



Can Meditation Take the Place of Exercise? Only a Differentiated Picture of the Human Being Gives Us the Key to the Different Levels of Health

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Editorial Note: *When the Olympic games are held, the human body receives a lot of attention. There is a relationship between movement and health. And it behooves especially those who are on a spiritual path to "guard their physical and mental health." (Rudolf Steiner) Meditation cannot replace physical movement; by the same token, contemplative practice is indispensable. Michaela Glöckler makes this clear in the following article which focuses especially on the stages of life and the different members of the human being.**

Physical exercise is a central concern in our time. The word exercise has come to include all manner of movement exercises today; the term either refers to outer techniques which are akin to gymnastics or to inner work grounded in meditative practice. The latter implies forms of exercise involving highly refined types of movement that are hardly perceptible from the outside, movements that can lead over into directing forces and currents inside the body. The aim of this work is to bring about a change within one's own constitution, and to promote harmony and health. The human body is more and more recognized as changeable, vulnerable, unique, and irreplaceable.

This one special body—with its possibilities for inner and outer movement—is the place where the human being, as an individual, can become aware of

the self in relation to the whole of existence. Only inasmuch as I move myself in a physical, psychological, or spiritual sense do I become conscious of the fact that I actually exist on these different levels. Without movement or inner activity I neither experience myself nor the world. Seen in this way, opportunities for movement and opportunities for development are one and the same thing.

There is physical and soul/spiritual movement suitable to every stage of life and, also, commensurate health. Therefore it is a decisive factor for childhood, with its imperative to incarnate and make a

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home in the physical world, that sufficient room and stimulus for bodily movement are given. Bodily dexterity, muscle strength, and stamina in walking, jumping, and “working” must all be built up; all these things need years and years of practice and repetition. To achieve this, sport, dance, and—in Waldorf schools—eurythmy all have their different effects; all of these forms of movement work in their own particular ways and they are not interchangeable.

Forms of Movement for Body, Soul, and Spirit

When we are engaged in sports, our spirit and soul are completely focused on the aim to be achieved in the physical world. In tennis, for example, the focus is on hitting the ball. This orientation makes the practice of sport an incarnating activity; it awakens us to the here and now in time and space. However, within our constitution the activity of sports also furthers materialism, because in sports the spiritual serves the body to the highest degree possible. In dance, body and spirit serve motives and needs of the soul. The kinds of expression and experience furthered for the soul depend on the kind of dance-technique. In eurythmy, on the other hand, body and soul are adapted to the forms of movement which are particular to the life processes of the body. This includes the means of expression of a conscious life in soul and spirit.

The degree to which a human being can move and express himself freely in the course of his life depends on the solidity and versatility he has been able to achieve in his inner and outer freedom of movement. And just as meditation cannot replace physical movement in childhood and youth, sports and physical movement cannot replace what has to be achieved in later life. In youth it is necessary to do physical exercise in order to incarnate properly; later on in life, excarnating activity is needed. In order to come to oneself and wake up to one’s spiritual home, one needs to practice contemplation and meditation in accordance with one’s intrinsic spiritual motives. Physical exercise and meditation both have their time in life and need to be determined in accordance with the particular demands and needs of the individual.

Development through the Tasks We Take upon Ourselves

It is hard to find general rules in this realm, because of the difference in destinies and needs presented by each individual life. Also, the debate of the last 10 or 20 years between the different models of preventing illnesses, pathogenesis and salutogenesis, has shown us that health depends to a large degree on an individual’s will to live and overall motivation. Even though it makes sense to recognize possible harmful influences for body and soul and to avoid them, and, simultaneously, live as healthy a life as possible (pathogenetic orientation), there is also validity in the fact that people will not be able to develop enough strength and resistance without challenges, without being taxed, and without facing threats and danger; these will make us able to deal with stress and cope with life and all its vicissitudes (salutogenetic orientation). We each need to learn to define our own individual boundaries in what we are able to take up and achieve.

The discussions around this theme, between pathogenesis and salutogenesis, do show how helpful it is to have a differentiated picture of the human being and to be aware of individual destiny. When these factors are taken into account, one gains the clarity one needs in order to proceed in one’s own life. After all, the physical body has its own laws and needs a specific stimulus for all its organs. The eye needs to deal with light and color in order to learn to see properly; the organs of digestion need different types of food. For the brain to develop properly, it is necessary, among many other things, that a multiplicity of movement exercises are offered in the context of coordination and dexterity.

The laws of the etheric organism are the opposite of those of the physical. Here we meet a system of regulatory processes that serves the preservation of life functions, regeneration, and also healing. What is important here is not so much a focus on specific organs; the point here is to stimulate the total organism. In order to stimulate the etheric, the system as a whole needs to be addressed. This can be achieved by means of a healthy way of living as well as by taking into account how the soul is treated. After all, joy, contentment, beauty, religious and artistic exercises as well as impressions of nature

are not merely sensations in their own right. They also have a positive effect on our feeling of well-being and, with that, the functions of the etheric organism.

On a soul level, however, the laws of polarity reign. In this realm it is necessary always to keep an eye on the opposite sides and find a new balance in every situation. Here we are dealing with the tension between sympathies and antipathies, concentration and relaxation, hyperactivity and exhaustion, feelings of abundance and emptiness. These opposites which exist in our consciousness and are carried by the astral body, must be recognized, metamorphosed, and utilized to support regenerative and developmental processes.

On the level of the I (the I organization), however, different laws hold sway. Here we are concerned with integration and building identity, as well as the ability to communicate on a spiritual level. That which counts here are the things a human being commits to, the areas where an individual chooses to engage in life and is able to take responsibility. These factors become an integrated part of each individuality.

Viewed in this way there are two wellsprings of health: the etheric organism and the activity of the I. Those are matched with the two levels on which the human constitution functions: the physical organism and the astral organization. These latter two are also where outer and inner causes of illness originate. The more we pay attention to our physical health (proceeding from the ether body) and to our spiritual health (proceeding from the I organization), the more we will be able to gain spiritual and bodily mobility on our way through life.

Michaela Glöckler was born in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1946. She studied medicine at the universities of Tübingen and Marburg and went on to study pediatrics at the community hospital of Herdecke and at the University children's clinic of Bochum. She practiced as a pediatrician and school doctor for ten years. Since Easter 1988, she has been the leader of the Medical Section at the Goetheanum. She lectures and writes books on medical, physical, and religious topics, and also on counseling. She writes: "In my practice as a pediatrician I met many children with movement challenges who were struggling with speech problems and learning disabilities. As a result I have come to value the benefits of movement more and more, particularly in infancy and in childhood in general. My work as a physician has also made me realize that bodily fitness and good nutrition are not the only prerequisites for a healthy life. Active work in the realm of the spirit and the soul are needed just as much."

