

EDUCAREDO

FOUNDATION COURSE

LESSON 6

The Threefold Human Constitution

SUPPLEMENTARY CONTENT

First Exercise: Control of Thinking



EduCareDo
International Research and Learning Centre
based on the work of Rudolf Steiner

The Threefold Human Constitution

On our path we have already experienced various manifestations of our three godly gifts including how our twelve senses relate to our Thinking, Feeling and Willing¹. All these experiences present themselves through our threefold bodily constitution:

- *Nerve-Sense* system (head - thinking),
- *Rhythmic* system, (heart, Lung - feeling)
- *Metabolic-Limb* system (willing)

We will now take a look at ourselves to get acquainted more closely with our threefold constitution.

NERVE-SENSE SYSTEM - HEAD AND THINKING

- The shape of our head is round, very well formed, and expresses our personality; we recognise each other's faces. The head is hard outside and soft within. The bones of the skull are immobile in relation to each other, apart from the lower jaw.
- For the head to carry out its important function of thinking, it needs coolness and quietness. In very hot weather we have difficulties with clear, conscious thinking. Even when we have a headache we use a cold compress to soothe it. We find it difficult to think clearly and to concentrate if we are in a situation where we have to move our head around quickly and frequently.

EXPERIMENT

1. While you are walking, watch how your body and limbs move, but your head stays quiet, as if it is travelling in a carriage on the top of the body.
2. While someone is telling a story or explaining something to you, try to move your head vigorously and vehemently in all directions and observe how the various functions of your head diminish.

We take in the outer world, the light, sound, air, water and nourishment through our head; it is our absorption pole.

We are the most conscious in our head through our thinking capacity, but at the same time our head, the centre of our nerve-sense system, is the least 'alive' part of our threefold constitution; an injured nerve has minimal life generating force to heal or re-grow.

METABOLIC-LIMB SYSTEM - WILL

- The opposite pole to the head, nerve-sense system, is our metabolic-limb system where our will related activities and movements manifest.
- The limbs are elongated in an outward raying shape in the arms, hands, legs and feet. They are soft outside and hard inside. Bones of the limbs are extremely mobile.

¹ See Tables Lesson 2, Page 4 and Lesson 3, Page 3

- The whole metabolic-limb system functions in movement with its ongoing metabolic activity. It is our warmth pole. If we have an abdominal ache, we use a warm compress to soothe it.
- The metabolic-limb system is also our dispersion pole; excretions are dispersed, and through our limbs we carry out and perform our work in the world. Through propagation we entered the outer world at birth from the metabolic-limb system of our mother.
- This is the most 'living' part of our organism; an abdominal injury heals very fast. But we are the least conscious of all the activities, which take place in the metabolism. Imagine the mess we would create if we could direct our consciousness towards our various organs, eg to allocate the nutrients they need, or to relieve them from work, or activate a muscle to move etc.

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EXPERIMENT

Hold a pencil in your mouth and try to write your initials by moving your head and neck, without the support of your hands. Then write the initials with the pencil in your hand. Compare the first experience of conscious concentration (but clumsiness) with the second experience of nearly unconscious ease.

Between the polarities of the nerve-sense system (head and thinking) and the Metabolic-limb system (will), we have the middle, the central balancing, harmonising, Rhythmic system: (heart, lung & feeling), which re-establishes the equilibrium between upper and lower.

RHYTHMIC SYSTEM: HEART, LUNG AND FEELING

- The thorax, the chest, is the middle, the uniting element, without which the poles could not exist. The structure of the rib cage is spherical in character, each individual rib is like a protraction of a limb. The rib cage enfolds the soft parts, and muscles also surround it. The bones of the rib cage are partly mobile (not as free as the limbs) and their movement is rhythmical like the organs they surround.
- The spinal column is elongated and is surrounded by muscles, like a limb. Each separate vertebra is like a small skull enveloping the soft parts of the spinal cord.
- Blood and oxygen are carried right through the whole organism from the first breath to the last one in an amazing rhythm of four pulse beats for every breath – 72 pulse beats with 18 breaths every minute.

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EXPERIMENT

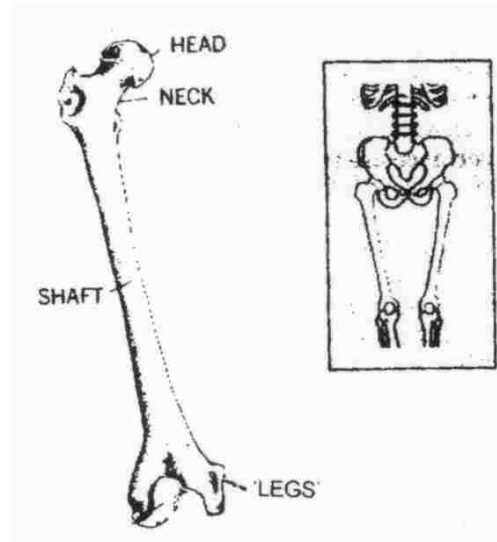
Sit for a short while, then place a finger on your wrist and count your pulse beat for a minute and afterwards count your breathing for one minute. Pulse and breathing could be somewhat faster or slower than 72 or 18 in a minute according to your condition, age and nature. Repeat these measurements at various times for comparison.

Threefoldness

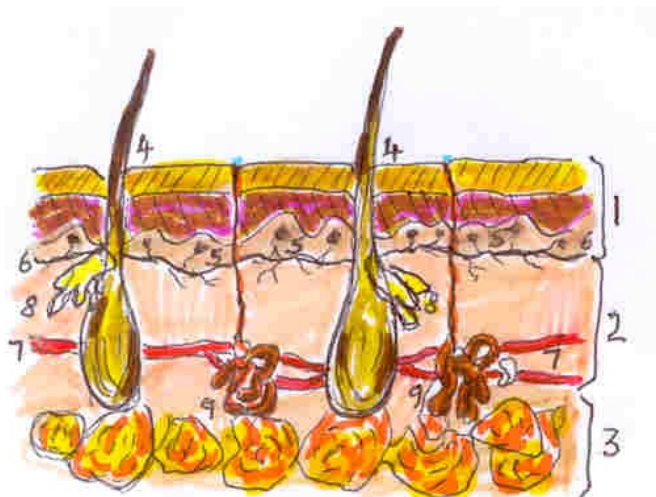
Threefoldness can be recognised in all our regions, in all our organs and in all components ever so small. In the head, the spherical upper pole, the nerve-sense centre is in the skull, the lower jaw-movement and mouth communicates with digestion and metabolic-limb system, the lower pole, and the nose connects to the rhythmic system through the respiratory tract, the middle.

We can discover the threefoldness in our bones too. We observe the femur and we see on the upper end the 'head and the neck', on the lower part the 'leg', with the slightly spiralling middle part the 'shaft'.

We can observe the threefoldness in the three layers of our skin. The outer tactile layer with nerves, composed of dead cells, with its dying and mineralising tendency, skin hair and nails which are high in silica. The vascular region, the dermis is the rhythmic region of the skin, emotions are accompanied by changes in circulation causing reddening or paleness. Rhythmic manifestations are expressed in respiratory functions. In the hypodermis, the metabolic layer, are the sweat glands and here is the growth activity of the hair follicles.



RIGHT FEMUR (FRONT VIEW)



THE THREEFOLD SKIN (SECTION)

1. Epidermis - NERVE-SENSE POLE
2. Dermis - RHYTHMIC CENTER
3. Hypodermis - METABOLIC POLE
4. Hair
5. Tactile corpuscles
6. Nerves
7. Blood vessels
8. Sebaceous glands
9. Sweat glands

THE THREEFOLD HUMAN CONSTITUTION

| UPPER POLE | MIDDLE | LOWER POLE |
|--|--|---|
| <i>Head, Nerve-Sense System</i> | <i>Heart-Lung, Rhythmic System</i> | <i>Metabolic- Limb System</i> |
| SKULL | RIB CAGE | LIMBS |
| hard outside, soft inside. Spherical, formed, individualised. Immovable except jaw. | soft inside, hard middle and soft outside. Spherical as a whole. Protracted individually. In Rhythmic movement. | soft outside, hard inside. Elongated, Radiating, (fingers, toes). Extremely mobile. |
| ABSORPTION POLE | HARMONISING | DISPERSION POLE |
| For light, sound, air and nourishment. | re-establishing equilibrium between upper and lower poles. | For excretions, propagation and work into the world. |
| Instrument of sensing and thinking | Instrument of pulse, breathing, feeling (or affect) | Instrument of metabolism, movement and willing. |
| Most conscious, but least alive. | Less conscious, less alive. | Least conscious, but most alive. |
| Coolness and quietness seeking. | between thinking and willing | Warmth and movement seeking |

When we look around us in the world, we come to realise that all living organisms manifest a Trinity in their threefold constitution. E.g. animals have head, trunk and metabolic-limb systems, however they mainly have a horizontal position, while the human being is upright with head looking up and forward.

We can also discover the threefoldness in the plant world. The roots, which are coolness and quietness seeking, sense in the soil the nutrients and water and absorb them. This is the absorption pole. We can observe all the metabolic activities, including propagation, at the flower-fruit pole. Here the plant needs the warmth of the sun and pollen, and scent, nectar, fruit and seed are dispersed. This is the warmth and movement seeking dispersion pole. The leaves are arranged around the stem in beautiful numerical rhythms. We continually breathe out carbon dioxide into the air and the plant leaves take in the carbon dioxide from the air and release oxygen for our in-breathing. The stem and the leaves create the rhythmic equilibrium between the two poles.

We can also look at the threefold human being in a diagrammatic way. We look at the plant and we see it in a vertical position, but with its flower-fruit pole towards the cosmos and with the root down into the earth. Here we observe a deeply significant

relationship between the human being and the plants. We have the image of an upside down plant in us.



EXPERIMENT

Try to find other threefold aspects in the human constitution, in nature and in the world. Write them down and keep adding to the list.

Care and Development of Our Thinking, Feeling and Willing in Our Threefold Constitution

We have learnt about our twelve Thinking, Feeling and Willing senses and how to care and what to do about their further development both in us and in the world. In a similar way we have brought into our consciousness the sense-perceptible threefold human constitution, through which the three Divine Gifts, our Thinking, Feeling and Willing manifest in us and in the world.

Now on our path of knowledge we have to search to find ways to nurture and develop our Thinking, Feeling and Willing soul forces, and also to extend this caring to our fellow human beings and the world. This development in the light of our consciousness enables us to deepen and widen our experiences of ourselves and of the world. How can we do this fruitfully, practically?

EXPERIMENT

1. Try to think of a simple object and then focus and concentrate on that thought. (It should not be an interesting or compelling thought). See how long can you hold it, without wandering away or a new thought intruding? You can measure the time and write it down. Try to observe the will activity you need to keep it focused.

2. Try to carry out a simple deed, a will activity, at a certain time of the day. (E.g.: open and close a door) Both the activity and the time has to be pre-determined by you and without any relation to life's requirements. See whether you can keep to your decision for this will activity which you made freely, earlier? Try to observe how much presence of mind you need to fulfil your will-activity at the time predetermined by you.
3. Observe your reactions in a situation, when someone responds to you unexpectedly. You might feel hurt, annoyed or saddened. Watch your reactions. What are your expressions, your gestures and your words? Are you conscious of them and how much control do you feel you have over your emotions and their expression? Try to observe the extent and the strength of your uncontrolled and intruding thought, and will impulses.

These are three of Rudolf Steiner's six basic exercises, which can lead us to recognise our often automatic, uncontrolled ways of thinking, prejudiced feelings and sentiments, and ingrained habits of doing things. These exercises give us the practical possibility to look at ourselves in a more conscious way and to bring more clarity into our relationships to others and to the world.

The Six Basic Exercises

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <i>1. Control of thinking</i> | <i>4. Positiveness in life</i> |
| <i>2. Control of willing</i> | <i>5. Open-mindedness for new experiences</i> |
| <i>3. Equanimity in feeling</i> | <i>6. Balance between above exercises</i> |

These exercises can gradually strengthen our concentration in conscious thinking (truth), can help us toward purpose directed willing (goodness) and balanced equanimity in our feeling (beauty). Through true inner experiences and realisations we don't only develop and strengthen our three godly gifts, but also move towards 'freeness' on our path leading the spiritual in us to the spiritual in the universe.

We will be working with the six basic exercises through the year, at first practicing them one by one, then together with different variations to discover various polarities, to lead us to different levels of conscious experiences. This work will be supported and widened by artistic exercises from different domains on our path. Now we can start with the first exercise:

Control of Thinking

Rudolf Steiner explains these important basic exercises many times in different contexts and we begin with some of his quotes.

Whoever succeeds in directing his thought, for at least five minutes daily, and for months on end, to some quite commonplace object – say for example a needle or a pencil – and in shutting out during those five minutes all thoughts that have no connection with the object, will have made very good progress in this direction. (A fresh object may be chosen each day, or one may be continued for several days.) (...) For when we are riveting our thought for a considerable time upon something that is entirely familiar, we may be quite sure that our thinking is in accord with reality. If we ask ourselves: What is a lead pencil made of? How are the different materials prepared? How are they put together? When were lead pencils invented? And so on, we can be more sure of our thoughts being consistent with reality than if we were to ponder the question of the descent of man – or, let us say of the meaning of life. (...) As to our thinking, what is important at this stage is not the object or event to which it is directed, but that it should be strong and vigorous and to the point. If it has been educated to be so in reference to simple physical realities that lie open to view, it will acquire the tendency to be so even when it finds itself no longer under the control of the physical world and its laws. One will find one gets rid in this way of any tendency one had before to loose and extravagant thinking.²

THE EXERCISE

Control of thinking is a concentration exercise for the illuminating and strengthening of independent thinking.

What to do: Concentrate for 5 minutes on thoughts about a simple manmade object, such as a pencil, a pin, a spoon, a pocket knife or a paper clip. Try to find out everything about this object and then you can order your thoughts in well structured sequences so that the whole process has an inner necessity. Try to think in a disciplined way and to keep irrelevant thoughts and non factual interpretations at a distance. You can have as many thoughts as you wish – there are no rules, or obligations – as long as you keep your concentration, clarity and objective certainty.

An example of how to build a sequence within the exercise about a spoon:

1. What is the basic form and what materials are used to make it?
2. How is it made, manufactured?
3. What are its different functions?
4. How did it come about originally?

² From 'Occult Science – An Outline' Rudolf Steiner Press, London, 1969.

5. What is its appearance?
6. Is it necessary, and what needs does it satisfy?
7. How was it used through history?
8. What varieties exist out of the basic archetype?

It is good to do the exercise in the morning, because it helps you to become really awake. After practicing it a few times you might feel a certain degree of perfection; but after a few weeks, the same exercise, with the newness gone, could become less interesting, even a little boring. Irrelevant, distracting thoughts could arise. This can be an important phase in the exercise process. The interest must now be generated out of inner thought forces and this could lead to heightened concentration, independent from outer supports, and also to new observations regarding the activity of the thought itself. Thinking becomes independent if we overcome arbitrary will-o'-the-wisp like associations and compulsive thoughts, which have nothing to do with thought concentration.

At the end of each exercise we will sense self sufficiency of thinking, manifesting through a subtle feeling of inner firmness and certainty. We should direct this sensing to the front of our forehead, so this feeling moves through over the back of our head down into our spine.

The whole exercise can become a strengthener of true harmonic order in our lives.

We will come back to this exercise by deepening it with increased consciousness, after we have worked through all the six.

EduCareDo Diary Page

Name:

Student Number:

Date:

What was really new to me in this lesson?

What was most inspiring in this lesson?

What can I do, what will I do with this finding? (Even if it is only a seemingly small deed.)

What have I done and what is in process of being done:

After three months?

After six months?

Other remarks: