



ANTHROPOSOPHICAL MEDICINE AND ITS RELATION TO OTHER MEDICAL TRADITIONS

(ITA WEGMAN & RUDOLF STEINER)

Anthroposophical medicine is *not* identical to natural medicine (“Naturheilkunde”, or naturopathy). It is, however, sometimes called "natural medicine" when reference is made to the use of medicines that have been produced from natural raw materials.

Anthroposophical medicine is *not* phytotherapy (herbal medicine), despite the fact that about 250 medicinal plants provide the raw material and basis for Anthroposophical medicines. Medicines prepared from natural mineral substances are more widely used in this field and generally are considered more important than those made from plant materials.

Anthroposophical medicine is *not* simply some form of homeopathic medicine. Two things it has adopted from that discipline are the method of potentiation (although greatly modified) and the notation used for potencies (in Anthroposophical medicine potencies above D30 or 30X are seldom used).

Anthroposophical medicine is rooted in the Western scientific paradigm and views itself as an extended form of this medicine. It is not in opposition to contemporary conventional medicine, which works with the scientific principles and methods accepted today; it fully recognizes and also implements its principles. However, Anthroposophy adds further insights, gained through other methods described above,



to what can be known about the human being through today's recognized scientific methods, and out of this **extended** insight into the world and the human being, it finds itself impelled to work also for an extension of the art of medicine.

Fundamentally speaking, contemporary medicine can offer no objection to what Anthroposophical medicine represents, since it does not negate contemporary medicine.

In addition, Anthroposophical medicine fully accepts the values of other medical traditions, as far as they fulfill the criteria of being scientific and comprehensible. Anthroposophical medicine intends to understand and renew great old traditions like Greco-Arab medicine (Tibb), Ayurvedic medicine and Traditional Chinese medicine.

Anthroposophically extended medicine seeks to make these old medical traditions accessible to modern thinking, consequently making them available to all people, which includes health care professionals and patients.

In this outline, the relationships between Anthroposophically extended medicine and other leading medical traditions will be investigated, so that the various traditions may cross-pollinate each other.

Anthroposophically extended medicine would never have been made possible without the Dutch physician **Ita Wegman** (1876-1943).



Ita Wegman in 1899 in Berlin

We highly recommend studying a thorough biographical documentation by the Dutch physician **J. E. Zeylman van Emmichoven**, who knew Ita Wegman personally, published by Mercury Press 1995, Spring Valley.

This biographical study of Ita Wegman (1876-1943), one of the most outstanding and controversial pupils and co-workers of Rudolf Steiner, will be available in an English translation later this year. It is an achievement of great importance by J. E. Zeylman van Emmichoven (son of the late Dr. Willem Zeylman van Emmichoven), who has for many years studied and researched all available sources - essays, autobiographical writings, diaries and letters - concerning this remarkable personality. The result of this



is an outstanding piece of Anthroposophical history. It gives a breathtaking picture of the intimate cooperation between Rudolf Steiner and Ita Wegman and how formative this relationship was for the establishment of anthroposophical medical work and the events leading up to the inauguration of the newly- formed Anthroposophical Society and the School of Spiritual Science. Steiner described to Ludwig Polzer- Hoditz that it was through Ita Wegman's "Parsifal" question that Anthroposophy found its new esoteric and early foundations in the Christmas Foundation Meeting of 1923.

Maria Ita Wegman was born in 1876 in the former Dutch East Indies, now known as Indonesia. Very little is known about her formative years. Her path led her to Holland at age 14, having already come across Theosophy in the East. In Holland, she completed her education and went on to do a "Mensendieck" gymnastic training, qualifying at age 26. She was particularly gifted with her hands and moved to Berlin in September 1902 to continue studies in Swedish massage and therapeutic gymnastics at the school of Dr. Thure-Brandt.

Rudolf Steiner had just become leader of the Theosophical Society in Germany in October 1902 and Ita Wegman was curious to meet him, as she had heard of him in Holland. Their first meeting was surprisingly uneventful, and consequently she didn't visit many of his lectures; she was absorbed more by the rich culture and scientific life of the city of Berlin as well as being busy in her training and work.

Steiner gave a lecture in April 1904 on Goethe's fairy tale, "The Green Snake and Beautiful Lily", which she attended and which suddenly made a deep impression. She immediately asked Rudolf Steiner: "...to hear more about this esoteric wisdom." Steiner invited her to a closed esoteric lecture, and that was it: "I knew from that moment that he was my teacher, is my teacher and will in the future be my teacher." Ita Wegman was received into the E. S., (Esoteric School) and attended all "classes" and as many lectures as she could.

Her decision to study medicine resulted from conversations with both Marie and Rudolf Steiner, and in Switzerland, as one of the first women that were allowed to



enroll as a medical student: at that time women were considered to become nurses but not a doctor. Ita enrolled at the Zurich Medical School in February 1905. She stayed in Zurich until 1920 to complete her medical studies and her specialization in gynecology. She traveled extensively during those years to hear Rudolf Steiner speak and participated actively in the international cultural life of Zurich. All of Steiner's Christology lecture cycles, the Gospel Cycles, were then given in Switzerland. She often wrote to Steiner asking for advice on Society members that she treated and from 1917 onwards developed and used mistletoe preparations (named "Icar" which later was re-named as "Iscador"), successfully it seems, for the treatment of cancer.

Initially, her relationship to Rudolf Steiner and Anthroposophy didn't essentially differ from that of other pupils and followers; it began to change slowly with her decision to move to Arlesheim and start a clinic there, "for the further development of Anthroposophical medicine." Following an illness (severe influenza with pleuritis) in 1917, this resolve had matured in her.

On June 8, 1921, the Clinic was opened in Steiner's presence. He visited the Clinic as often as he could and saw an estimated 400 to 450 patients there with Ita Wegman, Dr. Hilma Walter (German) and Dr. Madeleine van Deventer (Dutch) until September 1924 when he was taken ill. Ita Wegman's relationship to Steiner decisively changed on December 21, 1922 with the destruction of the Goetheanum by fire. She witnessed this drama, together with Steiner, and "flashbacks", as we would now call them, occurred; the true nature of which Steiner helped her to understand. Experiences of past lives surfaced, and from then on, step by step, their mutual karma was revealed. Ita Wegman accompanied Rudolf Steiner on most of his travels abroad and witnessed the increasing demands made on him, and his resulting exhaustion, as well as the spiritual heights of his work.

Steiner's work reached a crescendo in 1923. During a lecture tour in England (Penmaenmawr, August 1923), the inner revelations became stronger and "jubilant," and Ita Wegman asked the question concerning the renewal of the mysteries. With this question, new life flowed into Steiner and his task, and the preparations for the

Christmas Foundation Meeting were made. Their work together intensified, and they also started to work on the medical book, *Fundamentals of Therapy*. The inauguration of the Free High School of Spiritual Science (December 1923) and, later, the Medical Section (September 1924) was made possible. Their research and intensive cooperation became intimate; very moving letters from that time bear witness to that. It is easy to see how misunderstanding could arise. Rudolf Steiner became visibly ill, and he took to his bed in September 1924. Until then, he had refused to receive any medical help from anyone, but now he did, and Ita Wegman, his pupil, friend and co-worker, became his physician together with Dr. Ludwig Noll. Again, a moving account is given of these last six months of life with Ita Wegman at his side continuously. The work continued.

In his introduction, Zeylmans speaks of a "paralysis" in evolving an Anthroposophical history, i.e. the history of Anthroposophy and its pioneers. With his "Documentation on Ita Wegman", that ice seems to be broken. "Compositional history" is what I would call it, in that Zeylmans describes the people and events in such a way that the composition of the themes in lectures, letters and conversations shows the consequential development of the spiritual research.

I was deeply moved yet left with many questions. One is that we are allowed a glimpse of the relationship between initiate and pupil, and we can wonder if, in that, we are given an archetype of a new and modern esoteric cooperation - one that aims to work with the forces of karma, including the risks of doing so.

The second volume deals with the period 1925-1943 and ends with Ita Wegman's death, the disillusion and hope following the rifts in the Society. This part will be published soon. It is a must for anyone with responsibility and a warm heart for Anthroposophy.



Rembrandt van Rijn: Geneeskunde en Geneeskunst in zich verenigd

The Dutch painter and personal student of Christian Rosenkreutz Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) changed his style of painting dramatically after he met with Christian Rosenkreutz in Amsterdam, the Netherlands (a Republic for centuries with no Head of State). From painting traditionally still lifes and landscapes, he now paints as we know him: a confrontation of Light and Darkness with Man in the middle; exposed to both light and darkness. And when one stands in front of one of his paintings and one asks oneself: “where does the light come from?” One cannot really tell. In this painting, Rembrandt wanted to express that healing comes about when a skilled doctor has developed intuition, and receives blessings from another world; here portrayed by an angel (Archangel Raphael?).

The concept of healing of Rembrandt van Rijn goes far beyond “Evidence Based” medicine, as it is fashionable nowadays.

In all Northern European languages there are two words used for what a medical doctor practices: “Geneeskunde” and “Geneeskunst.” (German: “Heilkunde” and “Heilkunst”). One wants his doctor to be skilled: that a surgeon knows exactly how to cut or an internist how to apply an infusion (Heilkunde). But one wants his doctor



also to have mastered the art of healing (Heilkunst). To master medicine as an art comes with the years and wisdom is included in Heilkunst.

As a doctor, to master the Art of Healing, the doctor must go a path of inner development. And which doctor nowadays wants to go beyond “evidence based” medicine. In statistically manipulated “evidence based” medicine there is no place for the art of healing as this can only be based on an individual approach to the needs of the patient.

Which severely ill patient wants to be treated by a doctor who trust manipulated statistics only versus a doctor who knows all “evidence based” medicine but incorporates additionally his clinical experience and compassion towards the needy and the patients?

Each practicing doctor should have been critically ill once himself before he is put to practice and feel the desperation when a doctor, who has mastered to be skilled and follows the licensing directions of “evidence-based” medicine, tells him: “there is nothing we can do for you anymore!”

Doctors who practice Anthroposophical Medicine try to combine Heilkunst with Heilkunde by choosing to go a path of inner development as indicated by Rudolf Steiner.