

Activating our Health
A Report of a Lecture by Dr. Philip Incao
Sarah Hummingbird

Happy autumn everyone! At this year's regional meeting of kindergarten teachers at the Denver Waldorf School we heard from Dr. Philip Incao on the subject of how we kindergarten teachers can maintain our own health. It was a good talk, full of funny stories and inspirational quotes, and I will try to condense the high points for you here.

Dr. Incao began by saying that when he became an anthroposophic doctor he wanted to help people from the very beginning of our lives, so he started by delivering babies. The mothers came to trust him and ask him about caring for their newborns. Of course, he told them, the babies should be swaddled and kept warm and away from all stimulation. He reminded us how important it is, when speaking with parents, to remember our own confusion and hesitation when we first encountered this esoteric approach to health and childhood.

Dr. Incao spoke about the four parts of our being: the physical body, the life force (etheric) that permeates the physical body, the soul, and the spirit. These are associated with the elements earth, water, air, and fire respectively. In considering health, it is the relationship between fire and air that concerns us most: if there is not enough air, the fire dies out; if there is too much air, the fire rages and its warmth becomes threatening rather than useful. He compared the air to our moods — one day we want a certain thing; the next day that thing no longer interests us; we turn to something else; we are excited, depressed, and so forth. When the air of the moods is irregular, the flame of the spirit wavers and rages and cannot be used as a steady warmth in our lives.

Dr. Incao gave a little verse for children:

Fire water earth and air
Weave the body that I wear.

In addition to the fourfold nature of body, etheric body, soul, and spirit, there is the threefold nature of head (nerve), respiration (heart and lung) and metabolism (blood and guts, as he said). It is important to maintain a balanced rhythm in our feeling life, in the working of our heart and lungs. But we must avoid getting bogged down in our personal preferences, our likes and dislikes. We must bring feeling and thinking together, combine the clarity of thought with the warmth of feeling.

If we tamp down the soul forces, cultivating our understanding rather than our likes and dislikes we practice being guided by the spirit rather than the soul. This effort to change our thinking will help our health.

From the work of Dr. Mees, Dr. Incao shared a metaphor for us to work with: Picture a clear sky with a bright sun (the spirit) shining, warming the air (the soul of the earth) and the earth. Dark clouds come, our unresolved karmic issues. We are invited to clear the clouds, but when the clouds become too heavy, there is rain, which might cause floods, mudslides, and other kinds of damage. This rain and the resulting (temporary) damage to the earth represents physical illness. This suggests that when we aren't able to work on karma by our efforts, we are given "blessed illness" and the karma is transformed at a physical level.

When asked whether illness therefore means a failure in the spiritual realm, Dr. Incao reminded us that we are none of us perfect, and he offered a couple of quotes, one from the Chinese: “Fall down eight times, get up nine,” and the other from Winston Churchill: “The secret is to go from one failure to the next without loss of enthusiasm.”

In the end, the most important thing for our health is our attitude of soul. We can endeavor to have the sun of our spirit shine stronger and to carry more love in our hearts, but illness comes to help us with the problems that we aren't yet able to handle at another level.

To be healthy means to wake up to ourselves, to be inwardly active. What is it to be inwardly active? First, as Einstein said, the important thing is never to stop questioning; question everything, believe nothing. Ralph Nader's father said to him when he came home from school, “Ralph, what did you do today — think or believe?”

We must overcome our own inner laziness and become curious. We must want to know. Motivating ourselves is a matter of will, not of intelligence. This takes effort. As we cultivate curiosity, interest, and passion to know the truth, we will find joy in the experience of truth. For example, with difficult children, ask, “What is going on with the child?” Rather than making judgments, strive to understand. It requires effort.

Emerson said the one thing of value is to have an active soul. This is more important than an active body. Here, Dr. Incao referred to the many people who run and work out for their health. This is not a bad thing at all; movement is good. But it is the active soul, interested in everything outside itself that will keep us healthy.

Dr. Incao referred to a quote by St. John of the Cross (see *Words to Live By* by E. Easwaren) that love is not to have great feelings. It is rather great detachment and the capacity to suffer for the beloved.

According to Tibetan medicine, illness is caused by attachment, ignorance, and hate. According to Rudolf Steiner, the causes of illness are to be found in egotism and self-interest, in fear and materialism. We need to strive to detach from our own point of view, to become more sensitive in our spirit and less sensitive in our soul.

We can keep Lucifer and Ahriman in check by being Luciferic (interested, curious, and passionate) toward the world and Ahrimanic (cool, analytical, questioning, and discerning) toward ourselves. Our three most important tasks are to become inwardly active, to be willing to suffer for the beloved, and to cultivate a sense of rhythm.

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