

At their request, Rudolf Steiner met with a group of medical students during the holiday breaks of Christmas and Easter in 1923/24, for a series of lectures now known as the Course for Young Doctors. The students were searching for ways to spiritually deepen their medical studies while also fostering their own inner development. What follows is an excerpt from a larger conversation between Steiner and the students about meditation and its role in healing work, in which he introduces the importance of the “will to heal.”

[Question from a medical student] “...up to now I have not had the attitude that one ought to have as a physician... I have not had the will to heal. I think it has been the same with one or two of us. Many of us have not become physicians in order to heal, but we have become physicians because of the great interest we had in getting to know the nature of the human being, conditions of disease and normal conditions. We approached medicine entirely from the side of knowledge...”

[Steiner] “You must remember the following. When, in the sphere of medicine you divide these two things, the side of knowledge and the will to heal, it is a contradiction of the reality. It is very important to realize what is at stake here. Knowledge of the nature of the human being is necessary in many different fields of human activity. In pedagogy, for example, the essential starting point is a knowledge of the nature of the human being. In other domains, too, there must be knowledge of the human being if we have an eye to realities. Knowledge of the nature of the human being is essential for everyone who wants to get beyond superficialities. It is necessary for everyone...”

“So far as concrete details of knowledge of the human being are concerned, the following must be remembered. You spoke about knowing the conditions of disease in a human being. This is a preconception—the outcome of materialism. In itself it is a materialistic preconception. Taken in the concrete, what does it mean to know the conditions of disease in the human being? How can I know anything about a disease that is localized, let us say, in the liver, in the spleen, in the lungs, in the heart? How do I get knowledge of it? When I know what kind of healing process might be capable of overcoming the process of disease. ***In reality the process of disease is the question and one remains at a standstill at this point if one’s only aim is to get knowledge of the process of disease. The answer is the healing process.*** We know nothing at all about a process of disease when we do not know how it can be healed. Understanding consists of the knowledge of how the morbid process can be eliminated. Without the true will to heal there can be no medical study in the true sense. To know conditions of disease means nothing. Without passing on from the pathology to the therapy one would simply be concerned with the pathological aspect, imagining that one was thus getting knowledge of the human being. One would simply be describing a diseased organ. But a description of this kind is quite inadequate, is not of the least value...”

“Knowledge of healing should simply not exist without the will to heal. Today you ought to be speaking of something quite different. You should really be saying: ***‘Yes, I have studied medicine for a short time and now I have an ungovernable will to heal. I must restrain myself so that this will which comes from knowledge does not break loose in such a way that I want to heal all the healthy people!’*** This is really not a joke. The voice should be a voice of restraint. It should simply not be possible to say: ‘I have striven for the knowledge of healing but not the will to heal!’ For a knowledge that is real cannot separate itself from the will—that is quite impossible.”

From Rudolf Steiner, lecture of April 22, 1924, in *Course for Young Doctors: Meditative Contemplations and Instructions for Deepening the Art of Healing* (Spring Valley, NY: Mercury Press, 1994), 143-147. Permission for PAAM to share this excerpt kindly granted by the publisher.