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Summary

This article deals with certain aspects of Buddhist practice which has some effect on the health of persons. It is not intended to give great detail but to explain the modus operandi of these practices.

It should be made clear that Buddhist Monks, in theory, do not practise medicine; because, if they became famous by such practices, many, many people would be following them day and night seeking cures for their ailments and, consequently, the Monks would be put into a position where their meditation practice would be disturbed.

In practice, some older Monks do not withdraw from the world but cultivate their relations with laymen and specialize in medicine. The author has had the good fortune to be taught techniques of Buddhist medicine by Monks in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and China. Rather than differentiate the specific national variations of different countries this submission will deal with an overview of methods and techniques.

A POSSIBLE TAXONOMY OF BUDDHIST MEDICINE.

- 1.1 Preventive Medicine.
- 1.2 Mantra.
- 1.3 Pills manufactured from ground-up sacred objects.
- 1.4 Medicinal tea.
- 1.5 Puja food.
- 1.6 Blessing Cords and pieces of Cloth capable of protecting a person (KHAATHAAS).
- 1.7 Buddhist Images for medicinal use.
- 1.8 Buddhist Training in meditational practices and medicine use.
- 1.9 Pericentral methods.

2.0 PREVENTIVE MEDICINE.

The importance of thought, in the viewpoint of Buddhism, cannot be minimised. The source of our lives and hence our happiness and health is within our own power. This source is our own thought, speech and bodily actions. So the cause of our ill-health is our own unwholesome former actions and the cause of our good health is our own wholesome actions. We are victims of personal karma. In simplistic terms, our mind and body complex experiences, instant by instant, a set of rapid changes driven by the accumulated actions (karma) of a myriad of past events. Some of these events were where we caused harm to other beings and this harm returns to us in the form of pain. The preventive aspects of Buddhist medicine are

therefore to teach persons not to injure or kill other beings and not to use intoxicants that cloud the mind, such as, alcohol or drugs of addiction.

2.1 Food Offerings

Food and non-intoxicating drinks help sustain life. Therefore Buddhists are encouraged to offer food and drink to persons and animals. Since these offerings bring health to others, health will come to us; "just as the wheel of the cart follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage."

Buddhist laymen try to keep 5 rules of morality (precepts) and Monks keep 227 rules of morality. A Monk is a more Noble Person than a laymen for this reason. It can be seen that a ratio 227:5, as a multiplying effect of merit is achieved if the same food were offered to a Monk rather than a laymen. For this reason, preventive medicine consists of giving food offerings to Noble Persons.

The ratio given is for the sake of simplicity of explanation, but, in fact, due to the ability of Monks to develop higher forms of consciousness in what is technically termed Rupa and Arupa Jhanas (mental states) the multiplying factor can run into thousands or even a million. If the laymen can achieve some of these Jhanas at the time of offering the food, the effect is enhanced further.

Should the occasion arise where a laymen could offer a Monk some medicine or a robe to keep the Monks body comfortable, this would be cause for the future well-being of the person offering such things. The well-being can appear as rapid recovery from illness with a short convalescent period of some persons, whereas other persons who have not had the good fortune to have given such offerings have longer illnesses and extended convalescent periods.

From a Buddhist viewpoint, this explains why some people regain a state of good health rapidly while others do not. The preventive aspect of food offerings is characterized by it being considered a "Blessing" for a layperson to be given food or drink by a Monk.

2.2 Non-killing - Resultants on Health.

It is common for persons to kill insects. The effect of not killing insects over a prolonged period is that they do not trouble the person who practices this harmlessness.

It can be seen that preventive medicine has a wide compass within Buddhist action and certainly influences man's physical environs. Whether a person is rich or poor, skilled or unskilled, educated or ignorant, this process of harmlessness goes in the direction of achieving fulfilment in the process of

liberating themselves from disease.

In the forests of Thailand, there are many wild animals such as for example, tigers, which do not injure Monks because of their prolonged practice of harmlessness. The author was in retreat in deep forest in Southern New South Wales some years ago with a Thai Monk. The remote area has many poisonous snakes, the author witnessed a snake about 14 feet long rap itself around the Monk while the Monk was sitting in meditation and then uncoil itself and leave the vicinity of the Monk without biting him. The Monk at the time was practising a form of meditation known as Metta (Loving-Kindness) meditation. This may be considered to be another form of preventive medicine.

It will be seen that Buddhism's emphasis on understanding may seem like a truism until one considers the vast numbers of people who labour under the blind force of instinctive actions because they do not know the observable law of cause and effect (karma).

2.3 Effects on Sleep Patterns.

Since only positive action can neutralize negative actions, a change in man's thought can bring about a reduction in the effects of illness.

The author has met with many Monks who enjoy long life and good health, who are in their 80's and 90's, and their level of health arises from their practices of harmlessness and Metta meditation. The capabilities of these persons in practical matters has to be seen to be believed. Their health is so great that they require no sleep or no more than 3 hours a day.

The author met a meditation Master in China who is in his 70's who has not slept for 25 years, and has met a Tibetan Lama who has not slept for several years; both exhibited a high vitality and have great abilities in healing skills although their modest natures do not mention these things.

The interconnection between practice and health benefits are clearly understood by these Monks.

2.4 Attitudes toward Death of "Oneself."

Preventive medicine really depends on each person directing themselves to what is proper and ultimately leads to a lack of concern for illness and one's own death; since it is clearly understood in the mind how these things are "natural" as we go from life to life in rebirth. For this reason, our basic anxiety: the fear of death is conquered.

This is considered to be the ultimate in preventive medicine so death is not overcome by mourning anymore. We cannot exercise true compassion until this self-concern is broken.

This attitude means one may find a qualitative peace and assurance that endures through time.

3.0 MANTRA.

Good karma can be accumulated by an individual by living a morally just life. A person can also gain merit by concentrating on sacred words and meditating. This concentration is not reserved for Monks, but can be practiced by all laymen. These sacred words are called Mantra.

3.1 Effects on Sleep.

If Mantra is practised just before lying down to sleep, it is believed to have an immediate effect as well as helping the person to sleep soundly without evil dreams. A person who sleeps in this manner awakens refreshed in the morning and their general health improves in daily life. Some Buddhist laymen chant during the morning as a start to their day.

Certain Mantras require special instruction by a person skilled in the art to be effective

3.2 Effects on Recovery Time.

Mantra can increase the recovering rate from illness. The author has met a woman who was badly injured in a car smash and was told by Western Doctors that she would require at least 1 year in hospital to recover. This woman practised chanting Mantra with her mother and recovered rapidly so she could leave the hospital within 2 days.

The author has advised people on suitable Mantra to lower high blood pressure and to control medication in the case of a person with spinal injuries so that the side effects of the pain-relieving drugs stop because the person was able over time to reduce the dosage.

There is Mantra for many uses ranging from ease of childbirth to increasing the healing rate of broken bones. The use of inappropriate Mantra can have temporary adverse effects but these can be overcome by the appropriate Mantra being taught and used.

3.3 Understanding Mantra Meaning.

It is sometimes said that it is not necessary for the person using the Mantra (which may be in Pali or Sanskrit or other languages) to understand the meaning of the Mantra for some benefits to be achieved. However, for maximum benefit, it is better they do understand.

3.4 Reason for Effectiveness of Deva Mantras.

Some Mantra works by forming connecting links with Devas (Celestial Beings). The reason inappropriate Mantra is harmful is that it forms connections with malevolent beings who hinder the attainment of good health. (eg. pus-eating ghosts).

3.5 Reason for Effectiveness of Transformation Body Mantras.

Genuine Mantric knowledge is a profound knowledge and tends to be clothed by imagery. A practitioner who would understand the profound knowledge of Mantra must penetrate beyond that imagery and this relates to contemplative yoga. This yoga allows access to the deepest level of the adept's consciousness. At the highest level practice this involves creating Deva replicas on the practitioner's body. This is in the 4th Rupa Jhana state of consciousness. This Deva replica can emit strong energy and light. The author has witnessed this effect both on his own body and on the body of others. When this transformation, (which is a skill learned by long practice) is able to produce at will, the Mantric effects become reliable.

The ability to visualise Mantric syllables correctly, (eg. in Sanskrit or Tibetan alphabets) is important because visualisation of syllables in their English form is not considered to be as effective.

3.6 Mind Absorption States.

The proper use of Mantras belongs to a type of absorption of the mind which is technically known as the 3rd Arupa Jhana-"Sphere of Nothingness". If a person is unable to maintain this 3rd Arupa Jhana, which is a transcendence of the ordinary modes of consciousness, the practice will not be very strong and effective. The difficulty is that only people who can themselves attain 3rd Arupa Jhana level would have any knowledge that the Mantra practitioner was in fact being of great value. It is estimated that only about 1 person in 50,000 in Australia can access 3rd Arupa Jhana for any length of time. Accordingly, most people would be unable to distinguish the difference between a true creative transformation and a person chanting Mantra as a passive pawn.

3.7 Publicity of Non-Buddhist Mantric Methods.

Boasting of yogic power is not only impious but a sure way of losing it, so the true practitioner of Buddhist Mantra would be unlikely to advertise the fact and would certainly not perform the rite for financial reward.

Many Non-Buddhist organisations teach some kind of Mantra. The author is aware that certain organisations in Australia and overseas are charging money to teach persons the use of Non-Buddhist Mantra and, in some cases, this is to be deplored.

It is not the Mantra which is wrong, but the method of using it.

The author has spent some time over the years helping persons who have been resorting to make-believe by the reason of poor instruction in the proper use of Mantra. These neophytes had experienced considerable discomfort as the result of the misuse of Mantras. In the short run, it can be argued that their negative experiences with make-believe Mantra is worthless, and that, in the long run, if they have persistence they might seek out and find and practice proper Mantra, if they have a steadfastness and stubbornness of what is known in the West as "faith".

3.8 Need for Privacy of Mantric Practitioners.

The rarity of persons in Victoria who can practice Buddhist Mantra, as a medicine process, and the fact that such persons would never charge for such a service means that they live obscured from the general public by their own choice. Their power is that they work for the sake of all beings in an unselfish manner at a higher level than more unspiritual prayer practices which might be such self-seeking things as to pray for victory, a particular state of weather or good fortune, that can only be attained at the expense of others. Because of their wisdom in observing the outcome of illnesses, and the overall effect on a person's long term spiritual well-being, they may or may not choose to interrupt the course of an illness.

If such persons were registered, many persons might be upset if advised by the Mantric practitioner that he or she would not use their skills for the treatment of their illness. This may result in the sick person becoming upset. They may direct anger towards the Mantra practitioner with the karmic result that they would develop more severe illness. It must be understood that the Mantric practitioner has no ill-will towards any person and certainly has overcome the basic anxiety of the fear of death, since the practitioner knows that death comes to all persons.

The sick person's egoism could not be expected to understand the relative momentariness of their illness. The longer-term view of the sick person's health viewed by the Mantric practitioner is there may be possible "beneficial effects" of the "illness"; in the sense of being the sick person's karma. A "cure" may result in a birth defect in the next rebirth, if this karma was not allowed to run its course.

4.0 PILLS MANUFACTURED FROM GROUND UP SACRED OBJECTS.

The author would like to apologise for any passages which are unclear in this section, because his viewpoint in this area may appear to be opposed to the viewpoints of some wise Buddhists for whom he has profound respect. No disrespect is intended in any manner.

The author's view is that Sacred Objects should be maintained intact for us as long as possible.

Buddhist's of all traditions have shrines with images, paintings and stupas holding relics. These are treated with reverence (in Pali, Apacayana) since this helps in the overcoming of conceit.

From practices based on reverence are born humility in oneself and 'the Buddha tells us long life and beauty, happiness and strength, increase for those who are respectful and honour those who are senior to them. Those senior to oneself, include persons who have passed physically away, such as the Buddha. However, Buddha bone relics still exist and are useful objects to train the mind in respect. The author has some Buddha bone relics and has seen many famous overseas relics.

Buddha relics and those of famous Monks (Saints) have strange properties, such as emitting light and multiplying themselves.

Over 2,500 years, many persons have been healed by seeing relics and those events are well-known and documented in the Buddhist Literature.

Because of the known power of Buddhist relics, some Buddhist Monks grind up relics and make these into medicine pills. In Tibetan these are called Nang Cho Ril Bu. (Happy Mind-Body Pills)

The author has 3 rare pills in his possession given to him by a Tibetan Lama. A portion of one pill is used only for special occasions since it is irreplaceable. The other two are placed on his altar and venerated because these pills contain 160 relics.

The author would not use such a rare pill for a minor ailment such as, for example, a cold or a headache.

5.0 MEDICINAL TEA.

When the author was in China in 1983, the Abbot of a Buddhist Chinese Monastery prepared some tea that was grown and cured in the Monastery garden. It was explained that the tea had great medicinal properties and it certainly produced an increase in lightening and clearing the 1st Rupa Jhana state which was experienced at that time.

It is not known the botanical name of the tea plant used or the curing method.

The author has no special expertise on the subject of tea but believes that certain teas may have medicinal properties.

6.0 PUJA FOOD.

Pujas are Ceremonies when chanting is undertaken. Mantra is included in Puja Ceremonies.

Sometimes Buddhists undertake Pujas specifically for healing purposes. Food is placed on the Altar and eaten at a certain point in the Ceremony. This food increases health. A Puja can be done to benefit the health of a person who is not present at the actual Ceremony.

The effectiveness of a healing Puja is determined by the ability of the practitioners to maintain themselves in high Jhanas for the duration of the Ceremony. Since a Ceremony may last for as long as 5 hours, there are very few persons capable of powerful practice.

Dramatic improvements in the health and vitality of many persons has been consistently achieved by Pujas conducted by the author and others.

7.0 BLESSING CORDS AND PIECES OF CLOTH CAPABLE OF PROTECTING A PERSON. (KHAATHAAS)

By chanting Mantra or performing Puja near cotton cord for a considerable time, the cord is changed into what is commonly called a Blessing Cord. The Cord is then presented to a person and may be worn around the wrist or the neck. Beneficial results occur to the wearer of such a Cord. These Cords are useful in curative and preventive medicine.

The author has seen the curative aspects operate in helping addicts overcome drug addiction and increase healing rates of injuries such as broken bones and prevention of asthma attacks.

Strong Blessing Cords are characterized by having a subjectively "good vibrational pattern". They tend to break or get lost if the person wearing them undertakes unwise or harmful activities.

A characteristic effect of breaking or losing a Blessing Cord is that it is generally followed by a reoccurrence of the symptoms of the illness for which the Blessing Cord was given.

Since powerful Blessing Cords are rare due to the passing away of the Monk who originally produced them, and they tend to wear away over time; sometimes another person will be empowered by the Monk to make replicas for the sake of other persons.

Such empowerment is rare, so often Blessing Cords are not worn but placed on Altars as Sacred Objects.

At times one Monk or several Monks might prepare a long length of Cord and give it to another person to distribute to others.

A Blessing Cord is always given free of charge and is never sold by the person giving the Cord in the first place. It is the author's opinion that any Blessing Cord which was offered for sale might tend to lose some of its protective powers. The author has not ever heard of the sale of Buddhist Blessing Cords.

8.0 BUDDHIST IMAGES FOR MEDICINAL USE.

The iconography of Buddhist sculpture is quite complex. The gestures and attitudes of a Buddha Image permit identification of a particular moment in the Buddha's career, even when there is no narrative context for the figure. They are fully intelligible only to Buddhist worshippers or to those with adequate knowledge of the main events of the Buddha's life.

A frequently employed term is Mudra which refers to the hand positions on the Image.

Bodhisattva Images are also distinguished by either their Mudras or by emblems held in the hand. In the base of Images or sometimes inside the head are placed relics and written Mantra and other precious objects.

The original iconography appears to have been worked out originally by the Buddhist communities of South India. Over the centuries each country developed variations for particular practices.

Special features of the Images donate the Buddha's psychic qualities, which are ever more important perhaps than the physical marks which are visible indications of the former.

Certain Buddhist Images are renowned for their curative powers and have been seen to emit light energy.

The appropriate Bodhisattva Image is set up on an Altar and Mantras are recited as well as scriptural text, called dharani which has the effect of guiding the consciousness up through Jhanas to a sphere of marvellous luminosity which allows many to experience a manifestation of the Bodhisattva in their minds, which allows the curing of maladies and so forth.

Some Bodhisattva Images representing compassion are depicted in female form.

In Asian countries where the value of such yogic recitations is fully accepted, opinions differ widely as to how, why and under what conditions the practice is effective, but all agree their practice is effective.

The author has seen many powerful Images in Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, China

and Bangladesh and is aware of the existence of powerful Images in Victoria. These methods and therapies are effective and beneficial. In theory disrespect towards an Image could be harmful, but in practice such persons would be unlikely to see powerful Images since they are not on public display with a few notable exceptions.

The main exception is that the Victorian National Gallery has some powerful Images. The author has never observed in fact, any person having a disrespectful attitude towards these precious Images over the last thirty years.

9.0 MEDITATIONAL PRACTICES AND MEDICINE USE.

When medicine is used in Buddhist practice, instructions are generally given for suitable meditation to be undertaken to potentize the medicine. For example, a powerful Burmese Buddhist medicine is to cut the "eye" of a peacock feather, burn it, mix the ash with water and honey and drink it. To increase the effect the person should sit in meditation for half an hour.

9.1 Ayurveda Method.

The Buddhist Monk, the late Venerable Malewana Thero of Sri Lanka, was an expert on herbal medicines and attracted the attention of researchers and Universities around the World, particularly in Europe, Japan and the United States of America. He trained many assistants. The author had the privilege of some brief discussions with the Venerable. The Venerable had the ability to know the medicinal uses of leaves and roots of plants which grew in Sri Lanka and would always advise some adjustment of the mind as a form of meditation suitable to the temperament of the individual.

He had read many of the ancient Sinhalese Buddhist medicine texts and these rely on adjusting the four great elements which is the ultimate composition of the body.

These four great elements arise and fall, instant by instant and their successive states can be seen in meditation throughout the different Jhanas. This type of traditional medicine, which had its origins in India, is generally termed ayurveda and, supposedly, was practiced by the ancient Aryans which would put it over 3,000 years old.

The practice of ayurveda fell into disuse after repeated foreign invasions of India. Original works were destroyed and quacks thrived who introduced unauthorized modifications in the system. The ancient Buddhists of Sri Lanka preserved the original texts and translated them into Sinhalese.

The author is not aware of any Buddhist in Victoria who has all the abilities of the late Venerable Malewana Thero, but it may be possible that visiting Buddhist Monks may have such knowledge. Their short period of stay in

Australia precludes the possibility of them training others on a systematic basis.

9.2 Western Medicine Approaches to Herbal Remedies.

The science of the Western World has found the active components of some herbal remedies and has synthesized them.

One example is ellipticine derivatives. (ref. Synthesis of the tumour-inhibitory alkaloids, ellipticine, 9-methoxyellipticine, and related pyrido (4,3-b) carbazoles; by L.K.Datton, S.Demerac, B.C.Elmes, J.W.Loder, J.M.Swan and T.Teitei. Aust. J.Chem. 20(12):2715-27. (1967)

It is considered significant that one of the scientists on this project is a Buddhist.

It would seem unlikely that Western Doctors would have the skill to suggest to their patient's suitable meditation to potentize the activity of such medicine.

9.3 Relativities-Medicine and Training Time. Buddhist vs. Western Methods.

The relative cost of medication is obviously greater when the active ingredient is synthesized; but it allows a more uniform dosage to be prescribed than in the case of the natural product.

It would take longer to train a person skilled in Buddhist medicine than conventional Western medicine and there is no guarantee that a person so trained in meditation would be inclined to practice medicine for worldly gain. While the materialist is mainly interested in goods, the Buddhist is mainly interested in liberation. But Buddhism is "The Middle Way" and, therefore, in no way antagonistic to physical well-being. Some idea of the length of possible Buddhist medical training can be appreciated by considering the case of Dr.Yeshi Donden, personal physician to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. His schooling began at the age of six, and two years later he took the novice vows of a Buddhist Monk. He began his preliminary studies of medicine when he was nine.

At the age of thirteen, he was formally admitted to the Astro - Medical Institute in Lhasa. There he studied five years under the master physician. His internship lasted from the age of 18 until 22.

He spent some time at an English hospital at Lhasa, and has attended medical conferences in Europe.

He has made annotations to the English translation of The Ambrosia Heart Tantra. Volume 1, Published by Library of Tibetan Works and Archives

1977.

This text details the basis of illness, its diagnosis and method of healing. It should be consulted for detailed theory and practice of Tibetan Buddhist Medicine.

The original Sanskrit title was AMRTA-ASTANGAHRDAYOPADESATANTRA. The classification of ailments gives totals of 8, 234,400 divisions.

10.0 PERICENTRAL METHODS.

There are a few fully-enlightened Monks (ARHATS) in the World today.

These Arhats, at rare times, may give ointments to other persons.

The ointment itself may be some common material, such as, for example, Tiger Balm.

The ointment is used by first meditating on the Arhat, then applying the ointment to the sick person. A great amount of prana (life force) appears and cures are rapid.

The author has used such an ointment under the guidance of a Monk.

The ointment cured a cancer.

The great rarity of obtaining such ointment means its use is infinitesimal. On very rare occasions, illness is caused by a malevolent being taking up residence in a person's body. Methods exist to guide such a being to take rebirth in better form apart from the person's body.

This technique depends on Metta (Loving Kindness) meditation of a high order.