

Friends, Colleagues, how can we, ourselves, do spiritual research?

In the course of our work in anthroposophy, the impulse to do primary spiritual research can naturally awaken. Yet our own limitations immediately confront us. "I am not an initiate. What could I possibly bring to the world which Steiner has not already presented in clearer and more direct forms than I could ever hope to share?"

And yet the question of how to approach (or whether to attempt) spiritual research is deeply connected with the question of how to walk the path of knowledge. From a certain perspective, they are the same question.

There are indeed many ways to take up this question, as many ways as there are individual human beings. I wanted to share one approach, with which I have engaged for many years and which reached a certain culmination last year.

When I first read the Philosophy of Freedom at the age of twenty-one, I was a little disappointed. I had taken a couple of courses in philosophy at university and had been disturbed to find that for every convincing school of thought there appeared an equally convincing school which took issue with and effectively disproved the premises upon which the earlier school rested, or the conclusions to which it led. It never occurred to me that developments in philosophy over time reflected an evolution in human consciousness. It never occurred to me that philosophy itself had hit a wall in the nineteenth century and required an entirely new impulse to carry it forward.

And yet, while I was profoundly moved by all the other foundational anthroposophical books – knowing that in discovering anthroposophy I had found my way home – the Philosophy of Freedom left me feeling unsatisfied. What Steiner presented as proofs were not what I had come to expect as proofs. It was only much later that I came to recognize that Steiner's proofs were ones I needed to come to myself through actual experiences in consciousness, not through what recent developments had turned into the intellectual thrust and parry of modern philosophical thought.

It was my inability to make genuine progress along the path of knowledge presented in the other foundational books which led me back to the Philosophy of Freedom. I had heard or read somewhere (in fact, Steiner says it in many places) that the Philosophy of Freedom is a path of knowledge; and that, through it, Steiner had laid the critical scientific and philosophical foundation on which all of anthroposophy rests.

And so I returned to it with a new question: how could I follow the path of knowledge which is implicit in the Philosophy of Freedom. As I re-read those magnificent pages (Dr. Kenneth McAllister told me once that for him they are like reading poetry), a light came on when I came to Chapter Three, "Thinking in the Service of Knowledge". I saw how, in the process of observing our thinking, we can enter into a key, a foundational experience along the path of knowledge. And I began to experiment...

After many years of such experimentation, I realized that it would help this work to find colleagues, to work with others who were intensely engaged with the Philosophy of Freedom. And, in September of 2014, my wife Magi and I met with Chris Wilson, Victoria Ponce and Doug Wylie at Doug's cottage on Lake Ontario for a weekend project of engagement. We worked individually, in pairs and in a group, with two exercises I had created out of chapter three of the Philosophy of Freedom. The initial *form* for the group work was built upon work which Magi and I (and others)

had done with Yeshayahu ben Aharon over the course of six years of conferences which Magi had organised, years earlier.

Out of this weekend activity, an Exercise Advisory Group formed. At various times over the course of our three year journey, Robert McKay, Jonah Evans, Trinh Huynh, George Ivanoff and Paul Hodgkins joined. Some members participated for short periods, others joined and remained. I will always be grateful to all of them for their candor, their willingness to explore and their generous spirits.

I refined the exercises based on my own individual work, my observations of the group work and on the direct feedback provided by the Exercise Advisory Group during our monthly meetings, where we worked with the exercises. One inspiring discovery was that the group work with the exercises made it possible to get to know each other quite intimately, with a rare and reverential quality.

Early on, members of the Exercise Advisory Group agreed to take on roles as facilitators of break-out sessions during the Freedom Mystery Conferences in Toronto. During these conferences, we witnessed performances of scenes from the Portal of Initiation, produced by T-Quest Productions. The intention was to bring about a conversation between the Philosophy of Freedom and the Portal of Initiation. Reverends Daniel Hafner and Jonah Evans of the Christian Community kindly assisted with lectures. The first conference focused on exercises in Thinking which emerge out of the Philosophy; the second focused on exercises in Feeling.

It became apparent during the conferences that people who had invested time reading and studying the Philosophy of Freedom got the most out of the exercises. Some people who had struggled with the Philosophy made discoveries through the exercises, came to experience some of the practical spiritual directions which the Philosophy makes possible. And there were others who were entirely new to the Philosophy of Freedom. They came primarily for the Portal of Initiation and took up the work with the Philosophy sportingly!

All of these exercises are now available in the Research tab of the website for the Anthroposophical Society in Canada. There are two different possible streams of engagement:

For example, a monthly study group working with the Philosophy of Freedom might take up the second stream of exercises. Or you might choose to organise a local weekend conference around one or two of the exercises.

The exercises are broken into three groups: Thinking, Feeling and Willing. Each exercise is preceded by the quotes from the Philosophy which inspired the exercise. The first seven exercises, on Thinking, correspond to the first seven chapters of the Philosophy. The exercises on Feeling work with quotes from various chapters. The exercises on Willing derive primarily from chapter 9, but also later chapters.

After the second Freedom Mystery Conference in 2016, it became apparent that the intersection of people who were committed to working with both the Philosophy and the mystery drama was narrowing. And so, I constructed the third and final conference, during which the entire Portal of Initiation was performed, around a new theme: How to know Lucifer and Ahriman and Choose the Christ. In consequence, although I was able to refine the third set of exercises, on Willing, working with the Exercise Advisory Group, the Willing exercises have never been presented during a weekend conference.

These exercises were always experiments and remain experiments. There are many more exercises, implicit in the Philosophy of Freedom, which could be developed and refined individually and through work in groups. For example, Chapter Thirteen, The Value of Life (Optimism and Pessimism), could be developed into a weekend biography workshop. Anyone can take up this work! We don't need to be initiates.

I'm sharing the exercises in the hope that, for some, a contribution might be made towards discovering or rediscovering the Philosophy of Freedom. This may even inspire you to design your own exercises along the path of knowledge, working out of the Philosophy. In this way, we can become co-creators with Rudolf Steiner and colleagues to each other. We can begin, in our own modest and individual ways, to do spiritual research.

Timothy Nadelle, March 18, 2018