

DHAMMA THERAPY

By Yew Sim Hong

It is common knowledge that since many illnesses are caused by the mind, it can also become a powerful ally to those who seek to be cured. Many native healers all over the world depend as much on convincing the sufferer that he can be cured as in the efficacy of the herbal medicines that they concoct. In many cases the secret of their success lies in their ability to make the mind effect the cure. The Buddha noted this when He declared that 'mind not only makes one sick, it also cures'. Vipassana meditation has not yet been used by modern medical science as an aid in the healing process because modern doctors are still suspicious of allowing 'spiritual' matters to interfere with their scientific methods. However, as this writer points out, Vipassana meditation has little to do with 'Buddhism' as a religion. It is a pity that this well-tried method of using the mind to correct mental imbalances which lead to disease has not yet been widely used for the good of mankind.

Ed.

The miraculous part of Vipassana meditation is the wonder that it can generate healing and demonstrate the incredible power of mind over matter. However, it must be noted that it is not the right and proper aspiration for a yogi who is striving for enlightenment. I was not aware nor had I heard anything about the benefit of Dhamma therapy treatment which could perform great work in the case of a miracle healing. I came upon this strange incident not long after the publication of the late Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw's works on the self-healing power of the Dhamma therapy. His book on the "Cases of Healing Through Vipassana" gives an astounding account of releasing the potency of the human mind through Vipassana meditation.

I was sceptical that a yogi's mind trained in the Vipassana meditation could induce effects on his physical body and produce a spiritual healing. I changed my mind when I experienced a serious illness in Rangoon and I was given a course of Dhamma therapy by the Sayadaw. I will gladly share my experience of the invincible power of Dhamma therapy which is a reality and which is visibly effective. I must add that the vision of a mystical illumination which I encountered as a result of the meditation practice is an unforgettable experience in my life. With increased concentration of the mind phasing out mundane thoughts completely, an unfolding took over which gave me an instant insight

into the nature of phenomena, stripped to its barest form and yet grotesque as an apparition. It was a natural revelation of events extending to another dimension.

The benign and eminent exponent of Vipassana meditation, the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw of Burma, has introduced the ancient science of the Dhamma therapy as an application of the profound Dhamma through the practice of Vipassana meditation. "Mind not only makes sick, it also cures" is a truth which can be applied by focusing the mind on the powerful factor of *Bojjhanga*. Since the practice of *Bojjhanga* can produce an effective cure of disease, care is taken that there is no attachment in seeking relief from suffering as its main objective. It has to be a desireless undertaking. This will, therefore, not bring an adverse effect on the progress of Insight as a result of association with the Dhamma therapy for the purpose of procuring a cure. The Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw has shown in his later works a number of cases where the application of Dhamma therapy has produced some wonderful results of healing among his practising yogis at the Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha Rangoon. Healing of numerous serious diseases such as malaria, colic, tumour, arthritis, paralysis and many more physical ailments have been proven successful through the effective and skillful means of mindfulness.

Science today has come up with a revealing analysis of the mind and its effective power over the body. A recent study shows a remarkable slowing down of the body processes during meditation. There is decreased metabolism in the heart rate and cardiac output and consequently reducing the workload of the heart. The change is observed in the slowed brain waves, showing a more restful state. But the immediate physical function of meditation is that it helps to release tension by quieting the mental states which cause stress and anxiety. In an earlier research work it was found that physical diseases are induced by the mind in what are known as psychosomatic diseases. The mind is said to be the major cause of physical disorders of emotional origin. Mental distress also becomes a natural obstacle to the body mechanism to defend itself against all diseases. Immoral thoughts also help to change the mental attitude towards tensions leading to ill body health and mind. The therapeutic quality of Vipassana meditation is the central development of concentration on the reality and the ability to recognise fantasy which is a source of stress.

The importance of Dhamma therapeutic practice is in training the mind to direct pain or any other ailment to the basic physical source. The yogi must proceed on a pain-to-pain basis with increased mindfulness and note with care the awareness of each unit of pain as an element of the physical pain only. The feeling of a pain sensation is related to the body base alone, and mindfulness is guided along this line and is not allowed to stray but to remain on the physical area where the pain is located. Choose the one which is more apparent or distinguishable and meditate on it. Pain or any other physical discomfort is a

material element which is *rupa*. The mind that is conscious of the sensation of pain is a mental element, *nama*. A *rupa* and *nama* (body and mind) distinction is thereby to be closely recognized. There must be no cross-over from *rupa* to *nama*. It would be a serious error to treat a physical pain which is *rupa* as a mental attribute, *nama*.

The body pain is *dukkha* which is suffering that arises physically. The consciousness of pain is *domanassa*, a mental sensation of suffering that arises independently as a result of the actual physical pain. In the case where *dukkha* is allowed to slip over to the mental side, the *domanassa* elements of consciousness would recede and make way for the *dukkha* element to dominate and control the situation. To have physical pain implanted in the mind and identified as *dukkha* instead of its original element of *domanassa* must be mindfully avoided because it will unnecessarily create a non-real state of the pain phenomenon. On account of this error of accepting the existing physical property of pain (*rupa*) as a major contribution of the mental property of consciousness (*nama*), the sensation of physical pain would grow in strength and become established in the mind as a stable part of its conscious element. Therefore the conscious mind is made to endure the stress of pain as if the mind is rooted in *dukkha* instead of *domanassa*. When this happens mindfulness is lost. The yogi is reminded to note the difference of this *rupa* and *nama* aspect of the phenomenon of pain. So pain is *rupa* and knowing or sensing the object of pain is *nama*. *Dukkha* associates with *rupa*, and *domanassa* associates with *nama*. Never mix *dukkha* with *domanassa*. Meditation on the element of pain carefully in this order will help the yogi to see reality in the nature of phenomena. The yogi is, therefore, looking at the phenomenon of pain objectively and not subjectively. Another perception is that pain is not static and is conditioned and has change as its nature through the rise and fall and the final cessation.

I would like to quote an interesting case in the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw's book of the mysterious manifestation of healing of a 59 year old woman, Daw Than, who suffered from chronic hypertension. She spent some time in a meditation retreat at the meditation centre. On the fifth day Daw Than's blood pressure increased so alarmingly that she was unable to lift up her head. She patiently continued her Dhamma therapy although her children insisted on taking her home for 'proper' medical treatment. She felt it was far more noble for her to accept death in her growing confidence in the Dhamma than to submit to the wishes of her children. She swayed and appeared to fall over in her intense application of mindfulness when she was aware of a kind of heavy and oppressive feeling in her body. She continued to follow the Sayadaw's instruction not to let go her mindfulness. Daw Than kept on doggedly and did not relax her practice of mindfulness by not letting her mind go astray from the object of meditation. In an instant moment she felt the increasing warmth of her

body and a curious sensation that something went bursting in her chest. Strange lights also appeared from nowhere. Her mindfulness gained strength and so did her endurance to continue with her meditation. Later she felt her body was light and comfortable and the agony of her distress had disappeared. Her sense of relief was great when a two-hour sitting deep in concentration appeared a brief moment to her. Her mind was composed and orderly as she made her progress in meditation and not long later Daw Than completely regained her health without a trace of hypertension!

I will quote another amazing case of this Dhamma therapy miracle that our medical science is unable to penetrate and explain. Daw Khin Sein, fifty year old woman was afflicted by a growth in the region of her abdomen five years ago. She later found her distress increase with painful stiffness in her chest (epigastrium), headache, giddiness and dyspepsia together with her other ailments. Her son, a doctor in practice, suggested that surgery was necessary, but her confidence in the Dhamma therapy precluded a desire for a surgical operation. During her retreat at the Mahasi meditation centre in the month of April 1975 she commenced to work faithfully on the Dhamma therapy. As she continued with her daily meditation she soon experienced a setback in her illness which increased alarmingly. An old wound on her toe she suffered during her younger logging days also reappeared. Daw Khin Sein suffered severe pain that she was in tears. She even regretted that she made a wrong decision in seeking help through the Vipassana meditation and her desire at that moment was to leave the Yeiktha. Somehow she regained her confidence and agreed to stay back and continued her Dhamma therapy work on the advice of the Sayadaws. Daw Khin Sein faithfully continued her daily chores assigned to her in her meditation and she kept her mindfulness on the arising object despite her sickness. As she resumed her composure with renewed faith and mindfulness she found the pain in the toe had vanished surprisingly and it gave her a sense of ease and comfort. This miracle of healing gave her further inducement to increase her effort in the Dhamma practice. She had completed her 28th day of retreat at the meditation centre and thought of nothing else except to keep patiently on her mindfulness in solitude. Her faith and patience began to show results when she experienced a strange phenomenon of Insight. A large lump was felt to have moved upward to her chest which gave her a feeling of immense discomfort. Another movement followed soon after when it thrust downward and disintegrated in the process with a strange 'phyoke' sound. Her body was soaked in blood at the point where the growth appeared to have ripped itself open. The discharge of blood continued for three days which kept her constantly changing her lower garments. She experienced further Insight and her body appeared heavy as if she was made to bear a heavy load. She soon recovered her strength despite the heavy loss of blood. Daw Khin Sein found

the Dhamma therapy had worked. Today, she enjoys good health which gives her inspiration and strength to continue her spiritual work in her ageing years.

Cancer is something that is dreadful and which one associates with fast approaching death. It is a deadly and vicious sign of human suffering. But there is some hope if we look towards Dhamma therapy. I know a case when I was undergoing the *Vipassana* meditation training in November 1981. A young Burmese woman doctor was critically ill with terminal stomach cancer and was given a few months to live. Life indeed, was challenge. She had nothing to cling to except her only living faith in the Buddha Dhamma which had cast a strong impression on her mind that whatever her life would be she was merely to stay alive.

She left her job at the Rangoon General Hospital and decided to spend the rest of her days on meditation. She had now no worry about her worldly affairs, being single, and accepted that her life was about to end. This spirit of letting go and realizing the futility of her life helped her immensely in the progress of her meditation. She felt happy though it might seem strange for a young physician to live in a monastery where the long hours of meditation in silence and tranquillity were the last few precious moments of her closing days. It was a pleasant moment to keep her mind quietly engaged in the rise and fall of her abdominal movement and to follow the life and death of each cycle vanishing one after another. She closely followed the instruction of keeping her mind in one place at a time even in spite of the straying thoughts. She experienced spells of severe pain and noted every moment of the arising of pain as an element of the phenomenon existing in her mind, discerning clearly the physicality of the pain. The *Vipassana* meditation gave her an altered perception of the focus of attention on the *nama* and *rupa* reality to the extent that it was able to modify her pain in psychiatric terms. Her faith and confidence in the meditation process increased and her health generally improved. Regular visits to the hospital were made, and after a few months of observation the cancerous growth was found to be shrinking. In less than a year she was pronounced completely cured. It was a medical miracle and she was advised to continue her good work. It was at the time we were going through our intensive course of training when the young physician narrated her experience to our Penang group of yogis. Believe it or not, this incident is classified among the many cases of healing that have taken place in severe bouts of illness and pain through the process of *Vipassana* meditation.

I also came across another case of a desolate man who suffered from a nervous breakdown as a result of a chain of unhappy events affecting his family life. Battered by his frightful memory he became completely withdrawn from his social life and even his family. His only motivation was to make a trip to town with a fervent hope that his physician would help him overcome his problem.

The lonely and anguished man was desperately in need of help. He survived on medication and an occasional jab of tranquilisers to stabilise his nerves. In one of those visits he was advised to take a course of meditation which was an alien practice to his Catholic faith. The incident dragged on for some time when the man in the months following became a victim of phobia. The sight of a crowd would make him run for his home. Even a stranger easily caused his imagination to run wild. The only security he could find was in his own home and in living a quiet hermit's life. But he found there was no solution to his working life and so he sought the help of a friend. An introduction to the Dhamma therapy was arranged and he spent a quiet hour of Vipassana meditation each day to learn the simple basic forms of mindfulness about the rise and fall rhythm of his natural abdominal motion and the related thoughts, etc. It was an easy training exercise of observing the function of nature in only the rise and fall. Religious questions were never raised. The man patiently worked on the Vipassana meditation for some time and he was impressed by the simple form of mental exercise to observe the nature of his own breath of life in only its rising and falling. In this quiet hour of meditation he soon found calm and peace. So he continued and began to accept the routine of keeping a firm mindfulness. He regarded it as a daily dose of medication for his mental health. He gained confidence. At the same time he found there was no reason to change his strong Catholic faith. The only change he found was that he had gained a calm and saner attitude towards his morbid life as he made his daily progress. He was also awakened to a working miracle of the Dhamma therapy and on his own strength alone he continued to strive along the path of Vipassana meditation. Dhamma therapy is an important part of his useful life today.

