

## **Disease as the Language of the Soul**

In our society, disease is not considered to be a language, or a pathway, or even to have any form of sense. It is not recognised as being something central to our existence, but is rather seen to be an abundance of objectionable, more or less coincidental setbacks in life. For this reason we find it normal to refer to "diseases" in the plural, although this in itself makes no more sense than to refer to "healths". In contrast, the majority of major religions and their esoteric traditions always consider disease to be a fundamental part of our being.

According to the Creation stories, man has been incomplete ever since one side of him was removed in Paradise. Since that time, we have been continually on the lookout for what is popularly known as our "better half". The Christian religion promises that we will return to the spiritual unity and completeness of Paradise. The Saviour showed us the way back to wholeness/holiness, symbolised by Paradise, the Heavenly Kingdom of God, which Christ said was to be found in each of us. Completeness, and as a result complete health are only possible in that realm, that is to say, on the other side of this polar world of opposites.

Astonishingly, this corresponds to the view of the World Health Organisation (WHO), which defines health as a condition free of physical, mental and social suffering. According to this definition, healthy people may be found in the pages of anatomy books, but certainly not in our modern world. This belief, which is the natural world-view of the esoteric tradition, is confirmed by practitioners of orthodox medicine and natural healing – albeit with gritted teeth. Mankind is ill. The health statistics are in fact statistics showing the incidence of disease, and state for example that in 25 years, an average citizen will suffer 2 life-threatening, 20 serious and another 200 moderate to mild ailments. With their increasingly sophisticated diagnostic methods, practitioners of orthodox medicine cannot find anybody today who is completely healthy. If 1000 supposedly healthy people are surveyed, practically none of them are able to say that they are totally free of any medical complaint. Natural healers, with their even more sensitive diagnostic methods, have problems to find anyone with a completely normal liver, let alone anyone in perfect health. The conclusion is surprisingly obvious, and all schools of thought are in agreement: mankind is ill. Regardless of whether or not we share the hope of medicine that all disease will at some point be wiped out; at the moment, perfect health is not a thing of this world. It is possible to oppose this fact aggressively as in the case of orthodox and natural medicine, or to accept it like the religious and esoteric traditions; in any case, illness has become one of mankind's tasks.

The aggressive approach of the medical practitioner is to form an alliance with the patient against the symptom and to try to eliminate it as quickly as possible. The esoteric approach, which I intend to describe here, is quite the opposite: the doctor allies himself with the symptom and tries to find out what the patient lacks which could be causing it. Meaning is apportioned to the symptoms as they are interpreted.

This is in fact no unusual step and is widespread in normal life. We are accustomed to giving a meaning to everything possible, and are even put out if we fail to do so. Let us assume that

someone gives us the following answer to our question about the latest play: the stage measured four by six metres and was two metres high, there were eight actors, two of whom were men and six women, their costumes were made of x metres of silk and y metres of linen, the stage was lit by so many lux, etc. We would be fairly indignant, because we had in fact been expecting an interpretation of the contents of the play, and not a description of the external formal details. Something which seems so obvious to us in the theatre is no longer so when it comes to medicine. When a patient goes back to the internist three days after the initial examination, he is told that his blood and urine tests gave such and such a value, his blood pressure was x and his temperature was y. A shadow was visible in the X-ray picture and the ECG gave the following result. Astonishingly, in this situation the patient is not indignant, but accords the doctor and his scientific methods all respect, although also here the concern is with form rather than with content. Only when the internist interprets all the results and pronounces the words the patient has been waiting for, "This indicates that you have pneumonia", does the whole process begin to have any sense. However, the question is, why should we stop at this point, just when it begins to get interesting for the patient?

It would of course be possible to examine what inflammation and the lungs signify. It is obvious that the lungs are governed by the principle of contact and communication; they are after all responsible for the exchange of gases and for our speech, which relies on the modulations of the stream of air we exhale. Inflammation, on the other hand, is an expression of conflict. Pathogenic organisms fight against our antibodies, and the means they use is clearly aggressive: they besiege, attack, block and kill. The macrophages (literally translated as "great eaters") give just as little quarter as the antibodies, which hurl themselves in kamikaze fashion onto the pathogens and perish alongside them. All this would indicate that pneumonia reflects conflict in the area of communication. The frequent incidence of pneumonia in intensive care units is proof of this. It cannot primarily be caused by pathogens, because there are fewer to be found here than anywhere else. However, when the only remaining form of contact to the world is via a couple of plastic tubes, many people develop a contact problem, which for lack of other forms of expression can be physically manifested in the form of pneumonia.

Esoteric medicine assumes that all physical events are the expression of a hidden psychological agenda. If we cover up the physical manifestation, we only succeed in strengthening the psychological problem. Alleviating a symptom just has the effect of pushing it to one side, into the subconscious or the "shadows". This type of symptom displacement would not be thinkable in other areas, for example in technology. If the alarm signal on a machine lit up, we would not dream of unscrewing the bulb in order to have some peace. However, in the case of headaches or other pain, we think nothing of blocking the warning signal by taking painkillers. To put it bluntly, if this system is followed, the symptom will be sent from organ to organ and the patient from specialist to specialist.

Thanks to physics, we have known for a long time that in principle, nothing can be created: matter and energy can only be transformed from one form to another. From this, it is obvious that our approach can only displace symptoms rather than eliminating them. However, a vertical displacement, that is to say from the physical to the spiritual level, has much more chance of achieving healing than one which is restricted to the physical plane.

Symptoms arise when the person affected refuses to deal with an issue on a conscious level: the problem then sinks to the level of the physical body and materialises there. If s/he wants to solve this problem, there is little sense in suppressing its physical manifestation by chemical (e.g. cortisone) or mental means (e.g. affirmations, behavioural therapy). On the contrary, it is necessary to become aware of the problem lying behind the physical symptoms. Once it has again been brought to light, there is at least a chance of solving it. Furthermore, the body would be relieved of its need to depict the problem symptomatically. The body is in fact merely an alternative stage for our conscious being. If we refuse to permit a play to be played out in our consciousness, it will materialise on the physical stage.

From this it is clear that disease is another way in which we can learn. However, it is significantly more elegant and purposeful  $\frac{3}{4}$  although admittedly not more pleasant  $\frac{3}{4}$  to learn directly by means of our conscious being without having to present the issue on our alternative physical stage first. In this way we have the chance of genuine prevention. Today, for example, we sometimes speak of cancer prophylaxis, although we really mean early recognition. Naturally it is much better to become aware of a problem early rather than late, but this has nothing at all to do with prevention. Genuine prophylaxis means making physical symptoms unnecessary by voluntarily working through the issue on a spiritual level.

Anyone who understands disease as the language of the soul experiences first-hand in his or her own body that form and content always belong together, or, as Goethe expressed it: everything which is transitory is allegorical. Disease is the formal aspect of a spiritual content; or in other words, symptoms are the physical embodiment of spiritual issues.

Symptoms are in fact merely a special type of body language, which is certainly the most widespread means of communication on earth. However, although it is the most universal language, it is only consciously understood by a few people in our culture. Nevertheless, it would not be so difficult to learn it again, because not only do our bodies speak, we also use physical metaphors in our speech. Whether we grasp something or understand it, whether some things get on our nerves and others go to our heads, whether we take something to heart or feel it to be a blow, whether shivers run down our spine or something takes our breath away, the language is always psychosomatic and shows a connection between soul and body which our society is slowly rediscovering.

Further to our body language, which is expressed in the simple description of symptoms and which is augmented by colloquial expressions, proverbs and images, the findings of orthodox medicine are also available to help us interpret our symptoms. Indeed the formal description of the disease process is by no means wrong or even just superfluous. It would not be possible to follow a play if there were no stage, without lighting everything would be dark, and without costumes the play would be far less expressive  $\frac{3}{4}$  it would possibly even be embarrassing. Likewise, this esoteric approach is not directed against the medical establishment; it is rather meant to complement it. Therefore it is unnecessary to take a stand against orthodox medicine. It is almost exclusively occupied with the physical body, but is incomparably good at "repair work" on this level. Anyone who complains that medical practitioners do not concern themselves with the whole person can be compared to a visitor to the town swimming baths who complains that there is no view of the sea  $\frac{3}{4}$  although a view of

the sea was not promised, and the visitor is free to travel to the seaside at any time. Anyone who wishes to be healed should look for a holistic type of treatment which doesn't devalue orthodox medicine, but goes far beyond it.

The symptoms experienced and the results obtained should be accorded equal significance and should be pieced together little by little to form a complete picture of the disease and its causes. The area or organ affected shows where the problem is to be found; in the case of pneumonia in the area of contact and communication. The specific event throws light on the type of problem; in the case of pneumonia the problem is conflict.

The following questions have been shown to be helpful when making a diagnosis: why is this happening to me at this time? What does the symptom stop me from doing? What does it force me to do? What sense does it have in my life at this time?

Of course, every combination of symptoms is unique and can only be interpreted meaningfully when the individual situation is taken into account. This is especially important with diseases which have a radical effect on the body such as AIDS or cancer. A diagnosis only becomes completely exhaustive if the personal circumstances are taken into consideration as well as the organs affected.

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