

Spiritual Experience as a Source of Strength

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The Inner Path of the Physician, Illness as a Threshold Experience

Spirituality is a question of consciousness. Consider a deep insight attributed to Meister Eckehardt, a mystic of the Middle Ages; "If I were a king and did not know it, I would be no king." This is exactly how it is. What can it mean to the human being that all the wisdom of divine creation is brought together to create the complexity of his body, soul and spirit if he does not know about it, if he does not have any awareness of it, let alone self-awareness with regard to it?

Outside in the world around us, we are painful witnesses to how much nature has already been destroyed, to how many species have disappeared. Were they thoroughly studied before that happened? Who recognized their task in the whole and who thanked them for it, for their existence? Novalis' *Hymns to the Night* culminate in the insight: "We have nothing more to seek — The heart is full — the world is empty." This means that when all experience of the world has become nourishment for the heart, when it has become conscious inner life, then the purpose of creation is fulfilled. It is this major task of the human being that the word "spirituality" refers to in a comprehensive way (spirituality, spiritualization, spiritual experience). No one can develop this developmental potential for someone else.

Responsible for the Future

"Those who journey to the Truth journey alone." (Christian Morgenstern). As much as we can help each other learn this or that, or wake up to this or that, in the end it depends on each one of us to what extent we are able or want to make what we have learned and recognized really our own, make it part of our own consciously encompassed being. This is why spirituality eminently has to do with forming identity. Even if I know a lot, if I cannot really identify myself with what I know, it remains external to me, my heart does not feel nourished by it.

Thus the longing for spirituality is always also accompanied by the task of systematic practice and development. The degree of development of consciousness and capacities that can take place depends on the kind of practice.

Placed beside many ritualistic magical forms of practice based on feeling, breathing and mantric syllables stemming from ancient times, the anthroposophical path of schooling is rooted in idealistic philosophy and relies on the spiritualization of thinking. It has the aim of helping the human being become conscious of his independence, uniqueness and also personal responsibility for the entire development of humanity and the Earth.

The Profession as a Path of Schooling

It is self-understood that this path contains not only personal schooling of soul and spirit but also above all the desire to achieve spiritualization of professional and daily life. At present, it is only the profession of the priest or minister that takes holy orders, that is, where the priest's ordination reminds

us that actually every profession is a path of schooling which can lead to full awareness of one's task in social life, one's task within the whole of humanity. While it is self-understood that the priest's profession consists in service to God, it is still necessary to develop such awareness for the other professions. Rudolf Steiner offered essential suggestions for doing this.¹ However, consequential professional training and advanced training that build on these suggestions are still waiting to be developed. Normally, the content, the necessary knowledge and the practical skills are so much in the foreground of professional training that little space remains for esoteric questions.

Often people express the view that these are highly personal inner questions of development that one cannot "demand" within the framework of a professional training. However, I question this! Why is one allowed to demand the external techniques needed while a taboo is made of the inner developmental necessities?

Today people increasingly experience how, through the splitting of consciousness or suppression of it, they fall into exhaustion, get sick or burn out. In contrast, those who recognize and want to practice the holy service aspect of their work are able to make their professional lives into a social path of development. This gives them strength and goes hand in hand with their personal path of schooling.

Illness as a Threshold Experience

An example from medicine: The question of how health-giving and illness-causing influences in body and soul relate to each other is central for doctors and patients if — after the illness — healing and (as much as possible) prevention of future illness is to succeed. In one of Rudolf Steiner's notebooks pertaining to his course for young doctors he wrote a verse that places illness in relation to the threshold.²

If the doctor can become aware that every illness is a threshold experience, an unconscious encounter with the "Guardian of the Threshold," then a completely new view of not just illness and health but also the relation between soul-spiritual and physiological-physical processes arises. The doctor has the task of "raising up" every unhealthy physiological process into the light of the spirit as he comprehends the illness. Meanwhile the patient, through the insight that something is now at work in his body which he had not been able to maintain in the region of his spiritual light through his own strength, can become aware of concrete indications for his development. Through this perspective he can contribute to his own healing in a meditative way. In addition to external measures to prevent illness he can gain access to inner meditative instruments.

1. Compare Rudolf Steiner: *Mantrische Sprüche*, II, Rudolf Steiner Verlag 2003, GA 268, pp 239-317.
2. "Es stromen and der Schwelle / Sinnesdunkel and Geisteshelle / Zum Blendwerk ineinander / Dieses Blendwerks Abbild / Ist die Krankheit / In der Krankheit lebet der Huter. / Begegnung im Geist bewufst / Begegnung im Korper unbewufst." in *Mantrische Sprüche*, Seelenubungen II, Rudolf Steiner Verlag 2003, GA 268, p. 304.

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