

Spiritual Dimensions of Illness and Health

By Bert Hellinger

If we stand in our places as members of a family, we feel immediately better when we look at certain other members with whom we feel in tune. By the same token, when we look at family members with whom we are not in agreement – or whom we reject rather than love – we feel uneasy or angry or sad. Both love and rejection are felt in the body, causing us to feel better or worse as they take hold.

The Family Field

However, it often is not a personal matter; that is, we are not, as individuals, in agreement or disagreement with others in the family. It is the family as a whole, comprising not only its living members but also those who have died, that has a particular dynamic stance. Because a family is part of a field that is made up of both the living and the dead, they are all in resonance with one another, for better or for worse. In this field, none of the family can be excluded or lost, and the field is in disorder if members are rejected or forgotten.

These individuals exercise a strong influence on the present family and on the health of its members. This influence often shows up in illness. What does this mean? It means that an illness often represents an excluded member of the family. Put another way, this illness or malady encompasses the excluded member, forcing us, through the pain that it causes, to look at the excluded and to acknowledge his or her right to belong and to take his or her place among all the other members of the family. Therefore, while we may feel that an illness is in dissonance with our body, we become aware that it is actually in resonance with another person.

Perhaps you'd like to check this now for yourselves. You may close your eyes if you wish and come in tune with your body. Then you go to the organ or muscle or bone that hurts. You connect with that organ, become one with it. You allow yourself to look in the direction it wants you to look. Perhaps the person with whom this organ is in resonance comes into view. You look at that person with love, open your heart, take the person into your soul, and give him or her a home in you. Then, after a little while, you allow yourself to feel whether there has been any change in the organ that hurt, and you thank that organ for directing your attention to the person who had been missing from your soul.

Illnesses very often are connected to the fate of another member of the family that has been excluded or forgotten. Health, on the other hand, is restored when this excluded person is welcomed back into the family. Illness results

when one person becomes entangled with the fate of another family member who may have died many generations before. Thus, health is made possible when the neglected family member is received back into the family with love and when reconciliation with that person has been achieved.

Essential Insights

On the surface, this seems to be a very practical approach. Does it also have a spiritual dimension? Yes. It presupposes that in our soul we acknowledge that all people, irrespective of any moral judgment, have the same right to belong. This runs contrary to many religious beliefs, for instance in Christianity, where the predominant idea is that some people are chosen by God to be close to him and blessed, and that others are rejected by him and condemned.

On the familial level, some members of a family are considered to have the right to belong, whereas others have forfeited this right and are excluded. But the earth that supports and nourishes us supports and nourishes all beings, whether we consider them good or bad. The sun shines upon the good and the bad equally, and rain falls upon the just and the unjust equally. Therefore, the creative movement that keeps everything going is kind to everything and supports everything. To tune into this movement in every phase of life is what I would call spiritual. To give everything and everybody a place in our souls and in our hearts tunes us into this fundamental movement. To be in tune with everything as it is – this is spiritual. From this spiritual attitude and stance, we gain essential insights with regard to illness and health. When we are in tune with these insights, we help people in a spiritual way.

Illness and Conscience

There are other aspects of spiritual healing that I want to discuss briefly.

In the work I do, it becomes apparent that many illnesses are connected to the idea that we can save somebody by taking upon ourselves the illness or the fate of that person. We observe this especially with children. Very often a child wants to take upon him- or herself the illness of the mother, for instance. Such children become sad like the mother, become ill like the mother, and want to die like her or in place of her. If they wish to do this, they feel innocent and good. They feel in tune with the conscience, because they do this out of love. Therefore, they get ill with a good conscience. Their conscience supports their illness and their wish to die.

I offer an example. In a workshop for teachers and difficult students in Mexico, a teacher presented the case of a 12-year-old boy, who refused to learn any more. In the constellation, I placed the boy next to his teacher with his parents

opposite. I looked at the boy and said to him, "You are sad." At once, he began to weep. I looked at the mother and saw that she too began to weep. From this, I concluded that the boy's sadness was connected with something that had happened in his mother's family. I asked her and she answered that she had a twin sister who died at birth.

I placed a representative for her twin sister at some distance looking away from the family, and then asked the mother to stand behind her. I asked her how she felt in this place. She said, "Here, I feel better."

What does this show? In her heart, she wanted to follow her twin sister into death. This is a very common dynamic that comes to light through family constellations. It is a dynamic that leads to illness and death. A person says in her heart: "I follow you into death."

Then, in this constellation, I asked the boy to take the place of his mother behind her twin sister and asked him how he felt there. He, too, answered, "Here, I feel better."

What does this mean? He said in his heart to his mother, "I die in your place." This, too, is a common dynamic that leads to illness and death. The movement revealed why the boy no longer wanted to learn.

Healing Movements

The question now is, "How can this dynamic that leads to illness and death be stopped or reversed?" Obviously, the twin sister of the mother was in a certain way excluded from the family. Perhaps the pain of her loss was so great that they did not grieve for her in an appropriate way. The solution would be that she is received back into the family.

The movement that will achieve this is very simple. In the constellation, I placed the representative of the twin sister next to the mother. They looked into each other's eyes and embraced with deep love. Then the mother turned to her husband and said, "Now I will stay." Then she looked at her son and said, "Now I will stay." The boy's face lit up with joy. He was no longer sad. Once the twin sister was received back into the family, neither mother nor son was compelled to follow her into death any longer. And, of course, the father also was happy, because he too had felt that his wife wanted to leave the family.

Uniting with the Divine

So, now the question becomes, “What about this might be considered spiritual?” My initial response is that it is the idea that nobody is excluded or forgotten, that everybody who belongs to the family is given his or her rightful place in the family. In the second place, it is that everybody is left to his or her own fate and destiny, and that nobody attempts to get in the way of life and death. Finally, it means that nobody assumes that he or she has the right to take upon him or herself a responsibility that must be left to God; however we may define that word. This conviction is the result of an insight of a spiritual insight that our destiny and our illness and health are in the hands of forces that are beyond our understanding and beyond our hopes and our fears.

How can we then help those who are ill? We can only help when we remain in tune with these forces, when we do only that which they permit us to do and if we allow them to work through us. Such helping and healing is humble. And yet, it can heal not only individuals; it also can heal a family, a clan, and even a whole nation. All the great spiritual men and women were also healers in this wider sense. At the same time, healing in the deepest sense is uniting with the divine. It brings peace to the body, to the soul, to the family, and even further. Therefore, spiritual healing is going with a movement of love that is beyond merely personal love and personal concern. It is doing and non-doing at the same time, allowing something greater to take over. It is common and rare, humble and vast. What does one call this way of helping and healing? I call it spiritual.

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