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### **1. Health as a life principle**

Can we always be healthy and stay healthy?

One of the medical utopias is to create the perfect human being.

It was not only the genetic researchers in the early 2000s who, in their Human Genome Project dreamed of creating the always healthy, beautiful human being who would be spared aging and illness. But utopias are, as we know, constructs of ideas. At best, they can inspire us to improve human life through dreams and deeds, no more and no less. So, after the unsuccessful attempts to perfect the human being, we are left to think about how we can stay healthy. Human life, in fact all living things, means becoming and passing away. In view of this undisputed fact, how can health become principle of life - especially in these crisis-ridden times, when most people's everyday lives are characterized by stress and pressure to perform?

In my presentation, I want to suggest how we can come to terms with the fact that we cannot live endlessly but may become ill, in an appreciative and therefore constructive way. The very first step is to accept this unavoidable fact.

That sounds so obvious. But is it? I think not. We live in a society that is geared towards performance and perfection and illness and death are perceived as a disruption rather than a challenge. Many people today have deeply internalized the demands for performance and perfection. They devalue themselves or are being devalued by others when they feel they do not meet these standards.

These excessive demands on themselves and others almost inevitably lead to not feeling good enough and devaluing others who do not perform.

This creates a sense of deficiency and unspoken grievances that can lead to illness.

It would therefore be a constructive first step towards health as a principle of life to resist these devaluations and their psychological and physical consequences. And to soberly recognize that nobody has to be perfect and that everyone is a perfect being - with all the light and dark sides.

This is how I would summarize health as a life principle: a constructive and sober, cheerful and realistic approach to the facts of life and to accept yourself and other people, the world and society as they are. And not to make life unbearable with complaints, devaluations and negativism to the point of mental and physical illness. Health means accepting and recognizing what life means: change.

## **2. What does mental mean?**

This term describes all internal, cognitive processes such as attention, thinking (problem solving), emotions, memory, learning, motivation, perception. In my opinion, however, this meaning needs to be explained and supplemented.

However, people are by no means just cognitive beings who "work" with their heads. We are controlled by our feelings, by urges, desires and dreams, by the unconscious, which we can only understand very partially or not at all in the processes of action. Not taking into account the effect of feelings, the unconscious, the behavior controlled by instincts leads to underestimate the important driving forces that also have a positive influence on cognitive abilities. If we understand the term "mental" in a broader sense of "conscious", we have the chance to understand mental health as the result of a process of consciousness.

This would include feeling and recognizing our feelings, that we deal with our dreams and visions, that we think logically and become able to observe ourselves in order to gradually master a skill: Understanding and recognizing ourselves.

## **3. What is health?**

An official definition "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

This is stated by the WHO Constitution of 1948, to which the following definition was added in 2019: "Mental health and well-being are influenced not only by individual characteristics, but also by the social circumstances in which people find themselves and the environment in which they live". In 1986, the Ottawa Charter on Health Promotion adopted by the (WHO) postulated the need for a rethink in the fight against disease control. Disease should no longer be defined by a way of thinking that attributes the development of disease exclusively to individual pathogens or risks.

In future, health promotion should aim to "enable all people to have a greater degree of self-determination over their health and thus enable them to strengthen their health-related responsibility for their own health." (WHO, 1986, p.1) According to these WHO definitions, being healthy means that a person is able to feel well, take care of him-/herself, live a self-determined life, be aware of his/her own wishes and needs and to satisfy them and to find a way between rest and work.

### **A further definition of health**

This description of health by the WHO presupposes a lot: above all self-awareness, without which all other abilities are strictly speaking, not possible. Feeling well presupposes that a person can feel and is aware of this feeling. Taking care of yourself means feeling what is necessary for self-preservation. Living a self-determined life requires having an idea of who you are, where you want to go and what you need to do to avoid being dependent on other people. Deciding how much stimulation and work and how much rest we need, to stay in balance means knowing and perceiving yourself.

These are all abilities that require consciousness. In this respect the question arises: How can a person become self-aware in order to stay healthy? And with this awareness also accept that illness and death are part of life? You may be surprised by this thesis.

Self-awareness as a crucial aspect of health?

Therapists and doctors know only too well - and I experience it with my clients in my practice: many people today have a problem with feeling themselves in their body and perceiving themselves in their mental processes. However, this is the prerequisite for finding the right balance between exertion and recovery, between inevitable and self-inflicted dependencies. In addition to this it is important not only to create rules for yourself so that you can be able to make conscious decisions, but also to create a vigilance and presence in and presence towards yourself and others: being present here and now. As strange as this may sound, we need to recognize, acknowledge and perceive ourselves. This includes being in relationship with ourselves in order to know what is good for us and what harms us. This is where we arrive at the philosophical topic of "appreciation".

Appreciation always requires being in relationship with yourself, with other people and with reality.

Being without a relationship makes appreciation impossible. But before I step on the path to self-awareness as an aspect of health, I would like to address this question: What do we need to be aware of ourselves?

### **How does self-awareness arise?**

Let me put it provocatively in a nutshell: It is not possible to develop on your own self-awareness for mental and physical health. Every person needs another person and a community, to recognize themselves and to feel seen, perceived and acknowledged. It is only in the mirror, in relation to someone or something other than ourselves, that we can recognize who we are and what we want. Dieter Jarzombek described this in his lecture a year ago: "This understanding of health or illness contains two approaches of particular importance

- a. the idea of self-determination and the development of personal abilities and, in addition, the idea of participation in one's own personal health, health of the community and public health.
- b. the idea of an ecological understanding of health with a reference to public-political action, supportive environments and intensified social action. For the physically and mentally chronically ill, the creation of small networks of social support and self-help is a crucial necessity.

This is where special care and understanding can be conveyed. Many of those affected are particularly dependent on this and only in this way social isolation and helplessness can be avoided and fears can be overcome.

### **Health in everyday life and in times of crisis**

How can a person feel good when there are conflicts in his/her environment?

When the news about political events such as wars, armament, the rise of right-wing populism, environmental disasters, epidemics, economic decline flutter into your home every day? Or when someone is affected by the fear of unemployment, rent increases and the danger of having no influence or meaning at all?

When necessary official acts are increasingly complicated and difficult to accomplish and one gets the feeling of being helpless at the mercy of a "system"? It is a fact that in times of crisis like at present, people are far more susceptible to mental and physical illnesses: The environmental conditions no longer create inner security but fear and feelings of powerlessness. These in turn are emotions that can affect the cells of the body. In this respect, it makes sense to think about how we can succeed in not ignoring the crises and yet not be broken by them directly or indirectly.

### **Health is a human right**

Of course, it is obvious that health is not just a task for the individual. Environmental conditions, social circumstances, climatic factors, status, income and education play a decisive role in maintaining health. It is well known that rich and educated people have far more opportunities to stay healthy than poor, less educated people. There is already an injustice here due to social differences. There is no doubt that the state, the social systems can help to even out these differences through insurances. But despite all professions of human dignity, which cannot be made dependent on income, status and earnings, these injustices have not been abolished. In this respect, recourse to human rights is of relatively little use if the consequences are not drawn for the education and upbringing for children or in adult education: Namely, to develop a curriculum that not only teaches reading, writing, mathematics and how to work with a computer, but also how to deal with oneself. It would seem obvious to teach children very early how to eat well, how to feel themselves, how to develop self-esteem and self-confidence and social skills in order to feel comfortable in a community and assert themselves. It would also include learning to recognize yourself and other people, also those who have disabilities, are ill and need help. And the prerequisite for this is to be able to empathize, even towards yourself. But these are goals, that are not pursued at school or at home per se. And they are not achieved easily through a cognitive learning process.

### **Building communities for the sake of recovery**

You learn far less on your own than in relationships. So, it should also be considered, when it comes to health, creating spaces and conditions under which it is possible to become and be healthy. The Calumed e.V. association is an example of this. Many people, especially young people, come together here. In a beautiful and quiet place like the Refugium they gain many essential experiences that not only contribute to their mental development, but also to the recovery as a whole.

This space of opportunity was created by the initiator Dieter Jarzombek and Kathrin Fettweiss and Tom Erbskorn and many other therapists, doctors and healers who have enabled countless people to experience self-development and community building: in courses, workshops, through travel, through nature activities, through living and working together. This is an example of a healing space in which development and self-knowledge can take place. This includes transformation processes that play a decisive role in becoming healthy: Namely, old patterns that cause illness and prevent people from becoming who they are and who they want to be. Mental blockages very often manifest themselves in physical sufferings.

And in this respect a place of healing like the Refugium is designed to let go, understand oneself, recognize oneself through effectiveness with others and to grow beyond oneself and one's boundaries. In Humans of Calumed, created by Peter Weigle and Dr. Thomas Kauer, you can follow the development of people who have felt connected to this community for years and who have become "healthy" in various ways.

#### **4. Living appreciation in order to be healthy**

It may come as a surprise that I have used the commonplace term "appreciation", which describes praise or the acceptance of a political act (recognition of boundaries and laws, etc.) with mental health in everyday life. Interestingly enough, appreciation is not primarily a topic of psychology, but of philosophy, in which the focus is on the sighting and explanation processes of consciousness.

I referred to this term several times in my lecture in order to prepare you for the role appreciation plays in the process of health.

Before I go into the theories of appreciation - especially those of G.F.W. Hegel -

I would like to invite you on a fantasy journey: Just imagine how you feel when the day begins with the fact that you have overcome your tiredness and have done your morning exercise again.

Your partner tells you at breakfast that you look well rested today and that you are sure to be successful in the upcoming negotiations at work. You go into your office and get a message, that your boss would like to speak to you. A little restless, you make your way to him. He offers you the opportunity to take on a new lucrative job based on your perceived performance. This is very unexpected and you accept the opportunity gratefully and somewhat confused. In the evening you are invited to a birthday party at a friend's house. The present you bring is met with genuine enthusiasm and the evening is bright and cheerful. How do you feel when you go to bed after such an evening?

## **Appreciation - a complex process**

Giving and receiving appreciation involves many skills: Appreciate oneself and others: being in relationship; empathizing with someone; remembering what another person likes; giving the right words to give positive feedback; creating a project with another person and getting to know each other in the process; not repressing a situation, even if it is difficult, but deal with it constructively.

This "being in relationship" and the conscious perception of oneself, of another person, of real facts, of reality per se, just as it is, is the opposite of defense and it creates awareness and self-confidence. Simply because people are social beings per se and are dependent on relationships with other people in order to experience themselves.

The famous philosopher Hegel, in his difficult-to-read "Phenomenology of mind" gave a simple and logical formula for the principle of "appreciation" and used it to describe the **love** between people:

A meets B, B recognizes himself through A, A recognizes himself through B and in this process, something common emerges which constantly evolves. Hegel speaks - after many intermediate steps in which he describes the process of consciousness of appreciation also of reality – about the struggle for appreciation.

It is a fight to the death, to put it bluntly. Because what is not recognized does not exist.

What is recognized is perceived and only then can you deal with it and react to it. The struggle for appreciation between master and servant, the chapter that Marx and Engels used as a political program for communism, does not describe a class struggle, but rather the struggle between the master, a synonym for autonomous consciousness, and the servant, a synonym for the powerless consciousness that feels dependent. Now these two forms of consciousness fight with each other until the human being in which this struggle takes place finally begins to understand that we are always both at the same time:

Autonomous and dependent, powerful and powerless, without work and free and with oppressive work and unfree.

This self-awareness that arises from the struggle for appreciation is also crucial for the inner recovery process in everyday life. If we are and remain aware that we are and can do both, we are also capable.

Self-awareness and the ability to perceive oneself and others is an aspect of mental and therefore also physical health. Apart from this, the appreciation that a person shows to him-/herself and other people as well as towards reality, conveys a positive attitude towards life, through "being in contact". With this developing self-confidence body awareness also arises through contact with oneself.

Of course, appreciation cannot prevent illness, but only through appreciation, by recognizing, can illnesses be perceived and treated. This applies not only to illnesses, but also to conflicts and unpleasant facts. If they are not recognized, the problems are pre-programmed and cannot be solved.

## What happens if we are not recognized

How do people recognize themselves, others and reality? And what circumstances and abilities play a role in someone not only being able to recognize but also appreciate? Strictly speaking, appreciation is not possible without recognition. Because you can't appreciate what you don't recognize.

This can easily be explained by everyday moments:

- If a husband does not notice - recognize - that his wife is wearing a new sweater, he is also not in a position to recognize how pretty this sweater or his wife is. He has not even looked and she is disappointed.
- If an employee makes an enormous effort to meet a high-performance requirement and no one honors the performance and the result, he is neither recognized nor appreciated.
- In politics, this failure to recognize facts and social realities is a decisive cause of unresolved problems. This means that if something (for example, the underlying causes of a conflict) is not recognized, it cannot be dealt with: For example, the fact that many people of the population are "offended", do not feel seen, considered or respected - rightly or wrongly, that is irrelevant in this case.
- Non-perception as an aspect of "non-appreciation" cannot only be seen in medicine, in psychotherapy, in science, in politics, but always and everywhere. It's simple: if you don't look, you can't change anything. Medicine provides concrete examples of this: If a woman has severe back pain for years and none of the doctors she goes to recognizes that hip osteoarthritis is the cause, it follows that no one thinks of x-raying and operating on the hip. This is not a case made up by me, but actually happened.
- If someone doesn't want to recognize that his/her best friend is cheating on him/her because this is unthinkable, the disappointment and the rupture will surely come at some point.
- If politicians do not recognize the fear that is rumbling in the population, they will not be able to react appropriately to people acting out their fears (expressed through protests, refusals, shitstorms, repression, etc.). They do not recognize the psychological mechanisms at work. Therefore, they either do not react at all or react incorrectly. This failure to consider psychological factors is not only common practice in politics and diplomacy, but also in many sciences.
- A problem has psychological, psychosocial causes? Not only scientists, who are used to working on their subject from a purely material, technical perspective, do not even get the idea that this could be the case, nor do many decision-makers.
- In concrete terms, this means that people do not consider people as a factor in this world, but instead limit their perception and "cognition" to system factors excluding the knowledge that concerns the human factor and its role in the overall process. The climate debates are almost only about ecological, political, economic and scientific issues.

## **The striving and need for appreciation**

Hardly anyone can really imagine how powerful the striving and need for appreciation are. It is hardly ever talked about, it is a taboo subject for various reasons. Why? If someone directly demands appreciation, he or she runs the risk of making a fool of him-/herself, being considered weak or to be suspected of having a lack of self-esteem. Who would come to the idea of saying to a colleague: Now why don't you take me seriously and accept me fully and completely! I need that! Instead of an open declaration of wanting to be recognized the desire to be recognized is "shifted" to other behaviours and attitudes: For example, by showing off, being bossy, by oppressing and devaluing others. These are all tried and tested ways of making yourself feel powerful and in this way obtain something that others do not give you.

But also the "need to prove oneself" through excessive achievements, by conforming to (supposed) ideals of beauty, by accumulating status symbols as forms of action in the struggle for appreciation. The need for appreciation is also problematic for another reason. The feeling of neediness is subtle, deep-seated and filled with shame. Psychologically speaking, it is reminiscent of the powerlessness and dependence on parents in childhood. Especially in the western performance society with its high expectations, with the urge for individual freedom and independence the perceived neediness becomes an inner threat that must be warded off by whatever means and in whatever way. Thus, the desire for appreciation comes from an experience of lack, which is in contradiction to the desire to feel strong, autonomous and independent. It is not surprising that conflicts of goals arise in this way, which can only be resolved if this contradiction is consciously addressed: Recognizing that the desire for appreciation is recognized and accepted in order to deal with it constructively instead of acting it out and postponing it.

## **5. Conclusion: Everything has a spiritual origin**

In our technical and unfortunately also dehumanized age, the importance of human beings and their ability to have a consciousness is vastly underestimated. The image of man that prevails today implies that human beings have no free will because they are controlled either by the limbic system or/and their unconscious drives; or it is claimed that everything in a person's life is predetermined and for this reason alone, human influence is extremely limited. As conditionally true as these statements are, they have a fatal effect. They invite to resignation: What are we supposed to do if we ultimately have no influence on ourselves, others and the world?

I would like to end my contribution by reflecting on human potential.

- Every human being has a consciousness.
- Every human being has, more or less, the ability to imagine something, that is not yet there.
- Our entire culture on earth has emerged from these human abilities.



Apart from this undisputed fact, despite all the objections and intrusions into the understanding of what humans are and can be, humans are spiritual beings. Just as everything in this world has a spiritual origin. We can also say "information and energy" instead of "spirit".

All events in us, by us and in nature are controlled by information and energy.

Transferred to humans, we can understand this as follows: Depending on which positive or negative thoughts we deal with within ourselves, these contents (i.e. information) will have an effect on us and others.

This effective process is also reflected in the response through and to appreciation: Put simply, those who recognize themselves can recognize others. Those who perceive reality can influence it. Of course, this requires self-awareness, which in turn has a major influence on a person's health.

Self-confidence not in the sense of an inflated sense of self-worth, but in the sense of self-awareness. The calculation is ultimately simple: if we deal with negative thoughts, information and feelings, we double the negative. And the same applies vice versa: If we recognize ourselves and others, see possibilities and opportunities, we create ideas of a future that we want and from which we do not suffer, this attitude will have a positive effect on our body, soul and spirit, always with a sober view of what is and what could become.