



**Health and Well-Being of Body and Mind
by
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Ever since human beings have evolved, the purpose of any religion, any culture, any way of life, always has been to take care of the body and the mind.

When we look at a place like New York City, we see many millions of people who walk around and who do all sorts of things. With all respect, if we look from one perspective, it is just like looking at ants. But what is happening is that they are all just trying to take care of their body and their mind, what else? So this is a rather vast subject: the importance of a healthy body and a healthy mind and the connection between the two. First of all, let's look into the Buddhist concept of enlightenment and try to relate that to this subject. Enlightenment, or Buddhahood, means that a person reaches finally to their potential or destination, and that the person fully awakens and fully develops. So that particular person, whoever he or she is, when he or she fully awakens and fully develops, they reach Buddhahood. Reaching Buddhahood means a state of consciousness totally awakened and developed. So that means that such a person has a perfect and healthy mind.

Who has the healthiest mind on this planet? It may sound dualistic, but with the limitation of our language and vocabulary, I would not feel guilty by saying that the Buddha has the healthiest mind. And below Buddha, one person may be healthier than another, but there is a little bit of something there, so their mind cannot be considered ultimately healthy. Now don't take this literally; I am just using our title here and trying to combine this with it and make some sense out of it.

So now the mind-body connection can be explored by going into a little bit of detail about the Buddha. When a person becomes a Buddha, what is supposed to happen to that person? When we don't learn about Buddhism deeply, it sounds like when we attain enlightenment, we just disappear or something—we become nothing. That isn't the case. Enlightenment means that the mind reaches the ultimate level. So the

physical manifestation, the spontaneous manifestation beyond limitation, that is what a Buddha's body would be. In Vajrayana Buddhism there is a very appropriate term for it, and the mind aspect is expressed through this word—dharmakaya. The physical aspect, energy and all that, is indicated through the words sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya. So what is the healthiest body and mind on earth? The sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya. So if we relate the idea of a healthy mind and a healthy body to the Buddhist principle, then the ultimate of the purest and highest level of the mind and body is indicated through the dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya principle of the Buddha.

Dharma practice means doing things and saying things and thinking about things that will help a person to develop the healthiest aspect of mind and body. Therefore we have centers, membership, program—you know, we have all kinds of things. But the main purpose, the main core is doing every thing we can with our body, with our speech, and with our mind to reach that level of being fully awakened and fully developed.

Now, as knowledge, the Buddha taught many sutras and many tantras, and they are all words—words of advice given by the Buddha, the enlightened one who reached that level. Now all of his words can be interpreted on many levels, for the very simple reason that every single human being is at a different level of inner development. We all have different levels of mental health, let's say, to use our term of this talk. Therefore the particular method has to be the most beneficial instrument for us to proceed further. Because of this reason, the teaching of Buddha, called dharma, was given at many levels. Those levels are sometimes described as the nine yanas, sometimes as the three yanas, sometimes even as the two yanas. (I think when people's time is so precious, like a New Yorker's time, nine yanas might be two yanas.) Anyway, those different levels, those different yanas, can sometimes even become a different sect: the Hinayana sect, the Mahayana sect, the Vajrayana sect. And in the Hinayana sect itself there are many sects, and then among Mahayana and Vajrayana there are also plenty of sects.

The reason for all those sects is quite simple. It is because different levels of individuals received different levels of teachings to help them, and they continued that particular style and it became their particular sect or particular kind of lineage.

But all these particular lineages have a very simple belief in common: That is, to refine and purify and develop the mind, one has to apply the right methods and the right kind of discipline that will make it happen.

The practices that involve discipline, physical discipline, deal with causes and conditions that will result in physical negativity. In Buddhism, everything has a cause and condition. It can be a distant cause and condition, it can be an immediate cause and condition, it can be an accumulation of millions of things, but there must be a cause and condition for anything to happen. Therefore, these physical disciplines deal with those causes and conditions of negativity.

There are two ways to overcome negative physical manifestations. One of them is to dissolve the negative causes and conditions, while the other is to develop positive causes and conditions. It is actually the same thing, like two sides of a coin, but one is heads, and the other is tails. Those physical disciplines, then, are actions such as trying not to perform harmful physical acts against others, and trying not to perform harmful physical acts against yourself as well. Against others would be something like killing, and against yourself would be abusing yourself. So these are the basic disciplines.

Then, there are also disciplines for the speech, like not to say negative things, and on the positive side, to try to do beneficial things for yourself and others. Now look at these two. When you look at them, they are just two sides of the same coin. If you try to do positive things, you do not have to make two efforts—trying not to do negative things and then trying to do positive things. It's the same thing when you avoid negative things. How will you avoid doing negative things? Anything you do to avoid negative action itself is positive. So in that way the method of discipline involves the physical and verbal in dealing with the causes and conditions of negative manifestations. And it involves the causes and conditions of positiveness.

When you do something physically, you have to involve your mind: You cannot do something positive without involving your mind. You cannot say something positive without involving your mind; therefore your mind is involved there as well. But there

is another method that involves the mind more than the body and the speech, and that is meditation. When I talk about meditation here, what I am referring to is a particular method that involves a special discipline of the mind. It can be just sitting and not following thoughts, or just sitting and thinking of a particular thing. But there are very specific methods of meditation. When it comes to meditation, we don't have to think, "Now I want to meditate, but I don't know what to meditate on, or how to meditate." That question does not exist in Buddhism. If you want to meditate there is a meditation method, and you don't have to invent it. (Inventing is supposed to be risky, actually, from the Buddhist point of view). So in the Buddhist tradition, all the methods of meditation are already prepared; one just has to follow them.

So what happens during meditation? First, the mind must become calm. The reason is that our mind has all the capabilities—capabilities to understand, to think—everything is there, but it is like a precious thing that is locked in a safe. What appears is just a solid unmanageable safe; you don't see what is in there until you open it. In the same way, our mind has all the potentials, but without letting those potentials manifest, there is no guarantee that it will work. Because of that, we make lots of mistakes; we have ignorance and so forth. And worse than that, we are not even helpful to ourselves most of the time. So the number-one step in meditation is to make your mind calm. And because of the calmness, a clarity will happen; calm mind will be clear. (Generally speaking, people are always saying, "Don't disturb me right now, I have important things to think about," or "Don't make noise, go away; I want to think, I have some important decisions to make." So that is one expression of common sense.) After developing some clarity, then there will be the next method, the continuous method, to use that clarity, implement that clarity, and to develop further clarity.

Let's look into two particular terms: ignorance and wisdom. What do they really mean? Ignorance means that there is no understanding, absence of clarity. But what is wisdom? It is knowing, the absence of not knowing; and it is clarity. Through practice of meditation, you make your mind calm and clear, and you gain wisdom.

I come across people who like to ask tons of question. With all respect, they mean very well, because for them it is very complicated and they want to ask questions,

but I end up asking them the questions back, because the question itself is not clear. I don't mean I am better than they are. I have been through meditation, and practices, and I have met many teachers. I have been fortunate, I think most unfairly fortunate, and therefore I have had all these advantages in the early part of my life. Because of that, I have gained some kind of understanding, and somehow I will be able to see the questions clearly, a bit more clearly than some people who are asking them. (Not every person's questions are like that. Some people ask me questions that give me a headache. I have to think: they give me a hard time. I appreciate that, because I learn from them; those kinds of situations are my classroom.)

But anyway we have a saying, "Where is the answer? The really true answer is in the question." If you are able to phrase your question clearly in your mind, that is the answer. Of course, if you take it literally, certain kinds of questions will not follow that. If you ask me "When were you born?" even if you know how to ask that question with super clarity, it won't answer itself. But most of the important questions, the questions that are related to insight, more advanced questions, they contain the answers. What I am trying to say here is that to develop the clarity of the mind is the most important first step of meditation, which will naturally develop wisdom.

An average person might ask how we define a healthy mind. Healthy mind does not mean stubborn mind; many people think that healthy mind means stubborn mind. And in some places that are very liberal, they think healthy mind means the most emotional, sensitive mind—for example, a huge man who can cry just like a kid. That is culture, but it doesn't really mean very much when we talk about a healthy mind.

Anyway, when we talk about the body and the mind and its healthy quality, and also about well-being and all of that, they are all connected; they are definitely connected.

Now let's touch on one part of our title, 'well-being'. What is well-being? Well-being means a principle. When you have a valid principle, and you center your entire physical, mental, and verbal activities around that principle, then I think that is the

definition of well-being.

I have been asked several times in different places to talk about 'the practice of Buddhism in lay life in North America'. There are a lot of specifics in it: 'The practice of Buddhism in lay life in North America'. So people want to talk about it. Now what really makes sense in that is the well-being. That makes sense. Of course I can say when you wash your hair (because you wash your hair every morning in America), then you can think of your soap as the blessing of the Buddha, washing away all the negativities; I can talk like that, but that does not make too much sense.

Of course there is benefit if we have that kind of practice; we call it 'Beginning to end, the circle practice'. When you eat, you think of something, when you talk, you talk of something, when you sleep—everything. But that is too much for most of the people in North America. I think I would be responsible for making quite a few people quite crazy; I think some people could develop paranoia—imagine thinking like that for every single thing! It is not invalid; for a person of that level it would be very good; but what makes sense to me (and also there is no risk) is the well-being. If you have that principle, and if you are able to place every single effort that you make, even just to survive, around that principle, then I think you could consider your life very meaningful. That way, everything that you can do has some kind of benefit for yourself and for others, and everything that you do will have less chance of becoming harmful for yourself and for others. That would be a very good beginning.

And if you are able to carry on with that kind of well-being, that principle, then you can expect that just by living a normal life, and by doing a little bit of meditation every day, and some kind of study and further exploration into knowledge and wisdom—putting some kind of effort there, but for the rest just living a normal life—you will get great benefit out of it, because your life will be lived with a most valid principle and everything that you do will be involved with that principle. So my understanding about well-being means living with a valid principle.

Now how do we define that principle? Of course, according to each person's state of mind, according to each person's involvement in reality, there will need to be a slight

alteration or adjustment, but one principle that always remains is having faith and trust in the truth. Truth is the most important thing, for me. The reason I have faith in Buddhism is because everything that Buddha said is true. So because of that, I have faith and trust in the teachings of the Buddha. That is why I try to do something meaningful, even if most of the time I don't manage, and I have to work hard at it. I do it because that is the truth; to do something meaningful is beneficial, is good; doing something meaningless is harmful and not good. If somebody says a bad word to you, you don't like it, you don't feel good; if somebody cheats you, you don't like it, it doesn't feel good. It's the same for others: if you do something that is not good, people will not feel so good, they will suffer.

So believing in that kind of truth, having faith and trust in that kind of truth, is what I mean by the principle. That principle can become almost spontaneous, so that you try not to do anything that would be harmful to yourself and to others, and try to do everything beneficial, try to be as helpful as possible to yourself and to others. In that way, one can live a life with the most appropriate kind of positive qualities and good will.

Therefore I think it is most important as a Buddhist, or as a person who tries to be a good person, to discover the most essential principle, the most personal and simple, and then proceed from that principle and involve your entire actions and intentions in applying that principle. Somehow that covers this subject.

This article is an edited version of a teaching by Chamgon Tai Situ Rinpoche given in New York City on November 24, 1987. It was edited by Kathy Wesley.

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