

**ILLUSORY ILLNESS AND THE FEVERISH
PURSUIT OF HEALTH
(AND PREVENTION OF AGING)**

BY

RUDOLF STEINER (1861-1925)



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Health is something for which every man naturally longs. We may say this longing for health derives indeed not only from egotistic feelings and wishes, but also from the justified longing for work. We owe thanks for our capacity to work, for the possibility of becoming effective in the world, to our health. Hence, it is that we treasure health as a quite special beneficence. Indeed, there lies in this way of thinking about health something of the highest significance for its pursuit. In a certain way there is contained therein the secret of the particular circumstances under which health becomes at all worth pursuing. That the pursuit of health should only under certain circumstances be worthwhile might appear unusual. Our considerations today, however, should disclose that health belongs to those virtues that most readily become a reality in us if we pursue them not for their own sake, but for another's. That this does not always happen today can be taught us if we but look out into our present surrounding world.

However remarkable it may be when speaking of the feverish pursuit of health, the feverish insistence upon health, yet it is possible today for many people to make their own observations about it. With what means, in what countless ways, do most people today press towards health! Everywhere we find a hurried pursuit of health. We may travel through regions in which old castles and ruins tell us of monks and knights who once could call strength of spirit and of body their own. Today they have fallen into decay and replacing them in these same regions we find sanatoria (health spas and beauty farms). Was there ever in any time of world evolution such a variety of special efforts to achieve health, to struggle through to health by natural ways of living, by water- or aero-healing methods? People are sent for air and sun baths.



Once, an acquaintance of mine who was on his way to a sanitarium came to me during the first half of summer. It had been with much difficulty that he managed to get four weeks' vacation, which he planned to spend there. Of course, it seemed to be the best that could happen to a person, to stay for a time, more or less satisfying, in a sanitarium. Hence I had no wish to explain the futility of his plan and thus deprive him of all hope. On his return journey he came again to me. He brought a little book along in which was written all he was supposed to have accomplished during those four weeks contemplating his organism. Again, one could not deprive him of his joy, but, on the tip of one's tongue lay the question, "Do tell me, when have you been more driven? During the whole year at work or during those four weeks during which you were shoved from warmth to cold, from dryness to dampness, and were scrubbed with all those brushes?"

The worst part of it was that after some weeks he said to me, "This cure has helped me as little as all the others in the last thirty years." He had tried something different each summer. Whoever cared for this person could well look upon his feverish search for health in a somewhat sympathetic way.

How many people today run to mesmerizers and spiritual healers? How many writings there are on "Harmony With the Infinite" and the like! In short, the feverish pursuit of health is something that lives in our time. Now, one might raise another question. "Are these people actually sick?" Well, of course, something is probably wrong with them, but is there a chance that they will attain health through all these things?

Especially among ancient people an age-old saying remains even today. One says so frequently that what the simple person gets from such sayings often may contain something good, but just as often it is something false. So it is with the saying, "There are many illnesses, but only one state of health." This is foolish.

There are as many states of health as there are human beings. For each human being his individual health. What this says is that all general standard prescriptions holding that this or that is healthy for the human being are nonsense. The very part of humanity that is overcome by the feverish pursuit of health suffers most from the general prescriptions for health. Among them are those who believe that there could be something generally tagged as health, that if one does thus and so, that it would be healthy? It is most incredible that there is no realization that a sun bath can be healthy for a person, but that this may not be applied in general. It could be quite harmful for another. Generally, this is admitted but there is no following through in particular instances. We must make it clear to ourselves that health is a quite relative concept, something that is liable to a continuing process of change, especially for the human being, who is the most complicated being on the earth. We need but look into spiritual science. Then shall we penetrate deeply into human nature and recognize how changeable what we call health is. In reality, one forgets almost entirely today that upon which so much value is laid in material aspects. One forgets that the human being is in the throes of development.

What is meant by, “The human being is undergoing development?” Again it is necessary to refer to the being of man. The physical body is only a part of the human entity. This he has in common with all lifeless nature. But he has as second member the etheric or life body, which he has in common only with what is life-imbued. This member wages a continuing battle against everything that would destroy the physical body. Were the etheric body to withdraw from the physical body, in that moment the physical body would become a corpse. The third member is the astral body, which he has in common with animals, the bearer of desires and sorrow, of every feeling and representation, of joy and pain, the so-called consciousness body. The fourth part is his ego, the central point of his being that makes of him the crown of creation. The ego transforms

the three bodies through development out of the central point of the human being.

Let us consider an uneducated savage, an average man, or a highly educated idealist. The savage is still slave to his passions. The average man refines his urges. He denies himself the satisfaction of certain urges and sets in their place legal concepts or high religious ideals, that is, he remodels his astral body from out his ego. As a result the astral body now has two members. The one still has the form that exists in the savage, but the other part has been transformed into spirit self or manas. Through impressions from art or great impressions from founders of religion man works on his ether body and creates buddhi or life spirit. The physical body also can be transformed into atma, spirit self, [In other lectures, Rudolf Steiner refers to "atma" as "spirit-man." – e.Ed.] if a person devotes himself to the practice of certain spiritual-scientific exercises. Thus, the human being works unconsciously or consciously on his three bodies.

Were we able to look far, far back into the early development of man, we would find everywhere primitive cultural conditions, simple modes of life. Everything that those early people had in the way of appliances to satisfy their spiritual and bodily needs, their way of life, was simple. Everything, everything evolves, and within evolution the human being develops himself. This is most important. Imagine as vividly as you can a primitive man who grinds his grain to flour between stones, and picture to yourself the other things surrounding this individual. Compare him with a man of more recent cultural times. What surrounds this modern person, what does he see from morning until evening? He takes in the frightful impressions of the noisy big city, of street cars, buses and the like. We must then understand how evolution proceeds. We must carry over the insight we gain concerning simple things into the cultural process.

Goethe made the following statement, “The eye was fashioned by the light, for the light.” If we had no eyes, we could not see colors or light. Whence have we eyes? Goethe also said that out of undifferentiated organs the light drew forth eyes. So also is the ear formed by tone, the sense of warmth by warmth. The human being is formed by that which in the whole world spreads itself around him. Just as the eyes owe their existence to the light, so do other delicate structures owe their existence to what surrounds man. The simple primitive world is the dark chamber that still holds back many organs. What light is for the undifferentiated organs out of which the eye developed itself, the environment is for primitive humanity. Things work quite differently upon man in his present mode of living; he cannot turn back to the primitive conditions of culture. Rather is it so that an ever more intense, stronger spiritual light has been effective around him that has called forth the new.

We are able to realize the meaning of this transforming cultural process if we picture to ourselves how the being fares who is also subject to this influence but cannot go along with the transformation. Here we have the condition of the animals. They are differently structured from men. When we look at the animal as it appears in the physical world, we find that it has its physical body, its etheric body and its astral body in the physical world, but it has no ego in the physical world. Hence, the animals are powerless on the physical plane to undergo transformation of the three bodies, and cannot adapt themselves to a new environment. Two days ago we considered wild animals in captivity, how, out in the wilderness certain animals never have tuberculosis, tooth decay, -etc., but do in captivity. A whole series of decadent appearances show up in captivity or under other circumstances.

During the cultural process, men are continually subject to other conditions. This is the nature of culture. Otherwise, there would be no development, no

history of human beings. What we observed as experiments with animals as to the effect on the physical body appears as the opposite in men. Man, because he has an ego, has the capacity of inwardly digesting the impressions that storm in upon him from our culture. He is inwardly active, first adapts his astral body to the changed conditions and then reorganizes it. Thus, as he keeps evolving, he comes to higher cultures and always receives new impressions. At first these express themselves in feelings and perceptions. Were he now to remain passive, inactive, were there no activity stirred up in him, no creativity, then he would become stunted and sick as does the animal. This it is that distinguishes the human being, that he can adapt himself and, from out the astral body, gradually change the etheric and physical bodies. He must be inwardly up to this transformation however; otherwise there is no adjustment of the balance between what comes to him from the outside and what counters it from within. A man would be crushed by the impressions from outside as the animal in a cage is crushed by them because it has no inner creativity. But man has his inner activity. Against the spiritual lights around him, he must be able to set something, in a sense, to counter with eyes, with seeing.

Whatever turns out as a disharmony between impressions from the outside and the inner life is unhealthy. It is in the big cities that we can see what happens when impressions from the outside grow ever more powerful. When we tear along faster and faster, when we must let rumbling sounds and hurrying people go by us without taking a stance, without countering them — this is unhealthy. As regards this position towards the outside, the intellect is the least important, but what is important depends upon whether our feelings, our soul, indeed, our living bodies, can take a position towards it. This we will understand rightly through the consideration of a definite illness that appears especially in our time, and that did not occur earlier. A person not accustomed to absorb much, one poor in soul, is brought up against all kinds of impressions so that he finds



himself standing before a quite incomprehensible outer world. This is the case with many feminine natures. Their inner being is too weak, too little organized to digest it all. But we find this condition also in many masculine persons. The consequences result in the illnesses of hysteria. Everything connected with hysteria is derived from this imbalance.

Another form of illness takes hold when our lives bring us to the position of wanting to understand too much of what is set before us in the outer world. It is mostly the case with men who suffer with causality illness. One accustoms oneself always to ask, "Why? why? why? why?" It is even said that the human being must be the never-resting causality animal. Today, because we are too polite, we may no longer give the idle questioner the answer that a founder of religion gave. When he was asked, "What did God do before the creation of the world" he answered, "He cut rods for those who ask useless questions." This is exactly the opposite condition of the hysterical one. Here the restless longing for the solving of enigmas is too great. This is only a symptom of an inner attitude. The one who never wearies of always asking, "Why?" has a different constitution from other people. He gives signs of a different inner working of spiritual and bodily functions from the person who asks "Why" only on outer provocation. This leads to all hypochondriacal conditions, from the lightest case to the deepest illusory illness. So it is that the cultural process affects human beings. Man must above all have an open mind in order always to be able to digest what comes towards him. Now we can also make it clear to ourselves why so many people have the urge to shed this culture, to have done with this life. They are no longer up to what presses in upon them. They strive to get out. These are always weak natures who do not know how to counter the outer impressions with a mighty inner response.



Thus it is that we cannot speak today in clichés as regards health just because life itself is so manifold. The one person stands here, the other there. Because what has developed in the human being has developed in a certain sense through the outer world, each has his own health. This is why we must make the human being capable of understanding his environment, even to the very functions of the body. For the man who is born into circumstances in which light muscles and nerves are necessary, it would indeed be foolish to develop heavy muscles. Where does the gauge for the successful developing of the human being lie? It lies within the human being. As with money, so it is with health. When we go after money in order to have it for benevolent purposes, then it is something wholesome, something good. Going after money may not be condemned, for it is something that enables us to forward the cultural process. If we go after money for money's sake, then it is absurd, laughable. It is the same with health. If we go after health for health's sake, then the striving has no significance. If we put ourselves out for health for what we can achieve through our health, then the effort for the sake of health is justified. Whoever would acquire money should first make it clear to himself how much of it he needs. Then he should press forward for it. Whoever yearns for health must look into the easily misunderstood words like comfort, love of life, enjoyment of life, and what could be meant with them. Joy of life, satisfaction in life, love of life are present in savages. In the human being in whom outer and inner life are in harmony, in the harmoniously developed man, conditions must be such that if there is discomfort, if there is this or that hurt of body or of soul, this feeling of discomfort must be seen as some sort of illness, as a disharmony. Hence it is important in all education, in all public work, not to carry on routinely, but rather out of the expanse of a cultural view, so that joy and satisfaction in life are possible.

It is curious that what has just been said has been said by a representative of spiritual science. Yes, so says spiritual science whom people reproach for striving for asceticism. Someone comes along who takes great pleasure in nightly visits to the girlie shows or in downing his eight glasses of beer. Then he encounters people who take joy in something on a higher level. So he remarks that they punish themselves. No, they would punish themselves were they to sit with him in the music hall. Whoever enjoys the girlie shows and such belongs there, and it would be absurd to deprive him of the enjoyment. It is healthy only to take away his taste for it.

One should work to ennoble one's pleasures, one's gratifications in life. It is not so that Anthroposophists come together because they suffer when talking about higher worlds, but rather because it is their heart's deepest enjoyment. It would be the most terrible deprivation for them to sit down and play poker. They are completely full of the joy of life in every fiber of their beings.

There is no point in saying, even concerning health, that one should do this and so. The point is to provide joy and satisfaction in life. Indeed, the spiritual scientist in this case is quite the epicure of life. How is this to be conferred upon health? We must be clear about this, that when we give someone a rule about health, we must aim at what gives joy, bliss and pleasure to his astral body. For by the astral body the other members are affected. This is more easily said than done.

There are, for example, even those among the theosophists who mortify their flesh by no longer eating any meat. Should these be people who still hanker for meat, then must this mortification be seen at best as a preparation for a later condition. There comes, however, a point at which a person may have such a relation with his environment that it becomes impossible for him to eat meat. A physician who was also of those who ate no meat, not because he was a

theosophist, but because he considered this way of life healthy, was asked by a friend why he partook of no meat. He countered with the question, “Why don't you eat horse or cat meat?” Of course, the friend had to say that they disgusted him, although he ate meat of pig or cow, etc. To the physician all meat was disgusting.

Only then, when the inner subjective conditions correspond to the objective fact, has the moment come when the outer fact has a healthy effect. We must be inwardly up to the outer facts. This is expressed by the words, “comfortable feeling,” which we may not use lightly, but rather in its dignified meaning of harmonious concordance of our inner forces. Happiness and joy and delight and satisfaction, which are the foundation for a healthy life, always spring from the same foundation, from the feelings of an inner life that attend creativity, inner activity. Happy is the human being when he can be active. Of course, this activity is not to be understood as coarse activity.

Why does love make the human being happy? It is an activity we often do not see as such because it moves from within out, embracing the other one. With it we let our inner being flow out. Hence love's healing and blessing of life. Creativity may be of the most intimate nature; it does not have to become tumultuously visible. When someone is hunched over a book and the impressions from it depress him, overwhelm him, he will gradually become depressed. When, however, the reading of a book brings pictures to mind, then there is a creative activity that makes for happiness. It is something quite similar to becoming pale when one is anxious about coming events. Then the blood flows inwards in order to strengthen us so that what comes at us from the outside can find a counter-balance within. With the feeling of anxiety inner activity is alerted to outer activity. Becoming aware of an inner activity is healing. Had the human being been able to feel the activity of the inner

formation in the arising of the eyes out of the undifferentiated basic organ, then he would have perceived a feeling of well-being. He was not conscious, however, of that happening.

Instead of bringing a worn-out human being to a sanitarium, it were far better to bring him into an environment where he would be happy, at first soul-happy, but also physically happy. When you put a human being into an environment of joy, in which with each step he takes an inner feeling of joy awakes, that it is which will make him healthy, when, for example, he sees sunbeams streaming through the trees and perceives the colors and scents of flowers. This, however, a person must himself be able to feel, so that he himself can take the problem of his health in hand. Every step should stir him to inner activity. Paracelsus gave us the beautiful saying, “It is best that everyone should be himself, by himself, and no one else.” It is already a limitation of what makes us healthy if we must first go to another person. Here we are confronted with outer impressions that for a short while appear to help, but finally lead to hysteria.

When one considers the problem so, one comes upon other healthy thoughts. There are people and doctors today, especially “lay doctors,” who battle against doctors. Medicine does, indeed, need to be reformed, but this cannot come about through these battles. Rather must facts of spiritual science themselves reach into science. Spiritual science exists, but not to further dilettantism. There are people today who have the itch to cure others. It is, of course, easy to find this or that illness in a person. So somebody finds this or that organ in a person different from the way it appears in another. Or a person does not breathe as the one possessed with the curing fever thinks all people should breathe. So for this a cure gets invented. Shocking, most shocking! For it is not at all a matter of directing one's efforts at a routine concept of health. It is easy to say that this and that do not make for health. Consider someone who has lost one of his legs. He

is sick, certainly sicker than one who breathes irregularly, whose lungs are affected. It is not a question of healing this person. It would be foolish to say, “One must see to it that this person gets a leg again!” Just try to get him to grow another leg! What really matters is that life for his person be made as bearable as possible.

This is so in gross, but also in more subtle conditions. It is a fact that one can find a small flaw in each human being. Also, what often matters here is not to clear up the flaw, but rather, despite the human being's flaw, to make his life as bearable as possible. Think of a plant, the stem of which is wounded. The tissues and the bark grow around the wound. So is it also with human beings. The forces of nature maintain life as they grow around the flaw. Especially lay doctors fall victim to the error of wanting to cure everything. They would like to cultivate one kind of health for all human beings. There is as little of the one kind of health as there is one kind of normal human being. Not only are illnesses individual, but also healths. The best we can give to the human being, be we physician or counselor, is, to give him the firm frame of mind that he feels himself comfortable when he is healthy, uncomfortable when he is sick. Today this is not at all so easy in our circumstances. He who understands the matter of health will mostly fear such sicknesses as do not come to expression through fatigue and pain. It is, therefore, detrimental to sedate oneself with morphium. It is healthy when health brings zest. Illness brings apathy. This healthy way of living we can acquire only when we make ourselves inwardly strong. This we do when we oppose our complicated conditions with strong, inner activity. The feverish search for health will cease only then when human beings no longer strive for health as such. The human being must learn to feel and perceive whether he is healthy and to know that he can easily put up with a flaw in health. This is only possible through a strong world conception that is effective right down into the physical body. This world outlook makes for harmony. This,

however, is only possible through a world concept that is not dependent upon outer impressions. The spiritual scientific world concept leads man into regions that he can only reach if he is inwardly active. One cannot read a spiritual scientific book as one reads other books. It must be so written that it evokes one's own activity. The more one must struggle, the more there is between the lines, the healthier it is. This is so only in the theoretical matters, but spiritual science can be effective in all areas.

What we call spiritual science exists in order to become effective as a strong spiritual movement. It calls forth concepts that are provided with the most powerful energies so that human beings can take a stance against what faces one. Spiritual science would like to give an inner life that extends right into the limbs, into the blood circulation. Then will every individual perceive his health in his feeling of joy, in his feeling of zest and satisfaction. Almost every dietary regime is worthless. That the other fellow tells me that this and that are good for me is of no consequence. What matters is that I find satisfaction when taking my food. The human being must have understanding for his relation to this or that food. We should know what the spiritual process is that goes on between nature and us. To spiritualize everything — that's what becoming healthy means.

Perhaps it is currently thought that for the spiritual scientist eating is something to which he is indifferent, that he gorges himself, devoid of understanding for it. To become aware of what it means to partake of a part of the cosmos, a part that has been drenched with sunlight; to know of the complete spiritual relationship in which our environment stands, to savor it not only physically, but also spiritually, frees us from all sickening disgust, from all sickening encumbrances. Thus we see that to direct this striving for health onto the right tracks sets humanity a great challenge. But spiritual science will be strong. It will transform every human being who dedicates himself to it, bringing him to the attainment



of what, for himself, is the normal pattern. This is at the same time a noble striving toward freedom that comes out of spiritual science and makes man his own master. Every man is an individual being from the standpoint of his characteristics as well as of his states of health and illness. We are placed in lawful relation to the world and must learn to know our situation therein. No outer power can help us. When we find this strong inner stance, then only are we complete human beings from whom nothing can be taken. But it also holds that nobody can give us anything. Nevertheless, we shall find our way in health and in illness because we have a strong, inner stance within ourselves. This secret, too, of all healthy striving has been expressed by a spirit, an eminently healthy thinking and healthy feeling spirit. He tells us how the harmonized human being unerringly goes his way. It was Goethe who, in his poem, Orphic Primal Words, says:

“As on the day that to the world bestowed thee
The sun stood high to greet the planet's sphere,
Thou didst thenceforth thrive ever on and on,
According to the law that brought thee here.
So must thou be, canst not from thee escape
The Sibyls and the Prophets spoke thy fate;
Not time nor power can destroy the mould
When form once cast doth livingly unfold.”



In pursuit for eternal youth and live on earth...