "revelations" of a world near at hand might lose the

strengthening of that sound judgment that gives him certainty in distinguishing between delusion and reality. All of this, however, is not yet the most important. That lies in the exercises themselves that are used in a correct spiritual training. These must be so arranged that the student is always consciously aware of what takes place in the soul during inner meditation. In order to bring about imagination, a symbol is first formed. In this symbol are still contained mental images of outer perceptions. The human being is not alone responsible for the content of these mental images; he does not make it himself. Thus he may delude himself in regard to its origin; he may interpret its origin incorrectly. But the student of spiritual science removes this content from his consciousness when he advances to the exercises of inspiration. Here he contemplates his own soul activity only, which has formed the symbol. Here, also errors are still possible. Through education, learning, and through other means man has acquired the character of his soul activity. He cannot know everything about its origin. The student of spiritual science now removes even his own soul activity from his consciousness. If now anything remains in his consciousness, nothing is attached to it that cannot be surveyed. Nothing can intermingle with it that is not to be judged in regard to its whole content. In intuition, the student of spiritual science has thus a criterion enabling him to recognize how a clear reality of the world of soul and spirit is constituted. If he now applies the signs of soul and spirit-reality thus recognized to everything that comes under his observation, he is able to distinguish between illusion and reality. He may be certain that by employing this law he will remain protected from illusion in the supersensible world just as it cannot happen to him in the physical-sensory world to mistake an imaginary piece of hot iron for one that really burns. It is taken for granted that one only takes this attitude toward the knowledge one regards as one's own experiences in the supersensible worlds, and not toward what one receives as communications from other persons and that one comprehends with one's physical intellect and sound feeling for truth. The student of the spiritual will take pains to draw an exact line between what he has acquired in the one way and what he has acquired in the other. He will receive willingly, on the one hand, the communications about the higher worlds and seek to understand them by means of his capacity to judge. If on the other hand he states something as his own experience, his own

observation, he will have tested whether this has confronted him with precisely the qualities he has learned to perceive by means of unerring intuition.

After the student of the spiritual has encountered the "guardian of the threshold." further experiences await him as he ascends into supersensible worlds. First he will notice that an inner relationship exists between this "guardian of the threshold" and the soul-power that, in the above description, has resulted as the seventh, and has shaped itself into an independent principle. Indeed, this seventh principle is in a certain regard nothing else but the Doppelgänger, the "guardian of the threshold" himself, and this principle sets the student of the spiritual a special task. He has to direct and lead with his own new-born self what he is in his ordinary self and which appears to him in an image. A sort of battle against the Doppelgänger will result. The latter will constantly strive for supremacy. To establish the right relationship to this Doppelgänger and not permit him to do anything that is not under the influence of the new-born ego strengthens and fortifies man's powers. - In the higher world, self-knowledge is different, in a certain respect, from self-knowledge in the physical-sensory world. Whereas in the physical-sensory world self-knowledge appears only as an inner experience, the new-born self presents itself at once as an outer soul phenomenon. Man beholds his new-born self as another being standing before him, but he cannot perceive it completely. For whatever stage he may have reached upon the way into the supersensible worlds, there are always still higher stages. At these stages he will perceive ever more and more of his "higher self." The "higher self" can thus only partially reveal itself to the student of the spiritual at any of these stages. the temptation is extremely great which overtakes the human being when he first becomes aware of some aspect of his "higher self," so to speak, from the standpoint he has gained in the physical-sensory world. This temptation is even good and it must appear, if development is to proceed in the right way. We must observe what appears in the Doppelgänger, the "guardian of the threshold," and place it before the "higher self" in order to note the contrast between what we are and what we are to become. Through this observation the "guardian of the threshold" begins to take on quite a different form. He presents himself as an image of all the hindrances that the development of the higher self must encounter. The student will perceive what a load he must drag in the form of his ordinary self, and if he is not strong enough through his

preparations to say, "I will not remain stationary here, but unceasingly strive to reach my higher self," he will slacken his efforts and shrink back before what is in store for him. He has plunged into the world of soul and spirit, but now gives up his efforts. He becomes a prisoner of the form that, through the "guardian of the threshold," now stands before the soul. What is important here is the fact that in this experience he does not have the feeling of being a prisoner. On the contrary, he believes he experiences something quite different. The form that the "guardian of the threshold" calls forth can be of such a nature that it causes the impression in the soul of the observer of having before him, in the pictures that appear at this evolutionary stage, the entire compass of all imaginable worlds, of having attained the pinnacle of knowledge, with no need of striving further. Instead of feeling to be a prisoner he may feel himself as the immeasurably rich possessor of all the world mysteries. The fact that one can have such an experience that depicts the very opposite of the actual facts will, however, not astonish a person who keeps in mind the fact that, when he experiences this, he stands already in the world of soul and spirit and that it is a peculiarity of this world that that events may present themselves in reverse order. This fact was pointed out earlier in this book when life after death was discussed.

The figure that one perceives at this stage of development shows the student of the spiritual something in addition to what appeared to him in the first instance as the "guardian of the threshold." In this Doppelgänger all the peculiarities were perceived that the ordinary self of man has in consequence of the influence of the forces of Lucifer. Now, however, in the course of human evolution another power has entered the human soul through the influence of Lucifer. This is the power that was designated in an earlier section of this book as the power of Ahriman. It is the power that prevents the human being during physical sense-existence from perceiving the soul-spirit beings of the outer world lying behind the veil of the sensory. The form the human soul has assumed under the influence of this power is shown in a picture by the shape that emerges in the experience described. - The person who is adequately prepared for this experience will be able to interpret it correctly; very soon thereafter another form will appear that we may call the "greater guardian of

the threshold" in contrast to the already described "lesser guardian." This greater guardian tells the student of the spiritual that he must not remain stationary at this stage but must energetically work on. He calls forth in the observer the consciousness that the world that is conquered becomes truth, and is not transformed into illusion, only if the work is continued in an adequate manner. - If, because of incorrect spiritual training, a person were to enter upon this experience unprepared, then, in the encounter with the "greater guardian of the threshold," something would pour into his soul that only can be compared to the "feeling of immeasurable horror," of "boundless fear."

Just as the student of the spiritual in his encounter with the "lesser guardian of the threshold" is afforded the possibility of testing whether or not he is protected against delusions arising from the intermingling of his own being with the supersensible world, so can he also test himself by the experiences that finally lead to the "greater guardian of the threshold" whether he is capable of mastering the delusions described above as coming from the second source. If he is able to withstand the gigantic illusion that has been conjured up before him - that the picture world he has gained is a rich possession, while in reality he is only a prisoner - if he is able to resist this delusion, he is then, during the progressing course of his development, guarded from mistaking illusion from reality.

The "guardian of the threshold" will assume, to a certain degree, an individual shape for each human being. The Double is man's own creation through numerous earth incarnations. At the moment of death, the Double stays behind but waits for the moment to reunite again with the individuality at the moment of rebirth. The encounter with him corresponds indeed to the experience by which the personal character of the supersensible observations is overcome and through which the possibility is given of entering a region of experience that is free from personal coloring and applies to every human being.

To study more in depth about the Doppelgänger (the Guardian of the Threshold) one should read following works by Rudolf Steiner:

“An Outline of Occult Science” (Anthroposophic Press 1972). (Original title: “Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss” GA 13.)

“Cognition of the Higher Worlds” (Anthroposophic Press 1972)