

Health, Wellbeing, Competence and Aging in relation to *gso.ba rig.pa*

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Introduction

This article attempts to discuss the positive aspects of healthy living based on *gso.ba rig.pa* philosophy and principles, which are crucial for general wellbeing, health, competence and long life. It will focus on three humors and five elements of our body, as they are considered as the basic pillars of our body and vital energies. Since mind is the creator of all phenomena, an attempt is made to describe the mind and how it affects our health status. The food and behavior are described in detail as they are very important for maintaining optimal health, wellbeing and long life.

Definition of Health

The WHO defines health as a “state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. Health is the general condition of a person in all aspects and it is also a level of functional and/or metabolic efficiency of a person. Overall health is achieved through a combination of physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual well-being. Personal health depends partially on one's active, passive, and assisted observations about their health in their everyday life, and on the social structure of one's life. The maintenance of strong social relationship is linked to good health conditions, longevity, productivity, and a positive attitude. This is due to the fact that positive social interaction increases many chemical levels in the brain, which are linked to personality and intelligence traits.

Health care system

Health has been declared as a fundamental human right and the state holds responsibility for the health of its people. These principles have been recognized by nearly all government of the world and are enshrined in their respective constitutions. In Bhutan, health care is completely a government function and is provided free to its citizens through public health system. Since health is influenced by a number of factors such as adequate food, housing, basic sanitation,

healthy lifestyles, protection against environmental hazards and communicable diseases, the frontiers of health extend beyond the narrow limits of medical care. Health care embraces a multitude of services provided to the individuals or communities by the agents of health services or professions, for the purpose of promoting, maintaining, monitoring and restoring health. Traditional medicine in Bhutan is fully integrated with the national health care system and is available in all health facilities.

Health and wellbeing in relation to *gso.ba rig.pa*

According to Bhutanese traditional medicine known as *gso.ba rig.pa*, a person is considered healthy when three humors i.e. *rlung* (wind), *mkhris.pa* (bile) and *bad.kan* (phlegm) are in a state of complete balance or equilibrium. The concept of three humors helps to understand the human body, its structure and its functions. All biological activities can be traced to the normal or abnormal functioning of these three humors. *Gso.ba rig.pa* considers the balance of three humors as good health and imbalance as illness. Health and wellbeing, therefore, are a result of the three humors in a harmonious state of perfect balance.

Three Humors

rLung is composed of air and space and is related to the body's energy and nervous system. *Rlung* in its natural state maintains the autonomous nervous system, breathing, movements of the body, equilibrium of tissues and acuity of senses. Therefore, an imbalance in *rlung* can lead to conditions such as tiredness, insomnia and constipation.

mKhris.pa on the other hand is related to temperature and biochemical processes in the body. The main elements associated with *mkhris.pa* are fire and water. In its normal state, *mkhris.pa* is responsible for digestion, hunger, intelligence, determination and courage. An imbalance in *mkhris.pa* can lead to digestive problems and result in the discoloration of feces and urine.

Bad.kan is related to the maintenance of the skeletal system, strength and formation of the body. The basic elements associated with *bad.kan* are water and earth. In its normal state, it is responsible for firmness and stability, the maintenance of body fluids as well as love and forgiveness. An imbalance in *bad.kan* will result in excessive mucous production, asthma, exhaustion and breathing difficulties.

Five elements

In *gso.ba rig.pa*, it is believed that everything within the universe including the human beings is composed of five elements – *sa* (earth), *chu* (water), *me* (fire), *rlung* (air) and *namkha* (space). The humors are affected by these five elements, and perfect health is achieved only when each of the three humors is in equilibrium within us. Therefore, the health and wellbeing can also be defined as a state of perfect balance between the five basic elements, both in quantity and quality and the three humors. The food which nourishes our bodies is also derived from the five elements in various proportions.

Seven Body constituents

The human body is actually constructed by the following seven bodily constituents or components which provide shape and strength of the body:

1. *Dang.ma* (chile): contains the digested foods which supplies essence to all organs and tissues
2. *Khrag* (blood): bring oxygenation and nutrients to all tissues and organs
3. *Sha* (muscles): covers the body and organs, allow the joints to move and maintains the strength of the body
4. *Tshel* (fat): maintains the lubrications and oiliness of the organs and tissues
5. *Rue.pa* (bones) form the structure of the body and produce strength
6. *Kang* (bone marrow): nourishes all organs and systems
7. *Khu.wa* (reproductive fluid): contains energy and nourishes all the tissues especially semen fluid, ovum and menses

The dynamic force of the three humors should be in a state of equilibrium to maintain the whole body in a healthy state, while the seven bodily constituents should be in equilibrium and harmony according to their state.

Self Care

When people feel there is something wrong with their health, they attribute their problem to something else and then try to get well by doing something to get rid of the problem. How they practice self care to get relieved from ailments depends on what they believe are the causes of their ailments. Before the era of modern medicine, there were many theories explaining the causes of illness, for example, the imbalances of substance in the human body, karma, supernatural causes including black magic, evils spirits etc. Therefore, self care practices in many societies include a wide range of options such as using herbs, ointments, body massage, body heating, holy water, religious rituals and ceremonies, spirit possession and so on.

Karmic Diseases

Karmic diseases are difficult to cure even when treated by good doctors and good medicine. Such illnesses require strong spiritual healing and teachings. Only the Dharma practice, an altruistic lifestyle, and generosity can modify the unseen causes which result in karmic diseases. The most powerful medicine for all suffering is to know oneself and to cut the chains of attachment with the swords of wisdom. Only then can one wake up from the deep sleep of ignorance and realize the ultimate truth. One should search for a master who can guide the mind and spirit. Reciting mantras and conducting spiritual practices including meditation and visualization of deities will help in curing karmic diseases.

The Mind

In *gso.ba rig.pa*, the mind is considered to play an essential role in the physical health and wellbeing of a person. The mind gives good health and is also the cause of illness. After death, the body disappears but the mind continues its journey to the next lives without interference. The mind is the prime Materia and also the creator of the self and the external world. Unlike western medicine, all oriental sciences place their foundations at the level of the mind because, the mind is considered to be the core. The natural state of mind is luminous, boundless and without beginning. According to Buddhism, it has the quality and capacity to develop into the highest state of illumination. It is like a pure crystal, but our mind is born with temporary ignorance which obscures the inner light of wisdom like dust on the crystal.

The mind is classified into three categories as the Gross Mind, the Subtle Mind and the Very Subtle Mind. The gross mind (*sem.rag.pa*) resides in the brain and depends on the mechanical functions of the brain cells, which provide the conditions for its functioning. The brain and gross mind accommodates the seat of stupidity, memory functions, induce sleeping, interest, stress, tension, perception of the sensory organs etc. The gross mind passes the message to the subtle mind from where it reaches the very subtle mind. The subtle mind (*sem.trawa*) resides in the heart chakra in energy form. Its functions are to receive the dissolution of all consciousness and information from the gross mind. It is a great memory and data bank of life. The subtle mind allows feeling emotions such as fear, anxiety, sadness, panic, stress, love, compassion, joy, happiness, grief, greed and sorrow. The very subtle mind (*sem.shintu.trawa*) resides in the navel chakra and receives all subtle and gross mental experiences. It carries the memory for the next life and acts only during the dying process, bardo and during the time of conception. It can be reached by a state of deep meditation, shock, fainting, and high spiritual realization.

The ignorant mind cannot see the true phenomena and falls in love with the state of illusion which leads to *dug.sum* (three mental poisons) – *dod.cha* (desire or attachment), *She.dang* (hatred or anger) and *Ti.mug* (delusion or close mindedness) which is the main cause of suffering. Attachment is the main cause of psychological and physical mind disorders. Hatred is the emotion of anger and a destructive state of mind. It diminishes the peace and happiness of the self and others. Delusion or close mindedness is the root of all other afflictions and negative karma, and it is said to be the cause of all sufferings.

Causes of ill Health

The main cause of ill health according to *gso.ba rig.pa* is due to wrong consumption of food and unwholesome behavior. Therefore, one needs to be aware of the foods that aggravate certain conditions and try to avoid it and consume food that are of benefit to general health and specific disease conditions. The human behavior is also responsible for many of the ill health a person is suffering from. Excessive intake of light and rough food or drinks such as strong tea or pork, engaging in fasting and mental exertion can cause *rlung* disorders. Similarly, excessive intake of hot and sharp food and drinks spices, mutton, alcohol and too much physical activity will lead to the aggravation of *mkhris.pa* disorders. Excessive intake of heavy and oily foods or drinks such as raw fruits and sweets, and staying in wet and damp places are contributory factors of *bad.kan* disorders.

Another important cause of ill health according to *gso.ba rig.pa* is evil spirits (*don*). In order to protect from evil spirits, one can use precious stones and amulets containing mantras which are blessed by realized persons.

The Diet

Gso.ba rig.pa places great emphasis on diet and behavioral patterns of an individual for the maintenance of optimum health. Diet is the single most means through which we replenish the five elements inside the body. Since the elements are in a delicate state of dynamic equilibrium inside the body, intake of improper diet and unwholesome lifestyle can damage the homeostatic mechanism. A balanced diet in *gso.ba rig.pa* can be put as “a diet taken in harmony with the individual bodily energy”. This means that the implication of a balanced diet can differ from person to person depending on the individual biotype. Not only it is necessary to select appropriate and nutritious food according to one’s predisposition but hygienic preparation and timely consumption are equally important for the maintenance of optimal health.

A wholesome diet is the main source of energy for the body and mind while an unwholesome diet acts as poison and leads to sickness. The first disease in mankind according to *gso.ba rig.pa* was “indigestion” which occurs when the digestive fire cannot digest properly or tolerate the unwholesome food that produces toxins. As food has a profound influence on either increasing or decreasing the humors, it is advisable to select food and drinks which help pacify the humor imbalances.

Disorders associated with *rlung* are earache, arthritis, prolapsed rectum, cracking of the soles, colic pain, stiffness of thighs, sciatica, sleeplessness, unstable mentality and hemiplegia. The disorders associated with *mkhris.pa* are jaundice, haemorrhage, stomatitis, urticaria, erysipelas, conjunctivitis, pharyngitis, skin inflammation of the feet, and fainting. The disorders associated with *bad.kan* are indigestion, development of goiter, obesity, pallor, excessive sleep, loss of strength, laziness, arteriosclerosis and excessive salivation.

In *rlung* disorders, one should avoid the following food stuff- corn, millet, oats, pears, dried fruits, green peas, cabbage, cauliflower, potato, broccoli, eggplant, cold water and ice cream. In *mkhris.pa* disorders – corn, millet, brown rice, almond, sesame, yogurt, cheese, sour cream, papaya, peach, pineapple, melon, tomato, onion, radish, spinach, garlic, ginger and cumin should

be avoided. In *bad.kan* disorders, one should avoid wheat, rice, melon, grapes, banana, tomato, sweet potato, nuts and all types of oil.

Diet and behavior not only provide simple, practical and effective means of treatment, but are also the basis of preventive medicine and positive health. *Gso.ba rig.pa* emphasizes on the prevention of diseases and maintenance as well as promotion of positive health for which several do's and don'ts and conducts are prescribed for different parts of the day and night, seasons of the year and for different situations in life.

Behavior

Behavior plays an important role in traditional medicine as well as in Buddhism as it is the action of the body, mind and speech that determines a person's state of health. A healthy behavior supports the health and also the therapy. Having a positive understanding and searching for the inner light will promote the general wellbeing of everybody. The action of the mind and body produce immediate and direct positive or negative results. The negative individual behavior does not only create the premises of one's own disease, but also has a disruptive influence on the whole community and society. The following behavior may disturb the psycho-physical functions:

1. Factors that could aggravate wind disorders
 - Working on empty stomach
 - Fasting for a long time
 - Not sleeping properly
 - Thinking excessively
 - Repressing the organ functions
 - Consuming poor nutrient food
 - Talking excessively

2. Factor that could aggravate bile disorders
 - Excessive use of hot and oily food
 - Heavy exercise in the sun
 - Angry and aggressive or violent mind
 - Excessive drinking of alcohol
 - Sleep in the sun or any hot place in the day

3. Factors that could cause phlegm disorders

- Lack of exercise
- Over eating
- Consuming sweets, raw vegetables and milk products in access
- Sleep during day time
- Mental confusion and depression
- Laziness
- Consuming alcohol in access

Sleeping in time is one of the important behaviors for maintaining good health. In the event, one could not sleep at night due to unavoidable circumstances, partake of food on the next day should be less and try to sleep half the amount of time you stayed awake the previous night. It is especially important for people who are old, weak, mentally anxious and physically exhausted from work. During the month of June and July, if one can sleep a little during day time, it will help the body and mind to be healthy. If people do not follow the strict timing for sleeping, one can suffer from phlegm disorders and swelling of the body.

In *gso.ba rig.pa* it is mentioned that one can indulge in sex every day during winter, but in spring and autumn months one may indulge in sex after every 2 nights and in summer months, one should have sex only after 15 days. If one does not follow these timings, one may suffer from poor vision and giddiness and may even cause death in some cases.

A physical activity in moderation is good for maintaining positive health as it can help in the process of digestion. It can also help burning the excess fat in the body which can cause ill health. Taking regular bath is a very good behavior for maintaining positive health. If one can take bath with cold water during the month of September and October, one will not only experience an extra bodily stamina but will also live longer.

Proper breathing has profound effects on our health. Over 70% of waste by-products are eliminated through our breathing and our skin. Good breathing supports muscle growth and energy to get things done. Breathing is the only means of supplying oxygen to our bodies and various organs which is vital for our survival.

Daily Routine

Health is the foundation upon which our happiness depends and the daily routine is the key part of achieving this. If our aim is for a long and healthy life, we should observe daily routine which includes taking care of the body, mind and sense organs. Exercise, sex, sleep personal hygiene, religious practices and other daily practices are also very important.

The ideal time for waking up is before sunrise. Start your day with prayer and meditation, and focus on auspicious objects for a pleasant and successful day. Take time to plan your actions. We must empty our bowels and bladder immediately after this, so that we can develop regular bowel habits. This will help to evacuate any metabolic wastes that are accumulated in our body overnight.

Drinking a glass of tepid water when you first wake up can encourage regularity. Caring for our mouth, teeth and tongue is the next crucial step. Washing face with herbal decoctions, brushing our teeth with herbal powder or tooth paste, and regularly scraping our tongue with a metallic and wooden tongue scraper should be part of our daily routine. Herbal gurgles also have a place in our daily routine, as they help to enhance our sense of taste. They also improve our voice, complexion and sense of smell. Looking after the sense organs like eyes, ears, nose and skin is also very important.

If we follow the above daily routine, consume nutritious and balanced diet, and practice wholesome behavior, we can live a long and healthy life.

Conclusion

The ultimate aim of every person is to live a happy, healthy and long life, free of illness and adversary. It can be achieved through the practice and application of ancient wisdom based on *gso.ba rig.pa* philosophy. The most important elements of health, wellbeing and competence are positive mental attitude, correct dietary habits and proper behavior. If one can follow and practice these elements as described above, one will lead a healthy, prolonged and fulfilling life.

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