

# BUDDHIST APPROACH TO HARMONIOUS HEALTHCARE

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## ABSTRACT

The present article will highlight the Buddha's approach towards the cause and treatment of various physical and mental illness on the basis of information available in the Pāli literature, along with this, the meditation method of Buddha and its effect in the mental and physical diseases will be highlighted with some current examples (case studies), because it has been observed in various scientific experiments that meditation keeps the mind healthy and due to meditation, the root cause of diseases is cured automatically.

The present article would also discuss that, in the present day, a person can overcome from several small diseases if one follows the daily routine given by Buddha twenty-five hundred years ago. It will also be explained how the use of meditation technique of the Buddha is increasing in healing many diseases on the basis of some recent innovative research and few case studies.

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In today's material world, almost all human beings are battling with some major or minor diseases. If we study the ten major factors of death in 2016, issued by the World Health Organization (WHO), on May 24, 2018, we will find that 54% of all deaths are directly and indirectly related to the mind. If we go deeper, then we will come to know that root cause of ninety percent of the diseases

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is related to mind. When the bondage of the mind and body starts to break, one invites various kinds of diseases. That is why Buddha emphasized the importance of bondage between mind and breath in his meditation method and established the unbreakable bondage of mind with the body.

Basically, modern psychology cures ill persons. Often in hospitals, we will find only patients. Not a single healthy person visits hospital for his own treatment. But Buddha, who was a dexterous psychologist who provided doctrines according to the nature of mind and physical condition had provided immense psychotherapy around twenty five hundred years ago, which was not only useful for ill persons like Kisā Gotami, a psycho-patient; Yasa, who was suffering from depression, as well as a serial killer Aṅgulimāla, who had carried out the innumerable murders due to the weakness of mind, but also for the healthy kings like Bimbisāra, Ajātśhatru and Prasenjita; healthy as well as wealthy Anāthpinḍika and others of that time.

If we try to see above mentioned facts in Pāli and other Buddhist literature, we find that Buddha was not only the first skilled Psychiatrist in known history of the world, but he was also very familiar with various types of physical ailments and its therapies. There is also a description of three types of diseases in Pāli literature, which are related to Physical, Verbal and Mental actions. Buddha was not only aware of the causative diseases but was the first psychologist of the known history, that is why in the 'Roga Sutta' of the Aṅguttara Nikāya (Kashyap-IV,1960), he has interpreted two types of diseases: the first type of disease is *Kāyika Roga* (physical disease), which is something that can be cured in days, weeks, months or even years, but the second type of disease that Buddha had kept in the category of *Cetasika Roga* (Psychic diseases) is extremely rare and difficult to cure. *Cetasika* diseases can be cured only by the persons of *Arhata* category. Here again, these auspicious and chronic diseases and treatment are being described in a gradual way.

## 1. Physical diseases and diagnosis described in Buddhist literature:

Basically, Buddha had pointed 'Aging' as a main cause of the increase of the diseases (Shastri, 2006, p. 208)<sup>1</sup>. Buddha was associated with a royal family, but due to close association with nature and circumstances, he knew the diseases related to the seasons. Due to this very reason, Buddha incorporated many amendments in the Vinaya rules which were established by Buddha himself. Buddha had amended several rules of the monks and nuns in Vinaya Piṭaka and he had allowed to keep five types of medicines<sup>2</sup>, which are known as Ghee (*Sappi*), Butter (*Navanīta*), Oil (*Tel*), Honey (*Madhu*) and the concentrated thick juice of the sugar cane (*Phāṇita*) (Kashyap 1956, p. 218). In Pācittiyapāli, there are five different types of oils<sup>3</sup> which were mixed with different flora-s and were used to remove various diseases (Kashyap 1958, p. 124). Oils and medicines were used to keep the nose clean, while different types of collyriums (*Añjana*) were used to keep the eyes clean (Kashyap 1956, p. 221). Special attention has also been given to dental care during Buddha's period. It is learned that different types of trees and *latā*-s were used to clean the teeth. Buddha had also used a natural dental-kit to clean his teeth just after obtaining the *Bodhi*. Some Buddhist texts named that natural dental kit as *Nāgalatā* and the same dental kit *Nāgalatā* was offered to the King Asoka by the deities in the Mahāvamsa (Kashyap, 1971, p.156). It is worth noting that even today many medicines are made from the combination of these flora and fauna, even now a days we can see the use of these natural products in the rural areas of India<sup>4</sup>.

Due to the poor health condition of some monks, Buddha gave permission to use various medicines like root medicines, medicines produced by leafs, salts, medicines produced from fruits, etc (Kashyap 1956, p. 219-25). Physical diseases occur due to the imbalance of *Kapha*, *Pitta* and *Vāta* as well as some diseases related

1. "bhagavato pakatidubbale sarire khīṇe āyusañkhāre uppanno rogo bhiyyo abhivaḍḍhi"

2. "Tassa mayhaṃ, bhikkhave, etadahosi 'imāni kho pañca bhesajjāni, seyyathidaṃ – sappi, navanītaṃ, telaṃ, madhu, phāṇitaṃ; bhesajjāni ceva bhesajjasammatāni ca lokassa"

3. "Telaṃ nāma tilatelaṃ sāsapatelaṃ madhukatelaṃ eraṇḍatelaṃ vasātelaṃ"

4. "Utupariṇāmajāti utupariṇāmena"

to the season which are well reported in Buddhist literature.

The *Āhāra* (diet) plays an instrumental role in keeping the body healthy, if the person's diet is unbalanced, one would undoubtedly be in the grip of diseases, possibly due to this, Buddha has described *Vikāla Bhojana* (afternoon/ evening/ wrong timing) as inevitable. Diet is considered as one of the major factors of body growth, if one is restrained in the diet then one will be healthy. Probably these were the reason behind Buddha's advice<sup>5</sup> to take moderate meal for healthy life (Kashyap-IV, 1960, p. 153).

Buddha advised to keep restraint while doing *Kāyika* (Physical) and *Mānasika* (mental) activities, he said that when a person starts to think craving, hypocrisy, sex etc. as a real *Dhammā* (natural phenomenon), then invites diseases, in addition to this, in the 'Paṭhama & Dutiya Khama Sutta', he said that who lives their life in association of *Kāma* (Sex), *Kodha* (anger), mental craving actually lives with suffering and diseases (Kashyap-IV 1960, p. 161). He also said that the person who does not possess the ability to natural extremities like cold, hot, biting of various types of insects, and bitter word of the others, would suffer from various physical disorders. Buddha has also emphasized<sup>6</sup> the role of *Atikilamathāniyogo* as a major cause of diseases, fumes and surgical diseases (Nettipakaraṇa, 1998, p. 91).

It is a known fact that Buddha was not a doctor by profession, but in practical terms, he was well-versed in the physical ailments and in first-aid treatment. Apart from this, all other Buddhist literature along with Pāli literature provides a description of the great physician Jīvaka of Buddha's era, in which his therapeutic efficiency has been appreciated. Jīvaka was the adopted son of Bimbisāra who helped in upbringing (Kashyap 1956, pp. 286-88). Jīvaka was the student of Taxila University. He had such a great knowledge of medical herbs that in the last stage of study his master

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5. "Āhārasambhūto ayaṃ, bhagini, kāyo āhāraṃ nissāya. Āhāro pahātabbo'ti, iti yaṃ taṃ vuttaṃ idametam paṭicca vuttaṃ"

6. "kāmesu puññasaññī atakilamathānuyogamanuyuttā ca viharanti kāmasukhallikānuyogamanuyuttā ca, te tadabhiññā santā rogameva vaḍḍhayanti, gaṇḍameva vaḍḍhayanti, salameva vaḍḍhayanti"

ask him to bring a herb or tree around Taxila which do not have of medicinal properties, he returned to the master and informed him that he could not found any herbs, tree etc which do not owns the medicinal quality (Kashyap 1956, pp. 287-88). It means that royal-physician had ultimate knowledge of the herbs and medicines which are essential for treatment. Jivaka was an efficient royal-doctor but he was also a well-armed surgeon who cured the *Bhagandara* disease (Piles) of King Bimbisāra using some medicinal-cream (Kashyap 1956, p. 290-91). At the same time he had also operated stomach of lay-person in the case of chronic stomach pain. In the very first operation in Sāket city, the patient had been cured by Jivaka by *Nāsyā-Karma* (*Nathukkammena*) (Kashyap 1956, p. 288-90). This system is still used in the Ayurvedic medicine system as a “*Nāsyā*” method<sup>7</sup>, which is an essential part of *Pañcakarma*.

The Mahāniddeśa text provides<sup>8</sup> a list of fifty diseases (Kashyap, 1960, p. 12) which is also relevant in the present time, while the treatment process is also available in Tipiṭaka along with other Buddhist texts. In addition to this, specific diseases of the particular area like Magadha region are also reported in texts such as leprosy, boils, white leprosy, consumption and epilepsy.

First century text, Milindapañha gives following eight reasons for the cause of any disease : 1. bile (Pitta); 2. wind (Vāta); 3. phlegm (Semha); 4. all these three together, 5. owing to climate change; 6. unbearable diet; 7. sudden pain in body; 8. owing to result of an act (Kamma). The first three of these are very important, which cause various diseases. Bile (Pitta) causes three diseases (Talim,2009,

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7. <https://www.ayurveda.com/resources/cleansing/nasya>  
<http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/129268/2/10%20nasya%20review.pdf>

<https://www.omicsonline.org/open-access/ayurvedic-resolution-to-migraine-2167-1206.1000160.pdf>

8. “cakkhurogo sotarogo ghānarogo jivhārogo kāyarogo sīsarogo kaṇṇarogo mukharogo dantarogo kāso sāso pināso dāho jaro kucchirogo mucchā pakkhandikā sūlā visūcikā kuṭṭham gaṇḍo kilāso soso apamāro daddu kaṇḍu kacchu rakhasā vitacchikā lohitaṭṭham madhumeho aṃsā piḷakā bhagandalā, pittasamuṭṭhānā ābādhā semhasamuṭṭhānā ābādhā vātasamuṭṭhānā ābādhā sannipātikā ābādhā utupariṇāmajā ābādhā visamaparihārajā ābādhā opakamikā ābādhā kammavipākajā ābādhā, sītaṃ uṇhaṃ jigghacchā pipāsā uccāro passāvo daṃsamakasavātātapasarīsapasamphassā iti vā. Ime vuccanti pākāṭaparissayā”

p.3); Ten diseases are born due to wind (Vāta) (Talim,2009, p.3), whereas three diseases are caused due to Phlegm (Semeh) (Talim,2009, p.3).

Buddhist texts not only describe the things related to diseases, but these texts also played a vital role in introducing medicinal technique and herbs etc. even in countries outside. For example Chinese Tripiṭaka<sup>9</sup> mentions these five herbs several times: 1. Kantakari 軋託迦哩; 2. Vrhati-brhati 勿哩訶底; 3. Saha 娑訶; 4. Sahadeva 娑河提婆; 5. Sita-girigairika 稅多擬裏疙哩迦. Along with this, many books related to medicine such as ‘Bhesajjamañjusa’ were also written, as well as many Buddhist texts related to therapeutic importance had been composed in China and Tibet. On the basis of the Pāli and Buddhist texts, we can say that the treatment method of that time was very advanced and surgery was also on its peak. On the basis of Pāli literature, Dr. Meena Talim (Talim,2009, pp.77-117) has explained method and kinds of surgery and equipment being used for surgery in his book. Observing the components of the physical therapy available in Buddhist literature, it appears that the medical system of Buddha’s era was profound and very close to nature and the purpose was to fill the distance generated between humans and nature through natural way.

## 2. Mental illness and diagnosis described in Buddhist literature:

As previously described, Buddha has interpreted physical and mental diseases. In fact, the root cause of the physical diseases is ill-functioning of mind, because in the first and second gāthā of the Dhammapada (Narada, 1993, pp. 1-6), Buddha has called the mind as the source of all immoral and moral deeds. Currently, man is more liable to mental illness, which also leads to various types of physical diseases. Around 2,550 years ago, Buddha gave the world a new method by which the physical and mental diseases can be cured from the root, which is known as *Samatha* and *Vipassanā*. If a person is extremely sexual or suffering from the greed of the five-senses, he can take *Samatha* and *Vipassanā* as an essential medicine

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9 (CBETA, T18, no. 893b, 651, c26-27; no. 893c, 689, a24-26)

for his treatment (Nettipakaraṇa, 1998, p.91)<sup>10</sup>. If a person is suffering from bust, pimples or different types of skin related diseases, then the person can be free from these diseases by practicing of *Samatha* and *Vipassanā* (Nettipakaraṇa, 1998, p.91)<sup>11</sup>. The author of the present article during his ten-day meditation camp in Nālandā, experienced that a meditator who was suffering from bust, pimples in the day time, but by the end of same day, got almost cured of these skin diseases. In the second case, a young girl felt intense pain of migraine during meditation but after continuous practice of *Vipassanā*, she got rid of the pain. I also heard the discourses of Acharya Shri S.N. Goinka and learned that he was also suffering from intense pain of migraine, and after practicing this method he got freed from this disease. Then he decided to propagate this unique technique for the welfare of mankind, to promote this in the world as well as the birthplace of this technique i.e. India. *Vipassanā* was very useful during surgery and it works as a tool of surgery (Nettipakaraṇa, 1998, p.91)<sup>12</sup>. While talking on this issue, former Director of Nava Nālandā Mahāvihāra, Dr. Ravindra Panth and who had also been working for the long-time as a Director of 'Vipassanā Research Center, Igatpuri' and laid the foundation stone of the 'Vipassanā center' in Nālandā, informed me he himself witnessed that on his own personal request Acharya S.N. Goinka operated his gall-bladder stone without any anaesthesia or medicine while doing medication. It may be a subject of research, but if it is correct, then it proves that *Vipassanā* meditation is very useful even during surgery.

The above examples highlight the diagnosis of physical diseases by *Vipassanā*. A living example of its broad effect on mental therapy can be seen in the mental paradigm of the Yasa (Kashyap, 1956, pp.18-22), in the story of Aṅgulimāla (Tatia, 1977, pp. 381-94), in the story of Kisā- Gotami (Kashyap, 1959, pp. 432-33; Therīgāthā Aṭṭhakathā, pp.191-204). These incidents related to mental health

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10. "Attakilamathānuyogo kāmasukhallikānuyogo ca rogo, samathavipassanā roganigghātakabhesajjam"

11. "Attakilamathānuyogo kāmasukhallikānuyogo ca gaṇḍo, samathavipassanā gaṇḍanigghātakabhesajjam"

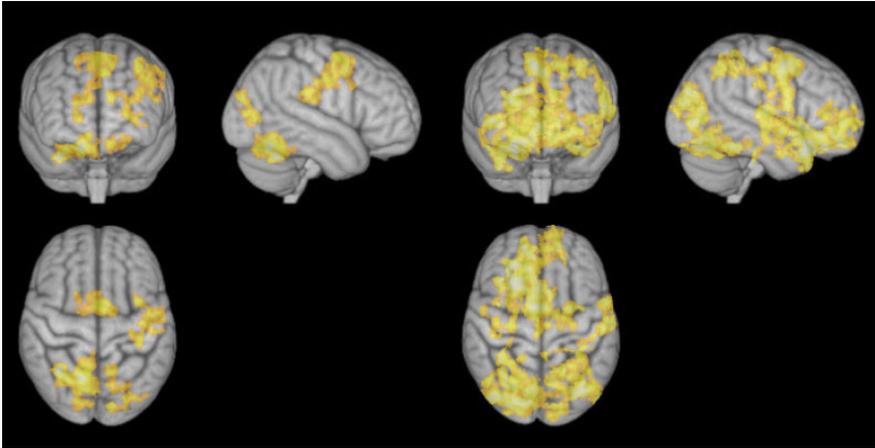
12. "Attakilamathānuyogo kāmasukhallikānuyogo ca sallo, samathavipassanā salludharaṇabhesajjam"

are well described in the scriptures. But if the śāstra (texts) misguide the people, they work as śāstra (weapon). However, Buddha himself encouraged people to raise questions and know the truth through argumentation. Buddha would also preach learning the truth by going against one's teacher in the 'Kālāma Sutta' (Kashyap-I, 1960, p. 174-179). In the 'Sabba-Sutta', Buddha said that the thought or knowledge which is beyond the knowledge of your senses organs (eyes, source, olfaction, tongue, mind, and mind) is just a wrong-knowledge. This type of wrong-knowledge will be used just to misguide people. Therefore, scientific confirmation of Buddha's teachings is also necessary, and the scientists have considered *Vipassanā* meditation as a complete science and the major centres of world working on this technique, that is why we are now able to say that the Buddha's sayings based on profound knowledge.

According to a research, by practicing Vipassana, a capability develops in the brain, so that the person responds to a subject with utmost efficiency (Knytl & Opitz, 2018). At the same time Scientists at Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center have found new evidence that mindful meditation reduces pain more effectively than placebo (WFBMC, 2015). The study used a two-pronged approach -- pain ratings and brain imaging -- to determine whether mindful meditation is merely a placebo effect. Seventy-five healthy, pain-free participants were randomly assigned to one of the four groups: mindful meditation, placebo meditation ("sham" meditation), placebo analgesic cream (petroleum jelly) or control. The study showed that the participants who practiced mindful meditation reported greater pain relief than placebo. Significantly, brain scans showed that mindful meditation produced very different patterns of activity than those produced by placebo to reduce pain.

In other research a team of researchers at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), the University of Oslo and the University of Sydney are now working to determine how the brain works during different kinds of meditation. Their most recent results were published in the journal *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*. The study shows that Meditation is more than just a way to calm our thoughts and lower stress levels: our brain processes more thoughts and feelings during meditation than

when you are simply relaxing, a coalition of researchers has found. “The study indicates that non-directive meditation allows for more room to process memories and emotions than during concentrated meditation,”. We can see the result in the given picture:



*Source: The Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Frontiers in Human Neuroscience Journal, <http://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnhum.2014.00086/full>*

The left image show the brain during concentrative meditation, while image to the right show the brain during non-directive meditation.

A research conducted by a group of Scientists from Laden University claimed that certain meditation techniques can promote creative thinking, even if you have never meditated before. The study is a clear indication that you don't need to be an experienced meditator to profit more from meditation. The findings support the belief that meditation can have a long-lasting influence on human cognition, including how we conceive new ideas (Colzato *et al.*, 2014). In another research scientist proved that non-directive meditation, which permits mind wandering, involves more extensive activation of brain areas associated with episodic memories and emotional processing, than during concentrative practicing or regular rest. It also works efficiently to recall the memory (Xu *et al.*, 2014), this research recalls the story of Culapanthaka (Kashyap, 1959, pp.322-323; Tatia, 1977, pp. 220-230; Tatia, 1977, pp. 203-215), who was suffering from memory loss and used to be the butt

of jokes among monks. After knowing this Buddha helped him to meditate in right style and as a result he got cured of his disease.

## CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, we can come to the conclusion that Buddha not only not preach doctrines for the wellbeing of his believers, but also had explanations for many malaises physical or mental. Buddha channelized the life of un-channelized people. Treatment of physical diseases in other countries has been going on for centuries in their own methods and styles, but the wonderful insight given by Buddha is the meditation technique. The technique of *Vipassanā* meditation is available for the world without any charge. Probably this is the very reason which persuaded Einstein, the greatest scientist of the modern world to say that Buddhism will be the religion of future due to its scientific approach and accepted Buddha as the oldest Scientist and first Psychologist of ancient time. *Vipassanā* Meditation System is the only accessible meditation method by which all the creatures of the world can be free from their various diseases without paying money. The whole human-kind should practice and realize this *Vipassanā* technique at least once in life to understand the reality of life.

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