

## The Water of Life

Laszlo Boeszoermenyi

The fairy tale “The Water of Life” from the collection of the *Grimm* brothers describes a king “who was sick” and who could be cured only by the water of life. The tale doesn’t say what his illness is. The medicine he needs reveals the essence of this: his illness is that he is thirsty for this water. What does that mean? Could that have a meaning for us, for modern men and women?

In the New Testament, in *John 4, 5 - 15*, we find another “story” about living water:

"Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus answered and said unto her, if thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst: but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water."

This story says not only that we are thirsty for the living water, but also that we generally do not even know that. The woman of Samaria doesn’t understand easily that it is she who needs water.

Thirst, physical thirst, is one of our most elementary biological needs, which we share with all living beings, with animals and plants. There is no life without water. The Lord is obviously speaking about a water that cannot be drawn from a well, but that we need not less than physical water. Physical water must be drunk again and again, the water he is speaking about is of a different nature: “whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst”. This obviously cannot be true for physical water. We are separated from physical water and if we are thirsty we must get in connection with it again and again. What should it mean that there is a kind of water, with which we can get into an eternal connection, never being separated from it?

The modern grown-up lives in a dualistic consciousness. His thinking is separated from his perception. He feels thinking as his own, but generally he does not feel his thoughts to be real – they are “just thoughts”, “just imaginations”. Reality is given to him only in perception; when he says that something is “real” or when he speaks about the “real world” he means the perceptual world. However, he does not understand his perceptions directly, they have to be interpreted by thinking. In other words: truth and reality are separated in him, he comes to truth through his thinking, to reality through his perception.

The duality of consciousness can be expressed still another way. In the dualistic consciousness presence and past are also separated, both in thinking and in perception. It is especially clear in the case of thinking: if we try to observe our thinking, we come always too late: by the time we become aware of our *thinking* it is already gone: the result, the *thought* remains behind. The thought must have come from thinking, the past of the thinking must have come from its present. However, we seem to be unable to experience this presence in a conscious way – to become conscious, thinking must take a fixed form, it must become a thought. The process of thinking, in which the thought is not yet formulated, in which thinking is like a transparent stream, usually remains unconscious. Perception works in a similar way: what we become aware of, is already fixed by a concept – the process of the perception, in which we are identical with the perceived phenomenon is not conscious.

Yet another aspect of the same duality is that we feel “ourselves” separated from the “world”. By “ourselves” we mean a certain – clearly egoistic – feeling of self, by “world” we mean everything and anybody else, generally not noticing that this world is only as we have become aware of it – we don’t know any other world than the one we know. In other words: we generally forget our own role in this view of the world and ourselves. We feel ourselves separated from everything and from anybody else, but this situation is not independent from the style of our cognition, from the dualistic consciousness. We need this feeling to be self-conscious at all, and we do not notice that exactly this need is that which separates us from the world, and especially from other human beings. We almost never pay really attention to another person, because we – at least partly – return to the self-feeling, thus distracting us from paying attention to others. We cannot use our feeling as an organ of cognition – we misuse it as a tool for self-feeling.

The consequence of the dualistic consciousness is that we are thirsty in every thought for the reality behind it, and we are thirsty in every perception for its hidden meaning. In everything we do, we are thirsty for a real feeling, which is not self-feeling, but which feels the truth and reality of the object of cognition. Lastly, our fundamental thirst is for meeting the other person, the other I-being, the thirst for charity, for love.

The healing of the divided, dualistic consciousness is the healing and freeing of the attention. The smallest son of the king is the last, very small portion of his free attention – the older sons do not follow his commands any more – which is able to find the proper way and to restore the flow of life, to restore the monistic, clean, transparent flow of free attention. In concentrated, deep spiritual

activities, especially in modern meditation<sup>1</sup>, we can experience that consciousness becomes “flowing”, like a stream. Such an experience is expressed for example by the basic meditation-sentence given by Rudolf *Steiner*: "I feel myself [in] thinking [at] one with the stream of the world occurrence." (“Ich empfinde mich denkend eins mit dem Strom des Weltgeschehens.”) In modern meditation thinking or perceiving are experienced in their present process, the attention is strong enough to remain in this experience. The dualism of past and present is resolved. At the same time, the other dualistic aspects also vanish: thinking *is* a reality in this process and perception need not be interpreted in a second step: it is immediately meaningful, even if this meaning cannot be or is very difficult to be said in words. In this experience the attention is strong enough to experience itself – we do not need the selfish feeling of self any more. The hindrance of building true human communities vanishes, we do not need separation to be aware of ourselves. In this unseparated consciousness we are not thirsty any more: we become “like a spring of water”:

*Isiah 58, 3 - 9, 11:*

"... Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labors. Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this way, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have been chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? ... Then shalt you call, and the LORD shall answer, thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. ... and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not."

This possible transformation of consciousness was known about, and promised as a general capacity for the future, a surprisingly long time ago. The requirement to “brake every yoke” is a very modern one. The man who is able to brake all habits of his consciousness – which keep it under yoke –, comes to the experience of the “stream of the world occurrence” in his thinking, which is now “like a spring of water, whose waters fail not”. At the same time he becomes able “to deal thy bread to the hungry”, he becomes a free, moral being.

Proper fasting is not asceticism. To refrain from this-and-that is hardly the proper way to unselfishness, rather to a kind of subtle egoism. Proper fasting is that we become the source of wealth itself – a spiritual wealth, of course. The spring needs not to refrain from water – it *is* water and it gives water. The essence of the moral attitude is not to renounce a part of wealth, but to give all of it – in joy, without a head bowing down like a “bulrush”.

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<sup>1</sup> see Georg Kuehlewind: “From Normal to Healthy”, 5. Chapter, and “Moderne Meditation” in “Gegenwart” Nr. 1 1997 by the author.

The New Testament repeats and confirms this promise:

*John 6, 35:*

"And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."

*John 7, 37 – 39:*

"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)"

A spring or a well must be taken care of. It must be kept clean, which actually means its water must be taken. If the water of a well is not taken then it gets stagnant and dries up. Many fairy tales contain this motif. For example in "Mrs. Holle" from the Grimm collection there is a tree, the fruit of which must be taken, an oven, the bread of which must be taken etc. The diligent girl does that, the lazy one does not, and will be punished. In modern social life nothing is needed more than this attitude: to pay attention to what the other person wants to give us. Real giving and real receiving are the same. The reason that we cannot receive is, that we want to keep it. A well neither creates nor keeps the water: it receives it and gives it. The apostles receive words at Pentecost that they neither create nor keep: they receive them and give them to others.

*Acts 2, 4, 7:*

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place... And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance... And they were all amazed and marvelled..."

They were all amazed and marvelled. Not only the hearers but the apostles themselves as well. They are saying words they didn't know before, they are speaking a fully improvisational language, the common language of mankind: the language of living, present thinking. Not that they are becoming an unconscious medium for something. Quite the opposite. Their attention reaches such a level of strength and freedom that they are able to receive and transmit the higher- order word, the "Word of Truth" (James 1, 18), without losing their I-consciousness. A modern meditation sentence aiming at a similar experience is given by R. Steiner in the following form: "It thinks in me." or "Thinking is through me." ("Es denkt in mir."<sup>2</sup>)

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<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Steiner: Die Schwelle der geistigen Welt, GA 17.

Even at Pentecost, there are people who don't understand what is going on: "Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine." (*Acts 2, 13*). Misunderstanding is as old as the history of Word. Understanding is not "caused" by some mechanical law. Words leave us free to understand and to keep, or not to understand or even to misunderstand. And this is good. It would not be a human life if words forced us to understand them. The "Word of Truth" is certainly powerful. But not powerful in the sense of some "military" force, rather in the sense that it makes those who want to take it free and healthy – like the sick king in the fairy tale.

At Pentecost, the apostles look as if they were drunk. They are in ecstasy. Not in the ecstasy of wine or drugs but in the ecstasy of "living water". They removed every hindrance, they resolved every habit, every fixed form in their consciousness that could hinder the free flow of spirit. They do not need anything else to remain self-conscious, they experience themselves in the pure act of giving. Their ecstasy is the true joy of receiving the "perfect gift coming from above" (*James 1, 17*) and of giving it to others in absolute freedom.

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About the author:

Laszlo Boeszoermyeni, born 1949 in Budapest, Hungary. He studied at the Technical University of Budapest. Through the leader of the university theater group he came into contact with anthroposophy. 1978 he got acquainted with Georg Kuehlewind in Zurich (surprisingly not in Budapest where they both lived at that time). Since then, the path of spiritual schooling is of primary importance to him. He published several articles about cognition and pedagogical issues in German and in Hungarian, among others in "Erziehungskunst" and "Gegenwart". He translated several writings of Kuehlewind into Hungarian, among others "From Normal to Healthy" and "Christmas". He is a professor of computer science at the University in Klagenfurt, Austria, where he lives with his wife Judith, a cellist, and their triplets.

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