



Tibetan Medicine in a Nutshell

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The history of Tibetan Medical System has evolved from its pre-Buddhist period of native Tibetan religion called *Yung-drun Bon* from 3800 years BC to the time of the emergence of Buddhism around 7th Century AD. However, it is popularly believed that the essence of the Tibetan medical system was taught by the Buddha himself in the manifestation of Medicine Buddha, The Supreme Healer.

Significantly, the Tibetan medical system enters into its most productive stage during the 7th and 8th century when the then Kings started patronizing the medical lineages. Many celebrated physicians were invited to Tibet; the stage had been set for the effective assimilation and incorporation of various Asian Medical System, particularly the Indian Ayurveda into Tibetan medical system.

During the 7th and 8th century AD, many celebrated physicians from Tibet's neighboring countries were formally invited to share their knowledge. Among all others, the Ayurvedic contributions to the enrichment of Tibetan medical system are near total. The *rGyud-shi* or the Four Great Tantras, which is still the most authoritative classics of Tibetan Medicine, bears ample proof of its loyal allegiance to Ayurvedic classics like Charaka, Susruta and Astanga hrdaya of Vagbhata.

Among many classics on Tibetan Medicines, the most authentic and authoritative text was the *Four Great Tantras* or the *Four treatises* which forms the main source book of Tibetan Medicine till today. It is basically the summary of the Tibetan peoples fight against the diseases by making healthy use of its abundant natural resource of flora and fauna.

The Four Great Tantra was said to be compiled by the Father of Tibetan Medicine, the Yuthog Yonten Gonpo. It is a unique system where medical science and spirituality are blended harmoniously together to offer total health to all. It is a science of preventing and treating diseases holistically wherein the patient is looked upon as a precious human being rather than as a malfunctioning organism; to restore and maintain the dynamic equilibrium between the mind and the body through proper diet, lifestyle, natural herbs and other accessory therapies. One of the salient features of Tibetan Medicine is to maintain the dynamic equilibrium between the microcosm of our body system and the macrocosm of external environment which sustains the living beings. It also encourages healthy relationship between Mind and Body and doctor and patient as the key factor in the realization of total health. Passed down through the centuries in a most closely guarded secret, it still enjoys unbroken continuity and popular practice in modern day world.

FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPT

The fundamental concept of Tibetan medical system revolves around the theory of 5 Cosmo-physical elements and three humoral energies the balance and imbalance of which attributes to health and disease. Every phenomenon, whether in the macro-cosmic or in the micro-cosmic: the disease, its treatment are all made out of these 5, Cosmo-physical elements viz; earth, water, fire, air and space. The diets, life styles, seasonal, and mental conditions are considered to be four causative factors that actually create the imbalance or disease in otherwise balanced and healthy body.

Similarly, based on the holistic and integrated Buddhist concept of Mind and Body relationship, Tibetan medical system recognizes *Marigpa*, the Ignorance as the root and fundamental cause of all the sufferings. Ignorance, in its simplest term, means not realizing the non-existence of Self due to which all the Sentient beings are afflicted with 3 - inborn mental poisons which in turn gives rise to three humoral energies.

PHARMACOLOGICAL ASPECT

According to the Tibetan medical system, there is no substance on this earth which does not have any medicinal value but, one should know its taste and potency, and its various ways and means to collect and process the raw plants for obtaining the maximum therapeutic value. The medicinal substances used in Tibetan Medicine are mainly natural herbs. Besides, some precious and semi-precious stones, salts, minerals and some animal extracts are also being used. The medicines are combined and prepared considering their individual taste and potency so as to ensure total and quality health of the individual without any unwelcome side effects.

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis of the disease is carried mainly through interrogation, visual and palpation. Significantly, the pulse and urine analysis forms the most unique and important part of Tibetan diagnostic method.

The pulse examination is not merely a feeling of pulse at the wrist of the patient. It involves extensive theoretical study followed by years of practical experience to be able to read correctly the message of pulse in terms of various etiological and pathological factors. It is most simple yet, very sophisticated and most reliable technique requiring great experience and expertise of mind. For the Tibetan doctors, his or her fingertips are the most reliable and sophisticated diagnostic tools. Similarly, the Urine Analysis; however simplistic and bizarre it may appear, takes a year of training and practical experience before one learns to see the various etiological and pathological factors in the silvery screen of urine.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN Tibetan medical system and ASTROLOGY:

One of the unique features of the Tibetan medical system is its close relationship with the Astronomy and Astrological science, which too has been derived from one of the Buddha's most important teachings of Kalachakra. The shifting balance of our body system in accordance with the seasonal changes in our outer and internal

environment are best explained through the Astrological calculations. The seven extra-ordinary pulse diagnosis which is based upon the Mother-Son and Friend – Foe relationship is also performed through the inter-relationship between the five Astro-logical elements like wood, fire, earth, metal and water, and the five visceral and six hollow organs of our body system.

Moreover, Tibetan doctors also consult wide range of Astrological calculations during the preparation of the medicines; performing some minor surgeries and accessory therapies, and also to ascertain the nature of the disease and its prognostication.

TREATMENT APPROACH

Tibetan medical system considers the treatment approach as very important factor in determining the precious health of the patient. Generally, the approach to the treatment follows four main steps:

The 1st step in the treatment of any disease starts with the proper administration of diets followed by the changes in the behavioral regimens. If the ensuing cannot be controlled through the former two steps, then the medicines are prescribed with the varying degree of strength. The last or the 4th step involves giving various accessory therapies like moxa-bustion, vene-section, purging and enemas, hot and cold fomentation, medicine bath, massage, cupping etc. The basic spiritual practice and healing meditation also forms very important part of the healing process.

With it's headquarter at Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh, Tibetan Medical and Astrological Institute founded by His Holiness The Dalai Lama has over 40 branches all over India and Nepal. The Institute also has many Societies for Tibetan Medicine in several countries in Europe and US.

Although, Tibetan Medicine treats almost all the common and major diseases, it is found particularly effective in treating in many major diseases like asthma, rheumatic arthritis, diabetes mellitus, cardio-vascular problems and hypertension, gastro-intestinal problems, nervous diseases, skins and thyroids, and psychosomatic problems etc. The medicines are also found to be very effective in

the treatment of various forms of cancer. As a matter of fact, the Clinical research department of Tibetan Medical Institute in collaboration with All India Medical Institute of Science (AIIMS), New Delhi, has already proved beyond doubt the effectiveness of Tibetan Medicine against Diabetes (1998 – 1999) and cancer in its various stages (2002 –2004).

The ultimate aims and objectives of Tibetan medical system are to provide to the evergreen tree of our body system the two blossoming flowers of health and longevity and the three precious fruits of spirituality, prosperity and happiness.

SARVA-MANGALAM

The Tibetan Medical and Astrological Institute founded by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 1959. It its headquarter in Dharamsala (Himachal Pradesh).