

BUDDHIST TANTRIC MEDICINE THEORY ON BEHALF OF ONESELF AND OTHERS

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Tantrism regards man as a microcosm with correspondences to different orders of nature. It sets the old three personal poisons of Buddhism—lust, hatred, and delusion—into correspondence with the three external poisons—the two described in classical Indian medical texts which are the ‘stable’ (or stationary) poison (e.g. from roots of vegetables) and the ‘mobile’ (or moving) poison (e.g. from snakes among animals), plus a third category ‘concocted’ (produced from such things as quicksilver, precious metals, and ambrosia (amṛta)—to wit, ‘delusion’ with the ‘stable’ one, ‘hatred’ with the ‘mobile’ one, and ‘lust’ with the ‘concocted’, perhaps with ‘lust’ regarded as creative. Besides, Tibetan medicine theory relates those three personal poisons to the disease-causing imbalances of the three physiological doṣa’s—lust promoting too much Wind, hatred the Bile, and delusion the Phlegm¹.

Already in ancient Buddhism it was held that the seven limbs of enlightenment, in their standard order of mindfulness, analysis of the doctrine, striving, joy, catharsis, samādhi, and indifference, were recommended to sick monks for getting over their illness.² Presumably this is believed to be the case by reason of overcoming lust, hatred, and delusion.

In the Buddhist Tantras the techniques of incantation and other ritual practices are applied to the alleviation of various illnesses. There appears here a premise of sympathetic magic. Here I distinguish my data by practices mainly intended to relieve the performer’s illness from those which a performer may use in an attempt to cure other patients.

1. This summary is based on materials collected in *Alex Wayman*, “The Concept of Poison in Buddhism,” *Oriens*, X: 1 (1957), pp. 107-09. The addition of a third category ‘concocted’ (*byas pa*) to the standard two poisons, is in a passage cited from the *Mahāmayūrividyārājñīsūtraśatasahasratikā-nāma*, in the Tibetan Tanjur. The association of the three psychological poisons with the three physiological ‘faults’ is found in the Tibetan medical text, *Bdud rtsi sñiñ po yan lag brgyad pa gsañ ba man ñag yon tan rgyud kyi lhan thabs*. The brochure “Exhibition of the history of Indian medicine and its spread in Asia,” prepared for the Third World Conference on Medical Education, New Delhi, 20-25 Nov. 1966, claims that this Tibetan text reflects a lost medical text of eighth century India of the Sanskrit title *Amṛta-aṣṭaṅga-hṛdaya-guh-yopadeśa-tantra*.

2. *Nalinaksha Dutt*, *Early Monastic Buddhism*, Calcutta, 1960, p. 251.

A. TANTRIC MACHINATIONS TO CURE ONESELF.

Some years ago I studied the life of the Tibetan reformer Tsoñ-kha-pa (1357-1419A.D.) from Tibetan biographies and prepared a synthetic biography in English, including the following passage:³

At Skyor-mo-luñ college in Central Tibet after listening to the instruction, he memorized in 17 days the great commentary on Guṇaprabha's *Vinayasūtra*. But this effort apparently brought on a fierce ailment in the upper part of his body, from which he was not relieved for a long time, despite prescriptions from specialists. It hung on for over a year, including eleven months of study with Red-mdah-pa at Sa-skya, where he also listened to the Sa-skya interpretation (sa-lugs) of the *Hevajra-tantra*. Then he took a prescription from a friend at Sa-skya who was versed in incantations (*mantra*). He recited several times a neuter HA and the former ailment left without a trace.

A long time later on I happened to notice in Tsoñ-kha-pa's commentary called *Sbas don* on the Śrī-Cakrasaṃvara-tantra, a section on treating illness by tantric means that might explain this 'neuter HA'. Whether it does or not, it is worthwhile to translate this section from Tibetan under its given heading:⁴

Pacification of illnesses by recourse to mantras and mystic circles (*cakra*).

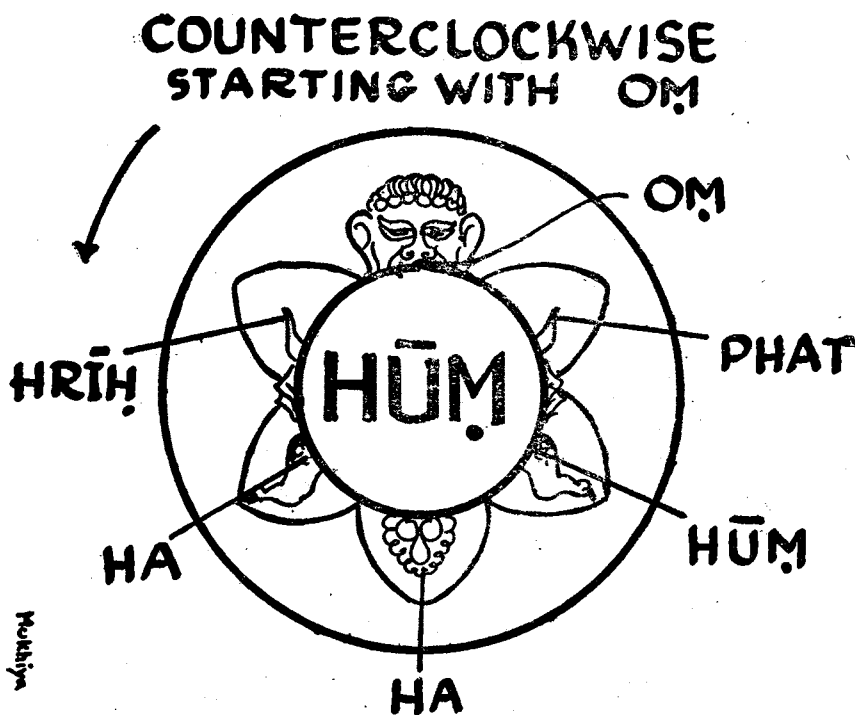
After that explanation of casting the prognostic, I shall explain the method of effecting the rite by mantras of the seven syllables⁵ constituting the upaḥḍaya (near-heart incantation), of the Hero Heruka and by the various dispositions of them in cakras (circles).

³ I have so far not published this synthetic biography. It was originally meant to be part of the introductory materials for my translation of Tsoñ-kha-pa's *Lam rim chen mo*, on which I have worked for some years.

⁴ The section below translated is from Tsoñ-kha-pa's *Sbas don* commentary on the Śrī-Cakrasaṃvaratantra in the Peking Tibetan Tripitaka (PTT), i. e. the Japanese photographic edition, Vol. 157, p. 78-5 to p. 79-1.

⁵ The Laghutantra (fundamental tantra) of the Śrī-Cakrasaṃvaratantra (PTT, Vol. 2 p. 29-5) gives the seven syllables in the order Taph Pha Hūṃ Hūṃ Ha Ha Hriḥ Om because the Tantra uses the left orientation. Tsoñ-kha-pa's commentary of Chap. 12 is on the saptākṣara (seven syllables) and explains (PTT, Vol. 157, p. 39-3) that the syllables are pronounced in the order Om Hriḥ Ha ha Hūṃ Phaṭ, arranged left-wise on a lotus, while the other Hūṃ belongs to the lord Heruka. Notice that the Lord's Hūṃ, in the center, or heart, is constantly pronounced.

- (1) He disposes the upahṛdaya of HA, etc. in the middle of a solar disk, either concretely by drawing, or mentally by contemplation.⁶ Then he should imagine that the illness is in the middle of this, and should recite upahṛdaya up to a thousand times by lengthened utterance (*spel tshig*).⁷ He contemplates on his left hand the syllables of mantra in the appearance of crystal; and when it is revealed to the sick person suffering from illness, no sooner is the hand seen, than the illness is entirely destroyed. Of this there is no doubt.



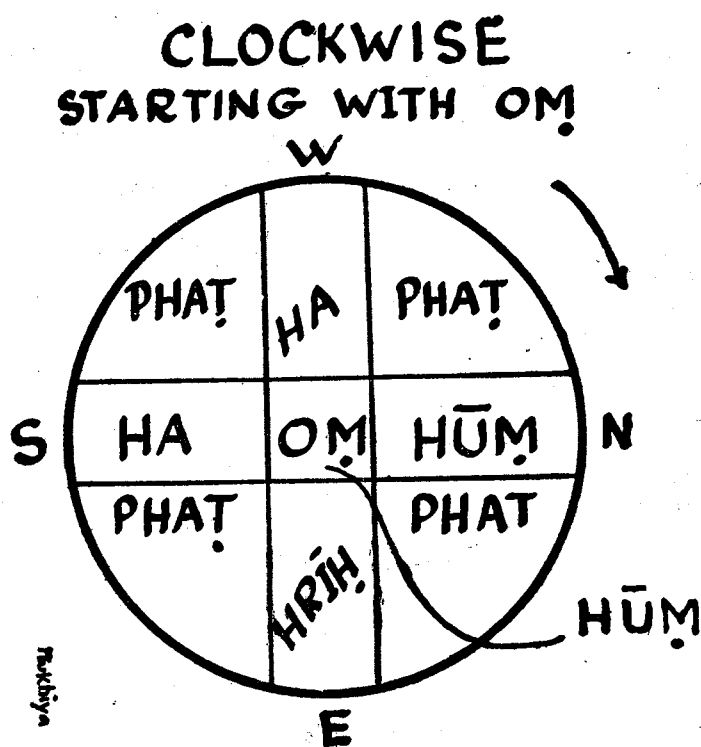
- (2) Many of the commentaries on **this** point assert that if one contemplates in the heart of the one to be cured (*sādhya*) his perceiving faculty (*viñāna*) the measure of a thumb and with the appearance of pure crystal, he is freed from the illness. So one should pay heed to that explanation.⁸

⁶ The diagram which I have given to illustrate how the syllables are disposed, is adapted from the picture that follows Karmavajra's *Vajra-caṇḍānusāreṇa pṛṣṭhya-cakra-nāma* (PTT, Vol 86, p. 111).

⁷ *Spel tshig*, as defined in the native Tibetan dictionary by Geshe Chos Grags, seem to mean expansion into phrases and longer, i.e. that the upahṛdaya is repeated making, so to say, phrases, sentences, paragraphs.

⁸ It is striking to identify the Buddhist *viñāna* with the "thumb-soul" which the old Upaniṣads locate in the heart.

(3) One contemplates a moon disk like the moon of autumn. In the middle of this moon one makes five sections (koṣṭhaka) by four directions and the middle; and by adding four in the intermediate directions, one arranges a total of nine sections.⁹ In its center one disposes an OM, in the east the HRIH, south HA, west HA, north HUM; also in the center, HUM, a PHAT in the four intermediate directions or four PHA's leaving out the T. When the letters appear white like the color of crystal, the bright circle dispels all illnesses. And the one to be cured contemplates on his left hand the circle located in the middle.



(4) One contemplates as places in his head the holder of the stable and mobile poisons; that from it (i.e. his head) a stream of ambrosia flows, ridding the entire body of poison. Thus it is freed from poison.

(5) Likewise, whatever the illnesses of plagues, demonic possession, and so on; from stable and mobile poisons: of fainting spells, aches, sores, and so on; of leprosy, from poison fangs, and so on; and whatever the illnesses other than those mentioned, all of them without doubt are purged when one arranges the seven syllables on the form of the moon, and imagined on the left hand are manifested to the one suffering with illness. When one contemplates that

⁹ The diagram which I have given to illustrate how the syllables are disposed, is adapted from the picture that follows the work *Mṛtyu-vañcanopadeśa* (PTT, Vol. 86, p. 30).

the rays of those mantra syllables arise with the nature of ambrosia, and purge and put to flight in the ten directions of east, etc., then one dispels the poison.

B. THE BHAISAJYA-GURU CULT FOR HEALING OTHERS.

Bhaiṣajya-guru is the Sanskrit name for the Lord of Healing, the chief figure of a Buddhist cult that was formerly wide-spread over Asia in the Mahāyāna Buddhist form along with elaborate iconographical representations, indeed inspiring some of the greatest art of Asia. Originally this art is not tantric. For example, the scripture which Liebenthal translated from Hsuan-tsang's Chinese rendition under the title, *The Sutra of the Lord of Healing* (Peiping, 1936), is simply Mahāyāna Buddhism with no admixture of tantric elements, such as incantations. An important part of this scripture is the twelve vows taken by this Buddha called Bhaiṣajya-guru, of which the sixth vow involves the restoration to health and good shape of beings merely by hearing his name. The panoply of artistic and ritual accompaniments helped to reinforce the devotion to and faith in this Lord of Healing.

Later, this healing cult underwent a native development in Tibet, whereupon the preexisting elements of this worship were richly embroidered with the procedures of ejecting demons as standardized by tantric rites and with the application of healing substances as derived from the medical traditions. Of course, this cult spread to Mongolia after its conversion to the Tibetan form of Buddhism and was accordingly represented at the Lamaist Yung-ho-kung Temple of Peking. It was here in 1931 and 1932 that Ferdinand D. Lessing (later a professor at Berkeley, California,) observed the cult and began to prepare draft translations of the associated ritual texts, now in my possession. Here there is space only to give some of the main theory and ritual practice, which makes use of mustard seed. The Healing Lord is especially called Vaiḍūrya-prabhāsa (Lapis lazuli splendor). This refers to his paradise, assigned to the east. The east was imagined as connected with the deep blue of lapis lazuli, so blue is considered the emblematic color of Bhaiṣajya-guru.

As in tantric rituals generally, the preceptor or chief performer must first go through a generative process in which he becomes identified with Bhaiṣajya-guru, who is in the center of the elaborate mandala. Then the preceptor, while standing outside, imagines himself to be inside as Bhaiṣajya-guru, opening the gates of the mandala from inside, beginning with the east gate. The disciples are introduced into the mandala with covered-up face. In practice this is generally done with the eye band. As to how the disciples are conferred the lineage of the Healing Lord (in my translation) 10:

“The preceptor says:

10 This is from a draft translation I made in the early 1950's of “Bhaiṣajya-guru, the Seven Brothers,” a native Tibetan sādhana in the “Rin Lhan” collection, Vol. Ga.

On the heads of you, who in yourselves are ordinary, there is now the body of Bhagavan Bhaiṣajya-guru, king of lapis lazuli light, with dark blue body color, in the aspect of a monk, right hand in gift-bestowing gesture and carrying an opened myrobalan (*a-ru-ru*) on the palm; the left in trance gesture and holding a lapis lazuli bowl filled with ambrosia; attired in the three kinds of religious dress made of red silk, seated with crossed legs on the diamond seat of the lotus, and endowed with the major and minor marks.”

Only when the performer is identified with this Lord of Healing can he be expected to be successful in the healing attempt. In case of sickness, the officiant blows upon the holy water, sprinkles the patient with it, and throws the mustard seeds one by one. They change into dharmapālas (protectors of the faith) and expel the demons of illness. This act is done three times. A fire is kindled in which *gu-gul* is strewn to send the demons into flight. (Dr. Lessing noted that guggulu is bdellium or the exudation of amyris agallochum, a fragrant gum resin, used as a perfume and medicament.)

Those are the main features of the tantric cult of the Healing Lord, but of course they occur in much more elaborate fashion in the actual Tibetan texts and corresponding cult. It is plain that the cures - such as occurred - depended on psychological art factors, including the magnificence of the Bhaiṣajya-guru cult trappings and paraphernalia. In the case of curing one's own sickness, as in the preceding section, the visualization and incantation process alone is deemed sufficient.

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