

# ***The Seven Rod Exercises: Honing Our Conscious Awareness***

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As I have been reporting, the intensive work that I am doing has been wonderfully fruitful.\* Through using speech sound etude-studies to give voice to the speech sounds, I am able to perceive the gesture-impulse of each of the sounds directly and then allow these impulses to come forth as eurythmy movement. And one of the reasons for my success is the extensive preparation I've done using the seven exercises with the copper rod. I thank Rudolf Steiner for these exercises and I am grateful that I was introduced to them in eurythmy school. \*(You may see my 2014 report, *The Speech Sound Etudes: Feeling the Gestures and Finding the Figures*, at the EANA website, artistic category. For this and *The Speech Sound Etudes: Revelations of the Logos* as booklets, inquire at the Rudolf Steiner Library in Hudson NY or the Turose Gift Shop in Ghent NY. 'Etudes' are studies, as in music practice.)

When I began to orient toward my renewed work in late 2012, I knew that my aim was to start with the speech sounds themselves. I hoped that I could develop a way to corroborate what Rudolf Steiner had indicated about them in his Figure drawings.\* All that I clearly recollected of these drawings since I last tried to study them were their general features: the three different color impulses as shown by hatchings, the strange shaping of the human form and the odd 'character' zones. My task now was to evoke the speech sound gesture-impulses inwardly, to learn how each moves, what its shaping force is within my own 'figure' and within the space around me, and where it lights up in my body. To prepare for this, I worked intensively to strengthen my experience of the movement qualities of the colors – including brown, grays, white and black – and I turned to the rod exercises for their help. \*(See them in *Eurythmy and the Impulse of Dance*, text by Marjorie Raffé, Cecil Harwood and Marguerite Lundgren)

As I began to do these rod exercises anew, I realized that the way I had done them in school could not serve my present needs. So one by one I took them up, actively looking for new approaches to them that would help me to enter the gesture-impulses and the Figures. In this article, I want to lay out the basics of what I found.

## **Proceeding from inside-out rather than outside-in**

In seeking to awaken the speech sound gestures 'from within,' as The Eurythmy Meditation counsels – and in speaking the speech sound etudes that I was composing to foster this

awakening – I was going to proceed from inner perceptions and cognition outward. This was to be an inside-out process, and this suggested that my approach to the foundation work of the rod exercises should be the same: my inner experiences should be the source and cause of my outer movements of the rod.

## ***The Eurythmy Meditation***

I seek within  
The Working of Creative Forces,  
The Living of Creative Powers.  
It tells me  
Of Earth's Might of Weight  
Through the word of my feet,  
It tells me  
Of Air's Forces of Form  
Through the singing of my hands,  
It tells me  
Of Heaven's Power of Light  
Through the sensing of my head,  
How the World in MAN [the human being]  
Speaks, sings, senses."

– Rudolf Steiner (rendered by Kate Reese Hurd)

The original in German:

Ich suche im Innern  
Der schaffenden Kräfte Wirken,  
Der schaffenden Mächte Leben.  
Es sagt mir  
Der Erde Schweremacht  
Durch meiner Füße Wort,  
Es sagt mir  
Der Lüfte Formgewalt  
Durch meiner Hände Singen,  
Es sagt mir  
Des Himmels Lichteskraft  
Durch meines Hauptes Sinnen,  
Wie die Welt im Menschen  
Spricht, singt, sinnt.

To start with, I reviewed how I had done the exercises in the past. Though I brought to them the same kind of attention as before, I perceived how easily the physical movements can dominate. I found that doing the exercises as physical patterns has little power to evoke the rich experience of the directions of space and the dimensions of my being that I needed for the work I was undertaking. Rather than promoting my awareness, they obstructed it. If I imagined myself going along or toward a wall, or tethered to changing points on walls, all of which I had done before,

I was introducing references to physical space and physical mechanics. This didn't feel right. If I stretched myself up or down, I was introducing the expression of *i* (ee) and not achieving an inward experience of 'up' or 'down.' If I leaned in the direction, all this did was demonstrate my intention and it made it harder for me to perceive my inward experiences. And tilting backward, for instance, usually summoned automatic body reactions and awareness in the opposite direction. Moving the rod with confidence and precision, 'carving' the air, gave the satisfaction of really 'doing' the directions, but this was just another overlay of physicality that opened the door to the personal expression of verve, etc. In general, making movements like this with the hope that they would sooner or later fill me with the inward feeling-perceptions that I knew should be there could easily set a bad habit.

Then I understood why I've always found these tactics to yield mediocre results inwardly: they seek the needed experiences from the outside-in. Turning away from these habits, I began an inside-out process and resolved that in order for the rod to go up (or left, etc.) my experience of that direction must send it there. But this inner experience isn't evoked and strengthened so easily after all. I sought help from within and an answer came: I found an ally in my faculty of hearing and my hearing imagination. Our hearing is one of the higher senses of the twelve we possess. In fact, Rudolf Steiner said that the zenith of our inner life lies between the senses of hearing and speech" (see his lecture, "The Twelve Senses," August 8, 1920, Dornach). Making use of my hearing freed me from basing my inner perceptions on a sense of movement or balance or the imagined sense of touching something – activities involving the lower senses – or of linking movement to something I see. With this ally, I entered into a new relationship and intimacy with the seven rod exercises.

### **The Sevenfold**

The Sevenfold exercise helps us awaken to the qualities of four directions in space and four of the dimensions of our being: down, up, right and left. In the inside-out approach, the rod is a friendly reminder of where our awareness is to have gone at any moment. At first, I simply stood in place. I listened for sounds in each of the directions. I simply asked, "do I hear anything below?" The presence or absence of a sound did not matter: my attention – not my body – went in that direction. "Do I hear anything overhead?" etc. I asked my attention to go as quickly and strongly as it could and I asked the rod to follow the direction of my attention. It is so easy to move the rod without making the inward transition; it takes determination and patience to prevent this. But my task was and is to hone a unison between my inner experience and my movement. Everything in eurythmy

depends upon this. And in fact, our soul-spiritual well-being, development and integrity depend upon it, too.

The rod needs to go without fuss in each direction; and I found that it goes more easily to the right and the left if the grip of my lower hand is looser during these movements. The rod can then be held vertically without awkwardness and strain in the arms and shoulders, and the alignment of the rod in all phases is still assured.

At length, after working to experience the directions in space and know their qualitative differences, I began to send my awareness to my own being: to my lower body or feet, to my upper body or top of my head, to my right or left side. And finally, I became even more specific, especially with the parts of my being to the right and left: I began to feel my right hip distinctly or my left eye – to begin to be able to send my gaze through one eye only. I knew that I needed my awareness to become just this exact if I hoped to succeed with the Figures work.

The only movement I've allowed is for the right and left directions: small step onto right foot – weight onto left – weight onto right – feet together with weight on both feet. I take a pause with attention inactive after the rod's seventh movement (down). The usual practice of moving forward and backward with the down and up of the rod conflicts with the down and up directions and muddles the inner awareness, so I don't do it. Above all, we need inward clarity, and with the help of these basic exercises we can form strong habits of inner attention. For this reason, I also do not wish to do the exercises to music. Our movements are then dictated by outer reference to the music rather than by the ripeness of our inward attention. Of course, we must learn to evoke our inner experiences at will and on time, but our development of this capacity should not be hurried.

### **The Double-Nine Surprise (AKA the Twelfefold)**

The sudden shifts in this exercise suggested to me the name, "Surprise." The qualities of front and back join those of up and down. Right away, I perceived that the usual twelve count rushes the critical transitions between the front and the back, making awareness during them difficult. Taking three counts for each directional section solves the problem – hence the name, "Double-Nine": Rod up – rod down – rod to back (surprise!); rod up – rod down – rod to front (surprise!). The twelve count can be used later on, but not at the start. Our consciousness needs time to learn to wake up.

In the rhythmic drama of the exercise, the deft, lightning quick toss and drop of the rod – up and down in front and in back – add their surprise awareness moments to the delightful front and back transitions as our inner experience precedes every move: up to chest, drop to front of thighs; up to shoulder blades, drop to back of thighs.

A bad habit can crop up that we will need to quash promptly: the tendency to tilt slightly forward when we pass the rod behind us, and vice versa. Automatic physicality can creep into our activity. This creates directional dissonance that spoils both the inner attention and its outer expression. We need to stay centered in ourselves; our attention moves and it moves the rod, in unison.

### The Spiral

Now come new complications. Holding the rod naturally and beginning to the right, we bring it again and again around our body, beginning with a large circle at hip level and raising it (in four revolutions) to a close circle at the shoulders and lowering it back down (in three revolutions) to a large circle below the hips again. It helps to work rigorously on the rising and falling aspects first, while speaking aloud the levels. With no repeat at the top level, one whole Spiral takes seven long beats counted in subdivisions as musicians do: “Hips-ee-and-a – Waist-ee-and-a – Ribs-ee-and-a – Collar-bone-shoulder-blades – Ribs-ee-and-a – Waist-ee-and-a – Hips-ee-and-a.” The rod passes behind on “and.”

Again, we can tend to tilt forward as we pass the rod behind us or leftward as we pass it round the right, etc., and it takes vigilance to root this out. Stretching at the bottom or tension at the top also needs to be quelled.

Once the rising and falling qualities are strongly felt, we can begin to include the experience of where the rod passes in the other directions, concentrating on these one at a time: “Hips-*right*-and-a – Waist-*right*-and-a ...” or “Hips-and-*back*-and” or “Hips-ee-and-*left*” or “*front*-Hips-and-a,” etc.

Then the gift reveals itself: When we stay poised within the spiral and succeed in awakening our attention such that all six dimensions, the gradations between them and the drawing in and expanding out begin to come together in a unity of real experiences, we can have glimpses of feeling the space immediately around ourselves becoming alive. I had no idea that this was possible. It is. And why else are we doing this exercise if not for this?

Moving spirals in space during this exercise introduces directional conflicts into our inward activity. What we need most is to be free of such hindrances as we work to master this complicated exercise.

### The Ecliptic (AKA the Waterfall)

The quality of continuity and regularity in the gradual progress of this exercise – rising from below through the front space to the zenith and falling through the backspace to below – brings to mind the sun’s progress along the ecliptic, so I call it that. I’m not alone in sensing in it the cycle of the day and of the seasons: night, sunrise, noon, sunset, *drop* and again night; or winter, spring, summer, autumn, *drop* and again winter.

With my listening attention I am able to take the rod on this gently enlivened rising and falling journey. The tendency to stretch outward in the directions will likely appear and will need to be quelled. As we bring our awareness and the rod down into our backspace, we aim to be prepared to drop the rod from behind our shoulders without faltering, prepared to catch it below at our thighs, and with our awareness we pass it downward through our lower backspace and bring it to the front to complete the cycle.

Letting go of the rod is not new. From a condition of stillness in the Surprise, we tossed it up and dropped it back down. But in the Ecliptic, our letting go of the rod interrupts a larger movement, occurs unseen in our backspace and requires timing and trust. When we catch the rod, it can give us a sense of being quickened in our backspace by the interval of the drop, and we can work to enlarge upon that throughout our whole backspace. The drop and catch are akin to the inward quickening of consciousness in autumn and at Michaelmas in particular (the festival that falls on September 29 each year).

### The Double-S (AKA Twirling)

This exercise is the farthest thing from the casual, physical act of twirling. The rod is our *S*-tool and the work we have already done to awaken an all-encompassing sense of the directions is taken further. Our directional awareness needs to go unbroken through the arm, through the fingers, through the end of the rod and beyond. I say “the” end because one end is enough to concentrate on to begin with! To move the rod with unbroken attention, I found that the tips of my thumb and fingers must hold the rod, that they must stay in continuous contact with it, that every movement of the rod is initiated and sustained from within with no reliance on the physical force of momentum, and I have to begin s-l-o-w-l-y.

Starting with the right hand, the rod is held horizontally, gently balanced. The left end is to move outward with our attention on the directions in which it points as it travels a circle that passes just above the arm; the other end passes just below. All of the fingers participate in governing the movement; none are simply riding along. The wrist moves only to keep the rod within the horizontal plane. The arm is quiet; there is no stretching. With no momentum, a glitch appears in the rod’s travel that we need to work through.

When we have gained confidence with each hand, we can begin to use our idle hand to trace the lower circle that the rod makes, doing so side-by-side with the moving rod and avoid bumping. This is difficult, but we can awaken the ability to hold the directional activity of both ends in our awareness, as they traverse their constantly changing, diagonally-opposed impulses simultaneously. Then the name, “Double-S,” makes absolute sense: the colors and characteristics of the *S* can be experienced in it.

### ‘Qui’

In the Qui exercise, the fingers and thumb form a close, coordinated unity. Each of them keeps unbroken contact with the rod while they deftly take turns serving as the fulcrum, quickly making their way along its surface to below and above. Our experience of below and above initiates their transitional journeys. The arms are quiet. In the still focus, a quickening throughout our being can be felt. This group effort in miniature bears in it a sensitivity akin to the sensitivity we need for moving group forms together.

Our awareness goes without disruption through our arms and each fingertip to the rod (as in the Double-S), relieving the physicality of disconnectedness in the hands, of arbitrary wrist flexing and of mudra-like finger poses. Alive with our attention, our fingers can become integral to our movement, able to contribute subtlety and fineness to our expression, completely in service of it.

### The Rod Flip

When with poise we learn to send the rod into the air and take hold of it again, with no wobble, with a perfect gauging of energy and perfect timing, we can begin to bring a finely-regulated expression to the transitions in poetry and music. This is the rejuvenating breath by which we prepare to take hold of each new phrase or initiate each new sound, word or interval, etc. I usually hold the rod horizontally to the front. If it is my right hand, the end to the left will flip up and around rightward (reverse for the left).

### Many gifts

As Rudolf Steiner said in Lecture 1 of *Eurythmy as Visible Singing* (pp. 1-2):

The onlooker does not only see the movement or gesture that is carried out by the eurythmist, but they also see what the eurythmist is inwardly feeling and experiencing. This makes it necessary that every movement or gesture on the part of the eurythmist should be an actual experience ....

The rod exercises done from the inside-out fit us to fulfill this necessity. We will be able, for instance, to move a circle while experiencing its center, or its periphery, and our onlookers will know which is our focus with no need to be shown by demonstrative over-moving or turning. They will feel our trust in them and they will grasp our expression through their inborn capacity to do so. Through the rod exercises, our inward perception of our expression strengthens, too. Then we will perceive what we add to our movement that does not belong there, such as a soul mood or a sound mood (e.g., the stretching of *i*) or a certain manner of gesturing that we’ve learned or are personally used to or prefer, or unconscious movements of the limbs, hands or feet. It will then be easier to root out these tendencies. And, as I have experienced in such large measure, the rod exercises hone the agility of our conscious awareness, making us fit to perceive the speech sound gesture-impulses directly from within, to differentiate their detailed characteristics with exactitude and know with confidence that our living experiences of these do communicate directly to our onlookers through our movement (see the lecture excerpts in “Veils, Dresses and Colors” and the lecture, “The Eurythmy Figures,” in *Eurythmy as Visible Speech*, 1984 edition).

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