Humanity on the Threshold

… Spiritual paths lead across a threshold, beyond which the distinction between inner and outer experience no longer holds. A human being crosses such a threshold as a whole and takes with him or herself what he or she is. What in his normal waking consciousness has seemed to exist 'within', will become equally discernible as their surroundings. Nor will it continue to have the shadowy character of our private thoughts, feelings, and intentions, which enables us to believe that what goes on inside us doesn't much matter as long as our behaviour is outwardly acceptable. The realities of the inner life begin to be experienced in full force as part of the universe.

It is no accident that a kind of threshold crossing is visible in many spheres of life today.

John Davy

Humanity on the Threshold

Spiritual development in turbulent times

Bernard Lievegoed

Hawthorn Press

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NOTES FOR THE SECOND EDITION

It is no longer appropriate in the modern world to refer to human beings solely in the masculine – 'man' or 'he/him/his'. The publisher has therefore taken the decision to change 'man' to 'humanity', 'human beings' or 'self' depending on the context, and to use 'they/them/their' in their modern singular forms to include all human beings, whatever their assigned gender at birth or gender identity. The original pronouns have been kept where they are part of a quote.

Contents

A Personal Foreword

Time: winter 1928–29. Place: the old 'Binnengasthuis' hospital in Amsterdam, Department of Internal Medicine, headed by Prof. Piet Ruitenga. More exact location: the 'closet', formerly a bathroom, adjacent to the women's ward. The closet was the domain of the youngest co-assistant, who carried out daily routine tests and noted the results on the patients' charts. The closet was also where in the morning the entire staff had coffee, standing room only, and where the latest news was exchanged.

On one particular morning: Prof. Ruitenga and all assistants and co-assistants are crowded together, coffee cups in hand. One of the assistants relates: 'Visited my aunt this weekend. Chronic rheumatism … poor thing … all bent over she is. Tried everything – salicyl, gold – nothing worked. Now they have taken her to the new Rudolf-Steiner Clinic, and you know what they do with her there? They talk to her every day for half an hour! Ha, ha, ha!' Loud laughter all round. Such folly!

Then the voice of the youngest 'co': 'I happened to meet some of the doctors who work there. They seemed quite reasonable people …' Abruptly Prof. Ruitenga turns round: 'What do you know about this anthroposophical medicine?'

Youngest 'co': 'Well, Professor, not much yet, but I am interested in it, and I hope eventually to find out more about it.'

Prof. Ruitenga: 'Strange … the other day I had a visit from one of those doctors, a former student of mine. He gave me a book to read. I tried, but, honestly, can you figure out what 'ether body' means?'

Youngest 'co': 'I haven't got that far yet, Professor.'

Ruitenga: 'Several of my former students went that way. Can't understand it. They were my best students …'

He detaches himself from the tight crowd and walks away, his cup still half full, mumbling: 'They were my best students …'

General silence and accusing glances to the youngest 'co', who spoiled the atmosphere.

That was the first experience of the youngest 'co'. At 24, he became a doctor, and discovered that the biographic conversation is part of every therapy. Thus he became interested in psychiatry, discovered curative education, and decided to start a curative home for mentally handicapped children on the basis of anthroposophy.

In Prof. Carp in Leiden he found a teacher who was prepared to let him carry out an investigation based on the work at the institute. This led in 1939 to a doctoral thesis.[1]

In the thirties discussions took place in the Jelgersma Clinic, in Holland, about the question whether in the future there would have to be a sub-specialisation for child psychiatry, and what would have to be included in the training. l had the privilege to take part in these deliberations, with my experience of the 'Zonnehuis' (curative home). After the Second World War, this specialisation did, in fact, come about.

Meanwhile, because of questions from the outside, my work took the direction of general psychotherapy. In the thirties, psychotherapy was virtually synonymous with psychoanalysis. I went my own way on the basis of anthroposophy, and was encouraged in this by regular contacts with people at the Jelgersma Clinic.

I called this form of psychotherapy 'biographic therapy' because its aim was to place the problems of the patient in the context of the biographical development of life as a whole, and not to look for the causes only in shocks and frustrations experienced in the patient's earliest past.

The concept 'development' became a central issue, and it became more and more clear to me that development occurs as a result of meeting and overcoming resistance – not only in one's own constitution, upbringing, and life experience, but also in the inability to accept the situation 'now' and in a lack of prospects for one's individual future. It also became evident that resistance (this 'helper of development') resulted from frightening inner experiences that are not understood.

In order to find a way of dealing with these life problems, an attempt was made to provide the client in the first place with an insight into the normal laws operative in the course of human life. This also became the topic for my book *Phases – Crisis and Development in the Individual*, which appeared in 1976.[2]

Many problems appear in a different light when they are recognised as parts of normal stages of development.

Resistance at a deeper level is the subject of this new book. This has made it necessary to refer to the totality of the anthroposophical image of man. Consequently, this book is 'more anthroposophical' than my previous one.

The book has two parts. The first part is general. It describes different aspects of human development against the background of the image of man and the world conception of anthroposophy.

The second part provides a picture of the fundamentals of biographic therapy. It is directed to more professionally oriented readers. It offers them a starting point for further individual study and practical experience. In addition, however, many aspects of what Part Two is concerned with will be of benefit to those who seek therapy.

This book is the result of 50 years of personal experience, and has, therefore, a personal bias. Undoubtedly, other, or additional, points of view are possible in this area.

A detailed introduction and foundation of the concepts derived from anthroposophy has been omitted; this book would have been disproportionally voluminous. Still, the most important terminology has been briefly commented on in the notes at the back of the book, with references to the relevant literature, so that plenty of opportunity for orientation and study in this subject area is provided.

October 1983 **B.C.J. Lievegoed**

Biography of the Author

Bernard Lievegoed was born 2 September 1905 at Medan, Sumatra, Indonesia, son of the managing editor of a local newspaper. He grew up here, and attended school, surrounded by some of the most magnificent natural beauty to be found anywhere in the world. Having moved to the Netherlands at age 17, where he completed his secondary education, Lievegoed decided to study medicine because, he reasoned rather unconventionally, that would leave his future open.

He completed his medical studies in six years. Meanwhile, Lievegoed had become interested in psychiatry, and coincidentally, became acquainted with anthroposophy through the Dutch psychiatrist Willem Zeylmans van Emmichoven. On a trip to Sweden, Lievegoed visited an anthroposophical institute for mentally disturbed children, and was so impressed with what he saw there that he decided to found a similar institution in Holland. In 1931, he opened the 'Zonnehuis'. During the first seven years he partly financed it by running a medium-sized general medical practice on the side. In 1939, Lievegoed completed a doctoral thesis based on the work at the institute; dealing with the therapeutic application of music, and published under the title *Maat, Ritme, Melodie* (Measure, Rhythm, Melody).

After the war years of 1940–45, the 'Zonnehuis' quickly grew to more than 200 children. Lievegoed, however, was at the same time being drawn into ventures of a quite different nature as well. Having written a book on child development and its relation to education,* and being a frequent lecturer on education and pedagogy from an anthroposophical viewpoint, he was asked in 1948 to deliver a major address to a prestigious group of industrialists on the question of how education could support the post-war industrial expansion in Holland. This soon led to individual requests for advice in matters related to occupational training. Lievegoed's workload as an industrial consultant soon increased to such an extent that he decided to

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**De Ontwikkelingsfasen van het kind* (Developmental phases of childhood).

withdraw as the director of 'Zonnehuis' and to become a full-time adviser on human problems in industry.

In 1954, Lievegoed was invited to join the faculty of the Netherlands Economic College (later Erasmus University) at Rotterdam as a professor of 'social pedagogy'. Lievegoed acceded, and also founded the Netherlands Paedagogical Institute as a means to carry out field-work. NPI, as it soon became known, rapidly established a position of leadership in the approach to social questions related to business and industry. With Lievegoed as the director and taking an active part in the work, NPI broke new ground in 'social-therapeutic organisation development', human relations, and occupational training.

In 1963, Lievegoed was asked for his co-operation in establishing a social sciences department at the *Technische Hogeschool* (Technical College), Twente, where eventually he was instrumental in starting a new course of study, which can be described as 'industrial-therapeutic engineering'. He also completed his book *The Developing Organization*, which was published in Holland in 1969, and became internationally known.

Meanwhile, however, other questions, too, were occupying him. Besides his professorial duties at the Economic College at Rotterdam, Lievegoed had also agreed to become the 'student psychiatrist'. He discovered that 85 per cent of all the problems the students brought to him were related to study difficulties, loneliness, and choosing the wrong subjects. In 1971, Lievegoed resigned as director of the NPI and founded the Vrije Hogeschool (Free High School, or College) to provide young people who had finished their secondary education, but were unsure about their future, with an opportunity to do a year of general orientation and personal development. In a round-about way, the 65-year-old physician, educator, industrial consultant, and professor had returned to his old love – psychiatry. This now took the form of 'individualisation encouragement' for young people. It was during his years as Rector of the 'VH' (he retired from this position in 1982) that Lievegoed wrote *Phases* (published in English in 1979) about human life development, which later became a best-seller in Holland.

Besides his numerous activities, which included many official functions in government and industry, Lievegoed produced no fewer than 21 books and pamphlets, not counting numerous articles, lecture reports etc., on a wide diversity of subjects, such as developmental psychology, curative pedagogy, social pedagogy, organisation development, education, architecture, community development, and medicine. In December 1983, he received the 'Gouden Ganzeveer'

(Golden Quill), a literary award of the Royal Netherlands Publishers' Association honouring authors who are deemed to have made a significant contribution to cultural life in the Netherlands. It was on this occasion that he was described as 'a true contemporary, a man who takes note of the issues of his time and of the needs of a turbulent world'. Lievegoed, moreover, had always been actively occupied with some of the most pressing social and cultural questions. 'Today,' he says, 'each question is a moral question'.

PART ONE

Chapter One

HUMANITY ON THE THRESHOLD

The basic premise of this book is a statement by Rudolf Steiner: 'Humanity has crossed the threshold'. Those safe boundaries that surrounded our consciousness during the past few centuries are no longer safe. Especially the inward boundary, towards the inner processes of body and soul, has become unreliable. Unfamiliar and compulsive forces gain entrance to our consciousness and push fears, compulsions, alienation, and depression to the surface.

The first sign of this came around 1980, in psychoanalysis. At first reviled and ridiculed by those for whom the boundary was still rock-solid, psychoanalysis soon penetrated cultural life. Today, it is hard to imagine a novel or a movie without psychoanalytic overtones.

The sense of anxiety increases year by year. But this can't be! One is supposed to be healthy, and psychologically well-adjusted, meaning to have a 'sensible' consciousness, oriented to the tangible and visible material world.

In the 20th century, the use of tranquillizers and alcohol was increasing year by year. In the 1970s and '80s, consumption approximately quadrupled, and at the time of the original publication of this book, consumption was continuing to increase month by month. What was, and still is, is going on?

This book intends to create a deeper understanding of these phenomena from the viewpoint of anthroposophy and its image of the human being. Anthroposophy provides insights into areas that are obscure to our ordinary understanding. Real insight forms the basis for overcoming anxiety and fear. Understanding banishes fear.

When in the evening dusk one goes for a walk through the fields, and suddenly in the mist one discerns the figure of a person standing on the path ahead, one is struck by fright and fear. Then comes the discovery it is only a bush. Relieved, one breathes easily again, and one's heart stops pounding. As soon as one has recognised the phenomenon for what itis, as soon as the fear of the unknown has been eliminated, one can assert one's ego and face the situation with composure.

In the following chapters, we will try to bring about this process of eliminating the fear of the unknown. We shall do this by making it intelligible that we are dealing here with developmental processes that are entirely justified and necessary for Western humankind – processes that are just as natural as the change of teeth and puberty, and as natural, too, as the changes humanity underwent in the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, and to the New Age that brought the urge for new discoveries.

What happened then was the emergence of an irresistible urge to shift attention from philosophical speculation to the world itself, seen as an unknown planet yet to be explored, and to nature, now seen as a source of abundant wealth to be exploited. And now attention is directed to our own inner world by a force that is equally irresistible. Instead of voyages of discovery to unknown continents, exploration of unknown territories in one's own human psyche is taking place. Terrifying frontiers are being crossed. Once it was a westward voyage that was taboo; you were supposed to come to the edge of the world there, and ships would get caught in an immense waterfall and plunge into the unfathomable depths of nothingness. Now, it is taboo to cross the boundaries of the familiar day-time consciousness because on the other side, one would be dragged down into the insanity of nothingness.

However, just as the ships that sailed westward did actually discover a new continent with new wonders and new treasures, so can they who complete the inward voyage in full consciousness discover that there, too, new wonders and new treasures are to be found.

Where scientific thinking goes astray is where it imagines that in essence humanity has always related to the world in the same way as it has for the past 150 years – that we have merely become cleverer than our dim-witted, superstitious ancestors. Now, finally, we have become sensible and scientific, and that is how it will be for evermore. But it is not working out that way! Just as once scholasticism was abandoned as the highest form of knowledge, to be replaced by science, so do we now experience an age in which, as an alternative to natural-scientific, naturalistic thought, there is a way of thinking that attempts to investigate both matter and spirit to an equal degree.

To put it differently: All ancient cultures were based on a spiritualistic worldview in which the divine world was seen as the creator. The only reality was a spiritual one. Matter was the big Maya, an illusionary world. The ancient Greeks, in a way, still lived with this divine world but developed the then-still new worldview of idealism, in whichbehind each external phenomenon, the idea was experienced

as cause and creator. Our New. Age has relegated both the divine world and the ideal world to the realm of childish wishfulness and knows only about matter. In materialism, natural laws and chance are the cause and creator of everything, and spirit is the big Maya, the illusionary world.

But in the 20th century, classic materialism has passed its zenith. We are about to take the next step: to 'spiritual realism', in which matter and spirit both are realities and in continuous interaction. 'No spirit without matter, no matter without spirit'. Thus a statement by Rudolf Steiner, which shows him to be a true realist.[1]

This book has been written with this realistic worldview in mind, as it is developed in anthroposophy.

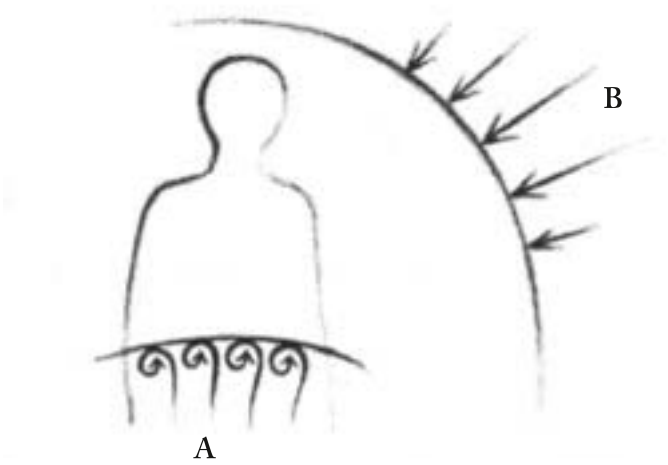
Modern humanity lives between two boundaries. One is an observational boundary. We view the outside of the phenomenal world. Everywhere we see only outer surfaces. If we want to know what lies behind the surface and cut the object we are observing in two, two new surfaces are created. Even with the greatest imaginable magnification of the electron microscope we only see the surfaces of the smallest particles, until the particles dissolve into non-material, hypothetical forces, which we can infer only through their activity.

The human being's view outward impinges on surfaces, made visible by illumination. The human being's view inward, into one's own soul (psyche), hits a dark wall, on which only memories are depicted. What goes on behind this mirror of memories in the way of organic processes and unconscious soul processes escapes our direct observation to the same extent as the forces working in nature escape our observation. On the way outward we call instruments to our aid that magnify or reduce in order to penetrate into the essence of things. On the way inward we attempt to get to know the essence of the world behind the mirror of memory by means of techniques such as dream analysis, hypnosis, and investigation of psychological phenomena.

But here, too, one gets no further than describing processes of an unconscious world in terms of the conscious. Thus, the human being lives between two boundaries they cannot cross with their day-consciousness.

Rudolf Steiner described these two boundaries in a lecture in 1918. He made a drawing, which is reproduced overleaf in somewhat simplified form.[2]

There are forces working out of the universe that only just touch the boundaries of our sense-perceptible world, without manifesting themselves.



Active forces bubbling up out of the metabolic system of the human being strain against the memory boundary.

Cosmos outside and metabolism inside are the two unknown worlds. Science has established firmly that it is powerless to penetrate into the essence of reality. The dogma 'ontological questions may not be asked' means: no questions about the being of things. We are permitted only to ask how the forces of the universe work, not what they are. Thus, we know well enough how a positive or a negative charge works, but not what a charge is. And when we call this 'energy', this is no more than an explanatory word. This is how materialism shows its fundamentally agnostic character, but, at any rate, it is honest about it (at least in the case of true scholars – not in the case of those who popularize science and make it appear as if naming something is the same as explaining it).

Materialism has two boundaries. The step to realism requires that the spirit, too, be investigated, in its interaction with matter. That means the outward and inward boundaries have to be breached, and spiritual 'being' has to be subjected to exact investigation in the same way we have learned to do in science. Realism in this sense does not mean a step backwards to old spiritualistic world views, but a step forward, which in fact has only been made possible by materialism, with its exact observation and strict procedural methods, preceding it.

By way of introduction, a summary is given below, which is meant to give the reader an impression of what they can or cannot expect in this book.

'Humanity has crossed the threshold': Unknown forces gain entry to consciousness from the 'unconscious' realm; they create confusion, which manifests itself in fears, depression, and the like. The world of

the psyche, which in this book we shall refer to as the 'soul world', must be consciously put in order and strengthened so as to keep its balance. This can be brought about only through the ego of the human being, by their individuality, which finds itself somewhere along the way on a long path of development., On this path, it has a past, a self-imposed task for the present, and a future in which the fruits of the present life form in turn the basis for a subsequent task.

With each incarnation, with each step in this process of development, a soul structure is built up in conjunction with the bodily nature given by heredity. In the bodily nature, a number of qualities are given: firstly, a physical body made up of matter; secondly, a system of life forces penetrating the physical body, continuously building it up and breaking it down, called the vegetative or ether body; and, thirdly, a system of animalistic psychical phenomena and mechanisms, called the astral body according to an old terminology, or, according to Aristotle, the animal soul.

Human beings are born with a physical body, vegetative forces, and animalistic soul forces. The ego must then still penetrate these 'instruments' and humanise them.

This humanising process is the task for the first half of life; subsequently, the humanised forces can be used for further development. This development always takes place in interaction with other human beings. In receiving and giving we follow our individual life's path and augment the 'talents' with which we started this life. This we are taught by the parable of the talents.[3]

Human beings have the animalistic soul functions in common with the animal. Out of the life sphere, drives rise up dedicated to perpetuating life: eating, procreating, building a nest, and defending a territory – all drives that humans have in common with the animal.

The stimulus–response mechanism forms the basis for the psychology of behaviourism. A materialistic psychology sees these mechanisms as the 'only real' soul life and views all 'so-called higher' drives and desires as a flight from reality. Human beings, it is said, should certainly not imagine themselves to be more than an intelligent animal. And the cause for all psychological disturbances would be, in fact, that humans, under the influence of cultural taboos, suppress these animalistic mechanisms. The cure, therefore, can only be the removal of these cultural. obstacles, and the creation of situations in which the animalistic mechanisms can be given free rein. Most modern group therapy is based on this. It is all derived, more or less, from psychoanalysis, and acknowledges only. a 'conscious and an unconscious psychical world.

Only the logotherapy of Frankl and the psychosynthesis of Assagioli recognise a psychical world related to a higher consciousness. In thehigher consciousness, human beings come in contact with their 'higher ego' and with that which they have gained in cultural attributes due to this higher consciousness.

An anthroposophical therapy consists of enhancing the ego functions, which raise the animalistic soul life to the human level in a quieted-down middle sphere of the soul. This means that immediate reactions have to be held back and internalized in the central area of the human soul, where they are confronted with moral, aesthetic and intellectual qualities.

This will be elaborated on in the chapters about the development of what is called the 'sentient soul', the 'intellectual and mind soul' and the 'consciousness soul'. The central point in this is that human beings only become human in the middle region, between the polar forces of sympathy and antipathy, and so on. In this middle region, human beings can momentarily be free and experience the spirit. The animal is tossed between comfort and discomfort, challenge and withdrawal, hunger and satiation, etc. Humans can internalize such stimuli and reactions between two poles and live in an intimate encounter with the world. Then a new quality arises, which, besides impressions, also calls forth meaning, beauty and moral judgement.

Human beings are beings of the middle and all human culture derives from the middle.

The child grows into this human culture by imitation and reverence; in a later phase, this tentative humanity is still to be tested with reference to the individual ego. This takes place in the middle phase of life. This means that after the early forties the individual character has been shaped, and then forms the basis for the ability to take one's place in cultural life – creatively, and by the giving of oneself.

The young person seeks to effect renewal by means of protest, and cannot do otherwise. In the third major life phase, after forty, the individual seeks renewal in drawing the consequences out of what Neumann has called the 'inner voice'.[4]

The mature, creative human being is the 'heretic' of the inner voice in relation to their environment. This inner voice had already announced itself (earlier in life) in the protest against that which came not from the self but had been contributed by the cultural environment. Only much later can this inner voice – the voice of the higher ego – manifest itself creatively, with quiet assurance.

The common thread running through this book is the process of ego development out of the middle.

Out of a strengthened middle sphere, which has become conscious, modern humanity can proceed across the outward threshold, and learn to experience more and more clearly the qualities that lie within the senseperceptions, until ultimately one encounters spiritual reality – spiritual beings that in days of old were self-evident. Once, they manifested themselves to a dreamy consciousness. Now, they must be sought in a clear day-consciousness that has passed through a training of the thinking, the feeling, and the will.

Out of a strengthened, conscious middle sphere, human beings can cross the inward boundary, and meet those forces that at the present break through the mirror of memory more and more to disrupt the day-consciousness. This conscious path inward is the only true therapy against the increasing threat of invasion out of the unconscious soul life, just as the conscious path outward is the therapy against the urge to escape in excarnation by means of addiction to drugs, alcohol, and other intoxicants.

In order to make the experiences that can possibly occur on these two paths understandable for the present time, the approach chosen in this book is first to describe how these paths were experienced in antiquity, in what is called the 'mysteries'. In these mysteries of ancient cultures, these paths can, indeed, also be recognised. The northern, Germanic mysteries knew the outward path of initiation, into the elemental world. The southern mysteries, particularly the Egyptian ones, went the inward path, into the unconscious soul life.

The ancient Greeks placed their gods on Olympus, in the wide, etheric world of elementals. Zeus-Jupiter controlled thunder and lightning. In art and philosophy, Apollo led humanity into the sun-illumined world of higher consciousness via the arts of the Musae. The Greeks were terrified of the 'underworld', where Dionysus let passion run wild as a result of intoxication, to overpower human beings. Only once a year, the bacchants and satyrs were set free and allowed to gain the upper hand for a short, time in an orgy controlled by the mysteries.

The hangover from these Dionysian festivities reinforced the loathing of the underworld for a considerable while afterwards; this was an important step in the development of the function of conscience. Modern humanity faces the necessity of being able to cope with both worlds. The anthroposophical path of development is therefore always a matter of balance between a step outwards and a step inwards. Only then can human beings hold on to the middle.

The first part of this book, after a description of the old mysteries, deals with *capita selecta* from anthroposophy as a foundation for insight

into psychical events for the benefit of all interested readers. Also, this lays a foundation for Part Two, in which modern syndromes and psychotherapy are discussed on a more professionally oriented level. This Part Two is no textbook on neuroses, but rather an exemplifying treatise of a few syndromes, in order to enable those who wish to gain further expertise in this area to see how spiritual insight can lead to rational action. Anthroposophical psychotherapy does not have fixed techniques that can be learned, but is based on an encounter of two human beings, with one seeking help and the other offering to search with them for their further path of development.

For besides general syndromes, mostly arising as a sign of the times, there exists only the highly individual path of development for every person. Only out of the greatest degree of respect for that path, however difficult, can the other be helped to find and develop their own middle. The helper allows themself no judgements, but only wonder and a sense of personal responsibility for awakening an individual moral sense in the other.

The reinforcement of the middle sphere is not only the first step in psychotherapy, but also on each individual path of development. This path begins with the creation of a rich inner life, with the experience of nature, of culture, and of the arts. It continues with the development of inner peace and finding moments of quiet contemplation, a preliminary to meditation, in which a content selected by ourselves fills us for a short time (which, therefore, is something different from repeating words while eliminating all thoughts).

Thus, a warm, sunny middle sphere will be gradually created, with positivity and openness for the world, and rich in content deriving from human culture.

Only a middle that offers warmth and light can be the starting point for a conscious crossing of the boundaries; otherwise the crossing is forced on us as a necessity of this age while we are unprepared.

A conscious path of inner development chosen by ourselves for ourselves, and a cultural therapy and psycho-therapy are in line with each other.

The following chapters are attempts to describe how we can consciously undergo the experiences on these paths of development without falling prey to neuroses, escapism, or addiction.