

Transmuting Imperil

Insight on the Healing Art from Mdm. Helena Roerich

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Service to humanity is a noble calling. While the call compels an answer, preparation for that service is critical. Throughout my 25 years in the healing art, I have collected teachings that improve the public's ability to care for and serve others as well as themselves and their own families. One of my most important criteria for my "collection" is the ability of the particular teaching to protect the healing servant entering into a potentially lifesaving act. The teaching must include recognition of boundaries, be an efficient and effective means of supporting health and well-being, and promote safety in all planes of consciousness—physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.

One of the first teachings I collected early on in life was the approach to saving a person who is drowning. While one may desire to help a person who is drowning, the American Red Cross Junior and Senior Lifesaving courses emphasize that a potential rescuer follow certain steps so that they themselves do not become a second victim in the unfortunate situation. The Lifesaver takes some type of floatation object, for example a lifesaver ring, with him when he swims out to the person crying for help. Rescuers are then taught to stop a certain distance from the person, call out and offer help before moving in to assist. The rationale for this process is that it is a well-known phenomenon that people who are drowning are highly prone to grab at the head and neck of the rescuer with such force of will to live that they often incapacitate or drown the rescuer. These principles of rescue in drowning situations are really quite applicable to any service situation in which people in need may be gasping for emotional, mental, spiritual as well as physical "air".

Years later, in the 1980's I came across one of the most profound, immediately applicable, and effective "lifesaving" teachings I have been blessed to receive and apply in my service to others—that is the teaching on *imperil* described by Mdm. Helena Roerich (1879 - 1957). Mdm. Roerich was a Russian born spiritual teacher and healer, whose series of *Agni Yoga* books, which she referred to as "*The Living Ethic*", was written over the course of thirteen years from 1924-1937. (Roerich, 1967) She wrote the series under the guidance and inspiration of her spiritual teachers, the Mahatmas Morya and Kuthumi, wise beings with whom she and her husband, famed artist and humanitarian Nicholas Roerich, had been receiving instruction since 1920 (Drayer, 2005, p. 17)

Although the dictionary definition defines the verb imperil to mean, “to bring into peril or to endanger”(Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary), Mdm. Roerich used the term as a noun. She defined imperil as “the poison resulting from irritability” that attracts danger (Agni Yoga, 15 p. 15) and is “deposited against the walls of the nerve channels and then spreads throughout the organism.”(p. 16). The deposits of imperil are painful and contribute to the decomposition of matter, including the body. Mdm. Roerich wrote, “If modern science would try to examine objectively the nerve channels, giving heed to the astral currents, it would encounter a strange decomposition of the astral substance during the passage of that substance through the nerve channels-this is a reaction to imperil.” (Agni Yoga,15, p. 15-16) All people are as subject to the deconstruction effects of imperil on a daily basis just as they are to the basic elements that create the matter universe: fire, air, water, and earth. But when one chooses the path of service, particularly healing service to humanity, the challenges associated with interacting with the public increase. In particular, the exposure to imperil increases when one ministers to the needs of the suffering. Mdm. Roerich also advised that a study of the physical traces of imperil could “lead to an understanding of the accumulations of psychic energy” and that one could “observe the traces of imperil in any nerve channel.” She also noted encouragingly that “around the granulations of this poisonous viper, is gathered another substance which absorbs it. (Agni Yoga, 220, p. 140 – 141) This substance is the positive psychic or spiritual energy discussed later.

The following is an historical montage of Mdm. Helena Roerich’s teachings on imperil extracted from the *Living Ethic* and her published letters. In addition to the overview of the teaching on the concept, this montage also includes some of the remedies and antidotes conveyed by the Mahatmas to the Roerichs which they were then to share with all humanity as an offering of help in the dissolution of imperil and the healing of those “infected” by it.

Imperil Explained

The body is the vessel through which the spirit of healing and service flows; therefore the public servant and healer is often compelled to consciously and purposefully guard their own health just as the lifesaver must remember to keep their distance when first entering into a rescue of a drowning victim. Mdm. Roerich wrote of the importance of health, “Therefore I say – health must be guarded. A vessel filled to the brim must be carried with caution.” (Hierarchy, 102, p. 65) In carrying that health one becomes acutely aware of the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual or energetic stressors that influence body, mind, and spirit every moment. Being able to acknowledge the presence of the poison “imperil” in and around one’s being contributes to the guarding of one’s health.

Imperil is not experienced by the senses as are other kinds of poisons such as chemical agents and certain plants. It is an energetic substance that manifests as the result of the irritation that is everywhere present in society. Mdm. Roerich paints a vivid picture of the exposure to imperil. “Indeed, it is not necessary to call forth irritation, because men are filled to the brim with it. It is

only necessary to lock six bipeds in one room and within an hour the door will be shaking from imperil. (Hierarchy, 423, p. 229) She writes that irritation and imperil is “precisely that poison which causes much trouble to people. Do not forget that meeting with even the grossest ignorance is not worth provoking one drop of imperil. Indeed, imperil does not remain only within; it evaporates and permeates space, for the purity of which we are all responsible.” (Agni Yoga, 221, p. 142)

Imperil not only impacts the nervous system. It is contagious.(Hierarchy, 335, p. 183) Mdm. Roerich stated that it is “necessary once and for all to understand about the infection of imperil! This process is transmitted like leprosy. There can be either an increase of strength or disintegration, there can be no third condition. One should not advise strengthening by force. It is impossible to save anyone from leprosy by coercion. It is impossible to keep anyone from imperil by violence. Friendliness is not violence. Growth of the heart comes not from a whip, and a beautiful garden can be grown only by beautiful actions.”(Fiery World I, 161, p. 92) Hence both Helena and Nicholas’ commitment to beauty, which will be discussed below as an antidote to imperil, was a theme throughout their life work.

Mdm. Roerich also wrote that “imperil acts at far distances and can affect the subtle body. Imperil clashes like a dissonance with the Fire of Space.”(Hierarchy, 335, p. 183) Yet despite its prevalence and ability to spread, imperil remains elusive to modern science and medicine just as it seems was the case in the early 20th century when Mdm. Roerich wrote:

The kindling of the nerve centers has not sufficiently attracted the attention of physicians. It is very important to observe that the flaming of each center gives rise to symptoms of the local organ, yet the organ itself is not ill but is only vibrating in response to the fire of the center. It is possible to show that many false illnesses are announced by physicians when they do not recognize the basic cause of sensations. Moreover, the cause itself of inflammation is superficially studied. (Aum, 202, p. 96-7) Many physical diseases break out as a result of the infiltration of imperil – just as if a firebrand had worked its way in. (Aum, 294, p. 143) Sickness may nestle within a man for a long time, but if it does not manifest itself in a coarse physical manner, none of the earthly physicians will acknowledge it.(Heart, 192, p. 119)

In addition, imperil affects “psychic” energy. Mdm. Roerich stated that imperil (as well as fear, doubt, and self-pity) was a “destroyer of psychic energy.” (Agni Yoga, 389, p. 246) But it is important to carefully portray what she meant in the 1920’s by the phrase “psychic energy.” She wrote that, “Psyche is derived from the Greek meaning ‘the rational soul’ (the human soul), and finally it becomes applied to the highest, the spiritual synthesis, the crown of the human being...But in both cases (Author’s Note: mediums and psychics) the higher psychic energy is absent, as this quality can be manifested only when the centers are open and are fiercely transmuted...The psychic realm is vast, and it includes endless diversity of manifestations, from

the highest to the lowest. She was very keen to differentiate “psychism” from higher psychic or realms of true spirituality associated with the “higher Manas and Buddhi” (Roerich, *Letters of Helena Roerich*, v. 1. p. 352). Psychism was inevitably to be found associated with disorders of the nervous system. (Fiery World III, 103, p. 358) Imperil is the chief enemy of development of psychic energy. (Aum, 387, p. 190)

The lower psychic energies that promote the presence of imperil can however be transmuted. Mdm. Roerich described the transmutation process as important to the “creative energies necessary for crossing into the Subtle World.” She continued, “Each spiritual striving produces its sediments, which assume the aspect of subtle energies during the passage into the Subtle World. Thus, it is important to aspire into the Higher Spheres. Ecstasy of spirit and joy of the heart yield those energies which nourish the subtle body. Indeed, only a feeling imbued with higher impulses provides the needed energies. It must be understood that imperil and gross earthly desires produce their ugly ulcers, which the spirit must heal in the subtle body...Thus on the path to the Fiery World one should become accustomed to the thought about transmutation of the centers, because liberation from the body is not deliverance from spiritual ulcers.” (Fiery World III, 103, p. 85) In other words, healing occurs at many levels of being. So often the only discussion around a disease or suffering focuses on physical symptoms and their physiological or anatomical cause. Mdm. Roerich suggests that one’s power of thought, vibration, and association with higher impulses influences the impact and persistence of imperil.

Thought Poison

It is human nature for someone experiencing illness to ask the question, “why is this happening?” Healthcare providers may pose a variety of explanations for causation. But in many healing traditions, causation is identified as being within the person who is suffering. The role of the healer or caregiver is simply to, as stated by Florence Nightingale, place the person “in the best condition for nature to act upon him.”(Nightingale, 1969, p. 110). Within this paradigm, a person’s beliefs, understanding, and thoughts about their suffering become critical to the healing process. Those who serve others, especially in time of sickness and death transition also have their own thoughts and feelings about the person or group for whom they are caring. Mdm. Roerich acknowledges the power of thought in healing and creating illness. “It is time to pay attention to the amount of sicknesses generated by thoughts. During each sickness it is not bad to make a suggestion against negative thoughts. Magnetic passes over the affected organ can also be made. Nothing special is needed beyond the prayer of the heart, which creates a magnetic link with the Highest. During the laying on of hands one should not think of the sickness, but should try to unite oneself with the Highest.” (Hierarchy, 132, p. 79)

Mdm. Roerich challenged the health providers of her time to consider that imperil or poisonous thoughts could affect people’s health—even at a distance:

People especially often close their eyes to everything referring to betrayal and psychic murder. They do not even wish to consider that they can harm at a distance by their thoughts. Thus people avoid that in which they are most often guilty. One does not even have to be a giant of thought in order to harm. Even a mediocre thought poisoned by the crystal of imperil will be very effective...Verily, poisoning by thoughts is even more harmful than narcotics. Likewise, one can remind about infection through thought-transmission. One may be weakened to such an extent that each infection can easily approach. Thought is like a key with which to open. (Hierarchy, 125, p. 75-76)

She warned that the feelings of fear and terror in particular formed a “peculiar magnet” for darkness. She often framed her understanding of the *Living Ethic* in terms of darkness and light. “Indeed, darkness advances upon one possessed by terror. Each instant man is evoking Light or darkness.”(Aum, 145, p. 73-4) Consciousness was one of the focal points of Mdm. Roerich’s teachings and writings on healing. Her writings on consciousness express a powerful sense of hope:

If we know that every condition is created by the consciousness, which is inalienable, then there can be no fear for one’s well-being. The dangers that one customarily fears are dispelled by a broadened consciousness. Therefore, the growth of consciousness is the essential foundation for progress. Then there will be no dangers, there will be only obstacles. Overcoming obstacles is a means for the developing of energy. If the mountain is perfectly smooth, one cannot ascend to the summit. Blessed are the stones that tear the sandals of those who ascend! (Heart, 406, p. 261)

Yet she challenges her students to take complete responsibility for the outcome of that expanding consciousness:

Certain periods of planetary existence are subject to assaults of the elements. The one resistance to them is a consistent striving of people toward a renewal of life. Thought can protect against the elemental forces, otherwise the balance would be so greatly disturbed that cosmic catastrophes would ensue. Would a year of famine, of drought, of disease not be the result of mass degeneration of thought? One man’s thoughts are not enough to resist the elements. A new trend in consciousness cannot yet give the needed form to conscious thought. Only complete realization and responsibility will make it possible to inject power into thought.(Agni Yoga, 22, p.21)

Is it not the time perhaps to bring the teaching on imperil to those who wonder about the cause of the increase in earthquakes, tsunami and other earth changes such as global warming? Healing traditions suggest that all such phenomena are a reflection of consciousness just as Mdm. Roerich suggests. However, the link between that awareness of human-nature connection with the power of thought – in particular the power of imperil-is not often included in the discussion.

Mdm. Roerich does not leave her students comfortless after her intense teaching on imperil. As any good teacher would do, she goes one step further offering a number of simple remedies and antidotes for preventing and dispelling imperil.

Antidotes and Remedies

Harmony in body, mind, and spirit is not always easy to achieve and maintain in a troubled world. Therefore, it is always helpful when a wise teacher synthesizes their experience on the spiritual path for just a moment so that we can grasp a simple remedy that inspires us to keep going up the mountain. There are a number of these remedies in the *Living Ethic* that I have tested over the years in my own life and with my clients. These remedies from the heart of Mdm. Roerich and the Mahatmas are simple but powerful healing instruments – in the right hands.

On a very physical level, Mdm Roerich cited *rest* as an important remedy in dealing with imperil. Only rest, she wrote, “can help the nervous system to overcome the dangerous enemy that can call forth the most diverse irritations and painful contractions of the organism.”(Agni Yoga,15, p. 15-16) She wrote that the yogi can indeed feel fatigue and become ill and that rest and regeneration would be needed from time to time:

But he will know that a new store of energy must then be gathered. He will know where energy was overspent and will, without losing equanimity, make use of valerian and musk. It is a joy to know that our bodily apparatus can obtain the needed restorative energy. Fatigue from the past is happiness for the future. A new reinforcement of energy is always an advance over the past. This means that fatigue is our friend. It is because of it that the wise serpent sheds his skin. The serpent knows that the success of this regeneration depends on rest, and does not strike during the new growth. Therefore, the person who knows what in him is fatigued will wisely prescribe rest for himself, summoning other of his centers for his work. (Agni Yoga, 241, p.154-155).

Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) is an herb commonly used in Russian culture. The traditional use of the plant is predicated on the story that the Russian St. Panteleimon distributed the root of the valerian plant to sick people in many villages because it filled him with so much joy. (Zevin, *A Russian Herbal*, 1997)

Plants and flowers were the object of much of the Roerich family’s research and service. In addition to the valerian mentioned above, Mdm Roerich recommended a number of plant-based remedies to dispel imperil:

Healing through the fragrance of flowers, resins, and seeds goes back to hoary antiquity. Thus, a rose not only possesses a similarity to musk but also prevents imperil. A garden of roses was considered by the ancients as a place of inspiration. Freesias are beneficial for the sympathetic nervous system, which vibrates so much in a Yogi. The seeds of

barley are unsurpassed for the lungs. You know already about mint, about the resin of cedar and other resins. Perfumes are now bereft of meaning like all other desecrated values, yet the origin of fragrance underlies a useful but forgotten knowledge. (Hierarchy, 316, p. 174)

Rubbing mint leaves along the spine is recommended by Mdm. Roerich for relief of the pain in the spine due to the awakening of the Kundalini. (Agni Yoga, 220 p. 140 – 141) I have also used mint along the spine for dispelling imperil. Mdm Roerich said of mint, “One should remember that during the departure of the astral body the physical remains unprotected, and if the air is poisoned, the appearance of undesirable guests is unavoidable. Mint is the best disinfectant. It also aids the astral body, which leaves the physical body more often than we think.(Agni Yoga, 196, p. 126) The fresh peppermint (*Mentha piperita*) leaves are plucked from the stems and can be rubbed gently either on the client’s spinal column or along the zone on the inner side of the feet associated holographically with the spine.

She also mentions the use of the oil of eucalyptus to “cleanse the atmosphere of the room”. (Heart, 465. p. 266). This can be done by purchasing medicinal grade essential oil of eucalyptus, blending 5-10 drops with one ounce of water in a glass spray bottle and dispensing it into the air.

Spiritually speaking, Mdm. Roerich recommended *patience* as one of the most important remedies. Mdm. Roerich wrote that it was not only a remedy but an “antidote” to imperil. It counteracts imperil and its associated experience of darkness. “We will not forget patience. It is a solace to know that patience overcomes any irritation. In the intensity of patience a special substance is created which, like a powerful antidote, neutralizes even imperil. But, of course, patience is not a lack of feeling...Patience is a conscious tension and an opposition to darkness.” (Heart, 478, p. 272) And while in that space of patience s/he who is afflicted with imperil must, according to Mdm. Roerich, repeat, “*How beautiful everything is!* And he will be right; because the flow of evolution follows immutable law, it is beautiful.”(Agni Yoga, 15, p.15-16) “Aspiration toward great deeds and beauty” was, according to the Roerichs, the greatest way to “spiritualize and to restore the health of humanity” (Roerich, *Letters of Helena Roerich*, v. 1, p. 276)

The raising of one’s consciousness changes one’s vibration. Mdm. Roerich seems to suggest changing one’s vibration, raising one’s consciousness by changing one’s thoughts and “striving toward the Lord” one would not only “avoid harm from thoughts sent” but also “acquire immunity.” (Hierarchy, 126, p. 76) “The culture of the spirit and thought are to be followed, thus manifesting an unconquerable devotion to Hierarchy. Only thus is the spirit uplifted; only thus can one be affirmed in the evolution of the spirit. Hence, the beauty of Service is contained in the blending of consciousnesses.” (Hierarchy, 128, p. 77) Hierarchy is defined in the *Living Ethic* as “the law of the universe. It is not a threat, but the call of the heart and a fiery admonition directing toward General Good [*sic*].” (Hierarchy, preface)

Through meditation, devotional practice, and service to humanity people connect with their heart's own energy. Heart connection promotes awareness of when there is a need to dispel inharmony and transmute imperil. Mdm. Roerich wrote, "People regard the Teaching of the Heart as having the least foundation. But can one regard the current of the heart energy as an occult thing? On the contrary, there is nothing more precise than the beat of the heart. The sensitive heart leads to the renewal of consciousness. At least show respect for the heart in its work." (Heart, 471. p. 268) Today, the Heartmath Institute (www.Heartmath.org) has conducted numerous studies on the energy of the heart which is identified as the seat of intuit-intelligence. Some of the results of that research are a number of self-help experiments that can be used to complement one's meditation practice. Mdm. Roerich identified heart intelligence as the point of access to "straight knowledge:"

One often confuses prejudice with straight-knowledge, yet these qualities are directly opposed to each other. Prejudice is an offspring of the mind, whereas the abode of straight-knowledge is in the heart. Thus, one cannot compare the offspring of the mind with those of the heart. The acceptance of such a thing is not only erroneous but also harmful, disparaging the activity of the heart. It can be observed how strata of prejudice are accumulated until the entire life is turned into a self-erected prison. But straight-knowledge concerns cosmic truth, hence, in itself it does not contain anything disparaging. The self-development of straight-knowledge induces solemnity of feeling. (Heart, 472, p. 268-9)

Conclusion

Mdm. Helena Roerich recorded a teaching on healing imperil that is profound in its esoteric understanding of the human body, energy fields, the power of thought, and the importance of the simplest of remedies applied with wholistic understanding and intention. The teaching is elegant in its simplicity and compassionate in its applicability to everyday life. My scientific observation is that many times some of the most simple remedies are the most profoundly effective especially when a person has made a "medicine" themselves or received a remedy from a person who cares about them most deeply and infused it with pointed attention to healing the need of the hour. Mdm. Roerich gave example of this phenomenon:

A Rishi sent small pieces of linen or palm leaf or birch bark to the needy and sick. Those who received these ridiculed them and said, 'Is it not ridiculous to waste one's forces in sending blank fragments?' They paid regard only to words. But those who were wise applied what had been sent to the affected part or the heart, receiving relief. They understood that the Rishi had placed his hand upon it and suffused what had been sent with his psychic energy. (Heart, 450, p. 257)

The teaching on imperil is as a simple piece of linen or birch bark that has been infused with the healing consciousness of the Mahatmas and then given to the Roerichs for the sustenance of their students. It is a specific example in the healing art which acknowledges ancient truth found in many cultures and traditions – that the power of healing is within us. The power of healing is influenced by how we think, feel and act in the world to create our health, the health of others, and Earth herself. Therefore this healing teaching on imperil seems essential to the path of evolution and enlightenment...the path of *bliss*.

The teaching on imperil documented by Mdm. Roerich in the book *Hierarchy* (422, p. 228) links the concepts of imperil and bliss in the following manner:

If you know that an exalted, self denying thought physically changes one's aura and even induces rays from the shoulders, then you already know one of the great mysteries of the world. Each visibility is the reflex of a material reaction. Thus, if irritation generates imperil, then each exalted thought must create an opposite beneficial substance. And so it is. Certainly Bliss is a complete reality. It is generated in the cortical system and reacts upon the brain matter. The Tibetan ringse has a deep significance, being the sediment crystallized by the manifestation of Bliss.

The Mahatmas established that their plan was to first “establish the fact of imperil” and then “define the ways of the manifestation of Bliss.” (*Hierarchy*, 422, p. 228). They had complete faith that a contemporary biochemist would ultimately show proof of the existence of Bliss. American scientist, Dr. Candice Pert did in fact demonstrate a connection between emotions such as bliss and neuropeptides in the body (Pert, *Molecules of Emotion*, 1997), the materialization or physical expression of feeling. Mdm. Roerich identified patience, as the state of awareness capable of dispelling imperil as “the source of Bliss.” (*Heart*, 479, p. 273) She also wrote that roses are “beneficial for Bliss.”(*Hierarchy*, 424, p. 230.)

Attending to the challenges related to imperil allows the clearance of the body from poison and the acceptance of the light of Mother (Mater) which is the energy that heals all wounds, disease, and suffering. History reveals that people have experimented for centuries if not millennia in creating healing environments. The teaching on imperil however holds the potential to deepen our understanding of the inner environment – the world within-that which enables or prevents us from connecting with the healing environment without. Can barley soup, rubbing the body with mint leaves, surrounding oneself with roses, freesia, cedar, and pine promote health and happiness and raise our spirits above the inharmony so prevalent in contemporary society? The teachers have given freely of their healing wisdom on the deconstruction of imperil. The decision to embrace new understanding about the body and to try such seemingly simple remedies is, as is tradition, up to the student. These teachings on imperil are just one of the many pioneering works in the areas referred to today as holistic health and energy medicine by Mdm. Roerich and her family.

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