

Anthroposophical Medicine and some Qualities of Youth

Allow me to begin with a youthful activity. I propose that we look at the following life story the way young people would take it in: listening to it without knowing where it will lead, with no more bias than necessary, painting a tableau in our minds before the full “judgment” sets in. What might this story, the portion that I am presenting here at least, teach us in the end? We’ll see.

Listening recently to a National Public Radio broadcast, I became aware of the growing-up story of the legendary African-American movie actor Sidney Poitier, perhaps best known for his role in the movie *Guess who's Coming to Dinner* (1967). His most recent book, *Life beyond Measure*¹, is well worth perusing. The book is written from the perspective of a wise, 82 year old, sending letters to his just born great-granddaughter. Interesting for us here are the initial recollections from his youth, growing up as a teenager on the Bermuda Cat Island, a place with no electricity or for that matter absolutely none of the other trappings of modern culture. A place so isolated that when he visits for the first time the bigger town Nassau he is scared of the giant “bugs or insects” until he is given by his mother the concept and the explanation of what automobiles are.

He is born 1927 in Miami, Florida, as such a thin and premature baby, that his father, counting on death the same day, immediately prepares a shoebox in which he would bury him. The mother, however, undaunted tells him to throw the box away. She has faith in a soothsayer, who predicts “that the boy will survive, and he will not be sickly. He will grow up and travel to most of the corners of the earth. He will walk with kings. He will be rich and famous. His name will be carried over the world.” Until his early teens the boy spends his time in the midst of nature gazing at the ocean and living in the general agricultural atmosphere of the tiny island. He looks at his mother and father with admiration and senses in them a quiet inner life that they never need to outwardly articulate.

Going to church on Sundays, the only day when he would wear shoes, begins a period of intense questioning for him, a preoccupation with what is “Up There”. In church hears sermons and songs and prayers about “Up There” as generally associated with a place called Heaven:

“But for me, even as a small boy sitting beside his mother every Sunday morning in church, there was another, less ominous “Up There”. I thought of it as “the place above my head.” This is where all the questions really started in me, with hours spent sitting on the rocks looking out over the waves toward the horizon, where sky and ocean meet, caused me to puzzle incessantly about how down here would intersect with “Up There”, and how far I would need to swim or sail to be at that point. And then after the sun went down, whenever I looked up on a clear, moonless night, there it was, bejeweled: the place above my head reaching as far as one could see. Stars in every direction. Bright stars that twinkled. Faint stars in the far distance. Clusters of stars. Empty spaces where there were none. And nearby stars that appear close enough to touch. These not only were my studies in rudimentary astronomy, but were also part of my quest to know more of my



Figure 1. The young Sidney Poitier
(www.thegoldenyears.org/poitier)

mother's connection to "Up There" and to the guardian angels among the stars that she believed in with all her being. These many decades later, whenever I look at the horizon or up at the night sky, with all that I've learned from taking my question to the next levels, I still don't completely discount the existence of guardian angels. Or, perhaps, I hedge my bets and figured that if they are real, and if one is watching over me as I sit here...then hands down it's my mother, Evelyn Outten Poitier."

The next moving report from him is that until he was a teenager this boy never had a mirror, where he would be able to see his own face and really know what he looked like.

"Of course, I could easily see what the faces of other children look like. I also knew well what the faces of family members, village elders, and people from other settlements looked like, simply from having seen them in the routine of their daily lives. But I had no way of looking at my own."

One day almost magic happens:

"What was unusual in this day was how the sunlight at my back had thrown a shadow on the surface of the water. Instantly that shadow took the shape of a boy who appeared to be my age, who began mirroring nearly every move I made. Was the shadow boy mocking me? Very well. Assuming it was, I responded with the blurring of nonsensical gestures executed as swiftly as my hands could fly...too swift and much too complex for any shadow on any pond anyway to imitate. I was wrong. With not even a fraction of time lapse between its motions and my own the shadow again mirrored, synchronized, and, yes, one could also say imitated every movement to the letter."

This shadow would disappear only when the sun would be hidden behind clouds. It would help of course, if the water would be completely still. But even then, no matter how carefully the boy looked he could never quite discern what this apparition really looked like. Years later, Sidney Poitier remembers how unhappy he would be on cloudy days and his mood would grow darker as the threat of rain increased and how convinced he would be that his shadowy companion shared the same sentiment about the weather.

"We were similar in temperament and personality."

Later, when he is finally exposed to real mirrors, he marvels at the beauty of his face and the resemblance that he encounters there to his parents.

Destiny brings him to Miami where he faces the realities of both a poor life, which he can understand, and the brutally racist attitudes of the South, which he cannot tolerate. He moves to New York where for the first time he comes into contact with snow and cold. Finally, after a stint in the Army, done in order to essentially feed himself, his destiny leads him to the movie acting career. Throughout, he becomes increasingly fascinated with technology and "scientific advances".

Eventually he tells us where he has arrived in his spiritual beliefs:

"As I search my recollections of all the members of the Poitier family --those who are still here and those long gone -- I can't say that anyone in the family had a preoccupation anything like mine for delving into life's most elusive mysteries. Would asking those questions be the job that was assigned to me at birth? Was it a mantle that I accidentally came across and put on while roaming the island of my youth? More questions looking for answers. Here are other variations: How did I end up in the family that I did? How do any of us get here? Well, some say by design: Faith in the will of God. Others say by random happenstance: trial and error. Modern science on the other hand, speaking with its customary quiet caution, points to the unfolding of evolutionary processes over billions of years -- that when studied in depth will yield proven scenarios that soon will leave no doubt as to how we got here. Meanwhile -- if, and, and but notwithstanding -- how we got here remains an unanswered question. May be some questions are eternal by nature and we are never meant to find an answer."

Ultimately, in his adult life, he comes to the conclusion that if there is a God it is an Intelligence that may have created one or more of the universes such as ours. But it would be certainly a power that is not too concerned with the inner workings on the earth as we know it.

Isn't this a metaphor for a typical "modern person" who undergoes the transformation from a wondering youth, concerned with the "Up There" to the "adult" whose ultimate attitude is that for the eternal questions there is no answer? And in this there is a transformation of a person that goes from the magic and the mysteries of "Up There" to an essentially godless universe. One could argue that the loss of idealism, or religiosity, is only illusionary in this case; that Sidney Poitier became well known for metamorphosing his "Up There" search into the fight for social justice free of racial prejudice. Certainly. But do concerns for the life on Earth, the humanistic causes, etc, always have to come at the expense of the awareness of the spiritual reality. Does growing old have to be accompanied by losing the "Up There"? Does growing into an adult have to be accompanied by a mandatory loss of the memory of one's spiritual home? Isn't this loss of a consciousness for the spiritual world the real sign of aging of the soul forces? Is the same absence of these youthful forces what makes it so difficult to meditate, to regain even a modest sense of clairvoyance? Isn't the fear of getting old not actually a fear of dying; and that, in itself, a fear of going into the "dark unknown" since we have forgotten the luminous "Up There" from where we came?

Rudolf Steiner not only gives some answers here as to why this happens but also how to "cure" it. If one central aspect of youth, which we are discussing here, means to retain the memory of our spiritual home that we came from, the "Up There", then we need a means to cultivate the forces that will keep us young.

We clearly cannot cover the topic comprehensively but maybe just a few comments will still be helpful. Rudolf Steiner makes us aware through his research that in more ancient times the human physical body would directly feed and support the spiritual consciousness of humans all the way to practically death. As a means of understanding this phenomenon let us say that the small child could then, and does now, understand the higher spiritual love existing in the world through the sense perceptions that would come directly through breast feeding, for example. In older times the nature observations made with the, say, 49 year old body would directly lead to accompanying spiritual insights. In the classical Greek times the physical body would nourish some kind of spiritual life until the 30th or 33rd year of life. Today the evolution of humanity has reached the point where the physical body infuses us with a sense for both spirituality and youth only until slightly beyond the teenage years. After that time we must now devise means ourselves how to feel "young". The path is reversed and the soul and spiritual life need to help the body, not the other way around. How do we do that?

Rudolf Steiner gives several methods. If one concerns oneself with Anthroposophy one soon comes to an exercise that he never tires of pointing to, i.e. the so called "backwards review", in German "Rueckschau", which literally translated means to look, to see backwards. He elucidates that imaging just about any series of events backwards one can strengthen any kind of memory enormously while also rejuvenating one's life forces. As examples one can give: recollecting the day's events in reverse order; re-living a piece of literature from the end towards to the beginning; or remembering the words of the title of this article as "Youth of Qualities and Medicine Anthroposophical". (Of course living every sound of a mantra backwards- instead of AUM to say MUA- is even more powerful, for reasons that go beyond the scope of this article.)

Finally, let's discuss even a nutritional means that Rudolf Steiner is giving for strengthening the memory



Figure 2. Lightroot, Young plant, just before being transplanted by Dr. Mark Kamsler from a potted state into the ground.

and spiritual life as discussed here. (All of these points should definitely be understood as helping in daily life with the “re-freshening” of the mind that every adult strives and longs for.)

Rudolf Steiner points out that one plant above all, the Lightroot, or *dioscorea batatas* as the plant is generally known, has the ability to store so called Light Ether, a fundamental part of the energetic life forces needed in the body. This Light Ether will be vital for the development of the people in the future, he tells us. We know in general that light is critical to both plants and animals for physiological processes, but especially in humans this light needs to connect to the Light Ether in order to lead to a good memory. Here is a brief excerpt from a lecture that Rudolf Steiner gave on the 2nd of January 1916:

"How does memory come about? ...

This is what occurs: the first thing we have to take into consideration is this, that when we met the man five days ago our etheric body experienced certain movements. It is the light part of the etheric body that we are now considering; of course, the other members of the etheric body -- the warmth, chemical and life parts also vibrate in sympathy, but it is the light part that we are considering today; I will speak of it therefore as the light body. Our etheric body, then, experienced certain movements ...as inner light movements; so that apart from our having perceived the man with our senses, we received the impression (not communicated through the senses) that gave rise to movements in our light body. Thus the whole result of our meeting with the man consisted in our light body experiencing all kinds of movements. While you stood before the man and spoke to him, your etheric Light body was in continual movement. What you said to him, what you felt and thought regarding him, is all disclosed in the movements of your Light body. When, several days after, you see this man again, the fresh sight of him stirs your soul, and this movement causes your etheric body, purely because of its laws of continuity, to reproduce the movement experienced five days before, when you met the man and exchanged thoughts with him. Very well, we encounter this man again after five days. The etheric Light body, stirred by this meeting, experiences again the same movements which it did at the first meeting... Remembrance is this: the perception from the outer ether of inner etheric movements; the perception from the outer light ether of movements in the inner Light body.

Suppose for example that you see two men meet each other. Perhaps the one merely sees the face of the other but because of this certain movements arise in his etheric body. Then he goes away. The etheric body retains the tendency to repeat these movements if it is stirred to do so. Five days later these two men meet again. They perceive each other, the one whose Light body made the movement is aware of the other and his Light body is stirred to make the same movements which it made when he saw the other's face before. This is expressed in his consciousness when he says I have seen the face before. That is: consciousness perceives the inner movements of the light ether from the outer light ether. This is remembrance purely as an act of perception. We can say: in the



Figure 3. Lightroot, mature plant. The long straight white tubers show the connection to the Light Ether.

external light one perceives the movements taking place in the inner Light body. But we do not see them as light movements. Why do we not see them thus in ordinary life? We do not see them as light movements, because this light ether body is seated within the physical body, and therefore the movements of the light ether body impinge everywhere on the physical body. Through these impacts the light movements of the etheric body are transformed into memory pictures. These light movements are not perceptible. It is only through what the memory presents to us through contact with the physical body that we are aware of them.”

Supporting these activities of the light ether can be greatly enhanced with the use of the Dioscorea (Lightroot) plant. A vine plant that likes to climb, one can see, like a young child, the striving of the vine towards the light of the sun “Up There” growing as if lifted towards the light (Figure 4). Gathering in this light, the plant carries these forces all the way down to the “underground parts”, the roots. These roots are known to grow several feet down into the earth like an arrow of light. Here, the forces of the light are then stored, to preserve the light for the future, for “older age”.

Combining the unique properties and abilities of this very special plant with the spiritual processes at work in Biodynamic agriculture and Anthroposophical medicine, a new world opens up for our health and nutrition. From the preparing of the soil, the spraying of the “BD preps”, the nurturing of the growing plant and the careful harvest, to the many rhythmic processes involved in the making of a remedy and preparing of a food ingredient an opportunity now exists to help keep accessible our youthful spiritual light as we move towards older age.



Figure 4. Lightroot vine reaching towards the light.

Making this Lightroot part of our daily nutrition is a tremendous help to enriching our body- both spiritual and physical- with the much needed Light Ether. It can be used either as a supplement, in a more concentrated potentized form, or as a staple as a potato replacement. The availability of this inner light, both obtained through exercises, and through nutrition, can then be the mirror for the Self, the Mirror, that allows us to recognize our lineage, our resemblance to the World of Light.

Sidney Poitier is a very luminous man! But like good students striving to be better than their teacher we must emulate his striving to improve the world while going beyond that and not lose the consciousness of the Light-filled “Up There”, for only then, in truth, there will be Youth.

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1. Sidney Poitier, *Life Beyond Measure*, Letters to my Great-Granddaughter, HarperCollins Publishers, 2008