

Essay 2

Transforming Consciousness through Anxiety Anxiety Phenomena in Daily Life and Its Opportunities

by

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The purpose of this essay is to describe the typical angst phenomena of our time with their destructive effect and also, especially, in their awakening effect, so that anxiety can be understood not only as a threat but also as an opportunity. Since this essay contains a number of statements and research from Rudolf Steiner, a knowledge of his life-work, anthroposophy, will be helpful.

Let me begin by describing a few characteristics of our time that typify symptomatically the conclusion of the twentieth century. One of the most distinguished psychotherapists of our time, Viktor Frankl, characterized the twentieth century as the century of anxiety. Statistically, every ninth German suffers from some phobia, an anxiety disorder that makes it difficult for that person to complete his or her biography out of his own strength. Last year the World Health Organization (WHO) published a census showing that approximately six percent of all people suffer from anxiety disorders. The tendency is increasing.

However, anxiety appears in disguise, hidden behind phenomena that Frankl characterizes as signs of our time: depression, aggression, and addiction. Interestingly, anxiety is most prevalent, in all its apparitions, in those countries that have marked outward security and comfort.

The recent emergence of the term “angst” or “anxiety” in literature shows just how much the concept of anxiety belongs to the twentyfirst century. Søren Kierkegaard in 1844, the middle of the nineteenth century, was the first to describe the phenomenon of anxiety in an essay he published titled *The Term Anxiety*. We know from his biography that Kierkegaard, an anxious neurotic, wrote from a deep personal relationship with anxiety.

As the anxiety-ridden state of soul in the waning nineteenth century gradually became a heeded subject, literature about the phenomenon of

anxiety grew undeniably in the twentieth century. No more is it only single individuals who are threatened by anxiety but rather modern biographies seem to be fundamentally characterized as being accompanied by anxiety.

Jacques Lusseyran sees in anxiety not only a gesture of soul that should be overcome as quickly as possible, but he attributes to it an important task and he calls upon anxiety for help in his booklet titled *Against the Defilement of the "I."* He turns directly to his readers: "And now I call upon you – all who would never recommend anxiety – let us have anxiety!" Lusseyran adjures us to accept anxiety as something that jolts us awake and to finally open our eyes to the dangerous position in which our own, non-self-seeking ego finds itself. Still very young, undeveloped, and inexperienced, it finds itself in constant danger of being buried, suffocated, and killed when it is left without protection to the outer world and its attacks.

Drug addicts who are in therapy after a long career of taking drugs and are asked about their motives for their drug consumption often say anxiety was their main motivation. Not fear of death which a drug-addict usually does not have, but rather fear of a life that is dead.

A second motive that is given over and over again is hopelessness of ever identifying with something, not with one's own self or with any kind of goal that could give meaning to existence and a perspective on the future.

A further characteristic of our time is the "burn-out syndrome." In the last few years thousands of manuals and self-help books have been published on the subject of burn-out syndrome which attests to how bad the suffering of these symptoms of exhaustion and burn-out really are and how necessary it is to find help. In many cases these symptoms are caused by a deep, existential anxiety that the sufferer does not admit to having. An important result of research by Steiner helps us understand the sudden appearance of the burn-out syndrome around the middle of the twentieth century.¹

Next to the pathological anxiety disorders, there are an abundance of anxieties that pervade our daily lives without provocations by any particular situation. These anxieties can be categorized into three groups. While one category is related more to individuals, the second category is related to the social environment, and the third to the general situation of the times. I would like to cite a few typical examples of all three categories.

An often-expressed anxiety that belongs in the first group is not living up to a certain standard, a certain idea of perfection. As an example, let us look at the qualities of a person representing the picture of perfection as suggested in advertising. The man must be good-looking, tan, and muscular with brilliant, white teeth, appropriate, stylish, hip clothing, surrounded by attractive female admirers, used to success, and rich. Together they enjoy their freedom which in advertising language means free time and is characterized by a white yacht, blue sky, and blazing sun. Almost as an afterthought the product being advertised appears.

This is a typical example of the advertising images we see on a daily basis and as our children and adolescents also experience them. It is one idealistic image of the human being; completely spellbound and captivated by the physical. Trying to live up to these suggested idealistic images causes anxiety for many people.

I see in this also one of the many causes of anorexia and bulimia. Renunciation of the flatness and emptiness of the world of advertising all around us seems to me to be a major motive for this particular disturbance of the soul. This typical statement from one adolescent is very telling: "I really don't want to grow up into the world of you adults!" Henning Köhler expressed this same sentiment in his book titled *The Quiet Yearning to Go Home* (not yet translated into English). The adolescents in this book do not want to fully, responsibly incarnate in the world that they find before them. Rather, they withdraw back from whence they came.

Fear of growing old is another common cause of anxiety. An entire industry has been built around methods for defying the aging process. A short time ago an anti-aging pill came onto the market in the United States. It was heralded as a great achievement and is touted to make one ten to fifteen years younger, including the reproductive forces. Years-long research has been invested in this and billions spent. This pill is already selling rapidly even in South America, a clear symptom of anxiety about aging. The value and importance of qualities of age, the wisdom-filled, blessing old person seem to me to be increasingly disappearing from our consciousness.

Another form of anxiety that plagues us daily is the fear of illness. I would like to speak briefly here about AIDS an illness which has brought the entire world together in horror at its terrifying specter.

A long-term study conducted in the United States about this disease examined the mental/emotional states of HIV-positive persons during the course of their illness. Two groups of patients were treated intensively both medically and psychologically starting at a particular stage of the disease. One group consisted of patients who were filled with high anxiety from the first outbreak of their illness and followed every symptom with spellbound interest. In the other group were patients who were little affected by anxiety and therefore had a rather relaxed attitude about the symptoms of their illness as they appeared. The results of the study showed that the patients who were fearful and anxious proceeded to the subsequent stages of the disease rapidly. In contrast, in those patients who had less anxiety a remission of the illness was observed, often even a reversal, a healing process, so that the disease never developed into AIDS.

A Swiss physician summarized these results by using the acronym AIDS which stands for Acquired Immune Deficit Syndrome, and put it like this: *Angst Ist Das Schlimmste* (anxiety is the worst).

It is really moving when one thinks of the saying: Fear goes straight to the marrow. Literally with AIDS as the immune cells are formed in the bone marrow, here we can vividly see the deep relationship between the soul aspect of a person and his physical aspect.

Besides the anxieties on an individual level, we also suffer daily from feelings of anxiety that are related to the social environment. Who among us does not know the fear of non-recognition, contempt, criticism, or loss of prestige? The list goes on and on. Many forms of angst that are often also disguised in the social realm. I would like to refer to two trends that seem especially characteristic of the times. On one side there is enormous anxiety about being insignificant; experiencing loss of influence and prestige which often shows up in the social sphere as behaviors involving the exercise of power. Today we have very much to do with this form even though it is often hidden and subtle. There is certainly a tendency to this living in each one of us which must be constantly examined in order to consciously overcome it.

However, the power only functions if it comes together with corresponding social behavior. A behavior that is likewise determined by anxiety but has a completely different cause is self-condemnation. Both these anxieties can lead toward a very dysfunctional symbiosis in the social sphere. Those who exercise power need those who have fear of self-condemnation. A melding can take place between the two groups that is often experienced by those in the social environment as something akin to a fortress into which only those found to be sympathizers are accepted.

Steiner expressed great concern about these old social structures as they related to the college of teachers in Waldorf schools. He characterized three formerly undeveloped social structures as follows:

The first form, which is well-known to all of us, is the hardened, fixed social structure. Within this structure there is one personality, or one small group, who has mastered some special knowledge and brings it to every situation. A lively discussion process, a real debate about something, is stifled. Seriously weighty statements, abruptly spoken, leads to silence. In this way wisdom can be perverted into a weapon of persuasion. Steiner very succinctly named this form of social structure the dogmatic form. A practical example may clarify the effect of such a social structure:

A college of teachers puts forward this question: How should Halloween be celebrated in the upper grades, with or without electronic music? The colleagues struggled to decide if they should allow recorded music, and if they should allow electrically amplified music. A pertinent statement by Steiner is thrown into the debate: "We must be successful in removing every form of technology out of the education of children up to age nineteen." That was the end of the struggle; the end of lively debate. The imposition of Steiner's statement (there are many others by him on the subject of technology) in order to push through one's own opinion divided the college

of teachers into two camps: those for and those against. Instead of moving forward to a new level of community through debate of the question, what transpired was division and paralyzing hardening of positions within the college of teachers, a sad earmark of an outmoded social structure.

The second kind of social structure likewise prevents any lively process. However, in this case, it is not an individual who imposes but rather each person hides behind the opinion of the others. In this way the following, for example, can happen: The weekly teacher's conference takes place before the meeting of the College of Teachers. When certain telephone lines are busy for hours on Thursday afternoon and this is repeated week after week, even an unsuspecting young teacher will slowly realize that during this time the actual consensus of opinion of certain groups about themes of the afternoon or evening conference is taking place, and in the conference only fixed, group views are represented: "But we think . . . My colleague also thinks . . . I have spoken with the other colleagues," and so forth. Since the individuals lack the courage to come to their own conclusions, a lively process of debate within the college of teachers is not allowed. This can only lead to partisanship and mutual conflict. Steiner called this energy of dissolution within the community sectarian.

He certainly did not mean that exchanging ideas or having discussions before or after the conference should not be allowed. It is only critical how individuals who have had previous discussions react to such a process during the conference. Does someone take an active part in the discussion, alert and speaking up at the right moment in order to carry the process forward without intent, and beholden only to his or her own, just-forming ideas, or does the someone take support only from something that has already been determined thereby just passively accepting a development, a process? This is the decisive question.

Steiner suffered endlessly under the third form of social structure. While the dogmatic community flourishes under the influence of Ahriman and the sectarian form is under the influence of Lucifer, the third form of social structure is affected by both the Ahrimanic and the Luciferic forces together.² The result of this cooperation is a tendency to confuse compromise.

The group in this third form is lacking the energy to advance into the conviction of their own ideas and to persevere until they are accomplished. Community processes are met with a lukewarm attitude and not carried to their conclusion. There is a lack of enthusiasm and no commitment to the actual goal. One feels bound to the common ideal only insofar as nothing disagreeable can grow out of it. Relativism and pragmatism are frequently cultivated without realizing that irreproachable truths do exist.

The Study of Man by Rudolf Steiner is, for example, such an irreproachable truth that may not be corrupted through compromise. When certain actions become necessary in light of an anthroposophical knowledge

of man, then these actions should be completed whether it is socially pleasant or not. The aspect of personal agreeableness may not play a role when a really clear conviction of knowledge is present. I will not elaborate here on how such a conviction of knowledge can be attained. But there are clear steps that lead to it as Steiner described in the course on curative education.

Consider all the anxiety phenomena together. Whether they are related primarily to an individual, the social environment, or the situation of the times such as fear of wars, environmental catastrophes, natural disasters, and so forth, we see them characterized by a common criterion: the fear of separation, separation in which connection is sought and a yearning to be connected is present. It could be separation from the home environment, from loved ones, from a certain life situation, or, the furthest level, separation from one's own self by the loss of identity.

People today experience themselves primarily as homeless, without protection or identity. How was it in earlier times?

Let us turn for a moment to the past in order to compare the feeling for life that earlier generations had with the feelings of people today. A modern-day, homeless, lonely person stands vis-à-vis a person from an earlier time who is supported by the community and wrapped in social protection. The further we go back in the past the larger and more stable were the groups of people who supported individuals, offered them security, and protected them. An individual could identify with that group.

In earliest times the soul incarnated into the whole human stream which gave it an identity. Later, the soul incarnated into a certain geographic area where a certain language was spoken. There, where one's own language was spoken, one felt spiritually at home. Identification with one's own people followed, subsequently with the tribe, then with the clan, and finally, the identity group was the family. Initially, the extended family but in the end the latest remaining identity group is the nuclear family, and today even this identification is rarely carried past childhood.

In this development it has also become clear that since the middle of the twentieth century the traditional source of strength has been quelled. In prior times, an individual was representative of a group and the individual carried the features of the group as if wearing a protective mantle. Today the individual stands alone. Since they are completely dependent upon themselves, individuals can now identify only with themselves. This is a dramatic moment in human history. For the first time in human development the ego is set apart from every group. For the first time human beings are representative of themselves.

Understandably strong egocentric forces are necessary for this self-assertion. For the time being egoism is a necessary prerequisite. Around and around it goes: The more a person is separated from others and supported by egoism, the more isolated is that person's "I." This developmental step

becomes especially dramatic during encounters when the respective egos collide “naked and unprotected,” as Steiner characterized it.

Here is a typical example of this drama: Imagine this situation in an elevator. Someone in the elevator wants to ride up to the tenth floor. Modern man that he is, he stands as a “significant representative” of himself in this little room. As soon as another “significant individuality” steps into the elevator, the space narrows regardless of how large the room is in reality. At each floor other “significant personalities” enter the elevator. Now, standing close together becomes so painful that certain gestures of avoidance come about with which we are all familiar: Someone looks nervously at his watch, at the floor indicator, the points of her shoes become interesting, or the lint on a sleeve. An encounter with the others is avoided by being centered on one’s own self. Finally, the elevator door opens onto the eighth floor and a dog enters. The tension releases and one can turn one’s attention to the dog; one is finally free from fixation on self.

It is always fascinating to observe, (also with one’s own self), how often this kind of non-encounter is repeated. Those who are representating only themselves must necessarily feel lonely, isolated, and trapped in their innermost being.

The Latin word *angustia*, which is the root word for the German words *Enge* and *Angst* (closeness and anxiety), shows just how direct a relationship there is between both. Having reached this painful point of development, it is easy to understand why all the offerings from the outside world that promise release from meaninglessness, loneliness, and narrow closeness, have been so intensely received.

To this category belong:

- Drug and media consumption, drastically on the rise.
- Yearning for groups that promise harmony and a better world. A guru is followed under the condition of giving-up individual responsibility.
- A need for violence and destruction in order to make room for one’s self.

These are dramatic gestures of avoidance prefacing the agonizing experience of inner distress. Jørgen Smit spoke of this situation in a lecture as the “drama of the consciousness soul at the end of the twentieth century.”

Characterizing the passive side of our ego, as so very cuddled and spoiled by each one of us today, Lusseyran was describing one cause for this drama. It is the ego which loves to be served. It is the ego which misleads us into

naïvely believing everything we hear through the media and statistics. (Analyses of news media have shown the nightly news shows, which claim to be instruments of objective truth-telling, are, in reality, some of the most dishonest programs on television. See Heinz Buddemeier's *Living in Artificial Worlds*, Stuttgart, 1993.) This passive side of our ego entices us into selfishly paying attention only to our own interests without observing the context in which we live.

Steiner presented how strongly this egoistic attitude, which is in accord with a certain degree of human development, can lead to an opening vis-à-vis evil in his lecture: *How Can I Find the Christ?* For approximately two-thirds of the lecture he described the increasing emanation of evil and its justification in our time. At the conclusion he described extensively the blackout experience; unconsciousness, powerlessness. The German word he used was *Ohnmacht*, nine times in two pages. He said today's human beings must go through this experience if they are genuinely striving to know themselves. A person can only be helped in this situation when he or she learns to allow this blackout experience of powerlessness without fighting it. In that moment one undergoes a zero-point experience. If one achieves this prerequisite in which all past moments are brought to silence, then forces of the future can stream into the created void. Only in this way can the Christ Being reveal himself to humankind at the etheric level. Steiner spoke further about this in the lecture cycle titled *Symptoms behind History*. He explained that the mystery of evil must first be traversed before the forces of the etheric Christ could be available to anyone.

How is the "I," the ego, to be preserved so that it does not succumb to the various Lucifer-influenced and Ahriman-influenced groupings and group-held views? As contemporaries, we are all endangered. Our anxieties mislead us again and again into error because occupation with anxiety prevents building any conviction of views. Someone who is tied up with their anxieties is helpless against the assaults in our time upon their thinking, feeling and willing. Just how much we are all endangered becomes clear in these subtle ways:

- Dulled thinking with a tendency to use catch phrases and clichés
- Numbed feeling-life that allows only conventional encounters
- Paralyzed will that is capable of only routine action

The most extreme form of this hardening tendency was described by Steiner in a lecture cycle titled *The Inner Aspect of the Social Question*. If there are no new, inner impacts, hardening will progress to such an extent that:

- thinking becomes paralyzed within a mechanization of the spirit. (Self-perpetuating computer technology, genetic manipulation; are these not already such expressions of the above?)
- the feeling life succumbs to vegetation of the soul. (Group behavior without individual responsibility, image presentation according to the current trend, do not these things already show a tendency to a plant-like, dulled existence that has lost all momentum towards the spiritual?)
- the will leads to animalization of the body in which the soul forces are pressed into the body and chained there. (Unrepressed libido and aggression already appear to be signs of this development.)

This developmental hardening heralds the arrival of the social bottleneck that Steiner clearly described as a challenge for the end of the twentieth century. It is understandable that this development is accompanied by anxieties, anxieties that can have a paralyzing effect on the one hand, but on the other hand can call us to a state of heightened alertness.

Steiner described the double effect of angst in this way: Either it completely throws the ego off track at the moment of its inception or it leads to an enhanced “I” experience. If we overcome the aspect of anxiety that releases panic and paralyzes, then anxiety becomes an opportunity, a glimpse into a new level of knowledge, even though it may be agonizing. Consciousness development is always connected with anxiety. The higher the consciousness, the greater the potential for anxiety.

In a lecture on December 12, 1918, Steiner stated: “In this age of the consciousness soul the task of humanity will be to grasp the entirety of the human being and to make human beings dependent upon themselves.” This is a process that will always be accompanied by anxiety. In this sense Jacques Lusseyran said: “Let us have anxiety!”

So much for the diagnosis of the situation in our time. How can we proceed with courage? How can we develop strength to overcome our anxieties? After we have acknowledged once-and-for-all the validity of anxiety we will muster the strength to confront it. A typical characteristic of anxiety is that it sneaks up from behind and takes us unawares. Therefore, our first act must be to get it from behind us, set it before us, and enter into a dialogue with it face to face. This means that we must approach it through our consciousness.

In the lecture cycle entitled *Social Understanding through Knowledge of Spiritual Science* Steiner associated anxiety to Ahriman and said that it must yield wherever the light of knowledge shines. We find in these statements the esoteric explanation of why today's people must see it as an essential task to gain a correct relationship to Ahrimanic forces of anxiety. The observation that anxiety associated with the social sphere can be extraordinarily helpful must be brought into this right relationship. Surely I would become more attuned to my fellow human beings and more empathetic if I had myself suffered through anxiety processes. Obviously, anxiety can make us more sympathetic.

During my time as a class teacher I experienced examples of this many times. For instance, once two hours before a parent evening a student's mother telephoned me to warn me of a brewing conflict. I went into the meeting with the appropriate anxiety and on this evening I experienced myself as especially empathetic and perceptive toward the parents. Through my own anxiety, an openness had come about that made it possible for me to have a much more intense bonding or sharing with the parents than was previously possible. I was actually grateful for the telephone call.

Let us summarize the helpful qualities of anxiety in daily life. Anxiety can help us develop a more alert consciousness. It allows us to experience being restricted to ourselves and our separateness from the world. It makes us aware of the precipice at the barrier and, if we engage it, it leads us to the zero-point where our masks fall away.

The task of the consciousness-soul must be to get past the closeness and anxiety of the zero-point and into new areas. We have seen how thinking, feeling, and willing are the soul-foundations for the working of the ego and how they are being relentlessly attacked in our time. Just think how much thought-energy, how much time, how much money are used to try to corrupt these three activities of the human soul. Human thinking, feeling, and willing must be very precious indeed.

If we want to get past the zero-point and forge a path into the future, we must establish a healthy relationship with anxiety in order to develop a new relationship to thinking, feeling, and willing. With thinking, with our consciousness, we will need to overcome the Ahriman-influenced understanding of the material world. If the spiritual character of reality is also to be recognized material can not be considered the origin of all things. Material should be understood as an emanation of the spirit if one wishes to think in terms of reality.

Consequently, in order to apply this knowledge concretely in our lives, we must deal with the laws of reincarnation and karma. If it is true that spirit is the origin of all things, then the conditions and events that I meet in my physical incarnation also have something to do with me and my state of development. Joy in discovering truths about destiny can be awakened with

this insight. Every social encounter has something to do with me specifically and can not be explained away as something accidental. When we think that our guardian angel has been working for eight hundred to one thousand years in order that we meet a certain personality so that further development can occur, then the significance of an encounter starts to become clear.

What a complicated preparation: Finding the parents at the right time, the appropriate language and nationality, childhood and adolescent development so that the desire arises to work within a certain group, and all this for two people.

Imagine that these two people actually come together. Naturally, it occurs through a conflict because they have something that they have to carry-through together. What if one person says: "No, thank you, I want nothing to do with this conflict!" What a disaster! Eight hundred years of work for nothing! Now everything has to begin again from scratch.

How do we interact with others when we have come to the realization of supernatural reality? Steiner described the quality that lies at the beginning of an extrasensory path to knowledge as the ability to be awed. I am awed when I realize that what I perceive in the physical world is only a part of the whole and the rest of it resides in the spiritual realm. I am amazed about what I encounter in the physical and I open myself to spiritual knowledge. Spiritualization of thinking can begin in this way. It makes possible a completely new approach, including a new approach in the social arena.

With a second step, I can, through this insight, acknowledge the spiritual origin of others. A lively interest in the essence of others is awakened in me. Encounters between the essence of beings can take place that are supported by sympathetic forces. In crass opposition to this stands all hardened nationalism which measures the worth of a person by ethnic origin, skin color, and language. These are characteristics of the past when people were identified according to group associations that provided their members with supportive social energy. In our time of development of individuality these outmoded identifications can only have a detrimental effect as we have clearly experienced in the conflict in Yugoslavia. Here is the proof of Steiner's insight that evil is just good at the wrong time. However, if we bring a real interest in the essence of another, try to understand another in his or her unique individuality, we spiritualize our feeling nature.

Spiritualization of the third area, the will, is especially difficult because the will is unconsciousness. Using the example of biography, I would like to demonstrate how an expansion is possible through inner cognition. Hiltgunt Zassenhaus was selflessly engaged in helping those persecuted by Hitler's regime. In her autobiography, *A Tree Blooms in November*, she described how her constant attention to the welfare of others brought her to the brink of exhaustion and led her to sharply judge her fellow human beings according to their dedication and, as need be, mercilessly condemn them.

She was a translator and given the duty by the Nazi Regime to oversee all the Scandinavian political prisoners. In a military uniform, armed with the keys to the prison, day after day she cared for these prisoners both physically and psychologically. Thanks to her care and dedication, shortly before the end of the war, all of the prisoners were saved from execution and with the help of the Danish and Swedish Red Cross taken to Scandinavia.

In her autobiography, Hiltgunt Zassenhaus looks back at this wartime with brutal honesty and describes how her readiness for sacrifice also made her overbearing. She felt superior to all her compatriots who had silently accepted the injustice of the Nazis, consciously looked away, remained passive, or even complied with the Nazis. A dramatic experience in her life precipitated a fundamental change of heart. Her brother was a physician and sent to the front for duty. He came home for a few days leave. The siblings felt an inner connection to each other and for this reason he sought her out to discuss everything he had experienced and suffered. But Hiltgunt had so much to do with “her prisoners” at that time that she never found the time for a talk with her brother. Disappointed, her brother returned to the war, and just a few weeks later he was killed.

When Hiltgunt received the news of his death, not only was she overcome with a deep sadness, but also an agonizing bad conscience and the devastating feeling of failure. She gained understanding for the weaknesses and failures of others through her own experiences of making such sacrifices to do good while at the same time miserably and irrevocably failing to make time for her dearly-loved brother. Through her own failure she learned to allow others the right to fail. The more she overcame her tendency to judge others based on good and evil, the more tolerant she became and the more freedom she could give to herself and others to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes. From the narrowness of judgment, Hiltgunt reached a level in which acting in freedom was possible.

Our will, unconscious as it is, can be expanded when we recognize the value of development. We learn to handle our mistakes openly and positively. Without failures there is no possibility of further development. Steiner one time pointedly expressed it this way: “There is little that is right that was not at one time done wrongly.”

In education we still have much to learn in this area. We should develop a pedagogical ethos which teaches children the joy of learning. When a teacher enters the classroom with a pile of corrected papers and a grim look the mood becomes immediately heavy. Taking the paper with the most mistakes and slamming it down on the poor student’s desk with an appropriate gesture will certainly not teach the joy of learning through making mistakes. How different it would be for the student if the teacher returned the paper with the comment: “You have already learned much, but there are a few mistakes that we should go over together. You still have some more to learn. I will be

happy to help you with it!” All of us are predisposed to coming down hard on discovered mistakes. Naturally, it is mostly the mistakes of others that are discovered and exposed. This is a behavior which encourages us to fear one another and especially hinders our development and the development of others. Only when we recognize the value of mistakes will we be able to create a level of encounter in which it is possible to learn. Learning means to want to more intensely connect with the world. Every learning process is a connection process which is only possible if it is accompanied by sympathetic forces.

Rejection, accusation, and prejudice with their antipathetic gesture can not awaken a will to learn. In short, no one learns if they are being threatened with the whip. This consciousness calls for a completely new jurisprudence; one in which the deeds are judged and the perpetrator must be stimulated to further development.

We know that when it comes to these conditions of development, all too quickly they become lost in the course of daily interaction. Only when we make ourselves repeatedly aware that our behavior towards mistakes and errors is a decisive factor in whether an atmosphere of freedom can exist where development is possible will we muster the strength to overcome our everyday behavior. This is the only way that the maxim which Rudolf Steiner proposed of a free human being can be fulfilled: “Live in the love of action and let live in the understanding of the other’s will.” (*The Philosophy of Freedom* by Rudolf Steiner).

The path up and over the total closeness of the zero-point, with all its attending anxiety phenomena, can be found only by achieving a new level thinking, feeling, and willing. If we make it clear to ourselves that such an undertaking is a process then we will not lose patience. We will assiduously continue the struggle to achieve it. Let us pay attention to our own practice and effort (and not that of others) and freedom can move into our dealings with our own efforts as well as interacting with others.

- *Acknowledgement of the spiritual origin of all things* so that reincarnation and karma are recognized as a reality.
- *Acknowledgement of the spiritual essence in every human being* that awakens sympathy and love for fellow human beings.
- *Acknowledgement of individual states of development and individual development dynamic* that allows for true tolerance of the behavior of others.

This threefold acknowledgement leads through the darkness and powerlessness of the zero-point of our developmental situation into a new expanse. Steiner provided us with help in this development process in many aspects. In his book *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*, which he labeled an anti-war book, Steiner describes exercises that appear to me to be explicitly for overcoming anxiety. He points out the fundamental causes of anxiety in daily life by telling how we have isolated ourselves inside our own consciousness from our physical bodies, from our life forces, from our soul forces, and from our own "I." In order to overcome this separation Steiner gives us conditions which, upon being met, can create a bridge to our own consciousness. The effort to meet these conditions is a prerequisite for attaining knowledge of higher worlds. As we will see, this effort is also a prerequisite for life in general.

The first condition has to do with the necessity of connecting once again the consciousness with the physical body. People must re-learn how to enjoy things, an astounding exercise. In the times we are living, I believe it is important for all of us to learn how to rightly enjoy things again. This has nothing to do with pleasure as an end in itself, but rather enjoyment as a counterbalance to a former effort. It is the task of enjoyment to allow body and soul to exhale after exertion and to relax. If one's consciousness is connected to the pleasure, then it must learn to use its ego forces and stop. We all have heard the saying about stopping while the taste is best, or stopping work on a drawing or painting before we go too far. In this way we can achieve a balance between tense, fulfillment of responsibilities and relaxing pleasure. It is an exercise to connect the physical with the consciousness.

The second condition has to do with re-bonding our consciousness with the context of our lives. Steiner described it as the tying of consciousness onto the etheric. Here we must again re-learn to feel ourselves a part of the whole. He gave an example of this which, as an educator, pleased me very much.

When a student has been impertinent to a teacher (this was certainly a terrible thing in 1918) and the teacher's only reaction is to discipline the student, the teacher loses his or her connection with the whole. First of all, the teacher should ask himself what this student's behavior has to do with him. Had he perhaps paid too little attention to the student lately, or was his instruction too boring because it had become routine? There are many questions through which he can reconnect to the entire social-complex of what happened.

What should be practiced here can be applied to everyday life. For example, one could ask: Why do I have this marriage partner, this profession, these friends? What does this have to do with me? Only when I learn to relate to life around me in this way can I accept the fact that the network of relationships around me is a part of my own self. In this way a lively exchange

between the inner and outer sides of my ego can occur. At the end of this journey the world and I will be one again.

The third condition has to do with re-connecting our consciousness to our soul forces, our astral body. This happens when we perceive our thoughts and feelings as being just as real as our physical actions. This is the only attitude with which we can consciously connect our thoughts and feelings so that we accept full responsibility for them.

The fourth condition has to do with completing a bridge to our own ego. Here the task is to very consciously connect with everything that I do so that the consequences of my actions are in line with my possibilities. If I have completed an assignment with alertness and dedication, then praise and criticism from others are not necessary motivators for me anymore because they would not be able to increase my effort. Here Steiner shows us a path to ego-identity that is appropriate to the will-mystery at the end of the twentieth century.

These remarks reveal how separation from our selves within various aspects of life can be overcome. At the same time this path makes clear how loss does not merely signify “not having something” but also proffers the opportunity to gain something totally new. To value loss as a positive possibility opens a perspective that turns one’s view from the past of “no more” toward the future of “not yet, but soon.” Seen from this angle the characteristics of our time such as depression, aggression, and addiction can be reevaluated. On one side they signify loss of security, protection, and identification and on the other side they represent a perverted filling of the empty space created by the loss. Rather, let us understand these traits as a call for help from a deep yearning for one’s own, inner satisfaction and we will learn new ways to direct our efforts.

Let us apply this perspective to anxiety. Anxiety shows us that former securities have been lost; on the other hand it is the harbinger of new insights which can disclose new securities. As an indicator of a consciousness process come due, anxiety calls us to self-action. If we do not accept the challenge, then we merely passively, as an observer, shoulder our anxiety and proceed along in constant danger of being so devoured by our anxiety, our only escapes remaining are typical gestures of avoidance.

The active way out of our anxiety leads us through various stations. First, anxiety should be accepted as a harbinger of new insights and should not be suppressed. Suppression of anxiety prevents the possibility for gaining new attitudes about it and perpetuates the suffering with which it is always connected. This makes it possible to recognize anxiety and suffering from the side of their necessity to our development and not only from their painful side.

With a positive attitude it will be possible, through anxiety and suffering, to gain the insight that I am separate from the world and I desire a new

connection with it. If I consciously acknowledge the yearning, I can acquire an inner listening, a new contact to my innermost being. If the outcome of this contact is a new impulse, then I can actively strive to realize it in the world.

This path gives exemplary insight into how the separation of thinking, feeling, and willing is to be overcome at the threshold and lead us into a new unity. Let us understand anxiety as a challenge to step onto this path. It can be our wakeup call to expanded consciousness for a new task in life and therewith the renewal of life qualities.

Footnotes

- ¹ “Forces of human development which have accompanied human beings unconsciously so that they could move forward, are now exhausted and will be totally exhausted by the middle of the twentieth century, approximately speaking. New forces must be dredged up out the depths of the soul. And, human beings must see how they are connected with the roots of spiritual life in the depths of their souls.” From: *The Mission of Michael* by Rudolf Steiner.
- ² The double nature of evil represented in the Bible with the names Satan and Diabolus is represented in Spiritual Science by the spiritual beings of Lucifer and Ahriman. Intellectual temptations belong in the realm of Lucifer, and libidinal/sensual temptations belong in the realm of Ahriman.