



## Newsletter Archives

### **Each of us a Healer: Medicine Buddha and the Karma of Healing**

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## Each of us a Healer: Medicine Buddha and the Karma of Healing

### Article of the Month - July 2002

A glamorous fashion consultant was once diagnosed with cancer. This is how she attempted to alleviate her suffering:

She sent a message through a friend of hers, a student at the Vajrapani institute in California, to ask for advice about healing practices. She was advised to buy animals that were in danger of being killed and to then free them in a safe place, thus enabling them to live longer.

This charming woman saved many animals from places where they were going to be killed. She actually freed two or three thousand animals, mostly chickens, fish, and worms. She had the chickens taken care of on a farm, and she freed the fish in open water. She also bought two thousand worms because they were cheap and readily available, and released them in the garden outside her home. Liberating worms was believed to be a particularly good idea as they go straight under the ground when they are released. Since they have some protection there from predators, they have a chance to live longer. It was less certain that animals freed in forests, lakes, or the ocean would have lived longer because they have natural enemies in those places.

It is said that when she returned to the hospital for a checkup after doing these practices, the doctors could not find any trace of the cancer.

True or not, this story should not come as a surprise to those subscribing to the karmic theory. In the words of Deepak Chopra:

*"No debt in the universe ever goes unpaid. There is a perfect accounting system in the universe, and everything is a constant "to and fro" exchange."*

Thus by granting those helpless animals the boon of life the lady vindicated her faith in the authenticity of the karmic law, namely that "*karma is both action and the consequence of that action.*" The actions she took were not magical or miraculous but rather a patient planting of causes which eventually bloomed into the effects of health and happiness. Indeed if we want to create happiness in our own lives, we must learn to sow the seeds of happiness for others. As with Buddhist practices more generally, the result one receives depend on one's past karma. Indeed everything that is happening at this moment is a result of the actions we have performed in the past. This is but an illustration of the proverb '*as we sow as shall we reap.*' If we have loving kindness and compassion, our prime concern will always be not to hurt others, and this itself is healing. According to Buddhist belief a compassionate person is the most powerful healer, not only of their own diseases and problems, but also those of others. Many of us will vouch that in a sickbay a doctor's friendly smile among the prevalence of disease and suffering all around can work wonders for the overall well being of the patient. Truly the use of love is to heal. When it flows without effort from the depth of the self, love creates health.

In Buddhist tradition the first and primordial healer was the great Buddha himself. Known popularly as the Medicine Buddha he is said to have revealed the teachings embodied in the sacred bodies of texts known as the Four Medical Tantras. The whole of Buddhist medicine is said to have derived from this sacred scripture. As explained in the first of these texts, Buddha the Great Healer was once seated in meditation surrounded by an assembly of disciples including divine physicians, great sages, non-Buddhist gods and bodhisattvas, all of whom wished to learn the art of healing. Rendered speechless by the radiant glory of his countenance, they were unable to request the desired teachings. To accommodate their unspoken wishes, the Medicine Buddha manifested two emanations, one to request the teachings and the other to deliver them. In this way, then, the Buddhist explanation of the various mental and physical ailments, their causes, diagnoses, and treatment is said to have originated.



Other than that, the action of the Buddha in understanding his disciple's needs without their explicitly stating so is in itself a reminder of his infinite compassion. Indeed healers such as the Buddha are referred to as great physicians not because of their medical abilities - as great as these are - but because they have the compassion and wisdom to diagnose and treat the root causes underlying all mental and physical malaise.

In visual arts the Buddha of healing is sometimes represented as golden in color, though his characteristic color is blue. In either representation his left hand rests in his lap in the mudra of meditation, supporting an iron begging-bowl. His right palm faces outwards, offering, in a gesture of generosity, a stem of the myrobalan plant. This is a healing fruit well-known in Tibetan medicine and a symbol here of the botanical realm's restorative fecundity, reminding us that the earth provides freely,

asking for nothing to sustain her fertility but gentle care.

However Buddhist science of medicine grants only a limited application to external medicine. These are considered sufficient only up to the level of removal of external symptoms of the disease. The cure for humankind's root illness is stressed to be spiritual illumination, the way to which lies within our own selves. Towards this end the Medicine Buddha is often shown surrounded with various fragrant and healing plants of the Tibetan pharmacopoeia, as also innumerable gods sages, and other exalted beings. Such a densely packed arrangement is referred to as the '*Paradise of the Medicine Buddha*.'



This paradise represents an idealized universe where remedies exist for every ailment. The Buddha himself is said to have stated, "*For as many sentient beings as exist in this world system, there is a path to liberation.*"

According to Romio Shrestha "*The Medicine Buddha is our complete spiritual apothecary. To discover the healing force within our being is to enter the paradise of the 'master of remedies.'*" In other words this paradise lies within our own selves, only a conditioning of the mind is required to identify it and partake of its pleasures. Romio Shrestha further says: "*Our body has the capacity to cure itself of any ailment. Every plant, every herb, every remedy has its counterpart within the subtle essences of the human body.*"

We have the capacity to heal not only ourselves but also those around us as the following story will demonstrate:



There was once a monk who lived in a small Tibetan village. He was quite ordinary, and spent his life going about his monastic duties. One year a terrible epidemic of small pox broke out in the village, killing many people in the area, the monk also contracted the disease and died. It was the middle of winter, the ground was frozen and the wood was scarce, so his body was taken to a lake and put under the ice. Shortly after this, the epidemic stopped. In the springtime, as the ice was melting, people noticed a rainbow over the place where the monk had been put. They went back and found his body floating there, perfectly preserved. He was brought back to the monastery and given a special cremation ceremony. As his body disappeared into the flames, rainbows came out of the pyre into the sky, and relics were discovered in the ashes. Everyone then recognized that this monk had been an extraordinary person in the garb of an 'ordinary' one, and credited him with purifying the negative karma that had caused the epidemic by taking it (absorbing it) into his own body. In the world of Tibetan Buddhism, sickness can be a manifestation of spiritual accomplishment

and a sacrifice made on the behalf of others. This is something a mother can understand, who gives her own vitality to nourish her children. Indeed here some find the justification for the wasting away of their bodies by rigorous ascetics, treating sickness as the broom that sweeps away bad karma, thus justifying their embracing of the hardships and suffering on the spiritual path as the highest form of purification.

An ordinary person has the capacity for extraordinary healing. This ability is gained by recognizing the suffering of others as our own, by suffering as they are suffering, by feeling one with them. Cultivating such sentiments gives rise to a warm and caring heart, full of compassion. Only then can be mobilized the boundless powers of healing that reside within the infinite depths of our consciousness. In fact disease and suffering are believed to be particularly liberating in as much as they offer us an opportunity to experience our interconnectedness with other beings by making us aware of our own mortality. There is a story about an abbot of a monastery who had gained much proficiency in the powers of compassionate healing. One day while addressing his disciples, he suddenly yelled in pain. When the lamas asked what was wrong, he told them that a dog was being beaten outside. Going out, they found an angry man with a stick chasing away a dog. When the man was called in the abbot pulled down his own robes to reveal his back. On the same place where the dog was hit were fresh cuts and bruises. This is the sort of oneness that an ideal healer is sought to possess.

The Buddhist tradition identifies the Medicine Buddha as the ideal healer, and it also stresses that the utmost powers of healing lie within our own selves. According to Deepak Chopra *"We have a pharmacy inside us that is absolutely exquisite. It makes the right medicine, for the precise time, for the right target organ - with no side effects."*



Thus by extension we come to the realization that the venerable Medicine Buddha is within each of us. The path to this realization lies through meditation, specifically the meditation of visualization. By meditating on him and visualizing him in front of us we can come face to face with the Medicine Buddha whose smile radiates compassion to the universe, and whose gentle eyes melt with love for all living beings.

Next, then, a ray of golden light comes from the heart of the Buddha, and gently penetrates our own heart. (Heart here means 'heart center' - the core of our being inside the center of our chest, not the physical pumping mechanism). This heart-center is defined as:

*"Within you there is a stillness and sanctuary to which you can retreat at any time and be yourself. This sanctuary is a simple awareness of comfort, which can't be violated by the turmoil of events. This place feels no trauma and stores no hurt. It is the healing mental space that one seeks to find in meditation."*

--- Deepak Chopra

This realization comes to us as a flash of insight, and it is not verbal, nor linguistically structured. It is a feeling of sudden, liberating knowledge, when without words we experience the truth. A

truth gauged through words is not spontaneous since a finite amount of time is required to dwell on their meaning. It is through this imaginative, symbolic and creative spiritual experience that 'ordinary' beings are transformed into extraordinary healers. This is the way to relate to the Medicine Buddha, the greatest of all healers.

No wonder then that doctors believing in these ideals perform this meditation and invoke the Medicine Buddha before they prepare their medicines and when offering them to patients. While doing so they also simultaneously chant his mantra. This mantra is *OM BEKANDZE BEKANDZE MAHA BEKANDZE RANDZE SAMUNGATE SOHA*. As they recite this sacred formula they visualize nectar flowing down from the syllables of the mantra into the medicine. The syllables then completely dissolve into the medicine and grant it the potency and power to heal.

This is a symbolic gesture aimed at the realization that as the sacred syllables making up the mantra grant the medicine its capacity to heal, likewise by consciously following the path of righteous karma, we are able to soak our lives with the nectar which flows from the virtues gained through such action.

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We hope you have enjoyed reading the article. Any comments or feedback that you may have will be greatly appreciated. Please send your feedback to [feedback@exoticindia.com](mailto:feedback@exoticindia.com).

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