

Oriental Spiritual Medicine

This is a vast subject, and my specific interest in health and healing is on medical systems that support spiritual unfolding and facilitate liberation from ignorance and suffering.

During this lecture, I will discuss some ideas and theories from three medical traditions:

- a. The main branch of our mainstream modern medicine, known to us as “Western” medicine.
- b. Traditional Chinese medicine.
- c. Buddhist - Ayurvedic medicine.

I will start with an overview of some traditional Buddhist theories about the spiritual principles underlying the issues of health and healing. Contemporary mainstream medicine has drawn divisions between the healing of the body and the healing of the mind. According to fundamental Buddhist principles, however, true healing involves the entire being and is ultimately dependent upon spiritual health.

All forms of illness or injury, whether of the body or mind, are believed to have their foundation in three primary afflictions of the being, which are described as the “Three Root Poisons”.

The three root poisons are often translated as “hatred”, “greed”, and “ignorance”, but these are simplified labels for complex casual factors that have evolved from primitive survival mechanisms. An amoeba’s chances of survival are improved if it has an aversion (or hatred) for what is harmful, a craving (or greed) for what is helpful, and if it ignores everything else (“ignore-ance”).



Ignoring what is not immediately relevant for survival is helpful to primitive life forms because it keeps them focused and prevents the depletion of crucial energy. But at more complex levels of evolution, sustained ignorance turns the survival mechanisms of aversion and craving into afflictions.

There are damaging aspects to the three root poisons that produce disease (“disease”), injury, and destructive emotional, and mental states.

Some manifestations of hate-based states are rage, paranoia, anxiety, and unrelenting remorse. Some of the illnesses considered to have their roots in anger are cancer, circulatory problems, heart problems, and inflammations.

Some manifestations of greed-based states are vanity, ambition, lust, and gluttony. Some illnesses considered to have their roots in greed are obesity and diabetes.

Some of the manifestations of ignorance are sloth, torpor, dullness, and memory-loss. Some of the illnesses considered to have their roots in ignorance are Alzheimer’s, leprosy, and digestive problems.

The three root poisons, considered to be the underlying cause of all suffering, require special antidotes.

It is believed that they can only be fully antidoted by specific techniques of meditation and mental cultivation, which fall into three categories corresponding to each of the root poisons. Within the Theravaden Buddhist lineage, these meditative techniques are considered the most effective form of medicine available.

Certain meditation methods which focus on the breath can be used to antidote all three of the root poisons.

Specific treatments for the root poison of hatred include meditations designed to cultivate beatific states. This includes meditation exercises on compassion, loving-kindness, and colour.



The treatment for the root poison of greed uses meditation techniques designed to cultivate detachment.

One of the forms of mental cultivation most highly recommended by the Buddha for this purpose is “The Thirty-two Parts of the Body.” This is an anatomy-based exercise (incorporating aspects of conventional study, meditation, and contemplation) in which the student works at increasingly subtle levels of awareness through a specific list of “body-parts”. This particular exercise can also help to cut through excessive sensuality.

The treatment for the root poison of ignorance uses meditation techniques which help brighten the mind. Examples of these are meditations that focus on the colour white and on light. Dullness of mind can also be brightened by types of memorization and recitation work that help promote clarity.

When the action of the three root poisons causes an imbalance, that in turn produces “dis-ease” and illness or injury in the body or mind. It is then necessary to apply physical and mental remedies.

History of Medicine

Every culture in the world has developed a medical technology. The study and use of medicine predates the beginning of recorded histories. All the medical lineages in the world have their respective strengths. If we learn those strengths then we can make the best medical choices for ourselves.

Western Medicine

Western medicine has two ancient roots characterized by Apollo and Artemis, the ancient Greek twin deities of medicine.

Allopathic medicine is the medicine of “broken parts” and was associated with the ancient Greek sun god Apollo.



Allopathic medicine is the primary system of medicine currently used in the west.

Its strengths are:

- (1). war medicine, crises intervention, inoculations, and repairing structural damage such as broken bones.
- (2). crises medicine includes surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy.
- (3). diagnostic technology such as MRIs and CatScans.

Limitations of modern Allopathic medicine are:

- (1). It ignores spiritual potential.
- (2). It is reductionist, focused on pieces and the treatment of symptoms, rather than on the whole being.
- (3). It has come to rely too much on the “magic bullet” of pharmacological remedies and chemical drugs made from “isolated” active ingredients.
- (4). It is heavily top-down, is primarily managed and dispersed by experts and specialists, and often ignores the views and input of the patient.

The pharmacological industry, which is approximately 80 years old, dominates mainstream medicine to an unhealthy degree. That domination is a symptom of a modern and unbalanced behaviourist automaton materialist view.

Holistic medicine is the medicine of the “whole person” and was associated with the ancient Greek moon goddess Artemis. The strengths of Holistic medicine are:

- a. it allows for spiritual potential
- b. its emphasis is keeping people healthy, on health maintenance, and preventative medicine



The Ancient Greek medical system was an integrated balance of Holistic and Allopathic medicine.

Mainstream medicine in Canada has become unbalanced and weighted overwhelmingly on the side of Allopathy.

A healthy society needs a healthy balance of both preventative medicine, and crises intervention. Nature always works to restore balance in any unbalanced system, so holistic health principles are re-emerging. Nutrition is an Artemis aspect which is firmly in the main steam, as is evidenced by the Canada Food Guide and tons of information and mis-information pouring out on all aspects of nutrition.

An expanding grassroots revival in our country of Artemis health principles is helping to restore the ideas that:

- a. health is holistic and involves all aspects of a being;
- b. the ideal of health is to keep the body strong so that it doesn't get sick;
- c. that the body will heal itself if pathogens that cause disease are removed;
- d. three fundamental methods for maintaining good health which each individual can implement and adjust for themselves are:
 1. exercise
 2. nutrition
 3. environment

Herbalism, the original source of many of our medicines, is regaining credibility and become increasing popular as an alternative to synthesized pharmacological drugs.

- (1). Each medical herb is a botanically complex source of many ingredients that act synergistically as nutriment for deficiencies in specific systems of the body.



- (2). As an example, yarrow, which is used for the regulation of irregular menstrual cycles, has over ten thousand active botanical ingredients working together.
- (3). According to our Western herbal lore, there are 120 herbal actions in total. Forty of these herbal actions are useful. Five of the useful herbal actions are:
1. tonic – stimulates nutrition by improving essential nutriments, improves systemic tone giving increased vigour, energy, and strength to the tissues of either specific organs or to the whole body.
 2. anti-inflammatory – helps reduce inflation, pain, and discomfort
 3. demulcents – smooths and protects
 4. bitter – stimulates normal, internal secretions, counteracting physical depression
 5. astringent – can reduce excess discharge, toning and giving strength to body tissue
- (4). There are eight systems in the body to which the herbal actions have either specific or general affinities:
1. circulatory system
 2. digestive system
 3. musculo-skeletal system
 4. nervous system
 5. reproductive system
 6. respiratory system
 7. urinary system
 8. skin



- (5). According to a past medical survey of Canadians:
- (a). 60% of Canadians use a blend of mainstream allopathic and alternative Artemis medicine.
 - (b). 40% use herbal and alternative medicine primarily.
 - (c). men between 25 – 40 years of age consultant doctors only for crisis situations.

In contrast, global surveys show that 80% of the of the world's population uses herbal medicine primarily.

Limitations of modern Holistic medicine are:

- (1). The lack of a consistent, reliable standard of training and certification for practitioners.
- (2). The lack of consistent standards of quality for herbs, botanicals, and natural medical ingredients.

Traditional Chinese Medicine

The ultimate goal of Traditional Chinese medicine is to help the individual attain the "Great Healing" of complete perfection, described in China as Tao.

Chinese medical charts and drawings date back to 1500 BC. "The Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic" from approximately 600 B.C. is the oldest formal Chinese medical text and set the foundation for Chinese medical theory.

In 1000 A.D., Dr. Wei-Yi cast two life-size bronze figures showing the acupuncture points. He also compiled "The Manual of Illustrated Points for Accupunture and Moxibustion".



The Basic Theories of Traditional Chinese Medicine are:

- a. The arising, continuing, and falling away of everything in the universe is described as the interaction between Yin and Yang. Yin contracts and Yang expands.
- b. Life has three fundamental, interactive components:
 1. Chi – which is life energy in each of us.
 2. Shen – is vitality (including mental faculties).
 3. Jing – is the essence of life and its material foundation.
 - a). innate Jing is inherited from our parents.
 - b). acquired Jing is from food and water.
- c. Chi flows through a network of energy pathways in the body that connect to the organs, extend to the limbs, and have accessible points on the surface of the body that are used in acupuncture and accupressure.
- d. The primary cause of illness is due to imbalances of vital life energy (chi) which leaves the body vulnerable to outside pathogenic influences.
- e. To treat an illness, it is necessary to balance and strengthen the individual's chi.
- f. There are three root sources of disease
 - (1). Emotional
 - (2). Environmental
 - (3). Behavioural



(1). Emotional causes

- a). anger – excess damages the liver and gall bladder
- b). joy – excess damages the heart and small intestine
- c). pensiveness – excess damages the stomach and spleen
- d). sorrow – excess damages the lungs and large intestine
- e). fear – excess damages the bladder and kidneys

(2). Environmental causes, if the body can't adapt to them

wind – heat – wet – cold – dryness

(3). Behavioural causes

- a). overworking
- b). excessive drinking
- c). over-eating
- d). unregulated sexual activities

4. Emotions also affect chi or life energy in different ways:

- 1]. anger – causes chi to rise
- 2]. joy – causes chi to retard
- 3]. pensiveness – causes chi to stagnate
- 4]. sorrow – causes chi to diminish
- 5]. fear – causes chi to fall
- 6]. shock – causes chi to scatter



Healing involves regulating, strengthening, and balancing the Chi. This often requires a balancing of opposites, which is done in a framework of five interactive categories described metaphorically as the “elements” of wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. These mystical elements represent a system of mutual nourishment and mutual restraint.

- (1). Wood is the energy of “production”. It nourishes fire and is restrained by metal. It is associated with the environmental condition of wind.
- (2). Fire is the energy of “growth”. It nourishes earth and is restrained by water. It is associated with the environmental condition of heat.
- (3). Earth is the energy of “transformation”. It nourishes metal and is restrained by wood. It is associated with the environmental condition of wet.
- (4). Metal is the energy of “harvest”. It nourishes water and is restrained by fire. It is associated with the environmental condition of dry.
- (5). Water is the energy of “storage”. It nourishes wood and is restrained by earth. It is associated with the environmental condition of cold.

The interdependent nature of these elements is the interaction of Yin and Yang as a description of the laws of nature. This ancient principle has advanced into the modern field of Chaos Theory. Strange Attractors are complex, modern, mathematical representations of dynamic and interdependent systems similar to Yin and Yang interaction.

The three fundamental components of healing in the Traditional Chinese Medical System are:

1. Qi Gong exercises
2. Nutrition
3. Herbal medicines

The most important method for individuals to use for the maintenance of good health and for self-healing is Medicine Qi Gong (energy attainment).



Medicine Qi Gong heals the three causes of disease: emotional, environmental, and behavioural. Medicine Qi Gong exercises have physical and mental aspects. Gentle physical movements increase the circulation of chi. Focused breathing improves absorption of universal chi. Specific sounds and colours nourish and heal.

Limitations of Traditional Chinese medicine are:

- (1). It retains many ancient beliefs which have proven to have little medical merit, such as the Doctrine of Signatures.
- (2). Some of it is entangled in a surplus of structured complexity that requires special experts to decode.

Buddhist-Ayurvedic Medicine

The ultimate goal of Buddhist medicine is to help the individual attain the “Great Healing” of complete liberation from ignorance and suffering, also known as enlightenment and awakening.

History of Buddhist Medicine

Buddhist medical lore is recorded as a separate body of medicine in the 4th century A.D. Its main foundation is Indian-Ayurvedic medicine from the Atharva Veda, which is 4,000 to 6,000 years old. Buddhist medicine also combines elements of ancient Greek and Traditional Chinese medicine.

Basic Theories of the Buddhist Medical System

The Buddhist medical system is organized systematically in the format of a “medicine tree” which has three roots:

- (1). the natural state of the body
- (2). diagnosis
- (3). treatment



The Buddhist medicine tree has nine trunks, which are the paths of diagnosis and treatment:

- (1). normal functioning body
- (2). malfunctioning body
- (3). visual examination
- (4). testing the pulse
- (5). questioning
- (6). diet
- (7). behavioral patterns
- (8). medicine
- (9). accessory

In the Buddhist medical system, the ultimate cause of "dis-ease" and illness is ignorance which gives rise to the three root poisons:

1. greed (attachment)
2. anger (hatred)
3. delusion (close-minded ignorance)

The three mental poisons produce the three humours of the body:

1. wind – from greed
2. bile – from anger
3. phelm – from delusionary close-mindedness



Imbalances in the three humours leave a person vulnerable to mundane causes of disease. The two kinds of causes of mundane disease are:

1. long term

- (a). due to spiritual factors, and
- (b). due to karmic causes

2. short-term due to factors in this present life

- (a). seasonal changes
- (b). evil spirits
- (c). poisonous substances
- (d). transitory self-subsiding illnesses (i.e. colds)
- (e). life factors, which include:
 - 1]. bad food
 - 2]. irregular and destructive behaviour
 - 3]. environmental factors

3. Psychological factors

The ultimate cause of “dis-ease” and illness is ignorance. The only complete healing is achieved by awakening or enlightenment.

The process of relative healing correlates to the Buddha’s Four Noble Truths:

- 1. the fact of the disease
- 2. the cause of the disease
- 3. the balancing that cures the disease
- 4. the relevant system that implements the balancing cure



The Buddhist medicine tree has forty-seven branches of treatment to provide for the balancing of imbalanced humours.

As an example:

On the sixth trunk, which is diet", are six branches which are the food and drink respectively for the three root afflictions of bile, wind, and phlegm.

The Buddhist medicine tree has 224 leaves, each of which represent specific medical treatments. As an example:

On the six branches from the sixth trunk are fourteen leaves of diet for wind disorders, twelve leaves of diet for bile disorders, and nine leaves for phlegm disorders.

The Buddhist medicine tree has two flowers and three fruits, which are only on the first trunk, which is "the healthy body":

- (a). The two flowers are Good Health and Long Life.
- (b). The three fruits are the Dharma, Affluence, and Happiness.

In the Buddhist medical system, secular medicine is performed by doctors, and spiritual medicine is performed by lamas.

Limitations of the Buddhist medical system are:

- (1). It retains ancient beliefs which are outmoded and been tested as medically irrelevant, such as the Doctrine of Signatures.
- (2). Medical theories are sometimes not adequately tested, such as idea that leafy green vegetables are poisonous.



All human systems have limitations. Despite some shortcomings, the ancient holistic medical traditions are striving to maintain a healthy balance between holistic and allopathic medicine. The treatment of hundreds of millions of patients over thousands of years proved that attempts to heal the mind or body in isolation from spiritual work have limited success.

In order to achieve abiding good health, it would be essential, at some point, to consider the factors underlying illness and injury. A “cure” that doesn’t deal with the inner afflictions will be limited in the benefit it provides.

Adjustments in lifestyle may be required to accommodate some form of meditation or mental cultivation by which to balance, neutralize, and reduce the three root poisons.

Confronting the root poisons within yourself of hatred/aversion, greed/craving, and ignorance/dull-mind is a challenge, but your good health, happiness, and well being depends upon how you deal with this challenge.

Our evolutionary history has bequeathed the three root poisons to us, but our legacy as human beings also includes the capacity to uproot them entirely.

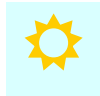
According to Buddhist theory, by completely uprooting the three root poisons a person can achieve the ultimate goal of healing, which is the full perfection of consciousness and complete liberation from ignorance and suffering.

I would like to conclude with a sincere wish that all of you be well and happy, that all of you be free from anxiety and harm, and that all of you guide yourselves to liberation and happiness.

Thank you all very much.



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