

Making Yourself New

Cognitive Yoga: Making Yourself a New Etheric Body and Individuality,
by Yeshayahu (Jesaiab) Ben-Aharon (Forest Row: Temple Lodge, 2016) 213 pp.

Review by David Adams

This is a most extraordinary book—probably the most extraordinary book that has been written within anthroposophy since the original work of Rudolf Steiner. Yet it is unusually challenging to write a concise review of it that does justice to its diverse, groundbreaking, and intimately experiential treasures. Aside from the sheer volume of significant spiritual content, this is because it is so densely written, with a nearly unrelenting content of descriptions and characterizations of mostly unfamiliar spiritual experiences, exercises, processes, and meetings. To be properly grasped, it should really be worked with meditatively—and probably read in shorter segments rather than all at once. Yet there is also a grand, metamorphosing flow and building culmination to the book as a whole.

I have always understood that there are three pathways to spiritual development or initiation offered within anthroposophy: the Christian path focused around working with The Gospel of St. John, the “Rosicrucian” path described in Steiner’s foundational *How to Know Higher Worlds*, and “a path” (the most safe and modern) based on work with the content and form of Steiner’s *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* (or *Freedom*). Yet it has never been quite clear what exactly this latter path involves and how ideally it proceeds, how it differs from the work one can do with other philosophical texts, and what specific exercises it might entail. One acquires from that book understanding of how we create reality by linking percept and concept, how this activity is the source of our freedom, the development of sense-free thinking (pure thinking and willing), and how all this can help guide us in living a moral life of “ethical individualism.” But it never seemed to spell out directly a specific path of spiritual development.

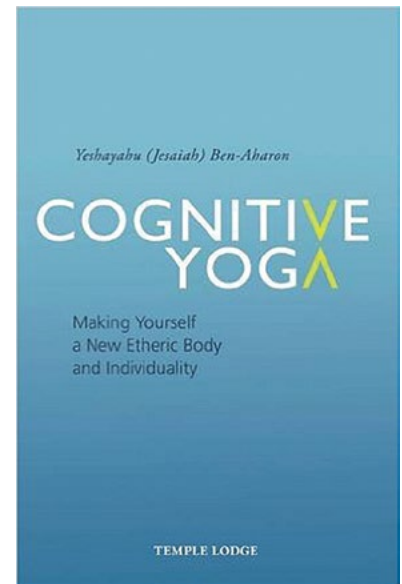
For the first time known to me since Rudolf Steiner’s somewhat scattered hints about the spiritual development work related to the content of *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*, someone has both actually traveled quite far on that path, and written (in English!) a kind of understandable, sequential “guidebook” for those wanting to pursue this journey—which proves to be especially about freeing, purifying, and individualizing one’s etheric body and, in the process, connecting it with the etheric world in general—the lowest level of the spiritual world.

It is a unique and significant contemporary achievement to connect and interpret from Rudolf Steiner’s lec-

tures the various comments, suggestions, indications, and explanations relating to this most contemporary of spiritual paths, and then through personal experimentation to forge these into a daily practice of spiritual self-development. In addition to being a first-hand description of the various phases, stages, and meditative tasks of this path, it is also a handbook for would-be practitioners of the path, the “*Knowledge of Higher Worlds*” for this previously rather obscure path. Ben-Aharon himself mostly refers to it as a report of his spiritual-scientific research, but it is also a handbook for practicing this path.

Perhaps Ben-Aharon’s most decisive insight is that this “*Philosophy*” path is actually the same as, or part of, that “new yoga” practice Steiner began to speak about in a few places starting on November 30, 1919 (*The Mission of the Archangel Michael*, CW 194) and especially in *The Boundaries of Natural Science* in 1920 (CW 322). Or we should probably say, as Ben Aharon does at one point, that the “new yoga” practice is a kind of intensification (or extension?) of work that can be done with the *Philosophy*.

This path or practice that Ben-Aharon names “cognitive yoga” (also at times “Michaelic yoga”) has been called the “new yoga” or “light yoga” or the “new yoga will.” Perhaps it could be better named “etheric yoga” or even “perceptual yoga” or “sensory yoga,” which would not appear to over-emphasize the work with thinking at the expense of work with sensing, feeling, and willing, a long-time problem within our movement. However, I think that, as chief pioneer of this path, Ben-Aharon should have the right of naming.



In addition to Ben-Aharon's extensive study of the writings on spiritual science, I think two features from his background helped him uniquely to decipher, pursue, and describe in detail this path, both of which he mentions in his preface. The first was a supersensible experience of the etheric Christ in his early twenties (with various follow-ups). The second has been his lifelong involvement with modern and postmodern philosophy, highlighted by his doctoral dissertation *The Cognition of the 'I' in Husserl's Phenomenology*. More recently, probably no other anthroposophist has investigated, understood, and interpreted the contemporary spiritual value of the writings of postmodernist philosophy more widely and deeply.

I know anthroposophical friends who have given up reading some of Ben-Aharon's earlier books (such as *The Event in Science, History, Philosophy & Art* and *The New Experience of the Supersensible*) because they weren't familiar enough with twentieth-century philosophy, especially the terminology and means of expression of contemporary postmodernism, or due to the challenging endnotes in *New Experience*. That should not be an issue here. I found that the challenge in this generally understandable book is more to maintain focus as the author describes often lofty or sublime spiritual experiences and unfamiliar supersensible meditative methods involved in the various stages of practicing cognitive yoga. Previous study of *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* is probably the best preparation for this book and the cognitive yoga path, although this is not exactly a beginner's book for anthroposophy.

The first two chapters give a penetrating overview of our ordinary representational cognition and sense of reality, based on ideas in *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* (but also on insights of modern philosophy, though Ben-Aharon doesn't mention that). He then starts depicting the cognitive yoga path with "how to" meditative instructions that seem very doable and achievable but steadily progress during the course of the book to loftier and more challenging spiritual experiences. Many passages, especially in the last half of the book, are poetic, inspiring depictions of spiritual meditative processes and experiences. Some of these by themselves seem to lift or even purify the soul of the actively involved reader just through mentally and imaginatively following Ben-Aharon's language. I found that one can almost get a kind of "contact high," absorbing as if by osmosis the detailed depictions of stages of spiritual experiences along this new yoga path. In any case, much of this book requires "an intensified inner cognition and participation from the reader." (p. 126)

Cognitive Yoga (and its shorter follow-up book *Cognitive Yoga: How a Book Is Born*, to be reviewed later) reveals for the first time something of the full scope of Ben-Aharon's spiritual achievements in pioneering the path of cognitive yoga (and what lay behind the writing of his earlier books), making it easier for others to also pursue this challenging journey of spiritual development. He emphasizes how such progress or achievements are to be received with humility as gifts of grace from the spiritual world. In more than one way he indicates something of the supersensible assistance he has received in traversing this path (and presumably, in writing this book).

He links experientially from an enhanced but also contemporary human perspective to some of the most difficult-to-fathom anthroposophical developments described by Rudolf Steiner (whom he also quotes at times to make these links). After reading *Cognitive Yoga*, you can start interpreting many things Steiner said in a new light, and it also provides new, fresh, seemingly more experiential understandings within the cognitive yoga context for a number of familiar anthroposophical terms and concepts like Spirit Self (Manas), Imagination, Inspiration, the etherization of the blood, the resurrected bodily Phantom, the sentient body, the etheric Christ, the third eye, Adam Kadmon, the Holy Grail, the future means of human reproduction proceeding from the larynx, and the functioning of several chakras—even for some not-specifically-anthroposophical concepts such as the Immaculate Conception, the Eucharist, the Tree of Life, the New Jerusalem, kundalini, entelexy (Aristotle), and the idea of a purely etheric "world wide web."

In the rest of this review, I will give a beginning, partial picture of some stages of the cognitive yoga practice, including quotations to provide a sense of the "tone" and quality of writing one can encounter in this book. There are often repetitions in varying language as well as periodic summaries that help the reader keep track of the progress on this journey through mostly unfamiliar spiritual territory. The steps and experiences of this path are not as concisely described as with Steiner *How to Know Higher Worlds* path. Almost every step is given multiple depictions and reviews—but each time stated somewhat differently, as if circling around a certain reality, approaching it from slightly varying perspectives. Ben-Aharon writes, "Such repetition and recapitulation form a vital part of the cognitive yoga practice and research. One must spiral back again and again to the original practices of each process, in order to move on to a higher level." (117)

The specific meditative exercises or processes that are described are primarily *examples* of working with perceptions from a single sense, examples which can be almost infinitely multiplied and deepened by similar work during the course of a lifetime with other examples from the same sense or other senses (of which there are twelve in all, related in groups of three to different aspects of the human constitution). As a new, modern path based fully on the freedom of the practitioner, this path to initiation seems not to have so many fixed stages or practices; there are alternatives and variations for most steps.

Ben-Aharon's explanation of the first steps of cognitive yoga begins with the electrolysis of water into two gases, hydrogen and oxygen, a scientific analogy to help explain the process of separating and etherizing of sense perception and mental imaging. The goal is to experience pure perception and pure thinking separately as freed etheric forces. He contrasts "presentation" of a real thing with "representation"—the shadowy mental image we form *after* the original experience. He adds that the first step of cognitive yoga practice involves decomposing ("electrolyzing") the condensed, hardened result of ordinary knowledge: the mental picture. This liberates the living, light, expansive essences of our experiences and thinking from their representations to their pure, living original etheric state. One must also learn to reverse that process.

The actual *activity* of thinking, and its source, *is not* represented—not dampened down or killed—as are all mental *representations*, although we are not normally aware of this process. In cognitive yoga we resist our hunger to use thinking to explain, name, fix, and possess every sensory experience; we first strive to open up a tiny separation or gap in time between perception and thinking, percept and concept. Then we learn to control and observe this spacing/separation process—or even stop the constant unconscious *compositioning* of our reality. From this we discover for the first time to what extent our ordinary cognition separates our etheric being-and-becoming from the world's real, living etheric being-and-becoming.

Both the now liberated percept and concept have an etheric life of their own, which had been killed, devitalized, suppressed, and hidden in the mental pictures that we use to represent reality. Now we experience the brain as an instrument to contract, narrow, condense, degrade, and devitalize the living forces of our own body and the cosmos, transforming them into mere mental pictures. Outside this activity of the head and brain, both thinking and perceiving are free, open, and living streams within

the greater cosmic whole. We can develop a new sort of "etheric breathing,"¹ alternating between "inhaling" deeper into the body on the one hand and "exhaling" or expanding into the etheric world, on the other.

In Chapter 4 Ben-Aharon moves on to the "etherization of sight." First let me summarize part of what Steiner says about this in *The Mission of the Archangel Michael*. Sense perception is not a purely material process. Each of our sense impressions—whether of light, warmth, sound, language, or touch—produces a kind of "afterimage" in our etheric body. This can be observed most easily with visual phenomena, such as seeing the afterimage of the sun or a bright light seen when closing one's eyes; or when an exterior color is observed intensely, the ethereal complementary color that can be seen afterwards against a white background. This flame-like, etheric afterimage gradually fades away for our own awareness, but it has been impressed into the cosmic ether, into the Akashic Record, as a real process. This is because an element of exterior soul streams into us on the wings of the etheric with each sense perception. Each sense perception involves this etheric level of apprehension as well as a physical level; it takes place unconsciously unless we specially attend to it. Since the Mystery of Golgotha, there is also an external soul or astral element, an element of thought that we encounter in our sense perceptions, along with the physical and etheric dimensions.

Each external sense impression encounters similar physical, etheric, and astral elements from within our own human nature. Steiner speaks of a "crossing" that takes place between an external, passive soul element of cosmic thought and an active, internal soul element of will. Normally we are not conscious of how the activity of our will in every sense perception forms this "crossing point" with the more "passive" cosmic thought/soul element streaming in from outside. Ben-Aharon introduces with a single extended example the practice of "mental electrolysis" of each of our senses that can be undertaken by the cognitive yogi. Through strengthening our will and devotion to this task, we advance in purifying and releasing part of the physical, etheric, and astral bodies responsible for our continual mental representations, so these can serve new tasks. Ben-Aharon summarizes: "We can individuate these freed bodily forces, make them our own, and use them now to purify, free, intensify and spiritualize sense perception." (53)

1 Spoken of by Steiner in *The Boundaries of Natural Science*, on pp. 120-121, where he calls it "breathing of the soul-spirit."

It has long been part of anthroposophical understanding and method in both the sciences and arts that by practicing a phenomenological or qualitative (vs. merely physical or quantitative) perception, one draws closer to the spiritual reality of a phenomenon. To present the basic cognitive yoga meditative process in this book, Ben-Aharon gives just one example from the practices of each of the first two groups of senses to be worked with: etherizing a color from the sense of sight that is part of the three “higher middle senses” (sight, hearing, warmth) and etherizing a scent from the sense of smell that is part of the three “lower middle senses” (smell, taste, touch). The effective practice of even these beginning examples will be quite taxing and challenging for most readers, most likely extending over many years or decades to achieve the results described by Ben-Aharon. However, many anthroposophical readers will have a certain head start with one process, the etherization of thinking, if they have worked for some time with the *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* and its picture of the processes of human knowing.

As a more specific, but still quite abbreviated, example of cognitive yoga practice, I will give a description, often using Ben-Aharon’s own language, of just the first, easiest step, the etherization of the sense of sight through six steps of work with a color impression. He begins:

“The first stage in the etherization of perception begins when we learn how to separate the pure ‘sense qualities’ from the objects to which they are attached.... Then we purify them further, penetrating beyond the pure quality into the next, higher force that works through them. The pure qualities of sense perceptions become transparent to the real formative forces *of the world* that work through them into our body, and mould, shape and nourish our body mainly until puberty. And then we let them stream inwardly as pure formative etheric forces... The more the purified formative forces of the etheric world impact the etheric formative forces of the body, the more a gradual liberation of the etheric body from the head downward takes place.” (53-54; my italics)

He then uses “the decomposition and deconstruction” of our “cognitive composition” of seeing colors “to demonstrate the process of sense-purification, etherization, and inhalation.” We begin by concentrating on a single color (red, in his example), disregarding the object to which it is attached. Although we can perhaps separate out the pure sense quality of red, we find it difficult to hold and prolong this object-free color awareness for very

long. Ben-Aharon found that, to keep the pure quality of red “alive and growing” in his consciousness, he had to “lend” it some of his own life force. This creates the additional task of making sure we are beholding the red in itself and not some of our own personal reactions to it.

This leads to the first of many paradoxes in the cognitive yoga practice: “we must take special care that the energy *we* donate to the red impression flows *solely from the red...*” (59, my italics) Already at this early step we are confronted with the illusory nature of the strict separation between self and world, subject and object, that characterizes our ordinary contemporary consciousness.

But, persevering, we come to experience red in itself as “a freely given gift” to us, even “a blessed gift.” We then feel we want to give something back to the being of red in gratitude for what we have received from it during our whole life. “This is what establishes the first cognitive-moral bond, an essentially subjective-objective, reciprocal determination and exchange of forces between the red and us.” It establishes a sense of trust and cooperation “with the forces of the real spiritual world working through red.” “This ‘mutual gifting’ makes the purified red quality more intense, vibrant, and saturated. . . . This mutual interplay becomes increasingly more alive and intense until a mutual exchange of intensities comes about, that is self-intensifying and self-supporting.” (59)

Eventually this leads to a moment when we forget ourselves and “experience that our conscious awareness is maintained and carried without our self-conscious reflection.... greatly enhanced forces of red take over and support our self-consciousness when we cannot support it ourselves.” (60) Goethe already pioneered this stage in his study of the moral effects of colors.

In the next stage, called “Falling in Red,” we awake to “a wholly new red self-consciousness” in which we become aware of the difference between “becoming red” and “having a *representation of red.*” (61-62) Ben-Aharon suggests the analogy of falling in love for this experience, where we briefly feel outside of our “embodied, brain-bound, represented self” and within “a wholly different place and time.” “It is our purest love and devotion to its gift that allows us to offer red an individualized, free gift of our own forces.” (62) And the being of red responds in kind. “Becoming red has become, in this way, a mutual exchange of intensities between ‘me’ and ‘red.’ ... Both of us enter into a reciprocal cycle of mutual enhancement and metamorphosis; both of us are changed through this mutual intensification.” (63)

This makes possible the next step on the path called “Quality Becomes Intensity”—

“in which self-consciousness, after it has been lost in the first experiences of purified red, is coming back from the other side, in-versed as it were, sustained and empowered through the transformed being of red itself. I am becoming red-self-consciousness, that is, I experience consciously the world through the fact that I share now the being and becoming of red in the universe.” (63) “The bridge [to red] is completed when there is only red, purified, enhanced, from both sides of the divide that separates human becoming from world becoming.” (64)

Ben-Aharon adds that when we work in this way with other colors as well, it becomes a “rainbow bridge.”

However, from the moment we become wholly red “we have not only lost any ability to represent the external color but . . . we also lost its qualitative soul experience.” As our ordinary perception of red disappeared into its pure soul quality, so the qualitative experience of red

“becomes colorless ‘color’ and this colorless color becomes pure intensity, which feels, wills and thinks itself through us.” (66) “The ‘color’ of red becomes the colorless color of pure world power, intensity, becoming.” (67)

This experience leads into the next, fourth stage, called “Intensity Becomes a Revelation of the Etheric World.” This is the point where the work with color must clearly go beyond Goethe’s qualitative-phenomenological soul experience of color to Rudolf Steiner’s purely super-sensible being of color. Instead of experiencing the color quality *inside* our soul, “our soul goes out and unites itself with the objective spiritual being of color.” (67) We now experience how the color is experiencing itself through us. The colorless intensity becomes transparent to forces of the spiritual world working through it:

“Through pure intensity we are becoming aware of a world force working, weaving and creating outside in the etheric world and into our bodily being. It is the real etheric world that weaves, operates, and works through the intensive forces of what we used to represent and experience as ‘red. . . . now pure intensity opens a gate through which real formative world forces are flowing into our whole being.” (68) “This world is experienced as intensely alive and vital, crisscrossed by currents and streams flowing from all directions of the cosmic circumference.” (68-69)

Before proceeding to the fifth stage, “Human-World

Essence Exchange,” Ben-Aharon takes a small detour to add perspectives about what is now perceived about the relationship between the cosmic etheric world and our own etheric body and forces, especially in the brain.

“In daily cognition and conduct, our head is our center that radiates from within outward, but in etheric experience from the outside, the physical head and brain is experienced as a ‘death machine’ into which a multiplicity of etheric world forces pour from expanding cosmic spaces to be annihilated and transformed into forces of wide-awake ordinary human consciousness.” (69-70) “The real, living world of light, color, and other sensations is far too intense and would have totally overwhelmed us and put us to sleep.” (72)

The full etheric light forces are devitalized when striking the retina of the eye, transformed into an electrical current that flows via the optic nerve to the brain, where all that is left of the original intense world-power is a mere mental image in our consciousness, only a shadowy corpse of—in this case—red. But when we are able to intensify and spiritualize color impressions, the etheric body (at least its upper part) can be released from the physical brain and develop an “etheric cognition”; this can serve as a kind of etheric mirror surface to reflect real, fully living etheric experiences to our awakened etheric cognition; this, Ben-Aharon tells us, is the foundation of Imagination.

Able to observe from outside the body, we see how etheric forces extracted from the perception of light and colors strike the etherized blood that flows from the body (especially the heart) into the brain, releasing etheric, soul, and spiritual forces that stimulate a still higher potential power in the already somewhat etherized blood. This is the force that creates our self-consciousness, fired by the blood’s warmth through which the human ego is living in the body:

“It belongs indeed to the most wonderful experiences that one undergoes in the course of cognitive yoga practice: to participate in this remarkable transformation process of the warmth element, the carrier of the Ego forces, that the instreaming world forces unite with, when they flow through our etherized senses, nerves and brain (and also through the whole skin).” (75)

A kind of difficult-to-describe mutual, reciprocal exchange of self-consciousness now can take place between our new etheric cognition, at first centered in the head,

continues on page 39 »»

and the cosmic etheric world. This marks a certain initial culmination in the whole cognitive yoga practice:

“the etherization of sense perception joins the etherization of the blood and its spiritualized fiery Ego forces, and the mutual spiritual essence exchange, that began with the exchange between the human etheric body and the etheric forces of the color red, is now intensified, enhanced, and raised to the Ego level. It becomes in this way a true spiritual, that is, a fully supersensible experience, illuminating and actualizing a new, fused human-world Self-consciousness, with the help of which more advanced stages of spiritual scientific research can be accomplished.” (76-77)

Ben-Aharon adds:

“It is also, at the same time, a fully individualized ‘Pentecostal illumination’ event, the conscious flaming up of individual spiritual consciousness, which is caused by means of uniting the inner Christ forces that we take into ourselves, with the ‘holy spirit’ that flows from the spiritual worlds into our etherized senses and thinking. When the two spiritual streams unite, we experience the lighting up of our Spirit Self as World Self, and the spiritual world experiences its own Christ-Self shining back to it from below, from the earth and humanity.” (77)

But there is one final stage in working with this etherization of vision, where we encounter “an unsurpassable body threshold.” If we try to use our new capacity of freed etheric cognition to penetrate into the body below the head, we find we are increasingly hindered and blocked the deeper we descend (starting already in the mouth region and increasing as we descend in the body).

“We discover that the body taken as a whole becomes nontransparent and then even ‘hostile’ to our etherized cognition and the color and light forces that stream from the etheric world into the head. As a matter of fact, the body begins to reject and repel it back.” (78)

Interestingly, different etherized colors are resisted by different lower body areas—for example, red by the stomach and green by the lungs.

We eventually discover that this resistance is a psychosomatic astral-etheric reaction experienced as dense, hardened, unconscious instinctive forces forming and possessing what Ben-Aharon calls the “metabolic-emotive-cognitive mechanism” (MECM), part of the human constitution. This hardened barrier serves to protect us in life “so we are not overwhelmed by the powerful forces and streams that connect our bodies with the physical,

etheric, and astral forces of the earth and cosmos.” (79) In fact, this resistance, this “feeling of inward solidity is the basis for our modern [self-]consciousness, without which we would remain ethereal, flowing beings with no cognitive or moral backbone.” (79) It could be said that the ultimate goal of the cognitive yoga practice is to

“succeed in consciously uniting the world’s etheric forces, streaming in through each sense perception, with the body’s own pure etheric forces, whose existence and operation is constantly inhibited, individuated, and suppressed by the dominantly astral forces of individuation.” (79)

This barrier is also called the “diaphragmatic threshold.” Below it lie, deep within our unconscious, highly protected pure, virginal, childhood life forces of exalted spiritual origin (“the sleeping beauty”), which the cognitive yoga process hopes to unite with its already liberated etheric cognitive forces. This causes a crisis in the work of purifying sense perceptions, one that can only be overcome if we learn additionally how to “struggle with the senses of smell, taste, touch, and a whole host of related sensations, desires, drive, and instincts, bundled together in the core of the whole MECM complex.” (80)



Most of the rest of the book concerns the search for necessarily strong forces, and a navigable passage, to be able to cross this denser bodily-soul threshold. First, we need to produce and gather additional etheric forces from work with the etherization of thinking. Following *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* in this task, we decompose and purify the components of the mental picture (percept and concept), liberating the living spiritual essence of thinking (which is also degraded and killed within our skulls). To free thinking from the senses and brain, we have to stop producing constant new representations from sensory input, and stop also the return of related memory pictures. Ben-Aharon calls these two sides “the soul hands of the two-petalled lotus flower or chakra,” creating a dead, empty consciousness from which pure etheric thinking could be able to resurrect as a vital, living, even cosmic force. Eventually, with “thinking’s released life stream” we then can simultaneously expand higher toward the cosmic etheric sun and “deeper into the new ‘sun in the earth.’” (97) We discover that this pure, life-giving thinking “unites wholly with the same original spiritual force and beings that create the physical earth and all its physically incarnated beings as well as all sun and galactic bodies in the starry heavens.” (102)

We then have the forces we need to tackle the etherization of the senses of smell, taste, and touch, which are imposed and sedimented on top of the lower senses of balance, movement, and life, a condensation from which much of our sense of self-consciousness derives in ordinary life. As an example, Ben-Aharon then embarks on a related but much more complex, seven-step process of fully etherizing the scent of a rose (sense of smell) and then becoming able to use the stronger life forces of its liberated etheric being to gradually penetrate and release the MECM resistance, initially by its connected centers in the middle and rear portions of the brain. He captures the moment when this project of the etherization of the rose scent combined with forces released by previous color etherization and thinking etherization finally after much effort and time succeeds in liberating the etheric brain completely from the physical brain:

“we feel as if our etheric skull cracks open, the brain’s etheric equivalents of the hemispheres are disconnected, separated from each other, turn inside out, and are etherically flattened, spread out and expand like the petals of a flower, or two wings of etheric flight. An *Umstülpung* [reversal] inside out and outside in, that is, a full inversion of the etheric brain and the etheric head takes place the deeper and longer the etheric ‘tunneling’ proceeds.” (126-127)

With the two-petalled chakra as its “third eye” center, this etheric brain now becomes the chief “cognitive, breathing, rhythmic” organ of etheric cognition, both within the human etheric body and for the cosmic etheric world. But this conscious etheric “seeing” through the chakra and brain is quite different than seeing with physical eyes: “the ‘third eye’ has a simultaneous panoramic etheric vision, and it can view the whole etheric brain process, as well as its connections to the surrounding etheric environment and cosmos, from all directions at once.” (128)

Along the way this knowledge process has involved the free, conscious giving up of oneself, which is

“an infinite elevation and spiritualization of freedom through the truest devotion and love to the other being that one is invited to become. This experience of metamorphosis, of coming to be hosted by the true being of the other, through love fired by the highest freedom, is going to be the most beautiful experience of a humanity progressing in the right way. Therefore, in the future the following must be increasingly understood: that any true knowledge demands becoming one with its subject ‘matter,’ which is not

matter at all but real spiritual being.” (114)

Ben-Aharon poetically summarizes the full scope of this achievement of “the first independently built supersensible, etheric organ . . . as an individual achievement of modern spiritual scientific research” as a kind of flowering process of the brain:

“it becomes an unfolding chalice of radiating inner light, opening, awakening, and growing toward and together with the light of the cosmos as a flower unfolds its enclosed petals toward the light of the sun. Its wonderfully flashing and shining radiations reach to the farthest cosmic spaces above, merging with spiritual radiations emanating from the sun, moon, planets and stars, and communicate far and wide with the etheric formative forces of all natural and earthly beings. It is a magnificently dynamic, ever awake and active organ of light, like a flowering, adorned crown, with the third eye as its stirring wheel, by means of which the united human-world’s living forces are regularizing, harmonizing, and directing the circulating ebbs, flows and currents of etheric perception and cognition. This flower that is formed and matured through the cognitive yoga practice becomes the main organ of etheric world-human, human-world cognition and consciousness.” (129-130)

This later develops further through “extension” to centers established in the larynx and heart (chakras) bringing new capacities, and then every area of the entire etheric body is diversely “retooled” spiritually to become an expanded but individuated world-human etheric body or being. Through “etheric essence exchange” within the now united human-world “I” “the world becomes self-conscious through the human and the human becomes world-conscious through the world.” (131-132)

Advancing still further along this path, Ben-Aharon is able to describe difficult-to-fully-imagine, yet at times sublime and even thrilling spiritual-scientific experiences in the last third of the book. Each new development in liberating, and building a new etheric body makes possible new levels of spiritual experiences and revelations. For example, as the human heartbeat and breathing harmonizes with the cosmic etheric heartbeat and breathing, we feel we are drawing closer to “the spiritual heart source of universal life” (the etheric Christ). (133)

Armed with the additional, stronger, condensed etherized sensory and thinking forces (the latter involving overcoming the ahrimanic death forces in the head), additional “heart forces” from the larger etheric world, and a

new intensifying of etheric cognitive breathing from head to heart, the practitioner is finally able to overcome the hardest MECM obstacles (“the dragon guardian of the lower world”), crossing the diaphragmatic threshold and, through work with the etheric forces of the metabolic and reproductive organs, consolidating a third functional center of “cognitive breathing,” of “mutual essence exchange between the etheric world and human body,” within the whole, threefold etheric body. In the meantime, the activated astral chakras have also been slowly building a new “etheric nerve system” as a “scaffold” for additional etheric cognitive functions as well as helping activate a stronger larynx center about which Ben-Aharon writes:

“It shapes our reproductive, heart, and head radiations with what can be called ‘the creative human-world-word,’ by means of which our interaction with the etheric world becomes spelled out and articulated, formed into etheric vowels, consonants, syllables, syntax, and vocabulary.”

A new essential openness and connection between the etheric body and the cosmic etheric world develops. In this new etheric “body/world continuum,” the etheric body and its forces “are parts of infinitely vast, planetary and cosmic assemblages and networks of functions and interconnections that weave outside the inner physical space of the body.” (145-146) As one of the most fascinating and challenging aspects of the latter part of this book, Ben-Aharon’s often compelling descriptions of vicarious spiritual experiences take place in unfamiliar worlds where the order and organization of the sensory world is reversed, meeting realities and beings we can only experience if we are able to *become* them. At a certain level the spiritual etheric world functions as a living being in which we participate and which, reciprocally, participates in us—with which we are organically interwoven. Ordinary illusory polarities of experience in the physical/sensory world—inner-outer, subject-object, self-world—dissolve or transform so that both aspects function and are experienced simultaneously and reciprocally. Ben-Aharon describes this:

“In this new topography, the body’s inner space is but the world’s infolded external space, and conversely, the external world is a body turned inside out and infinitely multiplied.” (145) “What we discover is that all inner organs and processes are neither ‘inside’ us nor, for that matter, ‘outside’ us, but that we are outside ourselves: . . . But then trees and animals, mountains and seas, clouds, rain and lightning, sun

and moon, are in the etheric world-body continuum, our inner forces and organs, while the etheric and astral counterparts of liver, kidneys, lungs, heart, are cosmic bodies and beings. The inner organs and organic processes are spread out as etheric-astral natural, biological, meteorological, atmospheric, planetary, and cosmic streams and functions, and participate in infinite flows of universal becomings.” (146) “We realize that what our senses perceive and what our thinking represents as an external world, distinct from our inner world, is not simply an arbitrary mistake or illusion, but a profoundly meaningful and *exact reversal and inversion* of the true state of all etheric, astral, and spiritual affairs.” (146)

This experience of a shared etheric planetary body infused by cosmic radiations from the circumference of the cosmos is not the only new experience that penetration of the lower bodily depths and creation of a new etheric body makes possible. In the etherization of the lower body, a kind of reversal of puberty takes place, liberating the “holy treasure” of the purest, paradisaal etheric forces hidden there during childhood and preserved from “humanity’s pre-luciferic childhood.” Similarly, the separation of the sexes is etherically reversed, without which human beings “could never have achieved self-consciousness, freedom, and true love based on freedom.” (152) In those depths are also found “Christ’s primordial, paradisaal forces working together with his eternal forces of resurrection.” Spiritualized, the flesh begins once again to become Word, and in a kind of “immaculate conception event” a new human-world etheric being is conceived, a new etheric “cosmic child” can develop with the “seed forces of a new universe.”

I don’t want to spoil the experiences of inspiring joyfulness readers can have from discovering some of the spiritual events depicted in the last third of this book, but I want at least to indicate the nature of some of the treasures to be found. As would be expected, Ben-Aharon struggles at times to describe unfamiliar spiritual experiences in language formed for physical world phenomena.

Having freed and formed a new etheric body, the practitioner must further conceive and create a truly *independent* spiritual individuality that can fully function in the etheric world, the Spirit Self. This involves mastering the forces both of birth or incarnation and of death or excarnation. Ben-Aharon tells us this work is supported, among other sources including astral forces, by “the ever-growing forces of [Rudolf Steiner’s] eternally preserved

etheric body” (166) which have been able to be accessed and individualized since the end of the twentieth century. As part of this process we must “build a hut” as an etheric dwelling, go through a ritual of death and rebirth to enter into communion with the spiritual cosmic community, guiding our newborn etheric body to be consumed by cosmic fire, as we individually re-enact the etheric second death of Christ, the “Second Mystery of Golgotha.” We then rise and gradually re-form ourselves like a phoenix, becoming a kind of perpetual metamorphosis process.

As our “baby steps” in this new phase of the cognitive yoga journey we have to learn how to nourish ourselves and develop the capacities we need; Ben-Aharon depicts this as the cosmic-etheric equivalent of the human early-childhood stages of learning to walk, speak, and think—but occurring etherically in reverse order. To accomplish this, we enter into the etheric “kinder garden” (“the spiritual region closest to the physical earth”) filled with “mighty everlasting trees with magnificent flowers and fruits of eternal life and bountiful meadows that flourish with indescribably radiant beauty and grace.... We realize that we enter the garden of spiritual earthly accomplishments, which the cosmic gardeners, the angels, tend and cultivate with infinite devotion, joy, love, and expertise.” (185) These are the splendid spiritual flowerings of all true moral ideals and deeds, artworks, compositions, and ideas, also unrealized “youthful ideals of the living and the dead of all times and ages.” (185-186) One of the most striking encounters in this garden is with the now reunited two trees from Paradise forming one gigantic etheric cosmic Tree of Life, an achievement in which Rudolf Steiner played a key role.

The next phase of having to learn the cosmic language is particularly aided by working with the etheric effects of great, truthful works of art on earth. Ben-Aharon gives the example of the complementary nature of Leonardo’s *Last Supper* and Raphael’s *Sistine Madonna*. “They are experienced as creative and formative, world-creating and shaping forces that teach us our ‘etheric mother tongue.’” (190) The following development is to draw on spiritual fruits created by moral deeds on earth to produce a “moral gravity” and etheric ground to counteract the one-sided forces of levity in the etheric world. Ben-Aharon comments: “Cultivating and spiritualizing the moral accomplishments of humanity is one of the main tasks of all beings, human and angelic, that work in the supersensible Michael school since the mid-20th century....”

In his final chapter, Ben-Aharon depicts how the

more mature etheric individuality joins in co-creating the “new sun” of the Christ-permeated etherized earth. Although the step of a “mutual essence exchange with the cosmic source” (Christ) is “the most intimate soul experience in the etheric world,” (205) he tries to describe it in ordinary language because, he tells us, sharing this is the wish of the Christ being. In the development of this “communication,” the other being is inside us and we are inside the other. “Communication is here communion” or “mutual essence exchange.” (207) This process involves (for Ben-Aharon at least) working with the mantra that begins “More radiant than the sun,” which Christ first “enhances” and then “reverses” to better express how “He, the highest, is bowing down to embrace and purify the feet of our lowest self...” (211)

In conclusion let me reflect on a couple of questions. Since Ben-Aharon primarily describes the experiences and processes of an *etheric body* path, does it cover the complete new yoga path to the Spirit Self that presumably also includes the involvement of the astral body and ego? In any case, the role of the astral body and ego need further clarification, especially since development of the Spirit Self is depicted in anthroposophical literature as a transformation of the *astral* body. Also, in this regard Ben-Aharon has made clear that he is only communicating Imaginative experiences, even though, he says, some Inspired and Intuited aspects belong to the Imaginative faculty.

Secondly, he suggests these processes always happen in an individualized form. Would each of us experience these events somewhat differently? It seems to me more research is necessary by others to confirm these steps and their variations. However, as we might wonder how “objective” his descriptions are of this path, we then realize that actually the whole idea of “objectivity” evaporates in fully subject-objective spiritual (etheric) world experiences like those described here. We come to realize that every truth and being (and every polarity) is multi-sided and must always be individually re-experienced anew from varying perspectives, especially at this level when “knowing” something means *becoming* it. Of course, this realization may make some people used to the ordinary, fixed, subject-object sensory world uncomfortable—yet this realization seems to be an increasing necessity in navigating the changing spiritual climate of the twenty-first century.

David Adams (ctrarcht@nccn.net) edits the newsletter for the Art Section in North America and a regular contributor to being human.