

On Purification and Healing

When it comes to Buddhist methods of healing, special mention should be made of the view of karma as the cause of illness. Karma in general means action and its results, and this is something neutral in itself. Whether it is positive, constructive action, or negative action, the same principles apply - causes bring results, and create seeds for the further repetition and expansion of an action and its effects. This is the way the mind and emotions and body either degenerates or improves.

In Buddhism, from wrong view and self grasping ignorance, the negative emotions of greed, anger, sadness, fear develop and increase, and this has effects energetically, and in terms of the elements, all the way down to the physical level. When these responses to life become habitual, they are imprinted and become a pattern that in some way defines a person's life. This is what we then speak of as a person's karma.

Healing karmic causes is different from just alleviating the temporary suffering of one negative emotion or a physical imbalance and illness. It goes much further than that. When we heal the karmic cause of a disease, we uproot not only the cause of that one effect, but of all the oceans of suffering, mental and physical, that could possibly result from that negative karmic tendency. It is really something joyful and profound.

Ultimately, it's the person liberated by wisdom who is fully healthy, and this should be known by everyone, so we can orient ourselves to the ideal.

Purification is then an ongoing practice for those in a monastic setting, as well as for contemplatives of every tradition. The reason is that we continue to make mistakes until we've completed the path, and we need to correct our way of living, thinking and being with others.

Another reason this practice is needed is that we all have a great store of experiences in the form of karmic impressions from our past actions. Like

seeds, unless they are transformed, we can carry these with us, and when the right conditions come together, they can ripen and bring us suffering.

I remember being in the waiting room with other patients at the hospital where a family member was being seen. Many of them were undergoing treatment for serious diseases, and I prayed and meditated, and tried many different mantras, but the only one that felt like it fit was one for purifying karma, that of Vajrasattva. This makes more sense to me now.

In the visualization used with this practice, we see our body made of light being purified, and becoming pristine, immaculate, and luminous. The four opponent powers are enjoined here: of refuge and the dedication to the ultimate benefit of others; dispassionately naming and relinquishing our past wrong actions; making strong vows that are in accord with our true nature; and virtuous action, in this case recitation. Practicing this way in time can bring radical, deep transformation, and healing.

Like a lot of Westerners, I have difficulty believing in the ideas of rebirth, but as many teachers will tell us, this makes for a narrow view of ourselves, our mind, and our karma. It also effects how we see the spiritual practice we do. Looking within, I find many causes and potentials, positive and negative. This view that says we have a great store of karma is much more workable, and it leads to far greater conscientiousness, and enthusiasm for our own practice, and greater compassion for others.

*May we all totally purify even the most subtle remainder
of negative karma
and its cause in self grasping,
and may we then skillfully lead all others to freedom,
joy and ease,
and the full health of the Noble Ones*