

Tibetan Medicine in Brief

Have you ever wondered what Tibetan Medicine is all about? Lillian Too, in *The Buddha Book* (2003), gives a succinct summary of Tibetan Medicine. It is so different to modern medicine, which focusses on treating the symptoms of disease.

She points out, first, the role of the Medicine Buddha: 'In Tibet, the Medicine Buddha is revered as the source of the healing arts, and it is through him that the Four Medical Tantras, the basis of Tibetan medicine, came into being.'

Then Lillian Too summarizes the ideas that underpin Tibetan medicine: 'In accordance with the Four Medical Tantras, every disease originates from the three poisonous delusions: ignorance, hatred and attachment. These three delusions lead to imbalances in the three bodily humours (phlegm, wind and bile), in the various bodily constituents (blood, flesh, bone and so on) and in the waste products or impurities (excrement, urine, and perspiration). All of these are analyzed into twenty-five divisions.

If all twenty-five areas are in balance and the three factors of the tastes, the inherent qualities of your food, and your behaviour are wholesome, then your health and life will flourish. If they are not in balance, then your health and life will be harmed, and that imbalance will spread over the skin, increase in the flesh, move along the vessels, meet the bones, and descend into the solid and hollow organs.

Treatment of disease and the maintenance of health are required to bring the various elements of the body back into balance. There are four progressive treatments for this. The first two require changes in approach – that is, in the type of food we eat and in our behaviour. Only when these prove ineffective is the physician advised to prescribe medicine. And only when this also fails is he or she to revert to external forms of treatment, such as cauterization. However, none of the treatments has a lasting effect unless it is accompanied by spiritual transformation.

If ignorance and associated delusions remain festering within us, sooner or later they give rise to disease and the recurring misery of cyclic existence. Buddhas such as Shakyamuni and Medicine Buddha are revered as great physicians not because of their healing powers – great though these are – but because they have the compassion, wisdom and skilful means to diagnose and treat the root delusions that underlie are mental and physical afflictions.'

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