



Bringing Intention

the “1-being” as *spiritual kernel*

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Sometimes we just want to be seen for who we really are. But finding who we are is not as immediate or as simple a task as we might hope for—we are not simply our bodies, we are not simply our habits and patterns, we are not simply our emotions. There is a part of us, deep in our core, which actually transcends any particular expression or situation. And when we can find and recognize that core it is one of the most deeply satisfying experiences a human being can have. It is the aspect we long to have acknowledged by those most dear to us, and ourselves give voice to. In anthroposophic medicine, this inner essence is called the “I-being,” also the “I” because it is that word which can be spoken only about ourselves, when we are conscious of being a unique individuality.

In anthroposophy, the I-being is recognized as a distinct spiritual member of the human being. It is connected to the specific details of our visible body (the physical), our habits, patterns, and growth in time (the etheric), and our awareness and emotions as sensing beings (the astral), as well as to the spiritual world. It is spoken of as an individual human being’s spiritual kernel because it both precedes, and continues beyond, the growth and development we can see during the course of a lifetime.

This fourth member of the human being, that guides and works down into the astral, etheric, and physical bodies, is unique to each individual. Our astral body makes us conscious, allowing us to sense our body and our environment, but it is not

a uniquely human attribute. The I-being adds the capacity for “self”-consciousness as opposed to mere sensing-consciousness. Through it we can appreciate that our true self is distinct from our environment, both the environment of the surrounding physical world, as well as our own intermittent feelings—the stuff of artistic self-expression and moral struggle. .

Four kingdoms of nature can be identified because there are four different ways in which the physical, etheric, astral and I-being can work together in a living being: when a being has just a physical body it belongs to the mineral world; or, physical substance interacting and lifted by etheric forces—the plant world; physical substance and etheric forces now lifted to a state of specialized organ formation and sensing activity—the animal world; and finally, physical, etheric, astral and I together—the human being. This seeming hierarchy does not mean that a mineral, plant or animal is not guided by a more refined spiritual activity, but that that higher spiritual aspect is not directly present and incarnated into the living body. Only human beings have a unique, incarnated I-being.

The I directs and organizes many recognizable aspects of our physical and spiritual physiology; foremost among them: immunity, warmth and intentionality.

The immune system is closely connected to our physiology. It is unique among the organ systems, because although there are indeed organs where the immune system finds special emphasis and concentration—primarily the bone marrow, spleen, and

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lymph nodes—our immune functions work all throughout the body. In fact, we know clinically that the spleen, or networks of lymph nodes, can be surgically removed and there will be relatively little disturbance in immune function. Rudolf Steiner speak of this possibility because the spleen, in particular, is such a spiritual organ that most of its activity remains unseen and its manifest physical activities so delicate that the physical structure of the spleen can be taken out with very little change in its overall function.¹ The immune system is an essential tool of the I-being, so integral to our body, but also so spiritual, that it almost runs the risk of being overlooked in an anatomic survey. Much of the time we take it for granted.

But while we may be tempted to overlook it, the immune system is anything but casual in its activity. It is truly a manifest expression of “self”-consciousness, of finely differentiating what is “self” and what is foreign—not only in terms of what comes into the body through viruses, bacteria, pollen, or splinters, but also recognizing in our own tissues when cell growth has become imbalanced or is no longer properly integrated into the whole, through cancer cell recognition and destruction. Healthy immunity allows us to be both self-preserving and open to the world at the same time. This is a more refined activity than the sympathetic and antipathetic swings in judgment of the astral body, in which we are either open or closed, but unable to hold both gestures at the same time.

We become more keenly aware of this highly nuanced activity of the immune system when the system itself gets out of balance. When it is too open, then we are too strongly influenced by substances and activities of the outside world. We sacrifice our preservation of self. Immune deficiencies can

be understood as an expression of a disconnect between the I-being and the white blood cells, the physiologic tools of the I-being. Either the active sensing of the immune system is disturbed (antibody-mediated immunity), or the capacity for meeting and eliminating what does not belong inadequate (cell-mediated immunity). Auto-immune disease likewise arises out of a loss of self-consciousness, as the immune system loses its understanding of what is foreign and begins to attack the body's own tissues. This may arise as an attempted (albeit imperfect) compensation for other faltering aspects of boundary recognition—as in colitis when there is inadequate digestive activity, so that still foreign substance is absorbed out of the bowel lumen which must then be met by the immune system. The result is a misplaced “digestive” compensation carried out by the immune system. But the bowel wall, or a joint (as in rheumatoid arthritis), the brain (migraine) or the skin (atopic dermatitis) is not a proper digestive organ, and suffers in that compensatory inflammation. In trying to protect the body from the outside world, the immune system injures its own body.

In other circumstances, where the I-being is unable to properly penetrate a particular organ (the doorway for its spiritual activity is in some way closed), then the I-being uses another organ, the immune system (a doorway which is accessible), to try to gain entry. But again, the inflammatory process which is actually trying to bring a healing through warmth, damages the target organ in the process. Completely new therapeutic approaches to insulin-dependent diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and antibody-mediated thyroiditis can be found if we look at them as part of an immune-mediated compensatory activity of the I-being.

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Warmth, in all its forms, is a second essential tool of the I-being. Without sufficient warmth the I cannot be active in the body. Warmth regulation gives us another picture of I activity, especially when we look at fever. Fever, though too often feared in popular culture, needs to be recognized as a very powerful tool of the immune system. Fever is helpful, not just because it works against the "foreignness" of viruses and bacteria, but because in that accentuated experience of warmth, the I-being is able to be exceptionally active in determining what is part of self and what needs to be let go of. We can think about this concretely in terms of immune function and protection, but there are now many generations of anthroposophic physicians, nurses, and observant parents who can attest to the powerful developmental changes that often come for children through the experience of fever. One has the impression that for the child the body is now better "claimed," more comfortable, and that development which may have been hindered—by fears, clumsiness, or lack of orientation—have now been transformed. Through a strong inflammatory warmth experience, the I-being is able to work more deeply and more completely into the activities of the astral, etheric, and physical bodies, and the child becomes more skillful and comfortable.

While the immune aspect of warmth is fundamental, we should also expand our considerations of warmth beyond what can merely be measured with a thermometer. Warmth stands as a bridge between what is physically perceptible and what works between human beings in the sense of community and morality. It is no accident that when we speak of someone who is "warm-hearted" we suggest an inviting goodness and friendliness. Someone who has "ice in his veins" brings a very

different quality, with the implication that there is no sense for the goodness or worthiness of other human beings.

The relationship between physical warmth and emotional or social warmth has actually been scientifically confirmed.

In a study at Yale University, researchers (while riding in an elevator) asked undergraduate test subjects to briefly hold either a warm cup of coffee, or iced coffee as they (the researchers) wrote down information.² The subjects then arrived on their floor, where they understood the research was to take place and were given a packet of information about an individual and then asked to assess his or her personality traits. Results showed that the participants assessed the person as significantly "warmer" if they had previously held the warm cup of coffee rather than the iced cup of coffee. On personality scales unrelated to the trait of "warmth," the researchers found no difference in how participants who held an iced, versus hot, coffee responded.

In a second part of the study, participants held heated or frozen therapeutic packs as part of a product evaluation study and then were told they could receive a gift certificate for a friend or a gift for themselves as a thank you for participating in the study. Those who held the hot pack were more likely to ask for the gift certificate for a friend, while those who held the frozen pack tended to keep the gift for themselves. The researchers' interpretation of this study: "It appears that the effect of physical temperature is not just on how we see others, it affects our own behavior as well." and "Physical warmth can make us see others as warmer people, but also cause us to be warmer—more generous and trusting—as well."³ In a very real way, warmth allows us not only to better sense ourselves (self-consciousness), but also allows us, through our

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I-being, to actively sense the “I” of another human being. This is admittedly not the predominant portion of our wakeful sensing activity—we actually spend a great deal of our time interacting with the world through more reflexive or habitual behaviors—which really belong more to the astral body than to the I. That same kind of routine assessment is also regularly directed towards ourselves, taking for granted that we are who we are, and we do what we do. But sometimes, when the I-being really shines through, we can see past that also. We come to a place of both looking more deeply into the human beings that surround us, and also evaluating whether our routine “self” is an accurate expression of our true self.

This kind of self-evaluation is a predictable part of human biography, and actually follows a consistent rhythm. On an emotional and spiritual level, we experience enhancements of “I”-consciousness every seven years. Rudolf Steiner pointed out how there are significant developmental thresholds that are met at seven years (growth of the adult teeth and readiness for abstract learning), and 14 years (pubertal changes and the transformation of social awareness). But that rhythm actually continues beyond these physically manifest transformations, with continued “fevers” of self-awareness and intentionality at 21, 28, 35, 42, 49, 56, and 63 years. Not every one of these thresholds marks an important transformation for every individuality, but the overall rhythm of the seven year periods is a profound reminder that we are always growing beings, and that we can decide who we ought to be. In a very practical manner, acknowledgement of the seven year rhythms can be tremendously reassuring. The patient softens when his or her experience is put in context: “No, you are not going crazy. It

is completely appropriate that at this stage of life you are re-evaluating who you are on all levels.”

Recognition of these biographical rhythms is also helpful in working with chronic illness and in striving to shift habitual patterns of behavior. The I-being—consciously bidden or not—pushes us on a spiritual level to (re-)evaluate what is self and what is not. In a way we become a whole new person every seven years. These biographical nodal points are very good opportunities to enlist other therapeutic modalities: artistic therapies allow us an opportunity to express the situation; meditative activity to help guide the situation. A biographical crisis should be understood as a transformation in the same way that a fever or inflammation can be understood as a healing crisis. We look to the past to see who we have been, and whether that self is the expression of our I-being we wish to carry into the future. We have to examine the elements of our life that we have taken on out of duty, out of imitation, out of laziness or fear, versus what we really want to do and to be. Intention is a third gift of the I-being.

In illness, and in health, we want to be seen for who we truly are. We are always striving to give a true voice to our I. Through inflammations—whether of the immune system, of warmth, or of biographical transformation—we enter the process of such nuanced differentiation. These are expressions of the I, which allow us to manifest the most spiritual core of our individual human being. 

NOTES

- 1 Steiner, Rudolf. *An Occult Physiology*. Rudolf Steiner Press, 2005.
- 2 Science. 2008 Oct 24;322(5901):606-7.
- 3 *ibid.*