

The Physician's Path*

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The physician's path is one of knowledge of the human being in health and illness, and knowledge of the whole world of nature from which our remedies derive.

The path on which the physician walks through life and through the world is a path of healing, both for himself and for the patient. We can look at healing from many aspects, but I would like to take the historical approach. That is: "When did healing—and the physician—enter the history of mankind?" "When did mankind first become ill?" The Bible tell us, and Rudolf Steiner confirms and elucidates the story, that mankind became ill when Adam and Eve ate of the apple of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden. It was the serpent who made them do it; and Rudolf Steiner tells us that the serpent was Lucifer and that the time was the epoch of Ancient Lemuria.

Before Lucifer's temptation we humans lived on Earth but had no desire for earthly things because our new young egos were still in the lap of God. From our ego, or "I," we saw the spiritual world, and we saw the earthly world, and we saw our own bodies and souls but as though outside us, separate from us, as a kind of double. Before the Fall we did not experience our thinking, feeling and willing as belonging to us, but rather that they went on alongside of us, and belonged to the whole world process.

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The original illnesses of mankind are egotism and materialism.

And then, Rudolf Steiner tells us, Lucifer, the serpent, approached Adam and Eve, tempting them somewhat like this: "My dear Sir and Madam, it is terrible how you are kept in this state of utter dependency! It would be far more interesting to dive down into your double, into your soul with your ego. And you needn't fear that you will be overwhelmed, because I will give your ego some of my own power."

And so, Lucifer beguiled Adam and Eve into eating the apple, and their egos immersed themselves in their souls, taking along Lucifer, who, Rudolf Steiner tells us, remains to this day in our sentient soul, closely related to our feelings.

This event was the birth of egotism for mankind. Now for the first time it became possible for the human being to be selfish because his self, his ego or "I," now strengthened through Lucifer and accompanied by Lucifer, had taken possession of his soul instead of remaining outside as God had planned.

This new excessive ego caused us two distinct problems. The first was that we began to regard our thinking, feeling, and willing as our own possessions. And the second was that we gained an interest in the earth and in matter, and began to desire material, earthly things. Thus, it was Lucifer who planted the seeds of both egotism and materialism in mankind in Lemuria. With this insight, we return to the question, "When did illness enter mankind?" And now we can reply that what we usually call illness—cancer, arthritis, pneumonia—are not the real illnesses. The real illnesses, the original illnesses of mankind, are egotism and materialism.

In order to overcome them, there have been throughout history those human beings who have sought to develop certain qualities in themselves, qualities attained on a path of inner development. There are many such paths, but the goal of all true paths is to restore the original relationship and balance of our human "I" with the spiritual world, thus freeing it from our body, and allowing our consciousness to expand into the whole universe around us where it belongs, yet without losing our grounding on earth.

However, the human beings who have walked this path of healing, of spiritual development, have been too few to offset the destructive effects of egotism and materialism in the vast majority of human souls. So God gave humankind another path of healing to prevent them from totally succumbing to their desire for earthly things and to remind

mind them of their spiritual origin—the path of pain, suffering and illness.

Illnesses such as arthritis and cancer are the *remedies* for the original soul sicknesses of egotism and materialism! And Rudolf Steiner tells us that the scales are held in perfect balance. There is exactly as much pain and suffering in the world as there is interest only in the material and the physical. Our egotism and our materialism would obstruct our evolution if we were not able to become sick when we need to. Thus, Dr. Mees in his book, *Blessed by Illness*,¹ defines illness as the embodiment of a spiritual deformation that would otherwise hinder our evolution. And here is what another imaginative soul, the poet T. S. Eliot says:

Our only health is the disease
If we obey the dying nurse
Whose constant care is not to please
But to remind of our, and Adam's curse,
And that, to be restored, our sickness
must grow worse.

—from the poem "East Coker"

The physician's path is one of knowledge: of the human being in health and in illness; and of the whole world of nature from which our remedies derive. This knowledge alone is the task of several lifetimes. As physicians we barely scratch the surface. Yet we must not be so absorbed in pursuing knowledge that we neglect another even more important aspect of the healer's path: the experience of the futility of our knowledge. Despite all our training and learning, we often feel inadequate, even powerless.

Rudolf Steiner acknowledges this feeling of powerlessness as healthy, "for it is nothing but the sensation of disease. For when we have a disease and we do not feel it, we are just that much more ill."

And so when we physicians acknowledge our inadequacy, we become healthier through discovering that we are, indeed, wounded healers. We need this wound, and it must remain incurable, so that the likewise incurable luciferic pride and self-love that infect us so deeply can be somewhat offset.

In Thornton Wilder's play *The Angel That Troubled the Waters*, the angel refuses to allow the physician to be healed saying, "Without your wound, where would your power be? The very angels themselves cannot persuade the wretched and blundering children on

Earth as can one human being broken on the wheels of living.”

If we are broken, it is the *personal* (*persona* = *mask*, lat.) ego that must break because it is corrupted by Lucifer; and the more it is broken, the more can the Christ forces work through us, bringing healing. As St. Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians, “Most gladly will I therefore glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me For when I am weak then am I strong.” As weak and broken physicians we limp along our path feeling the futility of our knowledge, having confronted with bitter pain our recalcitrant pride and self-love. But we still have one thing, I hope, and that is the *will to heal*. This is indispensable. Without it we can make no progress at all.

So where do we go now? I would say that we have now prepared ourselves for the goal of surrender, total surrender. We can find the concept of surrender being discussed today in the field of healing and therapy outside the anthroposophical movement. Midwives whom I've been fortunate to work with have told me from their experience that the goal of their work is to help the woman in labor achieve a state of surrender. And those who work with cancer patients and with the terminally ill, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and Steven Levine, also say that their goal is to help the patient achieve a state of surrender.

Rudolf Steiner, in the lecture cycle, “*The World of the Senses and the World of the Spirit*,” said that by directing our thinking to the world around us we do not and cannot arrive at the truth. We can only arrive at the truth through surrender.

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And yet we *need* pure and discriminating thinking. Anthroposophy is based on such thinking. Yet if it doesn't lead us to truth in the world then what is it for? Rudolf Steiner tells us that our thinking is primarily a tool to be directed back to ourselves in order to correct our mistakes and grow wiser. That must be the primary focus of our thinking: self-correction, self-education. The correction of one small bad habit advances us more spiritually than reading 100 lectures, he said.

Rudolf Steiner even said in another context that Anthroposophy is *dangerous*, if it remains only in our thinking and is not used for self correction and self education. Anthroposophical thinking and Anthroposophical knowledge nourish our soul, but they can also nourish our egotism. Rudolf Steiner tells us that unless we are

observing ourselves very carefully, we fail to notice that, "We become proud and haughty in respect to our own forces as soon as we depend on them." And yet it seems we must depend on them. How can we not depend on our own forces?

And here again I think the crucial insight is to realize that they are not our forces. Our thinking, feeling, and willing belong to the world. That we experience them as our own is the continuing illusion of Lucifer stemming from his original deed of bringing our ego inside of our body and making it more powerful than it was meant to be. And this Luciferic illusion can be corrected on a path of illness and healing or on a path of spiritual development. In reality they are the same path described from different aspects. For only in this way from different viewpoints can the reality of this path be approached and kept alive. We all know it as the path described in *Knowledge of Higher Worlds*. In *The World of the Senses and the World of the Spirit*, Rudolf Steiner describes it as the path of surrender.

In order to learn about the world, it is very difficult to avoid thinking, although I've known people who do seem to manage this, and now I must change my opinion about them! But Rudolf Steiner tells us that we must learn to regard the results of all thinking about the world as merely provisional and never to expect any real understanding of the world through thinking alone. To truly understand our world we must begin, as the ancient Greeks knew, with *wonder*, then progress to *reverence*, then to feeling oneself to be in *harmony with the laws of the world*, and then advancing to the final stage, *surrender* to the wisdom-filled course of the world. Rudolf Steiner describes surrender as, "the very highest condition of soul to which the human being has to attain if he would arrive at truth." This surrender, for the physician, too, must be the culmination of his path.

How does the call to surrender meet the physician in his or her everyday practice? Every therapist and physician working out of anthroposophy knows, (and many outside of anthroposophy as well), that healing and self-overcoming go hand in hand. And yet, this knowledge, that healing requires self-transformation, carries a hidden danger because it may prompt the healer to demand from the patient what cannot be demanded—that the patient change himself.

If a physician sees that the patient is resisting the healing out of fear of the painful change that healing entails, then he is tempted to say, "I cannot heal this one: he will have to learn from life. Life will teach him;

I cannot."

And so usually such a patient stops coming. For us it is a failure, but if we acknowledge it as *our* failure and not the patient's failure, then we may confront a bitterly painful thought, that maybe our will to heal wasn't strong enough, that our heart's forces of love weren't strong enough, and that we were unable ourselves to take the necessary steps from thinking about the patient to surrendering to what the patient brought us.

I know a non-anthroposophical physician who, out of his long experience in the emergency room caring for patients of other doctors, discovered a law. He said that every patient gets the doctor he deserves. And the other half of this truth is surely that every doctor gets the patient he deserves!

So, just as each illness is a lesson for the patient, so is each patient a lesson for the doctor, especially the difficult, recalcitrant patient who must find the courage to let go of everything personal, and surrender to the healing.

The physician can only help in such a case by identifying his *own* personal or judgmental thoughts and feelings called forth by the patient, and by letting go of them because they make a wall between patient and doctor, obstructing the healing that flows from the heart. Even positive reactions engendered by a patient must be surrendered, as they obscure an objective insight into what the patient needs.

If we as physicians can learn to surrender to the lessons which the patient brings us, then through the pain and self-knowledge of that lesson we can strengthen our will to heal and can further unfold our organ of healing: the courageous and loving heart.