

UNICEF-SPARC education group; Oxford, Friday 23 to Wednesday 28 August 1996

## RELAXATION, VISUALISATION, CONCENTRATION AND MEDITATION EXERCISES IN SCHOOLS (from class 3 onwards; developed by Hans Oberressl, Germany)

The following experiments of relaxation, visualisation, concentration and meditation have been done over a period of more than 4 years with speech handicapped students. Their ages ranged from 9 to 13 years old.

The *overall aim* of this experimentation *was* to dissolve conflicts, stress and tension and *to develop peace* in the students and the classroom, to develop self-respect, to improve the ability to concentrate and communicate better, and to raise the effectiveness of their ability to learn, and many more, as set out under 2.1 and 2.2

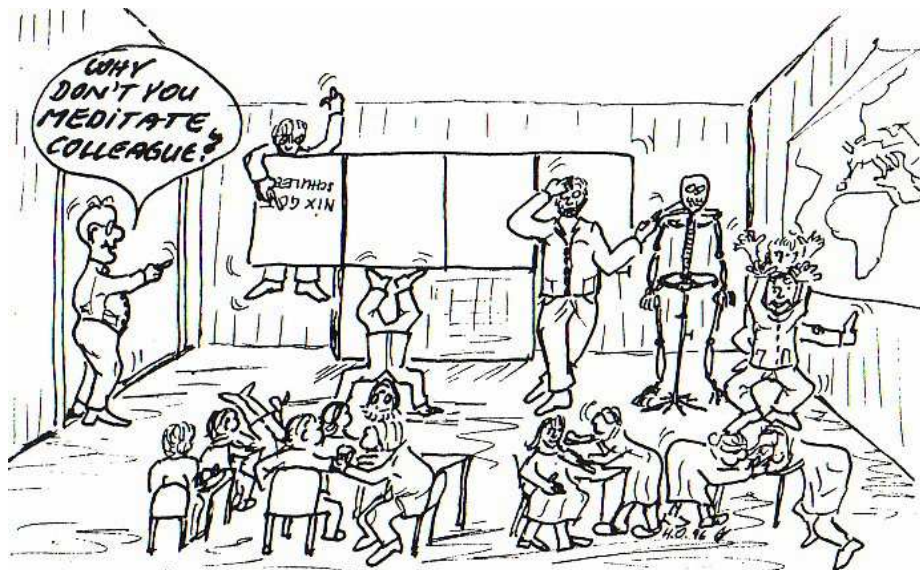
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### 1. Requirements/analysing the situation

In many classrooms you will find stress, competitive situations and aggression. Today's teaching puts emphasis on measurable results, e.g. test or examination results, whereas the development of students' personality is often neglected. For this it could be suggested that more method

interaction, communication, co-operation training and especially the promotion of selfrespect be introduced. Also it would be beneficial if psychosocial and communicative aspects (competence) were more developed, because these abilities are more and more neglected by parents.



Picture 1

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The following exercises were developed and practised in a school for speech handicapped children (stuttering), lacking the ability to use grammar and knowledge of syntax correctly as well as being unable to pronounce consonants like k, s, sch and so on.

These exercises were developed over a period of approximately 4 years in classes 3-6 with approximately 12 students. All students were severely speech handicapped but there were also developmental gaps in the classes, as well as severe behavioural problems, which made normally effective teaching difficult. Because of this, a teacher (who has put these papers together) started to experiment with these students to cooperate and practise specific relaxation, visualisation, concentration and mediation exercises. These exercises led to positive changes as the speech and concentration improved in the majority of these students. This encouraged the teacher to expand and deepen his experimentation with these exercises.



Picture 2

## 2. Aims

(the main aim was peace)

### 2.1. Choice of general aims

- innate peace of each student
- peace atmosphere in the class as a whole
- self-respect in each student
- development of innate power
- development of innate values
- development of an atmosphere of trust and the willingness to open up
- development of the ability to co-operate
- reduction of conflict
- promotion of mutual respect for each other
- promotion of the psychological social competence (psychosozialen Kompetenz)
- promotion of communicative competence
- promotion of hidden and visible qualities and specialities
- development of creativity
- development of virtues
- development of the right side of the brain, the holistic way of thinking in pictures

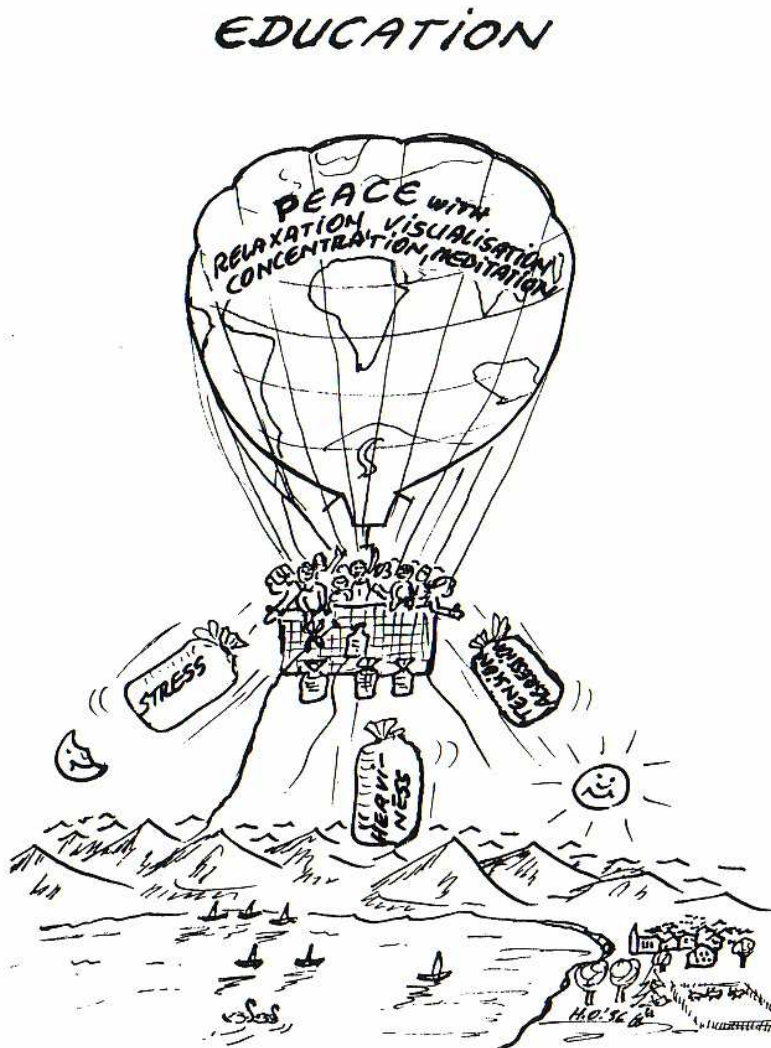
## 2.2. Choice of specialist aims

- promotion of trusting your own fantasy and intuition, for example to paint or to tell stories
- promotion of the power of concentration and retention
- promotion of the flow of speech (stuttering)
- promotion of grammar, syntax, sound and pronunciation of consonants
- promotion of speech structure, of the logical speech sequence and the understanding of the meaning of words
- promotion of flexibility
- promotion of innate powers, values and virtues in respect of specialist instructions, for example self-made stories and visualisation

## 3. Practical experience (examples)

### 3.1. Exercises to prepare visualisation and meditation practise

The children should be prepared with simple relaxation exercises. For example: They lie on a blanket and listen to calming music or a soothing story. To use autogenous training is also a possibility to relax. However, this teacher preferred progressive relaxation exercise, according to Jacobson. The method used is to tense the different parts of the body one by one and to relax them. Proper breathing plays a vital part as many students, due to tension and hyperactivity, are not breathing correctly.



Picture 3

It is suggested that the visualisation exercise is prepared in this way to make the children constantly aware of the power of thoughts. At the beginning they are asked to close their eyes and to visualise a pencil, which they had looked at before. After this exercise the students can be asked to describe the visualised pencil. More attractive is

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to let the students visualise their favourite objects, people they love, etc. The students realised that it was with that power of thought that they could travel and be in another place and with another person, even though their physical body remained in the classroom.

The humorous remark by the teacher, that this journey is inexpensive, made the children laugh. This helped the students to develop their trust and confidence for later journeys with their thoughts.

The imagination ability is of vast variety and needs stimulation to be brought out creatively.

The students loved to talk about their self painted pictures and then expanded the stories by using their imagination. Other students loved to listen to these stories and the teacher helped when necessary. The teacher always encouraged them to use non aggressive stories.

Over a length of time the students learned to tell very attractive stories. They loved especially to develop chain stories which involved the whole class. The way to develop a chain story is to let one student start with 2-3 sentences about his/herself painted picture and then another student continues the story etc. Whilst this story develops there are moments of humour or unexpected changes which help them to really keep their attention and have a lot of fun. They love to write these kinds of stories. In this way there is not only the promotion of emotional, social and intellectual creativity but there is also promotion of speech competency attained. More than usual, when you are doing these experiments you have to take into consideration the individual development of each one. All exercises should be done in a game like way with fun.

### **3.2. *Journey of the swans.*** Example of a journey using thoughts.

This exercise is suitable for any age group. In connection with the exercise set out before, the journey of the thoughts can now begin. The starting scene is the personal environment of the students.

In our thoughts ... we go to the school yard ... we are there alone ... whereas the students ... of the other classes ... are in their classrooms. ... With our thoughts ... we call our friends ... the swans ... the especially big ones ... The swans ... through the power of thoughts ... understand our call ... without shouting ... and they are ... coming here ... Their big wings ... rustle through the air ... and make a sound ... which every one knows ... who have observed flying swans ... One by one ... they touch down ... right in front of us ... Hans, the swan for the teacher first ...

... There is for each child a swan ... Smilingly they waddle towards us ... They smile and look forward ... to going with us ... together on the journey ... because the journey is a welcome way to change... Each child has a swan ... to which it belongs ... Each swan has a saddle and reins ... to hold onto ... because we want to be safe ... We want to relax ... and have pleasure ... on our swan and check ... whether the saddle ... is secure ... and everything is tied ... We ask our friends ... the swans ... whether they are ... ready to start the flight ... to a far-off place... We laugh ... and also ... the enormous swans laugh ... and we all ... are ready ... to go ...

The teacher gives ... the sign to take off ... and swans start ... running fast ... moving so their wings up and down ... They take off after 30 m ... with sitting ... on their backs ... The teacher ... with the swan named Hans is first ... That is fun !... Oh jeh!!! ... At this moment ... the students ... of the other classes ... are coming into the play ground ... They look wonderstruck ... and ask themselves ... what`s going on here... Unbelievable ... what they see! ... enormous

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swans ... with children on them ... hold it ... Are that not ... the students of class 6? ... Really!  
 ... they are the students of class 6! ... who are sitting on the swans ...

We on the swans ... circle around ... the School play ground ... Oh! ... what fun to see ... all  
 those astonished faces .. of the other teachers and students ...

Picture 4



This exercise has been especially chosen to erose a pleasurable excitement in the students to journey with their thoughts, because it motivates more easily. This motivation later flows favourable into the relaxation exercises. Later the students and the swans fly to far away quiet, peaceful and most beautiful countries. With this exercise there is the fulfillment of a number of aims reached:

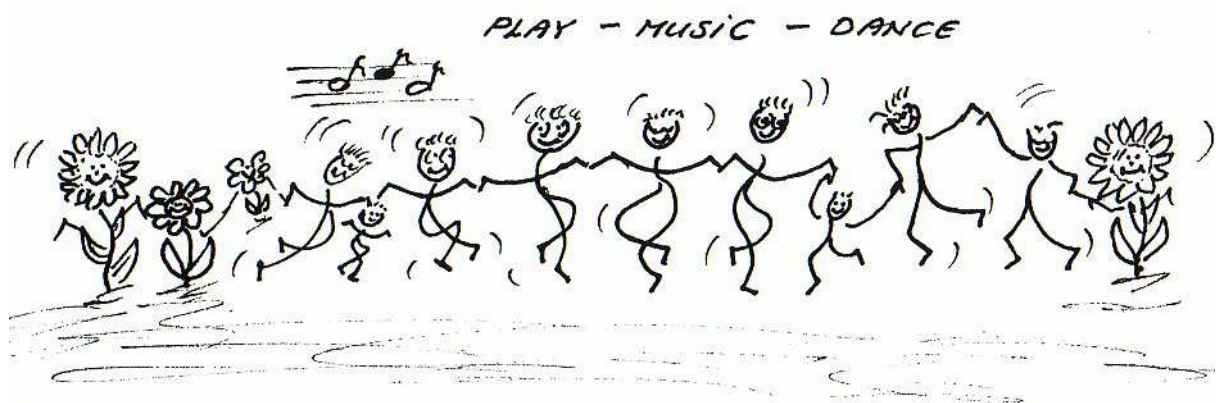
- motivation for the use of the power and effects of thoughts,
- Promotion for concentration and inner peace,
- the students adapt themselves to the same words, which generates the power of unity but gives them also the freedom to create their own individually pictures.
  
- With such journeys of contemplation the students are able to find further pictures and can create their own songs which can be integrated in the overall artpiece composed out of dance, songs, music and theatre. This artpiece will have been created by the students on their own including the building up of the sceneries. The artpiece can be performed for other classes and the parents, but only if it does not cause any stress. This can be connected with different departments of subjects at the school.

### 3.3. Visualising pictures which have a relaxing effect, continuation of exercise 3.2.

The following text has also been practised very often and was proposed as a possibility at a forum of advanced training for teachers. It is important to notice that the adjustments to the specific anthropological preconditions each head of the experiment has to accomplish himself. There are not only big differences inbetween the ages of the classes, but it is a well known fact that the mood of the students in the class varies from day to day. If the following journey of contemplation will be successful today, it does not mean that you will receive the same result tomorrow. This is why the author does not like too much preprepared journeys of contemplations which are offered on the market. There is a demand for spirituall energy which can be used flexibly according to any situation. To practise empathy is of basic importance. Otherwise a bloc of energy will arise and there will be no motivation to do the journey. But practise gives the key. It does not matter if mistakes are done, you only can learn from them.

#### *Suggestion for a commentary:*

We feel a desire to continue our journey with the swans ... We will continue the journey with our friends, the swans ... We take off from the area of the school ... In thoughts, we are flying ... We go higher and higher ... and we fly far away ... to a fabulous beautyful land ... From a distance ... we are able to discover ... a meadow ... a beautyful meadow ... We decide to land ... very gentle ... There is a lovely fragrance ... we perceive magnificent fragrances ... The flowers ... of that meadow ... are smelling so sweet ... They are so colourful ... The shapes and colours are unique ... We would like to play ... all would like to play ... We begin with a kind ... of hide and seek ... which almost starts ... by its own ... everyone plays that part ... he likes most ... There are no winners ... There is only the joy to play ... Everything is so easy ... It feels ... as if we are flying with a subtle body ... made of light over the meadow ... The bodies are so light ... They are so easy to move ... light like a feather ... it is a game of lightness ...



Picture 5

Afterwards we relaxe ... We lie down in the grass ... it is so soft ... and heated up by the sun ... Relaxation comes ... the body feels light ... more light ... It comes to a point of rest ... and restles against the grass ... We hear the murmuring of the trees ... They are rustling very slowly ... They rustle slower and slower ... Our breathing starts to take up that rhythm ... The rustle of the trees ... and my breathing are one ... Up above we watch the twigs ... and branches of the trees ... going slowly forth and back ... This rocking ... their rustling ... and my breathing ... are one ... We are all one ... the nature, my friends and I ... This way ... we take a break ... We enjoy the calmness ... It carries us away ... into infinity ... Everthing is light ...

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and soft ... and warm ... The breathing flows slowly and easily ... I can feel it again and again ... I become aware of the meadow ... very slowly I become again aware of the meadow ... the friends, the sky, so blue ... There are birds ... and it is as if they would like to play with us ... They sing their songs ... each one ... according to it's own ability ... The butterflys are dancing ... It is a dance of happiness ... all together ... with our feelings of easyness ... The impulse ... we get up now ... (\*) ... And in thoughts we travel back ... all the way back.... that we have come ... We are filled with peace ... which we have experienced ... on that journey ... through a harmonic world ...

### ***3.4. Meditation on light and stars as continuation of exercise 3.3.***

Instead of travelling back home, we continue the journey at the (\*) signed point:



***Picture 6***

... We go to a nearby lake ... sparkling in the greenary of the scene ... Surrounded by the fragrance of beautiful flowers ... And also the waters are smelling so sweet ... We can feel it with our hands ... It is comfortably warm there ... We stick our toes into the waters ... And then we go swimming ... We take a bath ... We are swimming ... we are floating on the water ... There is nothing to do ... if we do not want it ... We are carried by the water ... very gentle ... Very gentle ... touches the water our bodies ... and we experience a feeling of comfort ... We discover a waterfall ... we can hear it ... very low in the background ... This sound spreads ... an atmosphere of calmness ... We are relaxing ... The sounds of the water ... and the tuned murmuring ... we are floating in a relaxed way ... We come closer to that waterfall ... There is a rainbow ... sparkling in all colours ... We are swimming behind it ... We are hiding ... away from the others ... And suddenly ... beyond the rainbow ... and the waterfall ... very hidden ... there is ... there is ... a big gate ... We are calling the others ... Together we decide ... to open that gate ... very slowly ... Very slowly we open it ... and we are overwhelmed ... by the brilliance ... of a different world ... A world of light ... a world of disappearing light... in all colours... there is blue ... green ... purple ... yellow ... red ... and white ... everthing is ...composed

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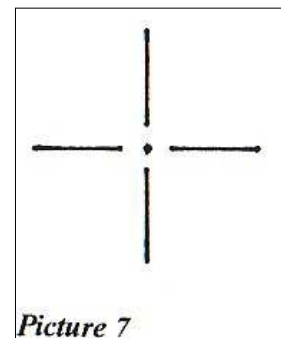
out of radiating light ... like the rainbow before ... or very similar ... and these lights ... have patterns ... different patterns ... They look like flowers ... like trees ... like smooth hillocks ... Everything dipped in light ... very transparent light ... We move around ... we continue to move ... amongst flowers and fruits of light ... We are going ... No ... we are floating ... We float passing ... different colours and figures ... they bend towards us ... very gentle ... It is as if they would like to say hello ... as if they would like to play ... as if they would like ... to give us fruits ... fragrances and friends ... as if they would like to dance ... with us ... in a smooth breeze ... We move on ... everything starts to become more ... and more subtle ... The light ... the flowers ... there is just ... a trace of light left ... a trace of gentle light ... It becomes more and more ... golden red ... the flowers ... the trees ... We hardly can recognize them anymore ... It is like in a soft brown ... We continue to float ... until we are ... surrounded ... by the golden red light ... only golden red, warm light ... soft light ... Is there someone? ... We are able to feel ... that we are not alone ... There are rays of warmth ... rays of peace ... They surround us ... rays of stillness ... rays of love ... are giving us company ... comfort ... comfort and ... soft gentleness ... Where do these feelings ... come from? ... From my inner self? ... from outside? ... I know them very well ... these feelings ... We are continuing ... very slowly ... carried in this warm world ... of feelings ... of peace ... of quietness ... of love ... Look ... back there ... There are bright stars ... stars ... Have these stars feelings? ... We are coming closer ... We are overwhelmed ... by a comforting atmosphere ... in the company ... of these stars ... of these bright stars ... Somehow ... we understand each other ... somehow ... they are able to communicate ... with us ... they are speaking ... the language ... of the feelings ... it is the language ... of the hearts ... They are just stars ... without bodies ... But nevertheless ... we understand ... the language of the feelings ... Comfort ... love ... peace ... deep peace ... stillness ... fills us ... in the company ... of these stars ... we are taking ... a rest ... just like this...

### **3.5. Meditation on a point of light to gain more depth** (suggested practise from class 5 onwards)

#### ***Preliminary remarks:***

Having taught the students of class 3 and 4 to deal with the journeys of meditations and thoughts, there was a demand for more search. Little by little and over a long period of time they got used to the concentration and meditation. Compared to the real development the explanations given hereby are very abstract. For example the meditation with the stars: In this there has been focused for a very long time only on feelings. For example there had been the idea to follow the star of Bethlehem and with that we were travelling in different emotional spheres using positive virtues up to that point to find the baby-boy in the cradle. And after some time the students were asking very naturally for an explanation to the principles of "concentration" and "meditation".

A stable mind is the condition for a powerful meditation. Therefore we were primarily speaking about the principles of "CONCENTRATION". With a magnifying glass rays of the energy of the sun had been bundled up. A piece of paper started to burn which was not possible with the help of a normal piece of glass. Also more principle of focusing of energy were explained to eleven year old kids. Examples of the ZEN-meditation are very well known. Focusing on a point calms down the mind. Having been asked by children, also the tennis player Boris Becker recommended to concentrate on a point, when there is a difficult situation. Christian mystics concentrated on



**Picture 7**



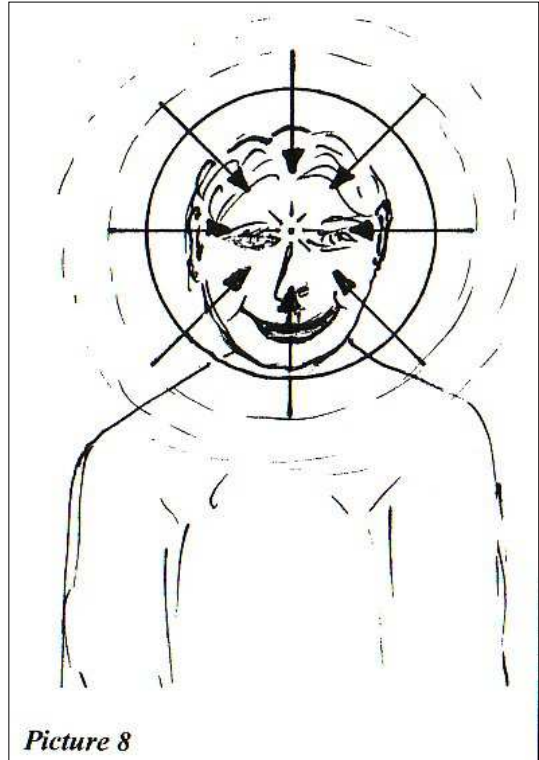
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the middle of the cross, that means at that point where the material horizontal and the spiri-  
tuell vertical (sticks) are touching. " In the middle where the two sticks meet there I am, that  
means the immateriel conscience of the christians" (picture 7).

Picture 8 shows how mental energies (feelings and thoughts) are focusing on a point. They are con-  
centrated in the middle of the cycle of the conscioussness (CON= latin: with; ZEN= middle used  
in the japanese zen-buddhism; "TRATION"= lat.: cycle).

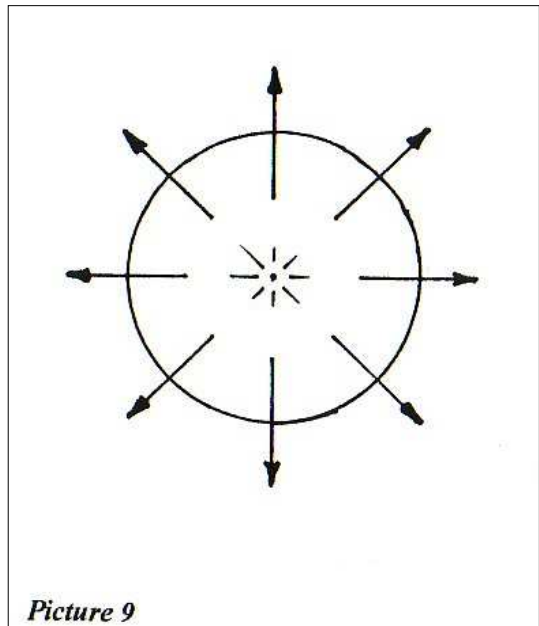
Images of saints of monotheistic religions always are shown with a circular aureole focused on the  
cycle of conscioussness whose metaphysic center radiates normally not visible light. We will come  
back to that point later on.

The intellect strives naturally for "coming to the point". Usually you are not accustomed to  
concentrated peace for a longer period. Therefore the training of concentration is necessary. The  
exercises will certainly become pleasant only then, when the mind experiences good feelings in  
concentrated peace, e.g. the feeling of peace or cheerfulness.



Picture 8

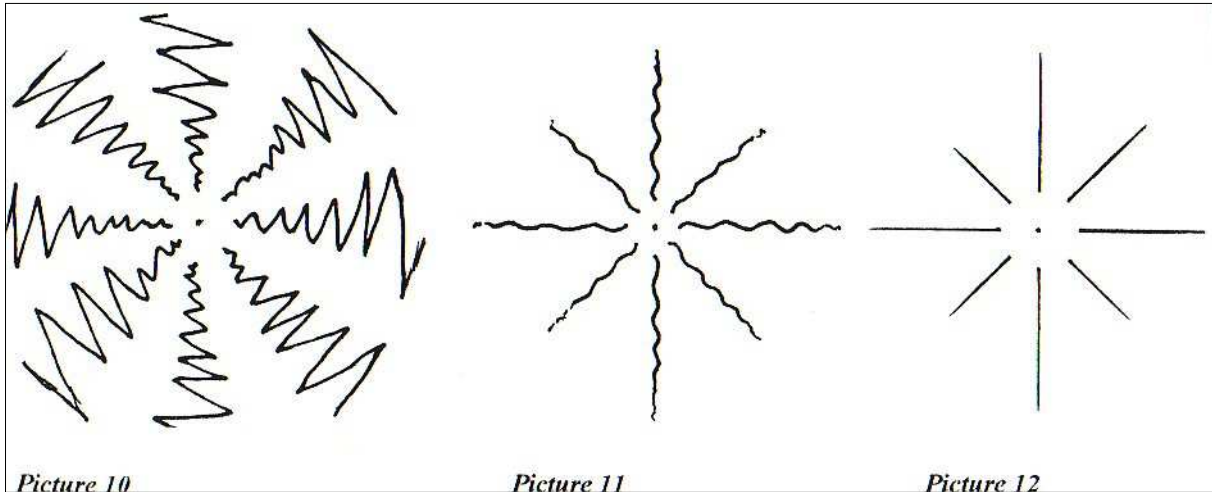
MEDITATION means the experience of good feelings like love, happyness and silence. In the  
state of concentration the intellect attracts our attention to an inner or outer point of light, while  
in the state of MEDITATION nice characteristics and emotions out of a hidden "good heart" shine  
forth (picture 9). The "good heart" is the unvisible point of light in the middle of the head. From that  
we proceeded - no matter wether this is true or not. We have simply tried to imagine a radiant  
concentrated point of light, from which warm feelings radiate. And experiencing pleasant peace  
at the same time, we continued to practise in this way. Out of the medium (MEDI) of the circle of  
conscioussness (TATION) we experienced our own feelings. The experiences were real.



Picture 9

Being very important light should be thrown once more on the *quality of thoughts and feel-  
ings*. The following three pictures 10 - 12 show three different stages of mind and consciouss-  
ness.

The mind and intellect of most of the students felt quite naturally attracted to picture no. 12,  
because it radiates peace and concentration. The "easy-waving" no. 11 shows peaceful, pow-  
erful thoughts and feelings. Picture no. 10 illustrates more alarming, probably fearful and ag-  
gressive thoughts and feelings.



The following commentary for meditation will move slowly towards the picture of peace. The intellect should try to follow the words. The contents should not be dogmatic by no means, but just considered as playing of thoughts according to the motto: "Let's see, what will happen, when I follow the words playfully - and then let them go.

### **Commentary for meditation:**

I feel within me ... I think within me ... But the thoughts ... you cannot touch ... the feelings ... you cannot touch ... But anyone has feelings ... and thoughts ... My thoughts ... I can control ... because ... I am creating my thoughts ... I attract them to inner peace ... I imagine peace ... Thoughts emerge again ... but I return softly ... to my inner peace ... to the light... I imagine ... I am peaceful ... and light within me ... I radiate peaceful light ... I ... the peaceful light ... am sitting ... in the middle ... of my head ... From there ... I am radiating ... and I feel ... and think ... I see a light ... within me ... I ... the radiant point of light ... feel ... and think ... and say ... what the body ... should do ... I let the ... finger move ... I let the toes move ... I think ... and the finger ... and hands do ... what I think ... I ... the radiant ... point of light ... think and feel ... I, the light ... am radiating quite far ... I am radiating far ... like the sun ... or like a big star ... They are rays ... of peace ... and silence ... I am peaceful ... I feel good ... I am totally relaxed ... peaceful ... peaceful ... deep silence ...

In this commentary for meditation about two years of gradual work are summarized. In detail the steps were explained with the students from different point of views and adapted to their momentary stage of reflection in order not to overcharge them. Through such exercises you meditate like one who search for a treasure. The original pure energy ("the good heart") with the positive values has mixed up more or less with other, negative energies (greed, sadness, anger etc.). The pure gold that is still there should be removed from copper and iron. The filtering of the pure gold happens through our attention we pay to the pure gold. Hereby the law of resonance works: on what we throw light that grows. When we look at the negative features or think of them or feel them, then these will grow. However when we look at the pure qualities, the gold, so these will grow. For this blind faith is not necessary, but the faith that the golden treasure is really hidden within yourself. The faith works like an amplifier in a radio. And the practical experiences amplify the faith anew in the further process, so that we go on developing.

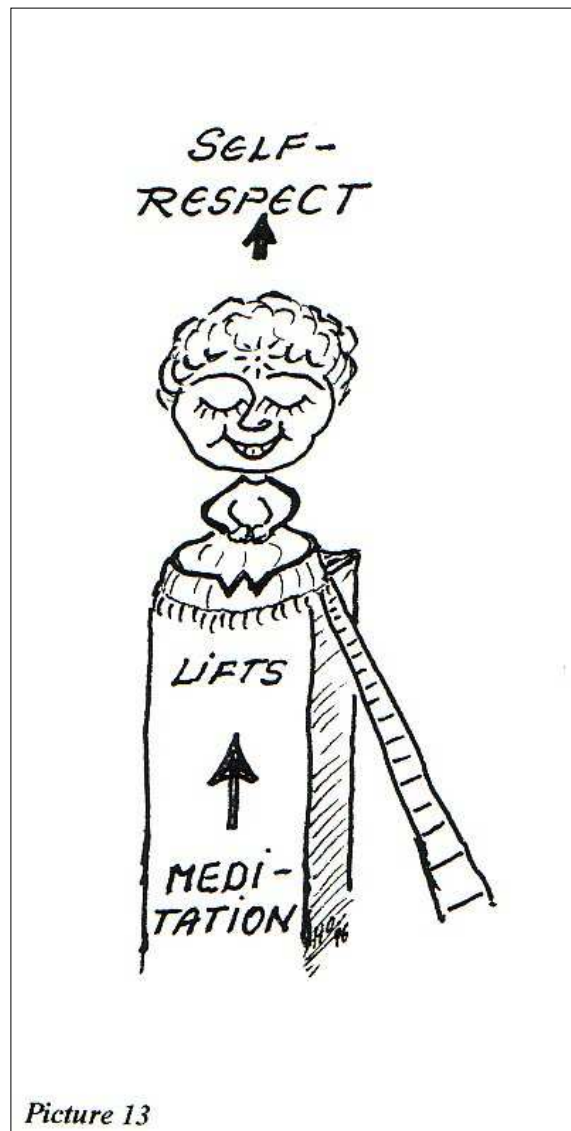
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As example **another short commentary** for meditation about the value of "LOVE":

I think of the light ... I think of the radiant light ... in the middle of my forehead ... of a light of love... I am a light of love ... I love my mother ... therefore ... I beaming upon her ... and my mother ... is beaming upon me ... we are beaming ... upon each other ... with love ... she likes me... because I am ... her child ... I like me, too ... When I smile... then I like me... then my ... father ... likes me too ... and my brothers ... and sisters ... like me too ... then my friends ... like me too ... When I am ... happy ... then all like me ... too ... I like me ... when I smile ... I like me ... when I ...

### 3. Suggestions on, how to use these exercises in schools

Exercises for relaxation, *journeys of thoughts and visualisations* can be carried out in any stage of age at school. The flexible justment to the emotional, intellectual and organisational possibilities is the most important hereby. When you feel the atmosphere, then you feel as a teacher where resistances emerge or where the spiritual-emotional energy flows smoothly. When you let yourself lead by the flow of energy of the students then all develops fine.



Picture 13

The *concentration and meditation exercises* explained above can only be introduced very carefully and in smallest steps. In this experiment we took about one year to come to a powerful point of light-meditation. Then however it was applied with pleasure. It brought about deep spiritual peace, even the bodies relaxed evidently. Finally we reached silence directly without any preparing commentary, while we were sitting with open eyes. The teacher could support the peace exercises of the students by looking in their eyes. Thereby spiritual energy was transmitted. Of course it was basic condition that the leader of the meditation himself was in the stage of deep silence. Later on different students led the meditation. Some practised spontaneously at home the stage of inner peace.

The general *attitude of the teacher* plays an important part hereby. The more he is himself in command of these exercises and able to embody inner values mentioned above, the more he can transmit those values as a living example. When the teacher is in the stage of balance and self-respect, he will have good relationships to his students. This is also the basis for solving conflicts and problems. A benevolent attitude and vision of the teacher strengthens the student's readiness for learning and for harmony and creates a peaceful and loveful atmosphere. Due to that the readiness for new meditation experiments will emerge in the student.

## 5. Reflections on the results

This project was bound up with a process of learning both for the students and the teacher. Besides the better results in the single subjects of the curriculum, the students have especially improved their individual and social behaviour. They have become more peaceful and loveful among themselves and have been more attentive to learning. Inner values having been mentioned in commentaries for meditation, in conversations and games have been increasingly integrated in the lively daily round of school. The atmosphere within the group have evidently become better and more relaxed although the students have been taught - besides by the leader of the project - by other subject teachers who haven't been involved in this project.

For example those students who have been categorized as failures at school and have been taken therefore in the school for speech-handicapped have regained within some months their lost selfconfidence by exercises for relaxation and meditation applied as basic therapy. While having been unsociable in communication and contacts in the beginning, they have so far developed their speech abilities after about ten months as if they never had any grave problems in this.

They have got better results in single subjects and two of them could even be sent to a higher school that corresponds the first six years of the secondary school. Through visualisations and other commentaries of the teacher and especially by their own "stories" in picture and word all children could rebuild their confidence in their speech. In spite of their neurological speech defects they have got courage and joy to speak.

First, in former schools, they were said not to be able to structure, to tell or even to write stories, but within some months they have learnt all this due to their animated power of imagination. Their writing-downs were logically structured in the most cases, their syntax and orthography improved. Contentment, cooperation and a new way to overcome conflicts peacefully could be found more often. Students with a strong motorical unrest have become more calm and concentrated. And - last, but not least - laughing faces could be seen increasingly. At least the students scattered with good wishes in all directions in different schools.

