

# The I, the Self, and the Body

— Dr. Edmond Schoorel

As you think upon your own experiences, do you recognize this? You have prepared a wonderful program for your group, your class, or your child's birthday party. Everything is well thought out and well prepared. And then suddenly something happens that messes everything up. It storms and rains while you prepared the party for outside. There are extra children in your class because your colleague got sick. Or the helper for the birthday party has called to say she cannot come. The whole plan is changed, but then you have to improvise.

Improvising is the normal situation for a child who comes to earth. Children carefully prepare. They choose the country, the culture, the language, parents and other people they want to meet. But the reality then turns out to be that the parents they have chosen are getting divorced, the school is shutting down, the best karmic friend is moving away. The child needs to improvise all the time in the incarnating process. Most children can cope with this; they have the possibility in their physiology to do this, though the circumstances may be difficult. We will speak today of the physiology of the predictable and the unpredictable in development, steps going up and down.

First we will look at two incarnating routes before working them out. The threefold human being is

the starting point with the upper pole, rhythmic area, and lower pole. Rudolf Steiner gives these three areas double names: the nerve-sense area/upper pole, metabolic-limb area/lower pole, and in between the area of rhythmic processes—breathing and circulation.

As well as these three different domains, humans also have two opposite incarnating routes within them, one that represents the past and one that opens the door to the future. We can recognize how past and future streams are illustrated when we look at a child's developmental stages. Children must stand upright, an innate capacity from the past, before they can walk. The ability to listen must exist before they can learn to speak. And children must have thoughts before they can identify what they perceive. But developing these abilities is not automatic. Around the child must be adults and children who already walk, speak, and think, to become imitative models for the child, so that the future can come to efficacy. In their own individual situations, children will develop themselves as members of a language community and become participants in the common human world of thoughts. By observing the created world that we all have in common, they learn to speak for themselves and to act in the group that they belong to. From this point

they can then do things individually because of who they uniquely are; this expresses the individual. For most children, this happens without difficulty. But for some others the development falters and they get stuck along these routes and may need therapy.

The human being comes to earth along two routes. One proceeds from below upward, ending in the head, and comes from the past. This route we associate with wisdom. The other one flowing from the head downward is oriented toward the future, ends in the pelvic region, and makes us think of light. There is one stream that is common to us all, the upward stream that enables us to stand, listen, and think—and another part that is individual, expressed in walking, speaking, and perceiving the world, which flows from the head downward.

### **The stream going up**

Let us begin with looking at the upward stream. This we may call the stream of thinking, seeing that it ends up in the head. Out of the breadth of pre-natal life, human beings prepare their landing on earth. They do not do it alone but have high, hierarchical helpers. The person directing this process is not the person we meet casually on the street later on but is the spiritual being within oneself to whom we later say “I.” All the wisdom gained in previous incarnations, as well as the wisdom that created humanity overall, works during pregnancy. From the periphery, both universal forces and individual formative forces from the I give humans the strength to condense, to compact themselves. The developing human being pulls itself in from the embryonic sheath so the child can physically appear on earth. The embryonic sheaths, comprised of the placenta, amnion, chorion, and the amniotic fluid, are beautiful images of the nurturing, supporting power of growth of the upward stream. From the moment of birth these physical sheaths are no longer needed and fall away. Their functions are taken over by the up-going stream.

A big change at birth is that the I no longer works on the inside of the human body but takes the lead from outside. After birth the I of day consciousness takes over guiding development. At night the upward stream can still do its work and aids recovery processes. When we follow the upward stream on its route, we first find the metabolic system—the source of substance formation, the source of vitality. The astral body dominates the upward stream and works in various organs. Incredibly high star wisdom works in the human body because we have organs.

Continuing upward, the diaphragm forms a boundary to the rhythmic system where we find the seven life processes. One of these seven processes is breathing. Breathing provides us with an appropriate picture for the events in this area. In breathing there is a rhythmic exchange between inside and outside. Breathing makes the difference between being alive or not. In the same way that metabolism is the source of substance, the rhythmic system is the source of life. In the rhythmic area, the astral body is no longer supreme. The astral body has left its imprint in organs below the diaphragm. In the rhythmic system the ether body is the ruler and works in rhythms. That is also why this area is interwoven with rhythms.

The stream going up is becoming more and more barren. We left the I outside the physical body, the astral body below the diaphragm, and the etheric body below the neck. In the head only the physical body’s primary effect is in charge. The ego, astral body, and etheric body have left their imprints in the physical head at an earlier time. When we try to find them, we can discover the intentions of the I, the wisdom of the astral body, and the living images of the etheric body inscribed in our thinking head. In the head, the dynamic of the upward stream comes to a standstill, becomes crystallized, and congeals into images, about which we can think. The physical body, too, forms an imprint in the whole skeleton and in the brain. This fact that the physical body makes an imprint gives us the feeling that we are who we are, every day the same person. The skeleton and brain are the physical imprint of the I. The skeleton is slightly more lifeless than the brain. We might formally say that the upward stream dies in the head.

### **The stream going down**

Now we come to the unpredictable side of development. The stream going down has a different mood. When we want to describe it properly, we need to conform to this mood. Day awakens. The rooster crows, the alarm goes off, a full bladder—or maybe, alas, a wet bed—awakens the child. Children wake up differently—some quickly, some struggling to get into bodies that give a lot of resistance. A splash of cold water in the face and a good breakfast help in waking up.

At the start of a new day the senses also wake up. Strictly speaking, the child arrives on earth every day anew and comes into the created world, the sensory world. The moment of waking up is related to the moment of birth. He comes from a world of creative will to the world of senses, which is full of sound, color,

taste, and smell. The child feels deeply related to this world, which pulls him awake through the twelve bridges of his senses. All sensory experience has its impact on the child's soul. Sensory experiences form the child down to the level of the physical body. In the nerve-sense pole there is strong collaboration between the senses and the brain. The imprints upon the physical body of the upward stream are partly determined by what is presented to them by the perceptions of the senses belonging to the downward stream.

After breakfast, the day can start. What shall we do today? We go down one step of the downward stream to the rhythmic area of social experience. Who is around, is there someone to play with, is it a school day or home day? While chatting, pushing, laughing, and grumbling, the child emerges as a fellow human being within his group. Through life experience the child learns how things work. This takes energy; the children get tired and are ready for a nap.

We can call this downward stream a will stream if we look to its end point—meaning the actual deeds, not the force of will which belongs to the upward stream. When does the child begin to act, to express its will? A screaming, hungry baby is expressing will and is usually successful. A hollering toddler that has been startled expresses will. A six-year-old who makes a cute face to get what she wants expresses something in her behavior. Will here is quite selfish. But from a very young age the child can also be unselfish by not crying when he sees his mummy sad or by sharing toys to comfort another child.

The region below the diaphragm is a puzzling area. Why do children act so differently from each other? Is it not precisely in how a child acts that something very personal emerges? Children come from the prenatal world with specific intentions. Through their

fellow human beings they meet their fate. We can say that this is the outside of fate. In the upward stream the karmic inside of fate is hidden as capabilities, as possibilities. These capabilities want to become visible, want to be fulfilled. Who does that? It is the downward stream. How do children get the idea to do certain things? By meeting others. What does this look like? It is through their behavior, their deeds towards others that they fulfill their possibilities: the hug, the bad temper, the step forward in development are all examples. The downward stream magically summons the I to appear by means of the deeds.

To be precise, it is not the I that appears here but the personality. By personality is meant the ego, the self. There is much confusion about the terms I, ego, self, personality, individuality, higher ego, superego, lower self. That is not the point here. What is meant is this. The way people show themselves in everyday life we will call personality. Not all possibilities humans bring to earth will emerge. In terms of the two streams, the down-stream makes something visible of the possibilities of the up-stream. Future and past work together to shape the unique personality. This demonstrates itself in the upper pole of the human body in the manner of how people perceive things. In the rhythmic system we can see this in the style of being of fellow humans. In the lower pole it demonstrates itself in people's deeds. In the downward will stream we see the day-conscious I at work. The I in the downward stream can use its forces to resolve aspects it meets in the astral, etheric, and physical bodies flowing toward it from the up-stream. ♦

**Dr. Edmond Schoorel** is an anthroposophic physician and school doctor in Holland. He is the author of *The First Seven Years: A Physiology of Childhood*.



Waiting for a workshop at the Dornach conference. Photo courtesy of Janni Nichol