

DHARMIC PHYSIOLOGY

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This is a recollection of the holy discourse of H.H. the Dalai Lama that I was fortunate to attend together with thousands of other devotees on 3rd. July 2003 at Java-tsal Choglomsar. Summing up the lofty ideals of the Buddha in two sentences, He said:

The Buddhist view is the Law of Cause and Effect (*paccitasasmupada*).
Buddhist action is non-violence.

When I heard these words, I instantly experienced a strong vibration with a mixed emotion of sincerity and ecstasy which filled my eyes with tears of devotion. The essence of His holy utterances kept ringing in my mind day until it became a habit-pattern with me to recall it almost every day. I wanted to relate this philosophy to human physiology and this caused me to write this paper with the title 'Dharma Physiology'.

To discuss Dharma is not within the purview of medical subjects, but I feel it is pertinent and relevant here to touch on the subject, since the philosophy of Tibetan medicine (*am chi*) is Buddhist in nature and the different aspects of Dharma constantly re-emerge.

Over two and a half millennia ago, the Buddha emerged as a human scientist and an omniscient physiologist. He explained that all animate and inanimate phenomena are the manifestation of the five cosmic physical energies, i.e. solid, liquid, heat, gas and space which embrace all the processes of creation and evolution of the universe (*snot-ki-jig-rten*) and the laws of biology (*non cut-it-sems-chan*). All living matter is in a state of constant activity and change (*gur-bai-rang-bzin*) and never in a state of equilibrium, i.e. becoming, degenerating and dying—the law of impermanence *anicca* (*mi-rtag-pa*). The internal milieu of the body, tissue and fluids are always in a state of thermodynamic activity, producing the required energy. No single element or unit functions independently, but all act interdependently and intra-dependently. This is the Buddha's doctrine of non-substantiality (*anatta*) that was fully adopted by the major philosophers of both the Theravada and Mahayana schools. The

Buddha regarded the truth of interdependent origination as the heart of his teaching. Comprehension of interdependent origination leads to the freedom that is the goal of the path offered by the Buddha.

The three inherent factors (*riung-mkhris-bad-kan*) regulate their activities harmoniously through all the systems in the body (*zugs*) and mind (*bsems*) in a healthy state, and their imbalances are due to external and internal factors that cause tension, turmoil, confusion, pain and suffering (*dukha*).

The Buddha discovered that the physical body is built at the subtle level. Our physical body, consisting of cells, tissues and other organisms, is built of sub-atomic, indivisible and invisible particles (*rdul-tha-rabs*). The *Diamond Sutra* says that an individual is nothing but an aggregate of five *skandas* (*phung-po-lna*), based on the Buddha's own analysis of the human person, viz: body sensation, perception, volition and consciousness. These two methods of reconstruction and deconstruction are both adopted by the Buddha to explain the false notion of 'self'. All mental formations and consciousness are due to contact (*reg-pa*) between the sense organs, skin and their respective objects. Modern physiologists also describe all physical and mental activities as phenomena that take place due to the inter-relationship of sensory and motor systems of the central nerve system. Of the five *skandas*, the first is mass and the other four are mind components in the form of energy.

It is, indeed, interesting to note that Western scientists also have reached the same conclusion. Before Albert Einstein integrated everything in the universe into two basic elements, namely energy and matter, he proved that matter is energy and energy is matter, although formless and unable to be grasped.

In the formalised meditative practice, the presence and interaction of the principal of emptiness and consciousness is quite obvious. The discovery of emptiness and the apprehension of the special creative role of consciousness are almost unique to the Buddhist tradition.

The development in question is a revolution, which has taken place in modern science since the beginning of the 20th century. Modern science too is looking beyond the surface of things, as does Buddhist Vipassyana, and a startling reality revealed itself. The

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impression of a stable and substantial physical universe composed of ultimate national entities-atom-and governed by unalterable laws of nature was destroyed for ever as explained in the Buddhist laws of Annicca and Anata. The Prajna, Paramita Heart Sutra states:

At the time of his attainment of radiant wisdom, the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara conquered all ills and suffering by the means of apprehending beyond any doubt that all five skandas are devoid of independent existence. Oh, Sariputra, form does not differ from the void and void does not differ from form. Form is void and void is form. The same is true for feelings, perceptions, volition and consciousness.

The Buddha's discovery based on his own personal experience, that every man has the same basic ability, Buddha-nature (*Bde-shegs sning-bo*), which has the capacity to know the complete and infinite universe but it is only man's ignorance (*ma-rig-pa*) and his tenacious attachment to wrong views (*log-lta*) that result in an incomplete and a distorted view of the universe and that the Buddha-nature has no limitation that man does have the ability to detect much more sophisticated theories and devices to enlarge man's contact with and understanding of the universe.

The Buddhist believes there is a specific cause for every ailment, suffering is due to the concept of ego (*bdag-dzin*) which manifests in the form of lust (*dod-chhags*), hatred (*zhe-rdang*) and ignorance (*ti-mug*). Every action has a reaction - the law of cause and effect.

Just as a moth is consumed by the flame to which it is attracted by consuming greed, even so the self-cherished and the heedless are consumed by their egoistic propensity and delusion, by neglecting their moral and spiritual responsibilities.

What should be done is left undone,
But what should not be done is done.
The self-important and the heedless,
For them the cankers only increase.

In day-to-day life we encounter craving in the form of lust, greed, ego, passion, hatred, jealousy, deceit etc. At the deepest level this defiling drive exists in the form of an innate tendency, as dormant defilement.

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These are a result of the craze for enjoyment derived through the six sense doors: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and feelings. To eradicate all such defilements, the Buddha recommends the cultivation of four sublime states, i.e. compassion (*karuna*), loving kindness (*metta*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*) and equanimity (*upekkha*). These moral values are intimately connected with the human neurophysiology and the action and practice of such values is certainly non-violent in nature.