

INTRINSIC HEALTH

Chögyam Trungpa in a Conversation with Health Professionals

I HAVE NOT BEEN to medical school myself, or been a nurse or doctor, but I would like to indicate, from the Buddhist point of view, how to become a helper and a useful person in relating with other people.

Health

The dictionary definition of *health is*, roughly speaking, "freedom from sickness." However we could look at it as something more than that. According to Shambhala tradition, people are basically and intrinsically good; or in Buddhist terms, people inherently possess Buddha nature. That is, from these points of view, health is intrinsic. That is, health comes first; sickness is secondary. Health is. This attitude is one of being fundamentally wholesome, with body and mind synchronized in a state of being which is indestructible and good. This attitude is not recommended exclusively for the patients or for the helpers or doctors. It can be adopted mutually because intrinsic goodness is always present in any interaction of one human being with another.

Faith

A second consideration, which comes out of the first, is faith. Commonly, faith means having religious conviction or having trust in someone who has proved himself to be good. But in this case, faith is based on a recognition of the intrinsic goodness of the helpers and the helpees, which exists constantly. When we communicate with anyone at all, there is a ground of trust, faith, or mutual inspiration which comes from acknowledging each other's basic goodness. Because of that faith, individuals can begin to learn to help themselves, work with themselves, and take some pride in their existence. Such pride is not on the level of vanity or one-upmanship, but it is the general sense of physical wellbeing. If there is not that sense of physical well-being, then when you get sick, things get much worse. You actually want to be sick, want to die, and you begin to give up. So a general sense of physical well-being from both helper and helpee's point of view seems to be very desirable and even necessary. By physical well-being I'm not talking about extravagance-buying expensive clothes, for instance-but about paying attention to your existence. There should be some sense of discipline throughout the day for both helpers and helpees. Because of this, nothing is done haphazardly. The minute you get up, you take a certain attitude in facing your world in the way you take a shower, brush your teeth, shave, wash your hair, and choose what to wear. In getting ready to leave your home and in just being yourself, some kind of tremendous dignity and elegance could take place. You could begin to "taste" your own mind and your own body. In that way, you are not working with a particular medical technique alone, but with the creation of an entire atmosphere; how you set up the room, how you handle yourself, how you are.

Working with Sickness

A lot of upsets are invited by inattention and by being unnecessarily cranky, unnecessarily slothful. The feeling is that you couldn't care less, you are just strung out, voluntarily in many cases. You may begin to develop a sense of protest against the world of health. So you invite all the worms, germs, and flies by being sloppy. There is no dignity, no intrinsic goodness in that. However, if the helpers have created a sense of well-being in their own lives, this could help to inspire the helpees. In that regard, "tasting" one's mind and body is very important.

The actual application of these principles is based on the bodhisattva vow, in which you are willing to become anything to serve anybody. You're willing to become a bridge, a ship, a train, a motorcar, chopsticks, knives and spoons, a comb. Anything that anybody uses, you are. You become a vehicle for people's well-being. Anybody's wellbeing. All sentient beings' well-being. With this attitude, you are not there only when someone is sick, shying away when they are not sick.

Taking care of sick people in their homes is a good example. Whether things go well or not, you are always available. The idea is one of taking a human being, responding and working with that person, whether that person is doing fine or experiencing terrible turmoil. There is some kind of even-temperedness and a natural sense of working together, which is the bodhisattva ideal. That bridge can be crossed by anybody, anytime, all the time, whether people are happy or sad, desperate or relaxed. It serves to bind them all together.

Madness

Our last issue is madness. Even though you cure a person of a particular disease, or particular problems, you still could be propagating each other's madness. When your health is good and you are highly fit, then you might be even more well equipped to conduct your madness, to propagate your madness any way you can. The minute you get hit by sickness, inconvenienced physically, you feel, "Maybe I'm doing something wrong." But when you have *been* cured, you may feel that you are okay. Then you can once again propagate all sorts of madness. So in being cured or in the process of curing, or being helped or in the process of helping, it is always necessary to take on the greater responsibility of not creating the fundamental disease, or madness. Madness is the result of not being able to synchronize body and mind together properly. Our goal is to create "Great Eastern Sun vision," which is the synchronizing of body and mind to uncover our basic health and to overcome madness.

QUESTION: There are times when we may see someone who has multiple complaints. We check him out and find there's nothing physically wrong. We don't necessarily want just to give him pills, and we are faced with the situation of realizing that the best thing he could probably do would be to sit, to meditate. Should we go ahead and ...

CHOGYAM TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: I would leave it up to you. That's *why you* are there. You see, people have to change their cultural preconceptions: doctors have a particular label, and psychotherapists have a particular label, and there's nothing in between the two so far in this society. So people jump back and forth between those two roles. Our role is definitely to create some kind of intermediate situation in which we

could accommodate both practices without becoming extreme. You don't have to create an encounter group while having your teeth fixed. You just relate with what's needed. At the same time, there has to be some attention to space and to the physical atmosphere, including how the doctors and nurses look, and how they conduct themselves in that particular atmosphere. When patients come into a treatment situation, they may have a sense of anxiety, a sense of hope, or a sense of complete negativity. It is a very sensitive matter to bring them into the right situation and work with them. The main point is that they are not stuck with their sickness. If a person regards sickness as an enemy, then his body has no working basis to be well. He thinks his body is invaded by enemies and he goes to the doctor to get rid of these foreigners occupying his castle. And once that's taken care of, it's all over. So no relationship is established. There is another problem which goes back even further-the concept of death as the archenemy, where we try to avoid death every minute, every second. There has to be more emphasis on creating an atmosphere of help. Sickness is a message, and it can be cured if the right situation is created.

Q: In working with people in a professional practice, is there a way to help people develop more psychological space?

CTR: This might seem like a very simple-minded approach, but in working with people, I think that the physical environment is extremely important. I mean the actual furniture and decoration in the room, as well as the way you are dressed, the way you smell. There should be some sense that the ground, or the environment, has been conquered, so that when the patient and doctor meet, there is what might be called sacredness involved with the whole situation. That is very important. Mind reflects body, and body is affected by the atmosphere. The idea is *recovering* rather than being *cured of a* particular disease. This approach could also be used with older people who are dying. In the process of dying they are uncovering some kind of sanity. So they could approach their death peacefully.

Q: In a life-death situation, you may have to decide whether to let someone die or stay alive. I just wonder how much karma is involved in that. It would seem as if a bodhisattva approach would always be to keep the person alive. And yet at the same time, there's also some point where you have to let them go.

CTR: I think it is a very individual matter. You can't make a blanket policy or write a statement saying, "The Buddhists say . . ." Sometimes it would be much more helpful for them to go; and sometimes they should stick to it so they can experience a more fundamental feeling, or taste, of their mind and body. It's very individual.

Basically, what we have been talking about is a general sense of healthiness, or intrinsic goodness, in your state of mind. There is some sense of not giving up on life, but viewing every day as a constant journey and a constant challenge, and at the same time a constant celebration. I shouldn't say too much. It is better to experience it yourself.