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VIPASSANA HEALTH



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VIPASSANA HEALTH

Dr R.M.Chokhani

The word 'health' is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word 'hal', meaning the whole, and thus implies the integral existence of a person. It is usually depicted by the bio-psycho-social model, where the biological, psychological and social factors operate together in a dynamic, interactive system. Of these, the psyche or the mind matters the most as it is the central directing force of one's entire life and activity. Accordingly, psycho-somatics, which studies the relationship between mind and body, is considered to be the kingpin of Health Sciences; it has numerous variants like psycho-neuro-immunology, psycho-endocrinology, psycho-cardiology, psycho-dermatology etc. Positive health, a concept developed to encompass the total quality of life, is the utopia that mankind is ever striving to realize.

Vipassana meditation is a scientific technique of self-observation, within the framework of one's own mind and body; a healing by observation of and participation in the universal laws of nature (Dhamma), that operate upon one's thoughts, feelings, judgements and sensations. It aims at the total eradication of mental negativities and conditionings to achieve real peace of mind and lead a happy and healthy life. Vipassana courses are open to students of any faith, nationality, colour or background; even those afflicted with sickness can participate, provided the person is able to comply with the code of discipline, follow the meditation instructions and practice accordingly and that the appropriate facilities and support are available at the centre to cater for the individual's needs.

A wealth of data exists about the beneficial effects of Vipassana in a variety of health disorders, both physical and mental. Such health benefits are considered to be just its by-products and it is advised that one should not pursue them as the main objective lest such efforts turn counter-productive. Healing - not disease cure, but the essential healing of human suffering (*dukkha*) - is the purpose of Vipassana. With joy and equanimity; one's approach to life is totally transformed, enabling one to face all the vicissitudes including disease, and even death, with serenity and fortitude.

The practice of medicine is a confluence of the twin streams of science and art. A healer needs not only the

learned skills of diagnosis and treatment but human understanding too, with love and compassion for the suffering. Besides, the constant exposure to human suffering may lead to professional burn-out unless the healer consistently endeavours to develop one's own autonomy and self-knowledge, augmenting one's ability to be a professional anchor to others in the tumult of their lives. As the saying goes, "Physician, heal thyself!" Vipassana shows a way.

Vipassana is acceptable and relevant to healers of diverse disciplines as it touches the common ground of healing. With its practice, healers grow in their personal as well as professional lives; empathetic sensitivity and diagnostic accuracy are enhanced and therapeutic effectiveness is facilitated. Many meditator-healers teach their patients 'Anapana' - a preparatory step in the training of Vipassana, in addition to administering the regular medical treatment. The patients are thus encouraged to take personal responsibility for their own health and well-being. Vipassana is truly the path of all-healing, including self-healing and other healing.

The existential position of Vipassana, namely, the inevitability of suffering (*dukkha*), and its exhortation to work ardently so as to eventually reach the ultimate goal of full liberation (*nibbāna*), makes it a perfect tool for self-actualization, a positive mental health measure indeed. Accordingly, the primary focus of research in the health area, is on studying and evaluating the psychological benefits of Vipassana, in terms of transformation in one's personality and attitude; one's coping patterns in the face of life-stressors; one's performance and adjustment at home, study and work; in short, the quality of life.

Dr Vithaldas Modi

Nature cure believes that all diseases are one and their cure is also one. Having a disease itself implies the deterioration of the natural state of the body. This happens because we live in the wrong way, because we go against nature. Man is the child of nature. He should live like other animals, like other beings. Nature wants him to work as he has been doing since time immemorial. He should eat the food that nature has made for him. He should not pollute it by adding something to it or removing something out of it. He should inhale pure air, drink pure water and have enough sleep. But where does man do so? The result is that his body becomes polluted, in other words it becomes filled with pollutants. It is true that nature has created a system in the body to drain out the pollutants that are produced normally. But although they are removed, additional pollutants caused by the wrong way of living, if not drained out, manifest in the form of disease. Then we lose our appetite, feel the desire to take rest and the desire to drink water persists. These are signals of nature. If a man recognizes them and lives accordingly, his body becomes free from pollutants and if he does not pollute it any more, it is clean (pollutant-free) and healthy.

The mind works within the confines of this body. Our body is also polluted by a defiled mind, this is, by impure thoughts that arise in it. The pollution so caused is deadlier than poison. There is only difference in the degree. Man survives if the amount of pollution is small. So in order to maintain good health, one should live a natural life, as prompted by nature, and take certain measures to keep one's mind pure. Innumerable and varied are the ways for attaining purity of the mind but the best in my view is Vipassana - a unique technique of meditation taught by the Buddha, both simple and unfailing. He himself attained enlightenment by practicing it and taught it to others out of compassion.

A sound mind can live only in a sound body. Therefore the first requirement for the practice of Vipassana is to keep one's body pure and healthy. To achieve this, one has to undertake the observance of five precepts:

1. I shall not kill
2. I shall not steal
3. I shall not commit sexual misconduct
4. I shall not tell lies
5. I shall not take intoxicants.

On the basis of these moral precepts, coupled with proper concentration of mind, one is ready to begin the practice of Vipassana.

Whatever right or wrong, good or evil, a person does, is stored in his/her mind. So mind is most important and all the results of evil deeds that are accumulated here are the cause of our next birth. If one's mind becomes ultra-pure, one is said to have attained enlightenment. But this happens in a span of several existences. A beginning, however, has to be made which is possible by the mind in the life of a human being only. The Buddha could attain the path of enlightenment by virtue of good deeds done in innumerable past lives. We are fortunate that this technique of Vipassana is made available to us in its pure form. It had disappeared from India but had been preserved in neighbouring Myanmar with great care. In its pristine purity this same technique was brought to India in 1969 by Goenkaji. So far several hundred thousand people from India and the world over have gained from this technique of meditation taught by him.

One who practices Vipassana without regarding it as ritual, achieves purity of mind. In other words, sensuality, anger, craving and aversion, which agitate Man's mind, become feebler as a result of the meditation practice. As the negativities become feebler, a person experiences profound peace.

Vipassana is undoubtedly a technique of freeing oneself from the cycle of birth and death. Besides, it is also a technique to purify one's mind and achieve mental peace. And this is desirable for everybody. Walking on the path of Vipassana is a unique method of living this life happily.

One who walks on this path derives benefit immediately. In addition, he suffuses and permeates the environment around him with the fragrance of his good-will and, in return, he gains the good-will of all.