



The Five Elements

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Geshe la: Since we briefly discussed the five elements last time, today I would like to explain a little more about the five elements and the Tibetan way of healing. The five elements are earth, fire, air (or wind), space, and water. Our human body is purely composed of these five elements. Not only the human body, the whole universe in which we are living is also composed of, or the result of the five elements. The solid parts of our body, are said to be earth elements. The heat of our body is the fire element. Movements of our whole body, are due to air, or wind element. Blood and every liquid part of our body is the water element and the millions of empty spaces within our body is the space element. So, when these elements are in harmony, or in balance and mutually assisting and working together in their natural way, then we are in good health, and free from sickness and illness.

When these five elements are in disharmony and imbalance then we are ill or sick.

The five elements within our body are very much related, or dependent upon the five external elements and their harmony. When the five external elements are unbalanced it affects the five internal elements resulting in disharmony and imbalance. It is clear that when the weather is not good, changing in temperature morning and evening, we will get more colds, flu, and other health problems.

When the fire element arises beyond its normal state, it causes fever and other physical illnesses. Also, when the fire element deteriorates beyond its normal state, then we lose digestive ability and the power of the pancreas is lost. As a result, the food doesn't digest properly.

In the same way, when the air, or wind element arises beyond its normal state, then we have air or wind disorders resulting mainly in mental problems. Some people become very aggressive and angry. Some suffer nervous types of disorders, then they are very high or intensely manic and very agitated. Western doctors cannot diagnose wind problems accurately. I don't think there is western medicine that directly helps cure wind disorders. When the air element declines or deteriorates and loses its normal function then we will have human waste discharging problems. Some people, when they are sick, and have whistling in their ears, it is due to wind or air disorders. At that time, the air, or wind is beyond its normal state. Again, this kind of illness cannot be diagnosed by western medicine as far as I know.

In the same way, the space elements, when they are naturally existing, the empty space in our body blocks. Then the air circulation, blood circulation, and other subtle energy that circulates in the body cannot properly function and it causes illnesses and other types of health problems.

In the same way, the water element, when it goes beyond there is a health problem, and when it goes down there is also a problem. Examples would be gall bladder and kidney problems.

Earth element, I don't know much about!

So, mainly due to the imbalance and disharmony of these five elements we get sick. This sickness causes us to deteriorate the functions of the five elements in the body and causes to destroy the central seat of the mind or consciousness. The full destruction of the central seat of the mind or consciousness is called death.

Now I would like to talk a little bit about healing. Healing means to cure or remedy by different methods and techniques. Methods and techniques don't necessarily mean medicine, but also the methods beside medicine, such as spiritual methods like ritual ceremonies. Even sound meditation and improving or enhancing will power, etc.

The Tibetan way of healing is combining all these things. One could say it is unique. Primarily the disease is caused by the disharmony of the five elements which are manipulated by one's karma and some external spirit and spells of non human beings. Medicine can directly help to cure the disease but can not help to keep away the evil spirits and spells. Therefore, we really need some other techniques besides medicine to cure these diseases and illnesses.

According to Tibetan Buddhism, ritual ceremony, sound meditation, and increasing will power, help to alleviate these other factors and cooperates with medicine thereby increasing the effectiveness of the medicine. Let me give you an example:

In the 1970's a Canadian woman came to southern India to educate Tibetan nurses. She stayed there many years and she became very ill. No medicines helped her and she went back to Canada to find a better doctor but she could not receive help. Her leg had a sore that could not heal with very strong pain. She returned to India with no hope. Finally she consulted with a high Tibetan Lama, as well as healer, named Geshe Chopak. He did divination about her illness and came to find out she had chopped down a tree in front of her house, and that this disease was caused by Naga. When the Lama told her this, at first, she could not remember having chopped down a tree in front of her house. Finally she remembered and then the Lama recommended a healing ceremony that is related to appeasing the Naga and helping to find him a new home where he could live. After performing this healing ceremony he sat for one week retreat doing a mantra specifically for nagas. He blew this mantric power on water, and let her drink. He also blew this mantric power on her leg.

Then everyday the pain moved somewhat downward and finally disappeared in the middle of her feet. Then he suggested she take medicine to cure the sore. This is a real example of Tibetan healing story. We have a tradition, if someone gets sick we do not rely only on medicine and the doctor, but we also adopt other healing methods through consulting the high Lama healer. The individual sits in a specific retreat, mantras, prostrations, meditations, circumambulations around the temples, stupas, pilgrimage, etc. I would like to stop here, and welcome questions!

Student: Geshe la, first this is a fascinating talk from my point of view, thanks. My question is this, are there other spirits besides Nagas that can adversely affect our health?

Geshe la: Yes, yes. Naga is from the animal kingdom. There are also harmful beings from the hungry ghost realm, and demigods. I don't know the English, but in Tibetan: Jungpo, Dirsar, Nugen. Maybe you can find them in a Tibetan dictionary.

Student: Could you give some examples of wind illnesses incurable by Western methods that have been relieved by Tibetan methods?

Geshe la: Due to the wind disorder in the body very unusual wind enters and moves through the heart artery. It causes damage to the relation between mind and body. The person becomes agitated, sometimes depressed and sleepless, loses sense of taste, but still, no particular ailments in the physical body that can be diagnosed through blood tests, urine tests, or X-rays.

Student: Geshe la, thank you again for such an interesting talk. My question is this: When you speak of sound meditation, is there a connection between the tones used and the illness? Also, could you clarify a bit what you mean by 'will power'?

Geshe la: Generally tone is related to illness, but I am not sure about the particular tone related to a disease. Will power means strong positive state of mind that is generated by meditation and other types of wholesome understandings. Free from the disturbances of the emotions, conjoined with positive hope is what we call the will power.

Student: When you use the word 'wind', is the meaning similar to the Tibetan word, 'rlung', or is it the air element you refer to?

Geshe la: Yes, it is rlung, you are right!

Student: I have cold feet at night and insomnia. I am told this indicates a particular imbalance, but I don't know which?

Geshe la: Rlung mainly. I think this is a rlung problem. Does sound bother you much like a dog barking?

Student: It can, or loud noises, yes.

Geshe la: Yes, it is rlung problem then.

Student: I am trying to relate sound as a means of Tibetan healing practice. Would the sound meditation work to change the character of the movement of the prana?

Geshe la: Of course, yes, especially in tantric practice because when we listen to very soft harmony music, it naturally helps to alleviate stress even for ordinary people like us.