

The term **AKADEMIE** (academy) originally derives from a Greek hero by the name of Akademos. He was revered as the patron and protector of the city of Athens, and therefore a sacred grove called AKADEMEIA outside the gates of the city was dedicated to him. According to legend, he was buried there. The Greek philosopher Plato acquired this olive grove around the year 388 BC to serve as a forum for discussion for his numerous disciples, and declared it a 'philosophical garden', which later came to be called simply 'academy'. Plato's concept comprised the idea that the school was not dependent on the presence of its founder but was to continue after his death. Research and teaching were free. Those who taught and studied there merely shared Plato's fundamental convictions; if that ceased to be the case, the student left the academy. The school was held in high esteem by the public, and important thinkers and sages joined it.

We have chosen the term Akademie for our institution in this spirit. Within the framework of our clearly formulated fundamental convictions, each of our members is at liberty to teach according to their own specialized knowledge and personal experience.

For theory, practical experience and human qualities to come together again, new possibilities for co-operation must be created — that is, an 'interdisciplinary, multiprofessional team' as it is called nowadays. We see our academics' as such a holistic team. Excellent specialist knowledge, social skills, the ability to empathize, farsightedness, and an open mind constitute the criteria necessary for teaching in the Akademie Panta Rhei.

PANTA RHEI, 'everything flows', is one of Plato's dictums. It is the briefest formulation of Heraclitus' flux doctrine which says: 'That which is eternally the same (the river) is subject to constant change.'

We, too, understand life and death in that sense. This is the basic principle on the strength of which the Akademie Panta Rhei addresses the public, and within the framework of which its members and lecturing guests give talks and counsel.

Thus we undertake an important step in order to inspire in our cultural environment a new, more open relationship with the topic of death. We are confident that, relying on our expert knowledge, patience and empathy, we can teach persons working in the fields of healthcare and counselling, as well as society in general, to develop skills to incorporate death.

For us, this also means the need to re-evaluate every now and then whether we ourselves are in flux with the academy's principles and with life as such, and whether we are giving enough space to all the changes and developments that come to pass. The academy's name Panta Rhei is an expression of how we understand living and dying: everything flows and nothing remains the same, there is only constant change.

The task we have set ourselves is a new way of dealing with dying, death and grieving. The denial of death that is prevalent in our society, has led to the phenomenon that dying takes place almost exclusively in hospitals, homes for the elderly, nursing homes, and hospices, and only rarely at home anymore. Often only health-care professionals are present, sometimes the closest relatives, and all too frequently no one at all. Media reports on accidents, suicides and great catastrophes resulting in many casualties hardly ever remind anyone of the reality of their own inevitable death.

Our object is to take dying, death and grieving out of the area of taboo topics and to integrate them as natural circumstances into public life and into the development of each individual. For this purpose we offer lectures, seminars, training courses and personal consultations. Subject-specific lectures, basic and advanced training as well as private consultations for individuals are intended for members of all those professions involved directly or indirectly with dying, death and grieving. We want to point out helpful ways and means showing how each individual may, in his or her own manner, cope with dying, death and grieving, and experience them as valuable for their own personal development. Our orientation is based on a realistic view of life yet comprises the vision of a change in our society towards greater mental health and joy of living. For this, in our opinion, the integration of the natural reality of death is indispensable. Our concern is to take the terror out of death and give it back its dignity, free from banal pathos. Living and dying belong together — since dying, in the final analysis, signifies the completion of birth.