

Therapeutic awareness

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Abstract

The therapeutic contributions of Rudolf Steiner are vast and cover many fields of human endeavor and serving – from agriculture to zoology. His therapeutic ways of practical endeavor can and do easily become completely exteriorized, even though his cosmology and the emphasis on human freedom, as being inwardly free of anything other than what is placed there in full consciousness, provide a key orientation for any therapy within the context of world-becoming. The implication of true freedom opens to the necessity of life itself to become a therapeutic tending. This article summarizes eight ‘ways’ of being therapeutically present within the inherent non-duality of self-world. These ‘ways’ are based in Rudolf Steiner’s second method of foundational attention (Steiner, 2011, 2017) His own work concentrated on the ‘way of knowledge’. He also suggested an accompanying ‘way of feeling’, which forms the basis of this article.

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Human beings, along with Earth and Her creatures, are undergoing vast and deep and permanent alterations as well as extinctions. Such transmutations, due to technological developments in all fields and accompanied with cultural degradations of soul and spirit life, are aspects of humanity’s taking over, completely, who we are and who we will become, but doing so, mainly, with very little self-knowledge.

If transmutation occurs without being met with deep inner awareness, unsustainability of Earth’s natural bounty and the destruction of the very nature of being human are the inevitable result. Any

consideration of therapeutics, within every realm of practice, must take into account this context. Doing so, even with a minimum of contemplation, reveals that along with the given therapeutic applications of the wisdom of the Spiritual Science of Rudolf Steiner, ‘therapeutic living’ becomes a necessity. Body, soul, spirit – willing, feeling, thinking – now require therapeutic nurturing as a way of life, a nurturing of ‘innerness’, in a time when the very notion of the importance and significance of an inner life is becoming obscure.

I have taken up this task of developing ways of therapeutic living for some 30 years, together

with Cheryl Sanders-Sardello, until her recent death, under the rubric of 'Spiritual Psychology'. This psychology was never intended to be 'anthroposophical psychology', another psychology existing alongside probably hundreds of other approaches to psychology, to be utilized mainly by anthroposophists. I have taken up this task, not as an anthroposophist, but as an anthroposopher, as one deeply dedicated to Anthroposophy, but unconstrained by what is deemed acceptable and 'orthodox'.

Not only am I an anthroposopher, I am an anthroposopher of Rudolf Steiner's 'alternate way'. In *Occult science, an outline*, Steiner speaks of his way of Anthroposophy as 'the direct path of knowledge'. He speaks of another possible path of Anthroposophy, 'The path of "feeling"':

The path of feeling, however, turns directly to feeling only and seeks to ascend from this to knowledge. It is based on the fact that when the soul surrenders itself completely to a feeling for a certain length of time, this feeling transforms itself into knowledge, into a picture like perception. If, for example, the soul fills itself completely during weeks, months, or even a longer period, with the feeling of humility, then the content of feeling transforms itself into a perception. One may, by passing step by step through such feelings, also find a path into the super-sensible regions. (Steiner, 2011, p. 379)

Rudolf Steiner goes on to say that the path of feeling is not very suitable for this time because it requires that one have a great deal of solitude in life in order to carry out the contemplations needed to go through this form of soul development. I have solved this difficulty, though, with my researches into silence, given in *Silence: The mystery of wholeness* (Sardello, 2006). There, suitable ways are presented on being within the Silence in the midst of our wild and chaotically busy world. Once Silence is felt as an actual presence, a being rather than a 'state

achieved', we have the necessary inner guidance for deepening into the Silence in the midst of any condition whatsoever.

I have developed multiple ways of following the 'Path of Feeling'. Immersing oneself in each of these 'steps' opens the possibility of therapeutic living.

Attention

The capacity of attention, when opened as experience, attentiveness, dissolves the distinction between 'inner' and 'outer' that characterizes ordinary consciousness. Non-duality characterizes the consciousness that is attention. If I say, 'Pay attention', doing so requires using attention while not being within it. 'I' feel as if I am here, a kind of onlooker, who then notices something over there, separate from the attention. Attention, as a capacity, is always attention within attention, and what is tended is never 'on its own'. It is immersed and nurtured within spirit, now awakened.

Attention is the mysterious place of our true freedom. When we are within our attention, nothing can confine it. When we are not within our attention, however, it is subject to being captured every moment by 'attention merchants' – advertising, news, thinking, images, distractions of every sort. Without the capacity of attention, we live in constant nervousness.

Attention only exists within the moment, the Infinite moment. It is not part of time as succession. Attention lives and dies each instant of its coming into being. It exists within the version of itself known as the Silence.

The Silence

There is a strong tendency to imagine silence as the absence of sound, as merely being quiet. Such a way of imagining silence deprives it of being anything in itself. The Silence exists everywhere, around us, and within everything in the world, expressing differently wherever noticed. For example, the silence of a brook forms one 'tone' of the Silence, while the Silence of a grove of trees forms another, while the Silence within the noisiness of street sounds of a

city forms yet another; all are one Silence of many manifestations. Silence never goes away. We go away from it. It is the 'other side' of existence, the 'in' of ex-istence. Silence is like the 'container' of all contents, and when a content is understood without noticing the Silence, content limits itself to being only information, often acting as if it is knowledge. With the felt presence of the Silence, everything is being born each instant.

Silence is wholly receptive, so we notice it only when we are open and receptive, radically so. Then, the presence of the Silence becomes palpable. Being able to feel the objective presence of Silence has great soul value. Silence initiates peace within the life of the soul. Silence mediates the polarities of soul life. Without presence to silence, the polarities of soul life are experienced as in conflict and full of contradiction.

The substance of silence stands between the contradictions and contraries of soul life and prevents them from fighting each other. The contradictions meet, not head on and directly, but have to travel through the medium of silence, which graces each of the contradictions.

Silence is the medium of therapeutic healing because spirit re-creates us through the medium of silence. Without the substance of silence we cannot free ourselves from all that has affected us from the past.

Heart Awareness

Heart-awareness, heartfulness, locates the experience of being human within the soul and spiritual center of the body, the heart. Here, soul and spirit unite within body, assuring we are not only biology and physiology, but are of the 'middle world'.

The practice of heartfulness contemplatively engages the actual organ of the heart, inwardly revealing what it is like to be incarnated as body and in the earthly world.

In developing the capacity to creatively radiate from the center outward, the holy, whole, nature of the human body reveals itself as intimately united

with imagination, creative presence, earth-unity, and the unfolding of the livingness of all things. It feels like our natural state, forgotten, long ago.

Heartfulness, the 'middle place' between thinking and willing, originates non-dual presence in everyday life, existing between ourselves and everything visible and invisible, given as the most primary way of knowing as 'being-with' – that is, intimate, intuitive knowing.

By becoming what we are present with, through the rhythm of body, intensified most completely within the heart, we know by communion rather than by the distance of mental-ness.

Heartfulness can be lived and experienced, not just in moments of the practice of contemplation, but as sensing, perceiving, knowing, and non-causal action.

Heartfulness alters what we know as power, into receptive-action, in harmony with the rhythms of Earth and Cosmos, from our feet to our head, from the widest expanses to the deepest interior.

Death Awareness

Death-awareness differs, infinitely, from 'awareness-of-death'. Death-awareness precedes awareness of death, though it is not conscious unless held in contemplation, within the Silence, and Attention.

The Whole of Life consists of that 'half' we call living, and that half we speak of as death. The two are always the fullness of Life. We have lost that sense of wholeness. An interval, time, exists in ordinary consciousness between life and death. This makes death seem across that border, and makes death seem repugnant. Contemplated deeply, the temporal demarcation between 'living' and 'death' dissolves and there is only Life. Living is the specific content of Life, the daily unfolding in particulars, while Life is the container. We are always within the 'container', the infinite 'now', and within that container, there is no death. The body dies, but 'I' do not die.

Once this truth is experienced in contemplation, it also opens us to being present, in feeling, which is nonetheless very specific, with anyone whose body has died. This expanded presence leads to

experiencing everything that occurs in our earthly being as an intimate composing of the relation of the living and those whose body has died. Fear of dying dissolves, never completely, but we are no longer subject to the dominance of anxiety.

Language Awareness

Language is given to us. It exists before we begin to speak. The gift is beyond all experience, yet exists for us. Words are related to the eternal word. When emptied of this dimension, they first become knowledge, then mere information, and then empty, and we waste away. Very few words of fullness of Being are left, and contemplatively entering those words can lead us away from merely using language into offering our speaking-being as the medium of presence of spiritual reality. Among these special, still living words are: Love, Death, Wonder, Life, and a few others.

Language is the medium of truth, and also the medium of error and lie. To feelingly know one from the other requires that the medium of language be spoken and heard with attentiveness, silence, and heartfulness. Language is not to add words to wisdom, but to be used by wisdom to convey itself to another.

Self-Awareness

The riddle of the 'I'. The 'I' is the beginning and the end, the ultimate truth. Distinctions are made between the 'lower self' and the 'higher self'. Or the 'I' is sometimes spoken of as 'the Christ in me'. But, what is the experience like?

We cannot add anything to our Being to become self-aware. Rather, everything has to be taken away of what we think we know of ourselves, and even what we are. Self-Awareness is 'no-thing'. It cannot be thought, it cannot be felt, it cannot be willed. To try and 'grasp' the 'I', the 'I' had to become separate from itself. Thus, we take the 'I' to be related to the 'me'. And, similarly, think that, somehow, it is possible to get from the 'me' to the 'I'.

Self-Awareness can be experienced only within and as utter Stillness, something radically deeper than the Silence. It is pure receptivity,

radical receptivity. Spiritual traditions have always known this, and provide elaborate ways of stripping personality. These ways, though, often take one into a tradition, a religion, a 'Way', where the simplicity of self-awareness can easily yield to particular surrounds deemed necessary for its realization.

Within the I, there is only listening. The I listens, that is all, and everything. Within the poise of listening, tremendous activity occurs. We are still, and the I speaks through us, through the senses. This brings about a fundamental change in which there is no 'positive' activity, no 'self-expression'. Surrender is the way. Within the I, everything is present, it is not leaving this world for the spiritual worlds, but everything is no-thing and no-thing is everything, and yet specific and revealed through sensing.

Sense Awareness

I cannot use the phrase 'sensory awareness' here because that phrase is now commonly understood as meaning intensified presence to the sensory world through the various senses. Within an awakened 'I', however, what can be immediately experienced is that the senses are not within us; we are within the senses.

Think of sensing as the act of the 'I' giving itself to the world. Sensation is not the result of the stimulation of the sense organs, which are only media of transmission. Sensation is the non-dual receptivity of soul. If I can sense what someone else is sensing, then the senses are not inside the body. To call such sensing 'empathy' is only to name a phenomenon, and, typically, to go on and make a theory of that phenomenon, like the theory of empathy, rather than tending what actually happens. To be present within the act of sensing in this manner requires developing the intuitive capacities of the heart, gradually feeling them spread through the body, where sensing unites into whole presence.

We are soul-sensitive to sensory impressions, not through the sensory organs (that is a secondary matter), but through the medium of the senses. This

medium fills all space and contains all sight, smell, sound, and the rest of the senses. All the senses are variations of light, and light contains all the elements of the senses. The I is the fount of senses, or the light. This light can vary in strength, and thus sensing can be expanded or contracted. We identify sensing with a contraction of light into physical form. Clairvoyance, though, is the instance of expanded sensing into clear sensing, whether that be seeing, or hearing, or touch, or any of the senses.

Spiritual-Earth Awareness

Before I-awareness began to emerge, millennia ago, human consciousness and Earth consciousness were the same. The vestiges of that consciousness occur in moments of feeling the exquisite joy, calmness, wonder, that occur within the natural world. Such consciousness can become the opening into the possibility of spiritual-earth awareness. This mode of awareness is critical to therapeutic presence of any kind, for any therapeutic activity occurring within wholeness is also Earth-healing and world-healing.

Besides the three states of waking, sleeping, and dreaming, there is a state that is even deeper, the embrace of Earth. We experience only vestiges of it, when we sometimes awaken with a sweet feeling, deep and throughout the body. Touching into the embrace of Earth, the overwhelming sense is that Earth lives wholly within joy, is wholly receptive, and Earth as we see and feel and experience Earth, when fully sensorily present, is the outward expression of this joy.

This state of Earth-embrace can also be approached in very deep contemplation, starting with being within the deepest of Silence, utter Stillness. Then, from within the Stillness, if the lips gesture the word 'Earth' (within the Stillness, word and the content of the word are one activity), the whole of Stillness reconfigures into the sweet embrace of Earth, a state that can now be sustained within contemplative awareness.

From there, it becomes possible to be contemplatively within any dimension of Earth. For example, if, from within the presence of the sweet

Earth, the word 'Tree' is gestured, the whole of one's being enters being 'tree'.

Within Earth-consciousness trees are inwardly present and experienced, with immediacy, as Earth's individuating awareness, something like the 'I' of Earth. The sap of trees, from within tree-sensation, is felt as an incredible flow of strength, the strength of the inner earth reaching to unite with sky, full of strength, something experienced like 'joy-strength-awareness'. Trees awareness as something like beings who live Earth awareness, each, and One at the same time, root and sky as one, all as perfect Silence and Stillness, a single tree, all trees, Whole Earth-awareness.

Rudolf Steiner's 'Second Way', the way of feeling, takes one into the depths of the Spiritual Earth, which is the ground, for us, for any therapeutic act. If we go deep enough, we find ourselves as if facing, meeting Rudolf Steiner, in the region of knowledge.

These eight ways do not complete the description of therapeutic awareness. There are others, such as 'relating', 'conversation', 'healing', 'Stillness', 'virtue'. Nor are the ones introduced in this article sufficiently detailed, though they are spoken in such a manner that the truth of them can be felt, while not confined to the manner spoken here.

How does one then enter this ground of inherent therapeutic presence? What is spoken here is from the realm of Wisdom. Not 'my' wisdom, but what occurs through inner listening. It cannot be taught, not as anything of a 'positivistic' nature, not as a set of skills to add on to who we are. There is nothing to learn, for learning would make what is immediate seem both distant and mental.

We develop into the ground of therapeutic awareness through a process of removal, of subtraction rather than addition. Each of these eight ways of therapeutic awareness, for example, begin to be noticed by subtracting the overlays of personality, acquired knowledge, power, identity, prestige, position, and most of all, spiritual greed.

This manner of developing therapeutic awareness is not, however, a variation of the 'via negativa' of mysticism. The realm of Wisdom can become science, and science here is practical wisdom. Feeling lives within Wisdom, and Wisdom is experienced as radical receptivity. ☯



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