

Dear Colleagues,

The extraordinary moment in time in which we find ourselves seems destined to become era defining. Like 9/11 or Watergate or the Kennedy Assassination, we will look back and see how events led to this point, but even more clearly how this moment set in motion an entire new configuration of thoughts. There is no reliable way to understand in advance what is about to unfold, how long it will take to play out, or how this turning point will seem in retrospect. We can just sense that, for one reason or another (more likely a whole host of reasons coalescing into this particular configuration) the world has come to a standstill and awaits a sense of direction.

I don't know anything about viruses and how they suddenly manifest in epidemics. Various sources blame a jump from wildlife to humans, the advent of a new electrification wave, nefarious government programs, predictable biological metamorphoses, or chance. What we can say with certainty is that fear, anxiety, and isolation have resulted. Alongside them, good will and generosity have also manifested, and many people have been learning new ways of doing what they do.

I want to offer a small contribution towards meeting the more difficult phenomena of the soul. These are exercises and meditations that I find helpful in managing the unknown. The root of all of them is the contrast between light and electricity. Rudolf Steiner calls electricity "captured light" (or, as I would translate it for greater contrast, "entrapped light") and points to what he calls sub-nature as the sphere of existence brought about by human ingenuity, a sphere which is dominated by materialistic, dead thinking. It is important to add that Steiner did not in any way advocate avoidance of electricity or technology. To the contrary, he was keen to use the newest innovations of his day. But he was under no illusion that this was pain free, and was clear that the use of these innovations took a toll on the human constitution. He specifically said, in his last written piece, that to overcome these sub-natural forces would mean that human consciousness had to rise as far above nature as technology descended below it. This was a startling challenge even in his day, and when we consider what level of thinking we are dealing with in distance learning at the moment, it is clear that the challenge is immense.

So, with all of this as background, here are a few exercise you can do:

1. In the little booklet "Light on the Path" which Steiner recommended to pupils in the early Esoteric School, there is a meditation: "Wisdom Lives in the Light"
Live deeply into each word in turn (except "the" which can be omitted completely), speaking the sentence inwardly, slowly, with the emphasis shifting to a different word each time. Ponder "wisdom" as you hear inwardly "WISDOM lives in the light."
Then concentrate on "lives" as you hear inwardly "Wisdom LIVES in the light."
Then:
Wisdom lives IN the light.
Wisdom lives in the LIGHT.

Only do as much as you can manage without losing focus; don't stress. There is tomorrow and the next day and the one after that. The mood should be quiet but not severe.

When you have contemplated all of the above in one sitting, and please don't skip steps and assume that you can begin where you left off (this would turn it from a spiritual practice into a materialistic one), try holding all of these meanings at once. You can try to "hang" them all on one word, or even a sound, and, however briefly, "see" the entire meaning together. There are more possibilities after that, but this would suffice to get going.

2. Particularly beneficial for building a relationship with natural light are the actual experiences of sunrise, sunset, and the starry night. Once a week, make a date with the sun at sunrise. Try to be outside when it is still dark, and experience the coming of the light until the sun rises about the horizon. Don't bring your phone along; try to immerse yourself in the lighting up of the world as darkness recedes before the light. If you do it for several weeks in a row, you will notice that the point where the sun rises over the horizon will move northwards (to your left as you face the East). This movement will continue until the summer solstice in June, and then begin moving to your right again.

Corresponding to the sunrise, sunset is another experience that can become a source of meditative experience when we live into the subtle shifts in the qualities of the light, outwardly as well as within us.

Finally, the starry night is a potential source of deep inner peacefulness. Right now, the time after sunset is the best time for seeing the most striking constellations (Bull, Orion, Cassiopeia, Big Dipper) as well as Sirius (the brightest star in our skies, in the South) and Venus shining brightly in the West. I took a 30-minute break from writing this letter for observing the stars, and came back refreshed and inwardly quiet.

3. Another way of contemplating light is in the sense of that which allows us to see, to understand, to grow. Choose a plant: flower, tree, shrub; try to look at its pattern of growing, at the way that it builds substance into a particular form. If you dare and are not intimidated by it, try drawing it. The point is not to create a work of art but to let your eyes and hand move along etheric forms. The etheric world is intrinsically healthy; plants don't develop cancer or indigestion or heart attacks; they can get sick from lack of moisture or nutrients or from attacks by pests, but in themselves they are healthy. Following their growth patterns moves us in healthy forms. Out breathing changes and our mind clears.

Those are three little ways of trying to balance our increased reliance on "fallen light." I would be grateful if you care to share any experiences you have with them or with other approaches you have tried.

Elan