

BODY, MIND AND THE THREE NYEPA

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The three *Nyepa* (*rlung*, *tripa* and *bekan*) emanate from the three mental poisons (desire–attachment, hatred–anger and closed mindedness) and the three mental poisons from the self-grasping ignorance. These three *Nyepas* act as a bridge between body and mind, and activate the physical, mental and vocal activities of a human being. They are also responsible for different kinds of human temperaments and emotions. In a balanced state, the *Nepas* are the seed of disease; in an imbalanced state, they are the cause of physical and mental disease. Our body, mind, and the three *Nyepa* are interrelated due to their common connection with the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, and space).

Pema Dorjee: I’m a practitioner of Tibetan medicine and I feel that there definitely are good reasons why the Tibetan medical community should contribute to this fruitful discussion. We have many wonderful new doctors who are skilled in the field of Tibetan medicine and who are also fluent in many languages. My talk is based on body, mind and the three *Nyepas*. Before touching upon this subject, I would like to say what I mean by “body” and what I mean by “mind.”

Is it possible to form a body without a mind? The Tibetan medical

system says that it is impossible for a fetus, or an embryo, or a body to form without consciousness of the three *Nyepas*. Here *Nyepa* means the same as *Dosha* in Ayurveda: to harm, defect, or defile. *Nyepa* helps us in the movement of our body, mind, and speech. It also gives heat to the body. The final outcome of *Nyepa* is destruction of the body—and the suffering of the body and mind that occur as the result of disease.

The body is comprised of many elements, including chemicals, atoms or molecules, flesh, fat, and so forth. But what is its real composition? According to Tibetan medical texts the body of a sentient being is composed of four principal or material elements: earth, water, fire, and air. These elements need space, so space is regarded as the fifth element. All diseases are nothing but disruptions or imbalances of the bodied elements. Thus, remedies in the form of medicine or food made up of these five elements are needed to correct these disruptions or imbalances. If we don't understand the interrelation between body, mind, and the five elements, questions will arise: Why are we given medicine? What is it composed of? What will it help in the body? Disease is nothing but something that is lacking in the body, something that is in overproduction, or something that's disrupted or imbalanced. To correct a lack in the body, we need to stimulate it with the element that is lacking; to correct over production we need the element that will restore normal levels.

What is the composition of a tiny embryo or fetus at the point of conception? Are the sperm and ovum, the reproductive seeds of the father and the mother, healthy? The very basic seeds of the child are from the parents, so these seeds must be healthy. Normally when we talk of childcare we are referring to childcare that occurs after conception, but in Tibetan medicine we say if you really want a child then you must check the quality of the seeds of the parents. Only then can we determine whether or not the parents can have a healthy child.

Childcare here means healthy semen and egg from the parents, and this healthy semen and egg are also of the nature of the four

elements. Consciousness during this period is being driven by karma and elusive emotion. Consciousness is directly connected to the child's karma, but the parents should have at least some kind of link with their child's karma. Next we visit the elusive mind. Let me explain by way of example. Suppose the child is to be male, then that consciousness in the very early stages of the body's development, as an embryo even, feels a hatred for and jealousy of the father. The developing embryo thinks that the sperm is his, and therefore feels greater attachment to the mother, and vice versa if the child is a girl. It is important to have that kind of negative thought, even if it's a delusion, during the period of conception. Finally, the most important thing is consciousness, and for that we need a sampling of the five elements from the father's seed and from the mother's seed.

If the consciousness has the subtle elements, it is very easy for it to have a link or connection with other materials, because all are composed of the five elements. If there is no quality or property of the five elements that connects them with consciousness, it is very difficult to talk about the connection, especially the nerves, or neurons, or brain. When we talk about the sensory organs, and the sense objects, and the sense in the sensory channel, what exactly is there in that particular sensory channel which has the power to see, or to touch, to feel, or to smell? If this eye, for example, is completely absolute, or completely independent, then why can't we see when we are sleeping? During that period of time, everything exists intact, so why can't we see? Where does that particular sense go? To understand these matters from the viewpoint of Tibetan medicine is critical to understanding the different types of elements.

I would like to quickly mention the heart, and the importance of the heart in Tibetan medicine. In the medical texts, *nying* is the heart, the "king" of all the internal organs, because it is the base of consciousness, the base of life. This is why it is given precedence over the brain, which is concerned with sensory organs. The heart is the base of the sensory channels, the base of the memory and the base of life. If something goes wrong with the heart, we see strange symptoms,

which doctors of Tibetan medicine know well. For example, in front of the heart we have the basis for the sense of ear, which is, from the perspective of the heart, the east direction, and is normally black in color. The right side, which is south of the heart, is the sense of eye, and it is red in color. The upper part of the heart is the sense of body, green in color, and on the lower side you find the sense of mind, blue in color. Thus, we have the six senses. It is strange that we know these things but are unable to prove them. While we are sleeping, in a dream state, we might meet a person in a black coat coming from the eastern direction. How can we prove this when in a dream?

Now the question is: What is the basic cause of disease or suffering? Every disease has a cause and effect and different symptoms. If a patient has a headache today, as a doctor I'll say they have either this or that, and it will be a very proximate explanation. But, if you investigate, you find that the patient has a headache as a result of their action, their karma. It is very difficult to explain the workings of karma to the patient—it is said that even enlightened people have difficulty explaining every cause and effect. According to Buddhism, and Tibetan medicine, the remote cause is ignorance. Due to our ignorance we do many things that are improper. Or, in other words, we commit a lot of non-virtuous acts, we make a lot of mistakes, physically, mentally, verbally due to ignorance, or not knowing, and as a result we experience problems. And with that ignorance comes the specific cause, which is what we call the three mental poisons: desire—attachment, hatred—anger and closed mindedness.

It is clearly mentioned that Lord Buddha was the supreme physician. He was a medical person, but his specialty was treating the diseases of mind: desire—attachment, hatred—anger and closed mindedness. The three *Nyepas*, or defects, temporarily help us, but their final effect is that they destroy the whole system. The first *Nyepa* is called *rlung*: the real meaning of *rlung*, the exact meaning of *rlung*, is movement; *rlung* means movement. The movement of body, mind, and speech is called *rlung*. It's very important to know the characteristics, because if you use words other than movement, or lightness of movement, you lose

the subtle quality of the characteristics. Then you won't be able to find the exact effect of that particular object, the *Nyepa*. So, in short, any movement that we have in our body, mind, and speech is from *rlung*. Yesterday, I heard about waves or movements or transformations. Even if these are very small, we can say *rlung*. And some texts in the Tibetan medical commentary, mention force. Force can also be used to describe *rlung*.

There are ten different types of *rlung* in our body. Basically we can say that the origin of the *rlung* is the life-sustaining *rlung*, or the subtle *rlung* that we have with consciousness. What is the particular movement of egg and sperm when they first combine? How does the fetus develop over the period of nine months? What is the basic cause of that movement? Here, we are not concerned with the seeds, but instead with what elements develop inside the fetus for nine months. According to Tibetan medicine, it is nothing but *rlung*, *Srog 'dzinrlung*. *Srog 'dzinrlung* comes from the basic intermediate consciousness. It's very important: *Srog 'dzinrlung* is the base of all movement or all types of *rlung*. Roughly we have ten different types of *rlung*: five basic *rlungs* and five secondary *rlungs*. Swallowing, inhalation, all this is taken care of by *Srog 'dzinrlung*. *Srog 'dzinrlung* is the mother of all *rlungs*, or, in other words, all movements, whether voluntary or involuntary, in body, mind, or speech—whether it's a wave or a vibration, or an electrical movement, these are just characteristics of *Srog 'dzinrlung*. From there, you have ascending *rlungs*. There are different types of ascending *rlungs* in our body: some movements ascend and some descend. These are what we call pervasive *rlungs*. All these different types of *rlungs*, movements in the body, are the movement of *rlung*.

There are connections with different types of elements. For example, life-sustaining *rlung* is called *ugh* and is connected with air; pervasive *rlung* is connected with space; fire-accompanying *rlung* is accompanied with fire; and descending *rlung* is connected with water. How can we say that some type of *rlung* that moves downwards is a *rlung*? Because it has a connection with water, and you'll rarely see water going upwards. Fire always goes up. So it's very important to

understand the different types of *rlung* and their connection with different types of elements.

What are the characteristics of *rlung*? This, I think, is the big question. We cannot say something is *rlung* because it moves the tree or the national flag; that is not enough. To know exactly what *rlung* is you have to understand its characteristics. It is rough in the sense that when you have *rlung* disease it makes everything rough, and then light, like lightness in the mind or lightness in the body, and then cold, hurt, stiff. When people say, “I have muscle tension,” my question is always, “Where does the tension come from?” When people have stiff necks, “Where does the stiffness come from?” The same with dizziness, “Where does this movement, this dizziness, come from?” Or dryness in the mouth, or ringing in the ears: where do these come from? We can say that a person with a bad case of *rlung* disease will have dry skin. And movement means the person is very restless, hyper, and very talkative. This is what we observe in our patients. Why does a patient who used to be very silent, and very quiet, and very relaxed, change their behavior and become very talkative and restless? When movement, which is the characteristic of *rlung*, increases too much we get abnormal moments in the form of symptoms. So, what is *rlung*? The Tibetan doctor will say rough, light, cold, subtle, hurt and *tiba*, which means inflammation, burning, or heat. We need this *tiba* even though it is a *Nyepa*. *Tiba* is slightly oily, sharp, with a reaction like fire that can burn very fast. It is said in the Tibetan medical texts that without anger and a lucid mind it is impossible to have *tiba*, and without *tiba*, it is impossible to have any type of fever-related disease. You can see the different characteristics of *tiba* and *rlung*.

We have another characteristic called *bekan*, which is basically set in the brain and which is very important from the Tibetan medical point of view. *Bekan* is oily, cool, heavy, slow, stable and sticky. When you vomit, or find your feces a little oily, and your body becomes swollen and oily and, most importantly, you feel heaviness in the body, this is characteristic of too much *bekan*. The stability of *bekan* is opposite to the movement of *rlung*. When there is too much *bekan* in our system,

we gradually lose our movement. We become lazy and lethargic, and prefer to sit in one place. Our minds also become slow. According to Tibetan medicine, *bekan*, or ignorance, lies in the brain. When we have a problem in understanding something, we will say, “I feel very dull” or “I feel very heavy.” When they cannot solve a problem, many thinkers point their finger to their head. Why do they do this? It is because of too much *bekan*—because of heaviness, dullness in any kind of activity of body, mind, or speech. What is the element that increases movement? When there is too much movement, when movement is too light, we need heaviness to slow it down. This characteristic lies with *bekan*.

Let’s talk about the qualities of the five elements and their actions. If I say a handful of soil is an Earth element, this is absolutely wrong; it has the composition of all five elements. If we really want to know the five elements and their characteristics then we have to understand that the characteristic of the so-called element Earth is heavy, stable, smooth, oily, and then dry, and its action is to make things firm, make things compact, assemble things. Due to its heaviness, stableness, and oiliness, it cures *rlung* disease, which has as its character lightness, mobility, etc. Earth-based material in general, and in medicine, has a strong smell. In a similar way, water is liquid, oily, cold and flexible, and it makes the body smooth and assembles things. It cures *tiba*. The fire element has a hot, sharp, dry, rough, oily, and mobile character. It generates heat, brightens the complexion, and cures *bekan* disease, which is its opposite. And then *rlung* means the air and is light, mobile, cold, rough, absorbent or dry, and it makes the body firm. It transforms the nutritional essences and it cures *bekan* and *tiba* diseases. Finally, without space, though it is not the active material of body, we cannot form anything. Space is essential for any material to have room.

Thank you very much. And smile at least three times a day—it can lead to world peace!