

THE FIRST MEETING OF AN ILL PERSON WITH A DOCTOR

1. The anthropological context

1.1. Every human being lives in, experiences his/her human reality in relationships. Nearly always we are not conscious of them. Chronologically they often belong to the past, still living in us, making our life human. When there has something to happen with human beings, it only is possible within relationships.

1.2 Because this is their existential reality, human beings don't have a direct access to themselves. By reasoning, by thinking, we can know very much about ourselves, but it stays intellectual knowledge. There is something like a wall between this knowing and ourselves. This knowledge "does not work", as long as we stay alone.

1.3 We break this wall down, we make breaches in it, by telling what we know to another person. What we tell, our knowledge, our seeking for knowledge gets shape in the other. The other takes what we tell her/him, into her/himself. So what we tell, what we know gets space. We can move in what we tell, in our knowledge and so it becomes really part of us.

1.4 By telling what we know, what is keeping us busy, is worrying us, our story changes. We tell each other things than we originally intended to do. Aspects which seemed unimportant or about which we even never thought, become important. By telling, our history changes. We become other people, another person.

1.5 We only have the possibility to tell in this manner, when there is freedom and trust. Freedom means that we really are together. We are thinking about anything else than being together. We are not rivaling who has the power in the relationship, there are no suspicions of mistrust. We are not thinking of persons or things which have nothing to do with our being together here. No worries which don't belong to this meeting together. Both are "simply" together, talking and listening to each other. And so there is trust, the possibility to open up and to listen, without anxieties, without prejudices.

1.6 This freedom and this trust, in the meeting of each other, is in fact a gift. In the same time it is always a decision, a decision about the whole of our life for this very moment, for this meeting, to trust to be open, to be present only for the other.

1.7 There are possibilities to prepare ourselves for this decision, this gift. By taking some space, before we meet, in which we leave everything what kept us busy behind us. Some sort of mediation or whatever, be it eventually for a very short time.

2. The meeting of a doctor and an ill person

2.1 Every meeting in freedom, in which both who meet "move in freedom", is a dynamic reality. The freedom in and between the persons is "moving around". Freedom is given and received.

2.2 The doctor carries in his situation the first responsibility. The ill person is in difficulties, often in distress. He is occupied by them, by it, and so unfree. He is –not generally because in the end the doctor is totally dependent on “having his patients” – dependent on the doctor. The doctor has his knowledge. He has, more important still, his being, not being worried in this situation. He has his institutional place. He is first of all responsible for the freedom in the meeting. The ill person joins in, in his/her freedom.

2.3 Some aspects of the freedom of the doctor, being together with the ill person.

2.3.1 Being together with the ill person he is thinking about nothing else. He is thinking with, and only so about, the person he is talking with, whom he is investigating.

2.3.2 He has no desires about the person. No fascinations, no wishes about success, no desires to get rid of her or him as quick as possible.

2.3.3 So he gives this ill woman/man, her/his own human worth. He is not with the illness, eventually even forgetting that he is together with a human being, he is with the person, who as an aspect of his being, is ill.

2.3.4 He accepts, in the context of the situation, the responsibility for the meeting and so for the woman, the man who comes to him.

2.3.5 In the acceptance of the situation, of this woman, man, he has the optimal possibilities to understand her, him.

2.4 This relationship has very deep consequences for the ill person:

2.4.1 She/he gets her/his worth as a human being back. She/he becomes again a human being who fortuitous is ill, instead of an ill person (or an illness) who accidentally too is a human being.

2.4.2. The ill person is freed from anxieties, wrath, desires. Anxieties about the illness and its consequences. Wrath about being ill. Desires to become healthy again as quick as possible, which so often make healing more difficult, to let other pay “the bill”.

2.4.3 The illness comes in the context of the life of the ill person. The illness becomes a symptom of the relationships in which she/he lives. The illness becomes an aspect of his/her life and is not any longer the centre.

2.4.4 The doctor participates in the relationships the ill person is living in. So he brings freedom in the life of the ill person. So he is an ally.

2.4.5 The ill person can now really get along with the illness. She/he can carry the load, because she/he is not any longer carrying alone. She/he can better, in a new way, order the relationship with the illness and so change and order the feelings which have to do with the illness.

2.4.6 In this freedom, which is given in the being together, a freedom of the whole person and especially in the relationship with the illness, the possibilities of the ill person, both mental and physical, for healing are organized, become real. That can even mean total healing, as in spontaneous regression of cancer, in all the cases in which placebo's do their job. It can mean that the illness does not destroy the ill person as a human being, because there stays freedom between the ill person and the illness. It can, in the end, mean to die in a human manner.

This freedom is anyway the freedom to join in with the treatment which is appointed with the doctor, so making it an ally against the illness. It is the freedom, too, to have an own opinion about the treatment, eventually to disagree with the doctor and to speak about it with him, her. In the end it is the freedom to take another doctor.

3. The first meeting between the ill person and the doctor

3.1 In the first meeting in fact most of the coming relationship is decided. So it is worthwhile to describe aspects of this first meeting which are important.

3.1.1 The doctor receives the entering ill person, looking at him, receiving him in his own being. His thinking and feelings are in no manner elsewhere.

3.1.2 So the ill person can tell about her/his feeling ill. The experiences in and the body, the anxieties, the fears, hesitations, guilt feelings, feeling of insecurity about the relationship with the doctor, which were in him/her, when entering, disappear. The ill person can, telling about them, order the aspects of what is happening with her/him.

3.1.3 The doctor sums up retelling. Is this what you told me, wished to tell me? Have I understood well? Is this everything? Is there something to add? Did I, or did you yourself misunderstand?

3.1.4 Together they make the diagnosis, the doctor telling what he understands, the ill person listening, checking, telling his/her understanding of what is happening to her/him and so understanding together, which may be immediate causes. In the same manner they agree upon the treatment, included the medicamentation, if any is necessary and they make appointments about the eventual follow-up.

3.1.5 In this manner the illness (or what looked like an illness) is identified and isolated. Ill person and doctor are already on a way forward. The healing process has already begun.