

## The Healing Medicine of Dhamma

Millinda-pañho 335

ye keci osadhā loke  
vijjanti vividhā bahū,  
dhammosadhasamaṃ na-tthi;  
etaṃ pivatha bhikkhavo.

Whatever medicines are found  
In the world—many and varied—  
None are equal to the Dhamma.  
Drink of this, monks!

dhammosadhaṃ pivivāna  
ajarāmaraṇā siyuṃ,  
bhāvayitvā ca passivā  
nibbutā upadhikkhaye ti

And having drunk  
The medicine of the Dhamma,  
You'll be untouched by age and death.  
Having meditated and seen—  
(You'll be) healed by ceasing to cling.

These two verses point to the healing symbolism of the the Buddha's teaching. He is often pictured as the great physician who, seeing the suffering of all beings in the world, applies the medical formula of the four noble truths to 1) describe the symptoms of suffering; 2) investigate its specific causes; 3) using this information, reverse the causes to conceive a cure; and finally 4) lay out a flexible program of treatment that will lead a person out of affliction to lasting health of body and mind.

Notice that the medicine will only work if it is drunk. The heart of the Buddhist message is not so much the theoretical analysis of the human condition, subtle and compelling as it is, but rather the practical effect of actually taking the cure. The physician can do no more than offer us the medicine—it is up to each of us to drink of it ourselves. This is where the practice of meditation and the moment-to-moment cultivation of wholesome mind states is so important.

Since all of our afflictions ultimately grow from our attachments (upādāna), and from the clinging constructions we forge (upadhi), the path to freedom or health (nibbutā=the cessation of suffering) will unfold as we learn to abandon these constructions and as they begin to wane (khaya). The mechanism for this cure is wisdom, which emerges as we begin to meditate (bhāvayitvā) and hence see more clearly (passivā) the nature of our constructed experience. Being cured does not mean that the process of aging and dying simply stops (since whatever is constructed must undergo change). But we can, through wisdom, be "untouched" by aging and death. Health consists of a sufficiently deep understanding of the nature of things that we do not cling to anything in the world. Non-attachment is itself the cure.

These verses are published and further explicated in the recent book *Engaged Buddhism in the West*, edited by Christopher Queen (Wisdom Publications, 2000), in a chapter titled, "Meditation, Healing and Stress Reduction."

—Andrew Olendzki