

Can you have a tumor in your feeling life?

by Adam Blanning, MD

There is a very unusual description of a tumor in anthroposophic medicine, in some comments made by Rudolf Steiner, who helped to found anthroposophic medicine with a group of physicians almost a century ago. It says that a tumor is a “sense organ”—like an eye or an ear—in the wrong place.”

That sounds very bizarre, until you spend some time thinking about the process, the activity of a sense organ, which is to create a space where the outside world can penetrate into us undisturbed. Our eye, or our ear, should accurately convey our surroundings without altering them. Those are not the only ways the outside world comes in. We breathe air, but warm and humidify it, and what we breathe in is different from what we breathe out. We take in food, but it is (necessarily) radically transformed through our digestion. Our sense impressions, however, really should come in without disruption or distortion. So our eyes, our ears, and our smell can truly be thought of as little “harbors” where the outside world comes into us.

What we do with these sensory impressions varies. Some we take deeply inside and make our own, such that we go through a kind of intellectual or emotional digestion of our experiences. It is very possible to learn facts by rote memory, and be able to “parrot them back” without really understanding their significance or application. But that kind of learning is very short-lived—like cramming the night before an exam, and forgetting it all two days later. What you have really worked through and understood in a deeper way, however, becomes your own. It is yours. And that usually stays with you for years.

Emotional experiences work similarly—some are met and let go of quickly without much consciousness. Others resonate very deeply and sculpt who we are as individual human beings. Real learning comes when we take those important experiences in and work them through, both those that are joyful and those that bring pain.

It is related to the distinction between being “conscious” and being “self-conscious.” When we are merely conscious the sense impression from the outside comes in and we are aware of it, though we may not act on it. But when we take the time to *see how we are* in that interaction, and *see what we do (or don’t do)*, then we can learn

from it, make it our own, and hopefully prioritize what make us happy and connected and avoid the patterns that are destructive or isolating.

Now, there are certain times in life when an experience is so strong that we are not able to quickly let go (it is not trivial in that way), but we are also not able to fully take it in and do something with it. Instead it gets “tucked away.” It becomes something that we are conscious of on a deep level—we are still holding it—but we don’t have the time, energy, or tools to know what to actually do with it. An event from the outside world is inside of us, but not really yet part of us. We could use the word “harbor” again, but a better word might be “hole” or “vacuum” because a part of our feeling life becomes walled off, separated out, and is not incorporated into our healthy feeling life.

If this same process happens on the level of our organs and tissues—a part of us becomes separated off, holding its own process and not being incorporated into the healthy physiology of our body—that gives us a kind of functional definition for a tumor. It is *in* us, and *of* us, but not in a *healthy* way part of us.

There are known immunologic connections between our feeling life and our bodily health, so it is not good to carry around these “not us” experiences in our soul life if we can avoid them. Please *do not* interpret this to mean that someone who has a tumor has developed it as a result of an imbalance in their feeling life. But it does mean that when we have a tumor, or are wishing to prevent a tumor, then working on our soul life and working to warm and integrate all the aspects of our life is helpful.

Mistletoe extracts are often given as a supportive anthroposophic treatment for cancer. Rudolf Steiner described mistletoe’s activity as “creating a mantle of warmth around the tumor” which helps it to be met by the immune system and transformed so that it can reintegrate into the whole. The work of creating a “mantle of warmth” around our experiences comes not through reliving painful past events, but by growing our healthy sense of self for the future. Three helpful resources are: *Stairway of Surprise: Six Steps to a Creative Life*, by Michael Lipson; *Crisis Points: Working Through Personal Problems*, by Julian Sleight; and *The Quiet Heart: Putting Stress in its Place*, by Peter Gruenewald, Teresa Hale.

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