

The Problem of Autoimmune Disease

“...and twofold always. May God us keep
from single vision and Newton’s sleep!”

William Blake (1757-1827)

“We can attain the greatest perfection in the description of disease, we can know precisely what happens in the organism in terms of modern physiology and physiological chemistry; and yet we may still not be able to heal the disease at all. In healing we must proceed not from the histological or microscopic diagnosis, but from *the great universal connections.*”

Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) Agriculture, p. 96

Human beings, like plants and animals, live with and by virtue of the earth beneath us and the heavens above us. The physical forces of the earth, primarily gravity and electromagnetism, influence us from below, so that our lower limbs and feet are especially adapted to gravity, and bear our body’s weight.

The spiritual forces of the universe around us influence us from above, imparting especially to our upper body, arms and head the capacity to reach up and out and expand into the space around us. Some of these universal forces are reflected back to us from the earth, and thus influence us also from below.

Science in ancient times always viewed the human being as positioned mid-way between the spiritual forces of the universe above us and the physical forces of the earth beneath us. All the processes and functions of our body were perceived to be influenced and indwelled from above and from below, from the heavens and from the earth, from spirit and from matter. The source of spirit was perceived to be the universe, the source of matter the earth, and they worked together within the bodies of humans, animals and plants.

In the last five hundred years our twofold human experience of the forces around and within us has drastically changed.

Today our human mind and our science can no longer experience that spiritual forces work in the universe, i.e. the macrocosm, and also in the microcosm of human physiology. Now, the processes of the universe and the functions of our body are seen as exclusively physical, allowing no supra-physical or spiritual influences at all, not even those of consciousness. Our old twofold view of ourselves has become a single vision in which we see our body as a machine composed of countless microscopic physical parts: cells, molecules, receptors, effectors, antibodies, cytokines—the list keeps growing as research progresses.

Today's medicine and biology are based on the assumption that these ultra-small cellular and sub-cellular parts of ourselves hold the secret causes of life, health and illness in our human organism. This assumption is called reductionism. It is the only acceptable rationale for most biomedical research today.

Rudolf Steiner applauded the triumphs of reductionistic research, such as the discovery of insulin as the life-saving treatment for diabetes.

Yet Steiner saw the goal of medicine to be *healing*. He perceived that the healing of physical illness or injury gave the soul an opportunity to grow stronger, to improve habits, maintain balance, resist stress and move forward in life. In healing, we change for the better and make progress in our individual lives, and this in turn makes healthy and moral social progress possible. Thus, how healers treat illness in their patients ripples out to society, for good or for ill.

The true healer understands the difference between healing an illness and suppressing it. Suppression is often the safest and best treatment, i.e. antibiotics for dangerous infections, but the discerning

practitioner will realize that such patients might need sensitive follow-up care to steer the interrupted healing process toward completion, so that the patient can experience the soul renewal that healing an illness can confer. Often it was the *gradually increasing need* for just this soul renewal that had triggered the illness in the first place!

As the opening quote attests, Steiner perceived that reductionistic knowledge would not lead to measures for true healing but only to measures for life support and extension, which are certainly worthy goals nonetheless, but which do not necessarily contribute to individual soul development and to social progress as healing does. For knowledge of healing he urged practitioners and researchers to look not down into the realm of the ultra-small within us, but up to the realm of the forces streaming in from the universe and internalized in our human organism. We all experience these forces in ourselves without knowing that they originate in the surrounding universe.

Three kinds of universal forces can be distinguished by the spiritual researcher, the etheric, the astral and the pure spirit forces. While most of us lack the clairvoyant ability to perceive these forces directly, we all have the capacity to recognize the “footprints” of these forces in our everyday physical world. Working backward from the physical effects to the spiritual causes, reversing the direction of reductionism, we can begin to understand how these forces work in the natural world and in our human organism. How can a knowledge of these forces help us to understand and heal autoimmune diseases?

Autoimmune diseases are defined as inflammations. From the viewpoint of reductionism, inflammations are always caused by our immune system responding to an antigen, usually a microbial or allergenic antigen (allergen). In autoimmune inflammation, the immune system responds not to exogenous, foreign antigens but to

endogenous, “self” antigens, i.e. to molecules belonging to our organism.

Any inflammation not known to be caused by a microbe or exogenous antigen is usually said to be idiopathic until or unless an antibody (auto-antibody) is found that reacts with a normal component of ourselves that has somehow become antigenic, i.e. provocative to our immune system. For example, the causation of type 1 diabetes changed from idiopathic to autoimmune after anti-pancreatic beta-cell antibodies were discovered in diabetic patients.

The preceding discussion makes perfect sense on the microscopic, reductionistic level, and conforms with our modern medical knowledge. If Steiner is correct, this knowledge of the molecular pathology of autoimmune diseases can certainly lead to, and has led to, treatments to suppress such illnesses, such as Remicade and Methotrexate, but not to treatments to heal them.

So let’s look again at illnesses like lupus, rheumatoid arthritis and rheumatic fever, not from a molecular viewpoint but this time proceeding from “the great universal connections.” How would Hippocrates have described such diseases?

Hippocrates is called the father of western medicine because he stood at the turning point in the history of medicine when the old, fading, clairvoyant and spiritual healing began its very gradual shift toward modern materialistic and reductionistic medicine. Since microscopes and reductionism did not yet exist, Hippocrates could only have described autoimmune diseases from outer clinical observation, that is, phenomenologically.

Did the ancient Greeks recognize autoimmune inflammation as distinct from other “normal” inflammations? Yes, we might surmise that they did, based on the meanings of two medical terms derived from the ancient Greek language: *rheumatism* and *catharsis*.

All of the chronic autoimmune inflammations of connective tissue recognized today (lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, scleroderma etc.) would have been viewed as forms of rheumatism in ancient medicine. Acute, usually self-healing inflammations, like the exanths of childhood (measles, rubella, varicella, etc.) and acute common flus, colds and gastroenteritis were not rheumatic, but cathartic! From outer observation, the important distinction was the presence or absence of *the discharge* of mucus, pus, blood, vomiting, diarrhea, or of an acute exanthem. Inflammations accompanied by such discharges were seen as cathartic, i.e. purifying, which is the original meaning of the Greek word.

Rheumatic inflammations had little or no discharge. In ancient medicine the treatment of rheumatic conditions included methods to stimulate the flow of fluid humors (chi, etheric) outward to the surface of the body, thus inducing a discharge of sorts. Methods such as cupping, counterirritation of the skin, bleeding, purging and the inducement of sweating were used. In these ways, a stagnant rheumatic inflammation was activated to move toward catharsis and healing. Care had to be taken not to overdo such activating treatment, lest the patient suffer a “healing crisis” that might prove lethal or excessively weakening. It was recognized that an inflammation could heal “by crisis or by lysis,” or a combination of the two. These two medical terms are derived from the Greek words for “decision” and “loosening,” respectively.

In discharging, cathartic inflammations, the ancient physician perceived that the fluid element of the body (the etheric) was unimpeded and worked freely and expansively, carrying the toxic substances of the illness out of the body like a tide depositing flotsam on the beach. In rheumatic inflammations, the fluid humors of the body were congested, unable to flow freely to carry the dregs of the inflammatory process out of the body. When such excreta of inflammation remained in the body, they acted as toxic irritants,

inciting further inflammation in a vicious cycle, which resulted in the chronic, recurrent nature of the rheumatic diseases.

Thus we see that Steiner's suggestion to the physicians of his day to view illness phenomenologically, "from the great universal connections" in order to heal, was practiced as a matter of course by physicians in ancient times. We can learn much today from ancient ways of healing, and many of these ways are still in use throughout the world.

It bears repeating that while the methods of modern reductionistic medicine have eased much suffering and greatly extended life, these are not the same as *healing*. The true healing process includes some degree of personal (soul) transformation and a step forward in self-knowledge for each individual so healed.

The anthroposophic approach to healing is thoroughly modern and points toward the future, yet it also has much in common with the ancient medical systems of both East and West. The wisdom of ancient Greece lives in the modern anthroposophic teaching of the four members (physical, etheric, astral, Ego) of the human being and the four elements, humors and temperaments. This human fourfoldness traces its origin directly from the fourfold "great universal connections" of the cosmos around us and the earth beneath us, connections which for the Greeks and other ancients were perceptible and self-evident. We can start with this fourfold cosmic view to help us understand and heal autoimmune diseases today, and then proceed to the sevenfoldness of the planets, the human organs and the metallic anthroposophic remedies. Using this phenomenological approach, the definition of autoimmunity greatly broadens, no longer depending on whether an auto-antibody reaction has been discovered in this or that illness. For our purpose, which is healing, any inflammation which is chronic or recurrent or which produces little or no discharge or which involves primarily muscles,

joints, heart or nervous system, is of an autoimmune “rheumatic” nature.

The classic example, which meets all the above criteria (many autoimmune inflammations meet only one or two) is rheumatic fever, which is seldom seen today.

An Anthroposophic Approach to the Pathophysiology of Autoimmune Diseases

Normal “Cathartic” Inflammation

Taking the flu as an example of an acute, febrile, “normal” cathartic inflammation which usually self-heals, we can say the following of our fourfold members in an acute flu episode:

Physical body: The illness begins when our immune system starts reacting to a flu virus, which is understood today as a foreign, invasive, parasitic particle of organic matter in the physical body. The immune reaction creates systemic inflammation including fever, pain, cough and weakness. The physical body is the stage upon which these events unfold, and it suffers their effects.

Etheric body: becomes very active in order to bring the flu inflammation to a successful healing. The etheric is the active inner force working throughout the physical body in the blood, lymph and in all extracellular and intracellular fluids. The etheric is the “workhorse” which, directed by the Ego-astral, carries out the processes of inflammation, mucous discharge and detoxification, and actively clears the flu virus and the toxic debris of inflammation from the body. In order to accomplish this intense work, the etheric must, during the acute inflammatory process, temporarily withdraw from its normal functions of creating energy and a sense of well-being in the physical body. Deprived of its usual active etheric support, the physical body then suffers malaise, weakness and prostration.

Astral body: guided by the Ego, the astral works in a directing, activating, and catabolic way in the inflammatory process, similar to its function in the digestion of food. In areas of the body where the physical is denser and there is a sluggish, congested, etheric stagnation and consequent retention of metabolic wastes, the astral will have to work more strongly to activate the etheric and get it moving. In these areas, pain is likely to result from the intensified astral activity, causing the deep aching that often accompanies flu.

During the acute inflammation, the astral, like the etheric, will have to withdraw somewhat from its usual activities in the body in thinking, perceiving and digesting. Therefore these bodily functions will be diminished during the inflammatory process.

Ego: The Ego provides the ultimate leadership, direction and balance necessary for every bodily process to unfold appropriately and in the right measure, both in maintaining health and in responding to illness. The Ego carries the influence of our individual karma into all of our physiologic and pathologic bodily processes.

The Ego works in us through its organs which comprise the Ego organization, such as the blood, the immune system, the pancreas, and many others. The Ego plays a greater or lesser role in every bodily organ and process and maintains our overall homeostasis.

In every acute inflammation the degree of systemic Ego involvement, working through its organ the immune system, is evidenced by the intensity of the fever and inflammation and of their accompanying chills and sweats. The classic example of an intense acute inflammation with very strong Ego participation is malaria.

By contrast, when the Ego is not involved and active enough in a given inflammatory process, then the result is indolence, stagnation, chronicity, cooling and eventual sclerosis. Thus it makes sense that

in the early 1900's the most effective treatment available for the sclerotic third stage of syphilis, neurosyphilis, was *fever therapy*, i.e. the injecting of syphilis patients with parasite-infected blood from malaria patients.

This barbaric-sounding treatment produced rigors, high fevers and drenching sweats and caused significant clinical improvement and even cures in many end-stage syphilis patients! The Austrian physician Wagner-Jauregg was given a Nobel prize in 1927 for his successful work using malarial fever therapy in syphilis. By inducing malaria, the intensely warming, activating and cleansing participation of the Ego was drawn back into an illness, neurosyphilis, from which it had previously withdrawn, and sclerosis had set in. The longer the Ego-deficient sclerotic process continues, the more difficult it is to reverse and to heal. Once the sclerosis of neurosyphilis had taken hold of a patient in the early 20th century, nothing short of the powerful reentry of the Ego, in the form of a malarial healing crisis, was able to heal it. Another profound lesson from history, understandable from “the great cosmic connections”!

In an inflammation, absence of fever signifies a deficient Ego participation or else an Ego-focus in a small, localized inflammation where a systemic fever response is unnecessary to achieve healing. The Ego initiates the immune system reaction when our flu episode begins, and the Ego shuts down this reaction at the appropriate time, karma permitting, before exhaustion and death supervene.

Autoimmune, Rheumatic Inflammation

Today, non-purulent, non-discharging inflammations that make the “rheumatic gesture” of moving inward rather than outward, and localizing in inner organs such as joints, muscles, kidneys, nervous system, heart/pericardium and gut are increasingly common. Such illnesses include the classic autoimmune connective tissue diseases (lupus, Sjogren's, rheumatoid arthritis, scleroderma, polymyositis, polymyalgia rheumatica etc), the inflammatory bowel diseases

(Crohn's, ulcerative colitis, lymphocytic colitis), as well as glomerulonephritis, multiple sclerosis, the fairly common uveitis and many others. Viewed phenomenologically, that is, proceeding from the cosmic/human fourfoldness, these various illnesses have a basic *internalizing, contracting* astral/etheric gesture in common, while the common cathartic inflammations all have an *externalizing, expansive* gesture. We'll attempt to describe below the dynamic of the fourfold human being we would usually find in autoimmune disease, in contrast to the dynamic previously described in common cathartic illnesses such as acute upper and lower respiratory inflammations.

Physical body:

In autoimmune inflammations, as in cathartic inflammations, the onset of symptoms is caused by the reaction of the immune system.

In cathartic inflammations, the immune response or the inflammatory response (they are one and the same) is directed by the Ego, driven by the astral and carried out by the etheric. This healing response clears and expels from the physical body the exogenous, foreign antigens that had provoked the response. This expulsion of foreign antigens and of the dead and dying white blood cells of the immune system which have ingested or battled these antigens results in the mucopurulent discharge commonly seen in cathartic inflammations like colds and flus.

In rheumatic, autoimmune inflammations there are usually (but not always) no microbial or other foreign antigens involved and usually no discharge. (As a reminder, in this discussion we are using phenomenologic criteria and grouping all non-discharging, non-purulent inflammations which are chronic or recurrent, i.e. not self-healing, in the category of rheumatic, autoimmune illness, including those inflammations not considered from reductionistic criteria to be autoimmune.)

As we age the physical body becomes denser and more mineralized, thus offering more resistance to the active work of the higher members (etheric, astral, Ego) within the physical. This accounts for the readily observed differences between children and adults in their response to inflammation. In children the fever is higher and better tolerated compared with adults. Children achieve a cathartic discharge more quickly, easily and profusely. An episode of vomiting, or a continual discharge of thick nasal mucus seldom interferes with a young child's play. A child's physical body is softer, more fluid, supple and more penetrable and permeable for its etheric, astral and Ego, thus allowing these higher members freer rein within the physical. The hardening of the physical body as we age is one reason why rheumatic, autoimmune inflammations are far more common in adults than in children.

Etheric Body:

We may visualize/imagine in our mind's eye the fluid organism of the physical body to be the vehicle of the etheric body. We've said that this etheric body, working in and through our fluids, is the "workhorse" inner force in all physiologic processes in our body, including the neurophysiologic processes of thinking. All of our cells are bathed in fluid and all of our physiologic processes go forward in a fluid medium. Just as our circulation of blood and lymph never rests during life, so we may imagine that our etheric body is in continual flow and movement, permeating our physical body both from outside-in and from inside-out until we die.

The outside-in permeation of the physical by the etheric (along with the astral and Ego) was recognized in alchemy as the *salt* condition of matter, while the inside-out permeation of the physical by the three higher members was called the *sulfur* condition of matter. In our human physical-material body, our head, brain, nerves and bones are primarily "salt," while our muscles and abdominal/pelvic organs are primarily "sulfur."

We might imagine that our etheric flows freely through our physical body like a mountain stream. When this stream gets sidetracked into dead-end pockets of stagnation, illness can result. In such pockets, cellular metabolism slows down and acid wastes (carbonic acid, lactic acid) and other cellular end-products build up. Having fallen out of our inner etheric flow and having not been carried away and eliminated from the body, these wastes then act like foreign matter in our physical body and provoke an inflammatory response from our astral and Ego. Whether the resulting inflammation is cathartic, rheumatic or entirely subclinical and asymptomatic, depends on a very complex set of individual factors in the patient.

Summarizing, we can say that in autoimmune inflammations, there is a restriction, a hindrance to the free expansive flow of the etheric body from center to periphery, resulting in a restriction of its ability to eliminate wastes and toxins, which are then retained and provoke irritation/inflammation in the physical body. This restriction of expansive etheric flow might have physical or astral causes, or both. The physical density/hardening factor has already been mentioned.

Astral Body:

I believe that our developing a real sense and feeling for the astral body, and for “astrality” in our surroundings is the key to understanding and healing autoimmune illness. Just as the fluids of our body: intracellular, extracellular, lymph, blood, mucus, are the instruments of etheric activity in us, so the gases of our body: oxygen, nitrogen, carbon dioxide, and others are the instruments of astral activity in us. We breathe these in and out of us continually, so with regard to our astral body the boundary with our surroundings is fluctuating and indistinct.

All of us have a greater or lesser aura (Greek for *breath* or *breeze*) of astrality surrounding our physical bodies. I once heard a

quite old and frail anthroposophist say of a very intense young co-worker, “His astrality stresses me.” I suddenly realized that for her, “astral” was not merely an abstract word, but a *concrete experience*.

The experience of astrality is conveyed by the word “atmosphere” as in the expression “you could cut the atmosphere in the room with a knife.” Astrality is contagious, and it works very strongly in all phenomena of social hysteria, whether infectious laughter, mass panic or mob rage. Charisma and glamour, as in movie stars and other attractive personalities, are manifestations of a powerful and expansive astral body.

It is important for the anthroposophic healer to cultivate a sense and feeling for the astrality of ones patients. Autoimmune illness, and really all illness, begins as an imbalance or disturbance in the harmony of the astral body, usually perceptible in the shades and colors of feelings that we consciously and unconsciously express with our words, tone, and our body language of gesture and movement.

Infants and children in their openness of soul, are like sponges for the astrality of their parents and of their home environment. When this astrality is warm, loving and peaceful, then this has a health-promoting effect on the child’s etheric body. The Ego forces of the parents directly influence the child’s astral body. The parents’ etheric forces directly influence the child’s physical body. Steiner called these relationships of influence from adult to child the “pedagogic law” in his course on curative education. This law pertains also to teachers and to any adult in a position of influence in a child’s life.

Astrality, being a quality of air and atmosphere, is like the weather. It can be sunny or stormy, peaceful or threatening, hot or freezing. The words *stress* and *stressors*, which were coined as biomedical terms only in the 1930’s, are really descriptions of negative astrality and how it affects living organisms. Stress causes

the astral and etheric to be more contracted than expanded. Stress *oppresses* us.

I always ask a new patient whether they felt loved, nurtured and carefree in their childhood, or whether they felt continually stressed. I also ask if they rebelled and acted out a lot in adolescence or if they were docile and well-behaved. Rebellious acting out is a strong expansive, cathartic gesture. I find that in most patients with autoimmune illness, usually women, there was significant stress in childhood and, more importantly, *an inability to adequately act out, express and externalize the stress*, i.e. an inadequate catharsis of the feeling life of the soul/astral body.

When such stress, i.e. negative astrality, is not processed by the Ego and released by the etheric but instead is internalized deeply into an inaccessible focus in the physical body, then the seed of future autoimmune illness and/or cancer is planted.

The fact that most autoimmune conditions are more common in females than males is most likely due to the difference between the sexes in their astral (soul) constitution. If it were due to physical and etheric differences, we would expect autoimmunity to be more common in men. We've said that rheumatic inflammations are more common in adults than in children because the physical body is more earthy and dense in adults. A hardened physical body resists the penetration and action of the higher members within the physical, just as, by analogy, dense metallic lead is a very poor conductor of the forces of warmth or electricity. As we age, our physical body, which in childhood was soft and permeable like copper, becomes more like lead.

Yet men, whose physical bodies are denser than women's and who suffer from sclerotic conditions like heart disease and COPD more than women, nevertheless have rheumatic, autoimmune inflammations less often than women. I believe the reason for this

apparent discrepancy is that a woman's astral body (soul) is more sensitive and impressionable than a man's. Steiner has said that life experiences are more deeply etched into a woman's soul than a man's and such experiences have a greater tendency to affect the etheric/physical organism in a woman than in a man.

A woman's astral body, compared to a man's, is generally more active, more wide-ranging, and more independent from the etheric/physical on the one side, and freer from the Ego on the other side. In men, the predominating forces of the physical body keep a restraining grip on the fluid flow of the etheric as well as on the airy, to-and-fro excursions of the astral.

A woman's astral body typically shines out strongly, expressing all the colors and shades of feminine beauty and feeling. Thus on the outer side, a woman's astral body usually extends/expands further into its surroundings than a man's. And on the inner side, it also *contracts further*. It can dive down so deeply into the etheric/physical that it leaves the Ego behind, and can get stuck in the depths of the body.

I believe the frightening fairy tales and legends that tell of getting lost in a deep labyrinth or dark woods are a picture of this journey of the soul/astral into our inner depths, from which, without Ego consciousness (portrayed as Ariadne's thread or a trail of breadcrumbs etc.), we are unable to return.

In the second lecture of the Course for Young Doctors, Steiner speaks of the seed of illness being planted when a feeling and the life events that produced it are too overwhelming, too painful to be tolerated within the conscious life of the soul and the feeling then "shoots down" into, and unites with, the physical body. This resulting astral-physical focus of intense but unconscious feeling then acts like an irritating foreign body which can be a seed for later autoimmune inflammation or for cancer. This is the exact same process I mentioned a bit earlier, using the words "stress" and

“negative astrality,” which, here we see, always engender and are accompanied by strong, disturbing feelings. These internalized, overwhelming feelings can also be a cause of ongoing post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Here the simple and insightful words of William Blake are again relevant:

“I was angry with my foe.
I held my wrath;
My wrath did grow.
I was angry with my friend.
I spoke my wrath;
My wrath did end.”

When anger is held, internalized, and fixed, then the Ego and etheric are more or less shut out of the process, resulting in a cold and hardened astral-physical focus of resentment which keeps growing and developing in a sclerotic direction like an irritating accumulation of plaque or dysplastic cells.

Speaking ones anger is an Ego/etheric act of courage and expression, allowing warmth, movement and ultimately forgiveness and healing to enter into the process. This is another example of the healing power of catharsis.

We know that in early, subclinical cancer, dysplastic or malignant cells can accumulate for years before becoming detectable or eliciting symptoms.

I believe that in early, subclinical autoimmune disease, something physical also accumulates, perhaps dysfunctional cells or their products. Such accumulations are likely to develop in localized areas like joints or muscles, or sometimes diffusely, possibly causing

fever, malaise and rash. They accumulate because the previously mentioned astral-physical focus or knot has created, like a log in a stream, an obstruction in the fluid lifestream of the etheric, where substances which should be swept along with the body's metabolic and eliminative processes instead become trapped and stuck.

Anything thus falling out of our etheric lifestream, gradually ceases to be "us" and instead becomes, like retained waste matter, something foreign, toxic and antigenic. This is how we might imagine that a repressed feeling of the soul/astral body eventually causes the appearance in the physical body of antigenic substances that elicit an immune reaction. When these substances reach a critical mass, then the immune system is triggered and inflammation ensues. If the Ego and etheric are strong enough to overcome the contracting gesture of the astral, then the inflammation proceeds cathartically and in the process the soul/ astral/feeling knot is greatly loosened and often healed. If the contracting gesture of the astral is too tight and deep to be loosened by the Ego and etheric, then an autoimmune inflammation ensues, rather than a cathartic one.

Thus, when the astral body is inherently dysfunctional as a result of old karma, or when the shocks and stresses of life batter the soul (astral), weaken the etheric and intimidate the Ego to the point of engendering feelings that are too confused, conflicted or painful for the soul to express them or for the Ego to resolve them consciously, then these feelings are often repressed to avoid the pain of dealing with them. If feelings are driven inward below consciousness to become tightly bound up with the physical body, then only physical illness can release them. The causes of many physical illnesses and specifically of rheumatic, autoimmune illnesses, thus lie within the soul, the astral body.

Ego:

We've said that an inflammation begins when the astral/Ego, working through its instrument the immune system, incarnates more deeply into the etheric/physical than normal, locally in a tissue or organ and/or systemically in the whole organism, producing fever.

Whether an inflammation follows an acute cathartic course or a chronic/recurrent rheumatic course will depend on the relative strengths of the physical, etheric, astral and Ego in the individual, and also on whether an overall expansive or contracting gesture predominates in the etheric/astral of the individual.

The healing forces in the human being reside in the etheric body and in the Ego. The Ego provides the wisdom and direction to heal and the etheric, when guided by the Ego, is the workhorse that carries out the work of healing. It is interesting in this regard that Hippocrates said that illness consisted of both *pathos*, i.e. passive suffering and *ponos*, i.e. active work. We could say that in physical illness our astral body suffers and learns and our etheric body works hard. Through illness the Ego guides the purification and edification of the astral body (soul), and the astral is healed a bit from its own karmic illness: its imbalance, disharmony and intractability. In the process, the physical body usually becomes better adapted to serve as an instrument of our three higher members.

Through physical illness, our astral body learns and opens a bit further to the wisdom of our Ego, a stepwise soul progress that happens via illness when it is unable to occur solely in consciousness through our Ego's experience of life.

The soul/astral always progresses through illness, regardless of whether the illness is cathartic, rheumatic or even terminal. In all rheumatic, autoimmune inflammations we can say that, compared with cathartic self-healing inflammations, the healing process is hindered and lengthened due to a part of the astral being stuck in the physical and due to the insufficient strength of etheric forces and Ego forces to free the astral from its physical attachment.

Another very important function of the Ego-organization is to maintain the appropriate rate of turnover of all of our cells, through

ensuring that mature cells of a given tissue die before becoming overripe and degenerating into a dysplastic/premalignant condition. The death process connected with the Ego-Organization works through *apoptosis*, so that old cells die to make room for new ones, and our physical body is continually renewed. (Goethe: “Death is Nature’s maneuver to create more life.”)

Steiner implies that if the apoptotic cell-death process is hindered or slowed down and post-mature cells accumulate instead of dying, this is caused by our Ego’s withdrawal from its incarnation into our etheric and physical. Modern science has discovered that inflammation causes the rate of cell apoptosis (and necrosis) to increase. This makes perfect sense from the anthroposophic viewpoint, knowing that inflammation comes about because the Ego (bringing the astral with it and working through the physical instrument of the immune system) incarnates more deeply into the etheric/physical body, locally or diffusely.

Summarizing, deeper Ego penetration intensifies the processes of inflammation, apoptosis and necrosis, while a withdrawal of appropriate Ego penetration in a bodily region or tissue causes a slowing of apoptosis and an accumulation of cells that become more overripe and “non-self” as the Ego withdraws. Biological selfhood is conferred by our Ego’s proper penetration into the cells, tissues and organs of our body, bringing death in order to make room for new life, maintaining cell turnover and the continual renewal of our tissues and organs.

We can further assume that if the Ego takes along with it most of the astral and etheric as it withdraws from a part of the physical body, then this sets the stage for tumor development. Ego withdrawal is more likely to lead to autoimmune inflammation, rather than cancer, when the astral remains stuck in the physical, creating a focus of irritation/inflammation, and the etheric is not inherently strong enough, nor aided by the Ego enough, to push the inflammatory

process toward catharsis, out through the eliminative channels of the body.

Therefore the treatment of rheumatic, autoimmune illness will consist in measures and remedies to loosen the astral from its bondage in the physical and to impart healing, equanimity and harmony to the astral. Also important are measures and remedies to strengthen the etheric and the Ego-organization and to bring their forces to bear on healing the root of the illness in the patient's astral body.

Again, all physical illness originates from inherited or acquired defects in our astral body, our soul. Steiner states, "... an abnormal soul life must inevitably express itself in an abnormal bodily life, although the abnormality may, to begin with, be hidden from outer observation ... Thus if we are able to perceive truly, ... we can ascertain the approach of the illness a long time before it can be physically diagnosed, in a wrong functioning of the life of feeling. Illness is only an abnormal life of feeling in the human being." Thus autoimmune illness and most chronic illnesses have long latency periods during which the future physical illness dwells in the soul.

With the above pathophysiology of the great universal connections as our basis, we will discuss in this course the seven metallic remedies, and other anthroposophic therapies in autoimmune disease.