

What if Disease is A Manifestation of Health?

– Dr. Kim A. Jobst

Disease and health are commonly thought of as distinct opposites. It is possible, however to see things in an entirely different way; one which is provocative but has far reaching consequences for health, social policy, industrial development, the environment and politics. Seen thus which both health and disease may be seen to be facets of healthy functioning, each necessary for the other, each giving rise to the other. From such a perspective, disease may be seen to be a manifestation of health; the healthy response of an organism striving to maintain physical, psychologic, and spiritual equilibrium.

Disease then, is not necessarily to be avoided, blocked, or suppressed. Rather, it needs to be understood to be a process of transformation, a process to be facilitated and worked with rather than antagonised because it is integral to the dynamic equilibrium we think of as health and is therefore part of the healing itself.

In many cases, perhaps all, people get ill because there is something going "wrong" in their lives. This could occur in a whole range of ways— relationships, environment, food, or employment. From the perspective of disease as a manifestation of health, however, disease is seen to be a meaningful state that can inform health workers how to help patients to heal themselves. In this way, instead of being meaningless, people's problems become diseases of meaning, enabling them to see that things are not necessarily "going wrong" but are, in fact, helping them to develop, correct imbalances and so become stronger, to live more fully and with more understanding. Seen from this perspective, depression; cancer; heart disease; neurodegenerative and autoimmune disease; dementia; and conditions such as community violence, genocide, and the problem of environmental devastation are "diseases of meaning."

World Health Organization forecasts make it clear that diseases of meaning will continue well into the next millennium to be the major cause of suffering and death worldwide. To deal with them, the world needs to reformulate the bio-molecular paradigm that has been exploited in the last two centuries because it does not address the reasons why these diseases arise, attending mainly to their molecular consequences.

A paradigm that includes the importance of meaning must now be given top priority. The concept that diseases are a manifestation of health, a call to a different relationship with ourselves and our environment, both animate and inanimate, is in itself a different approach. Programs for care and education based upon it would have immediate application in medicine, industry, education and ecology. Such a model would have far-reaching consequences for the understanding, treatment, and prevention of diseases and behaviours that lead to violence and environmental destruction as well as physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual pathologies..