

The Concept of Mental and Emotional Digestion in Tibetan Medicine

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Abstract

Tibetan medicine's primary emphasis on gastrointestinal digestion, which affects the function of the entire organism, has parallels in mental and emotional processes, with reference made to the individual's "mental and emotional digestion".

Tibetan medicine and Ayurveda describe the psyche as consisting of the empirical and absolute souls. The empirical soul, termed Purusa, is a material entity that regulates mental and emotional digestion. The term Purusa derives from the ancient Ayurveda text by Caraka Samhita, which describes the material, empirical soul. Unlike the immaterial, absolute soul, the material, empirical soul is subject to age and disease deterioration and is treatable pharmacologically [1].

This paper describes an account of the empirical soul, Purusa, and its role in the process of mental and emotional digestion. It also identifies distinct, clinically important features in comparison to the paradigm of mind in Western psychiatry. The discussion of Purusa comes mainly from Tibetan Medicine and is derived predominantly from the work of five generations of the Badmaev family, who have practiced Tibetan and Western Medicine since 1851 [2].

Keywords: *Tibetan Medicine; Empirical Soul Purusa; Mental and Emotional Digestion*

The empirical soul

Tibetan medicine's emphasis on gastrointestinal digestion affecting the function of the entire organism finds parallels in mental and emotional processes, with reference made to the individual's "mental and emotional digestion." The construct of the human psyche in Tibetan and Ayurveda medicines consists of the empirical and absolute souls. In Ayurveda vernacular Purusa, the empirical soul is a material entity that regulates mental and emotional digestion.

Purusa is pivotal to the structure and function of our psyche and comprises the mind, the five senses-sound, touch, vision, taste, and smell-and the sixth sense, the intellect, emotions, and memory.

The function of the five senses through specific attributes is essential in the daily functioning of the mind and understanding daily reality. Tibetan medicine lists senses in the following order: sound, touch, vision, taste, and smell. They provide critical information about the outside world, being a source of external information for the functioning of the mind. Listing the five senses is based on a perceived quantity of attributes inherent to a particular sense. The sense of hearing has one attribute, sound, while the subsequent senses have attributes added from the preceding senses. For example, the last sense, the sense of smell, has characteristics of sound, touch, vision, and

taste, as well as the attribute of smell. The perceived interrelation between the faculties of the senses is well recognized, e.g. “smelling” the “taste” of foods. Due to this interrelation between senses, people who have lost certain sense organs due to accident, injury, or disease can utilize other sensory attributes to communicate with the outside world. Blind people, for example, develop other attributes inherent with vision, i.e. sound and touch, that help them understand the environment. Analysis of how mnemonists memorize may illustrate cooperation between the senses, intellect, and the mind. In the case of mnemonists, either all senses or a particular one, specially developed, come to assist the memory, e.g. they can “see” the numbers in their mind or “see” colors when they hear sounds, thus having more than one helpful hint to record and recall a memory. Accessing memory can be attained with attributes of the five senses, and the executive utilization of accessed memory occurs with the sixth sense and mind.

Purusa’s function depends on creating, storing, and retrieving viable memory, with emotions originating in the mind sustaining the memory. Emotions sustain memory by creating a cause and effect and may also distort memory through an emotional filter of anger, love, hate, happiness, or jealousy, allowing a person to remember and understand what a particular emotion allows a person to remember and understand. The role of functional memory in the perception of reality is critical to the understanding originating in the mind. One can learn how to harness emotions effectively to access reality instead of distorted reality. This technique can help prevent and reverse the damage to Purusa’s functioning. The technique is based on pausing the rush of sensory attributes and emotions to the mind, allowing the mind to reclaim the functional memory.

The sixth sense, or the intellect, is the executive branch of the mind, and it coordinates input from the five senses, emotions, and memory, implementing the understanding of the mind. The intellect feeds back the outcome to the mind and validates the fulfillment of the understanding process. This redundancy in communication safeguards Purusa’s internal information and ultimate understanding. The information process facilitated by the mind and intellect provides the understanding of the abstract concepts of right or wrong, relevance or irrelevance, and danger or safety. Self-constructive or self-destructive behaviors depend on the functional or dysfunctional sixth sense. The interrelation between the senses, intellect, memory, and mind can work to our advantage, evoking and sustaining positive memory or, on the contrary, generating and sustaining destructive memory, resulting in, for example, addictive behaviors.

In Tibetan medicine, the mind construct operates in unison with the intellect, sensory information from the five senses, emotions, and memory to form the understanding. The mind is perceived and practiced as a synthesis of functions, which differs from Western psychiatry, which dissects and analyzes components of the mind. The latter derives from Freud’s distinguishing three separate components of the mind, Id, Ego, and Superego, recently substituted with neuroimaging of the brain activity correlating with the behavior and mental processes. The Western approach to the human mind has limitations, mainly due to the lack of recognition of the unity of the mind. This perception results in a narrow-field diagnosis and psychopharmacology directed to limited mechanisms supplanting a malfunctioning section of the mind at the cost of side effects and detriment to the mind.

Understanding depends on the flow of information accessed from functional memory, which can be diminished or altered due to psychological duress or psychiatric conditions. These conditions manifest, for example, by memory loss, illusion, or delusion, and acting upon wrong premises.

Ignorance impairs understanding. Ignorance results from life-inflicted and self-inflicted hurtful and harmful occurrences, known in Ayurveda as rajas and tamas. The outcome of repeating an insult cycle of hurt and harm and ensuing detriment to health depends on how long a person remains ignorant and does not recognize the actions and situations causing the emotional, mental, and physical detriment. Ultimately, ignorance adversely affects the construct of the mind, eventually leading to disease, both psychic and somatic.

Understanding the predicament of ignorance is critical in diagnosis, prevention, and recovery and must be internalized in the Purusa to correct mental and emotional digestion effectively. Acknowledging ignorance is insufficient to internalize the cause of ignorance, and

only understanding the cause would prevent the cycle of hurt and harm. Tibetan pharmacology recognizes food as a medicine principle, providing a drug design that restores mind unison and facilitates understanding. This drug design does not alter Purusa's inherent functions, in distinction to Western pharma drugs characteristically substituting a select mind's functions, affecting the integrity of mind function and resulting in side effects of therapy. Arguably, Western psychopharmacology does not prevent the hurt and harm cycle. The unique recognition of the integrated function of Purusa and its deterioration by disease or aging processes makes it possible to offer a practical, side-effects-free pharmacological treatment of mental and emotional digestion.

Mental and emotional digestion

Tibetan medicine compares the function of Purusa to that of the digestive tract and the processes of transforming food into elemental nutrients to sustain healthy body metabolism. The "food" for Purusa, however, is the complex source of information transformed into the mental and emotional energy making life possible in the first place. Mental and emotional digestion takes priority when considering sustaining health, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of a disease.

Essential to this process is the quantity and quality of information reaching Purusa's domains. Good karma is a particular form of information rooted in the Buddhist religion based on human deeds, which results in compassion and empathy. The discipline and consistency in the practice of good karma safeguards:

- A balanced mental and emotional digestion,
- Perception and understanding of objective reality, and ultimately,
- True peace of mind.

Often misunderstood as an abstract concept, peace of mind pivots on the emotional and intellectual understanding of suffering and misery running against an individual's true nature and purposeful existence. Paradoxically, the anguished person is guarding ownership of the suffering, protecting the illusion of self-image, a source of misery. That is, until the recognition that life's objective is not to hold to misery, shielding the illusion, but to confront the reality of the person's existence objectively. The more a person is preoccupied with self-image and attaining happiness at all costs, the less fulfilling life becomes. In Western culture, an ambitious, stress-driven personality, although desired, all too often drains off the emotional and intellectual reserves prematurely or permanently. Living with the winning attitude as the only option is a culprit of misery in Tibetan medicine, foretelling Purusa's mental and emotional burnout.

Opening of mental and emotional digestion to the positive of Karma can be illustrated with the line borrowed from the French philosopher and mathematician Rene Descartes: "Cogito ergo sum" - I think, therefore I am, an awareness of our existence to facilitate the Karma in an individual's life, in place of seeking the elusive self-image. People who enjoy longevity and fulfilling lives owe their success to thriving on their natural abilities, related purposeful personal lives, and professional careers, the opposite of success at all costs.

A healthy mental and emotional digestion manifests clinically with psychosomatic well-being and the ability to maintain health with the daily pursuit and practice of Karma, building up the physiological quality of TUMO, in the English language, the LIVING WARMTH. TUMO is indispensable in Tibetan medicine in maintaining spiritual, mental, and physical vitality and adaptability. In thermodynamics, TUMO relates to enthalpy, the total accumulated energy in the organism. A Tibetan physician can estimate the perceived TUMO, the state of health, and Purusa's health.

Practicing Karma, which nurtures Purusa's good mental and emotional nutrition, digestion, and health, requires the individual's sincerity.

Sincerity allows understanding of the purpose of Purusa's healthy functioning, which is opposite to the outcome leading to life's misery. Sincerity, even for a moment, in denying the grip of misery on an individual's life and a glimpse into true peace of mind has a lasting

effect. The uniquely powerful experience and understanding sustain preparedness for life's inevitable challenges and setbacks. Having a glimpse of true peace of mind allows an individual to confront the reality of various manifestations of mental and emotional digestion shortcomings and reconcile with true peace of mind.

Conclusion

Once an individual understands peace of mind, patience is essential in sustaining that accomplishment. Patience reserves the time for an intellectual process to implement healthy mental and emotional digestion. The praise of patience as a great virtue is pancultural. Still, there is an urgent need to learn and access patience in the intellectual process of mental and emotional digestion and attaining peace of mind. Practicing and learning the fulfillment of daily functions without anxious rushing is a good way to practice patience. In times of media, iPhones, and electronic communication devices, a self-coached ability to conduct the day without time devices teaches the quality of patience. Without feeling time pressure in one's life, the experience of a self-learned "standstill of time" signifies patience.

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