

THE THREE GATES OF FREEDOM

OVERCOMING DEFENSIVE REACTIONS AS THEY HAPPEN

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In another previous article 'The Three Sacrifices' I outlined the possible transforming of thinking, feeling and willing into the empathic perceptive powers of Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition. In the part focusing on the transformation of the will into intuitive perception, I gave the example of transforming defensive reaction into intuitive perception of another person, instead of reacting to his/her reaction to you.

Graduates and students of the professional training in Psychophonetics know about our processes of Overcoming Reactions, taught through the various branches of Psychophonetics Institute International during the past 30 years. But so far, all these processes were directed at what the individual can do towards overcoming defensive reactions *after* they took place, and *before* the next time.

In this article I wish to enter the possibility of overcoming defensive reaction *in the middle of that reaction*. This is a question I have been struggling with for many years both in my own development and in my teaching. It is being often asked by my students. I hereby make a contribution towards an answer.

Defensive reactions are so deeply wired into the physical structure of the organism— the conscious mind can hardly find a point of entry into it until after the event. The consequences of explosive or implosive reactions are so severe, both internally and interpersonally—that a later reflection can hardly penetrate into the dynamics that caused them. A cognitive reflection after the event can only have minimal effect on the reactive pattern, if at all. It cannot change it before the next reactive event. Automatic defensive reactions are the major destruction in all human relationships on all levels. As the process of individuation progresses unstopably further—the destructive effect of defensive reactions on human health and relationship will inevitably worsen as the restrains and controls of old, traditional, tribal and collective-cultural structures continue their inevitable disintegration.

Defensive reactions are the very opposite of human freedom. They are automatic, emerging directly from the instinctive layer of the will deep in the autonomic nervous and endocrine systems, just as it

is with all animals. They serve all animals well in the pursuit of physical survival. But in human beings in which a conscious soul is active—the same instinctive defences become hindrances to psychological-spiritual development. When the human ‘I’ is added to the ‘human animal’ nature - the meaning of everything changes. The cultivation of freedom requires the exact opposite of the dictates of instincts: freedom can only enter human life at the expense of habitual, automatic, repetitive patterns of our instinctive nature. For freedom to become a reality the lower human nature must be transformed into the potential higher human nature. Regarding the automatic defensive reactions – that means practical alchemy: the transformation of ‘human astrality’ (animal nature) – into one aspect of ‘human Spirit Self (Manas in Sanskrit)¹; base metal becomes gold.

For those seeking personal transformation and development and for professionals trying to help people to develop personally and socially— understanding the practical possibilities of overcoming defensive reactions is crucial: it is the inevitable threshold facing everyone at every step of conscious development.

The crucial practical question here is: what are the potential points of entry for the free individual will to enter into these established patterns of automatic defensive reactions? What chance do we have to stop the reaction *while it is happening*?

In my practical research, I found four such potential points of entry. I will call them ‘***the three gates of freedom***’. They are: 1) The Gate of Cognition (3 options); 2) The Gate of the Heart 3) The Gate of Choice of Action. I will describe them in words here, but the reader will only grasp their reality when trying them practically.

Some context is required here: in preparation for the basic attempt to overcome automatic defensive reaction there must be *a commitment*. That commitment constitutes the 3rd Condition of the 7 Conditions for spiritual development: *the commitment to regard one’s own inner life as a reality*. A practical attempt to fulfil this commitment would lead inevitably to the realisation that no one else is responsible for my emotions, feelings, opinions, choices, actions and reactions. They all emanate from myself; I am solely responsible for them. Only on that basis will any of the following could possibility become practicable.

¹ All these esoteric psychological terms are well defined in chapter 1 of Rudolf Steiner foundation book ‘Theosophy’: ‘The Nature of the Human Being’.
https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA009/English/RSP1965/GA009_index.html

Two streams of hereditary are woven together in the fundamental formation of the human constitution: 1) the stream of physical heredity, and 2) the individual soul and spirit stream, which we bring with us from our previous lives from before birth. The first stream is irrevocably woven into our physiology, governed by our given genetic structure. It is potentially capable of change but very slowly (as the relatively new science of Epigenetics starts to show²). Freedom can only enter human life through the 2nd stream that is forming us: the individual soul and spirit stream. Our automatic defensive reactions are governed by our inheritance stream. They work approximately like this:

1. The 1st potential gate of awareness: Impression-Sensation. An impression enters our awareness through our senses. Someone says something to me. I hear its sounds, I understand the meaning of the words, I perceive the intonation of the speech, I sense that there is a conscious human being in front of me acting intentionally. This is already 4 senses used in light of 'Applied Psychosophy'³: hearing, thought, intonation and the sense of 'I' of the other⁴. These impressions get reflected through various parts of the cerebral cortexes of the brain into specific mental images. **But** already then, these impressions trigger all the unconscious defences created in my past. ***This is the first point of potential cognitive entry into the reactive pattern:*** to become aware of these automatic responses provoked by the new impressions.

2. The 2nd potential cognitive gate of awareness: Provoked associations (mostly unconscious). A whole range of associations are being provoked by the mental pictures produced by the new impression. They inevitably include all the past experiences of aggression directed at me. The associations emerge from the huge pool of embodied memory in my etheric (life) body⁵. **But** potentially I can observe the rising of these associations and stop them from colouring the new impression, which has nothing to do with the past. This is ***a second point of potential cognitive entry into reactive patterns.***

3. No gate. The reaction enters into the blood– the bodily response (*not a point of entry at all!*): this mixture of new and old mental pictures effect the hippocampus on the two sides of my amygdala at bottom of my middle brain. At this point a whole cycle of hormonal secretion is taking place in my body which is so fast -consciousness has no chance of entering it. This is an event in my actual blood.

² See 'Epigenetics' in Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epigenetics>

³ Applied Psychosophy is my development of Rudolf Steiner's Psychosophy (1910) in combination with his educational literature (1909 – 1919) and other aspects of anthroposophical psychology.

⁴ In light of 'Applied Psychosophy' a normal human being possesses 12 normal senses: sight, touch, hearing, smell, taste, balance, movement, warmth, well-being (life), intonation, thought and 'I'.

⁵ In light of Applied Psychosophy memory storage is not located in the brain but in the totality of the 4th dimensional Etheric of Life Body (Chi).

The Hippocampus sends a signal to the pituitary gland in the middle of my forehead which in turn activates the adrenal glands, positioned on top of my two kidneys. They secrete many stress hormones but mainly cortisol and adrenaline into my blood stream. One effect of this is the reflexive tightening of muscles, narrowing of the blood vessels and the hyper palpitation of heart rate. All this is completely reflexive, immediate bodily reactions. *Normal consciousness cannot enter it.*

4. The gate of Emotional awareness– the gate of the heart: The heart sensation injects the reactive cycle into consciousness, because while we cannot control the heart *motorically* we can sense it. That sensation forms a new impression. The two impressions become one: 1) a person is standing in front of me speaking aggressively to me, and 2) my heart feels under attack. Conclusion: this person is attacking my heart! **But** at this point I can potentially stop this conclusion from forming in my mind, based on past experiences, and say to myself: “my heart feels pain and fear, my heart feels it is under attack. This sensation is real, *but it is not directly related to this person standing in front of me! It comes from past experience*”. ***This is the heart gate of entry into the reactive pattern.***

5. The 3rd potential cognitive gate of awareness: the temptation to ‘add fuel to the fire’ by producing more and more accusatory concepts– or the choice to stop that cognitive process, stop the building up of a ‘case’ against the ‘provocator’ and just listen, to oneself and to the other.

6. Into Will-Awareness- The gate of the choice: to act– or not to act: When the heart feels attacked – it presses ‘*The Panic Button*’. Every front-desk police officer, immigration officer, bank clerk, medical doctor, social worker, hospital nurse and psychiatrist have a ‘panic button’ at their disposal in case they think they are being attacked by a troubled or dangerous customer. The heart has got one as well. The human heart cannot protect itself. It needs to mobilise the ‘protective law enforcers’ of the constitution for its protection: the aggressive centre in the ‘Hara’, the solar plexus centre, the ‘enteric nervous system’ component of the ‘autonomic nervous system’, sometimes called ‘the Third Brain’ (1. the neocortex; 2. the limbic brain; 3. the reptilian brain⁶).

My own aggressive self-defence mechanism is now being activated: fighting with all the guns blazing. ***This IS my actual expressed or depressed reaction!*** I may choose to explode it– with interpersonal damage - or to implode it – with internal physiological damage to myself, according to habits and circumstances. The main point here is this: I can, potentially, make a choice. The element of choice brings in the conscious ‘I’ in: in a split of a second, I can make a choice about ***my action***. But there is a

⁶ See ‘The triune model of the mammalian brain’ Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triune_brain

third possible choice here, between Exploding and Imploding: Not to enact the reaction at all! What is the alternative to enacting the automatic reaction here? To take the risk and *feel the emotional pain* that mobilises the defensive reaction. **This is the ‘choice-of-action’ point of entry into the reactive pattern!** I *cannot* choose not to have pain in my heart. The pain IS there waiting to be felt for a long time. My natural instinct is to act immediately to avoid more pain. **But I can choose to take a risk and feel the pain.** This is the only alternative to defensive reaction: to choose to feel the emotional pain that lives behind the heart-pain caused by the fear contraction.

These are the three potential gates of freedom through which the conscious ‘I’ can enter into the otherwise unconscious cycle of automatic defensive reactions. These automatic defensive reactions are damaging to body, soul and human relationship. There are many reasons to try to overcome them for the improvement of normal, functional life, health and relationship.

There is another value for this striving: every real attempt to overcome automatic defensive reaction, even before it is fully successful, will result in a step of transforming one more aspect of the given human astrality- into one more aspect of Spirit-Self, one’s own ‘Manas’, one’s potential higher being. It will be a long road for the completion of this transformation. It used to be called in the leadership training centres of the ancient world: ‘*Initiation*’. It used to be a part of the leadership training for very specially select individuals chosen by the gods or their representatives—to become future leaders of their communities. You can still find traces of these traditional initiation processes in Bantu Southern Africa, Sub-Continental India, Aboriginal Australia, some Red Indian tribes, esoteric Gnostic, Kabbalistic and Sufi traditions, and more. But they are all based on the pre-individuation stage of human evolution. At some point at the dawn of the age of the Consciousness Soul (15th Century) they emerged again in Western Europe, in preparation for the Renaissance and the reformation, the enlightenment, the scientific and the technological age.

A beginning of a new kind of initiation emerged that is based on individual consciousness was established. This was the early version of the Anthroposophical Spiritual Science, of which Psychophonetics is one of the new branches. This article about overcoming defensive reactions as they happen, one expression of the whole development of Applied Psychosophy and Psychophonetics— is one of the results of this ongoing development.

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