

### **Panel 13: Medicine and Healing in the Bon Tradition (in Tibetan and English)**

**Panel organisers: Colin Millard (Cardiff University), Professor Geoffrey Samuel (Cardiff University)**

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This panel will look at medicine and healing in the Bon tradition of Tibet. A traditional classificatory scheme of Bon knowledge is to speak of the 'nine ways of Bon'. The four lower ways are concerned with rituals that aim to remove obstacles, hindrances, and sickness, particularly when these are seen to be caused by harmful spirits, and as such many of these practices are directly related to medicine. The rituals of the higher ways are also related to medicine in that the techniques of the lower ways are empowered by the mantras and tantric visualisations of the higher ways. The first of the lower ways is known as the 'Way of the Gshen of Phywa'. This includes divination, astrology, ransom rituals, and medicine.

Alongside an elaborate tradition of healing rituals, the Bon tradition also has a fully developed tradition of medicine which parallels that found in the principal text of the Tibetan Buddhist medical tradition, the Rgyud bzhi. The Bonpo regard the Rgyud bzhi as a reworking of their own main medical text, the 'Bum bzhi, which they claim to be much older than the Rgyud bzhi. In the 1930s the Bon lama and scholar Khyungtrul Jigmai Namkai Dorje (1897-1955) wrote a comprehensive four-volume commentary on the 'Bum bzhi, the Khyung sprul sman dpe, which is based on both Buddhist and Bonpo sources. In recent years there has been a resurgence of the Bon medical tradition, which is currently being taught in a number of medical schools in Tibet and Nepal using both the 'Bum bzhi and the Khyung sprul sman dpe.

Papers relating to any aspect of Bon medicine and healing are invited.

#### **Participants and abstracts**

##### **13.01 Presentation on Shang Shung and Tibet's special medical diagnosis method (in Tibetan language)**

By Kalsang Norbu, Dhargye monastery and Shang Shung Cultural Association, (Chamdo, Tibet),

##### **13.02 Essential Instructions on the diagnosis of the three humours (in Tibetan)**

Amchi Gege (Tsultrim Sangye), Triten Norbutse Bon Institution and Tashi Gyegay Thartenling Bon Medical School (Kathmandu/Dhorpatan, Nepal)

##### **13.03. *bad kan smug po* Disease (in Tibetan)**

Nyima Samphel, Jharkhot Traditional Herbal Medicine Centre, (Jharkhot, Nepal)

##### **13.04 A general outline of the diagnostic methods in the medical system of Shang Shung and Tibet and the need to preserve them (in Tibetan)**

Rinchen Tenzin, Menri Monastery (Dolanji, India)

##### **13.05 The Background to the Colophon of the rGyud-bzhi of the sde dge dpar khang Blockprint (in Tibetan)**

Nyima Woser Choekhortshang, Menri Monastery (Dolanji, India)

##### **13.06 The theory and practice of urine diagnosis in the Bon medical tradition**

Colin Millard

The two main forms of diagnosis in the Bon medical tradition, as in the mainstream Tibetan medical tradition based on the Gyushi, are pulse and urine diagnosis. In Bon medical tradition these two topics form the first two chapters of *mam gyal sman 'bum dkarpo*, the fourth volume of the principal Bon medical text, the *'bum bzhi*. This paper will focus specifically on urine diagnosis in the Bon tradition. The chapter on urine diagnosis is divided into 8 sections. The first concerns the preparations that should be undertaken prior to the Diagnosis. The second gives the time when the examination should be done. The third describes the qualities of the container in which the urine should be examined. The fourth concerns how the urine is formed in the body. The fifth discusses the qualities of the urine of a healthy person. The sixth details the qualities of the urine of a sick person. The seventh describes the qualities of the urine, which signify the imminent death of the patient. The eighth describes the qualities of the urine, which signify the action of harmful spirits; the techniques explained in this section relate strongly to Tibetan cosmological notions and the practices which are described take Tibetan medical diagnosis clearly into the domain of divination. The paper will discuss each of these sections in detail using the medical commentary of the Bon lama Khyungrul Rinpoche. In addition examples will be given of the clinical application of urine diagnosis at Tashi Gyegay Thartenling Bon medical school and clinic in the valley of Dhorpatan in West Nepal, and the medical clinic in the village of Darchen near mount Kailash in West Tibet, founded by Tenzin Wangdak, the religious and medical heir to Khyungrul Rinpoche.

### **13.07 Precious Pills in the Bon Medical Tradition**

By Geoffrey Samuel and Colin Millard

There are ten basic types of Tibetan medicinal compounds: decoctions, powders, pills, pastes, butters, ashes, concentrates, medicinal beers, herbal preparations and precious medicines. Perhaps the most celebrated and controversial category in this list is precious medicine (*rin chen ril bu*). These substances use the healing properties of minerals and metals which must first be subjected to lengthy and complicated processes of detoxification. There is a parallel here with the Indian alchemical traditions, the knowledge of which was used in the making of mercury-based medical compounds. This knowledge was known in Tibet, as Tibetan translations were made in the 12th century of Indian medical texts discussing this procedure by the Tibetan scholar Orgyen Rinchenpal (1230-1309). What little research that has been done on precious pills has focused primarily on levels of toxicity of medicinal compounds using mercury (e.g. Jurgen Aschoff's article 'Tibetan Medicine and Mercury: Mercury in Tibetan "Precious Pills"', and Sallon et al.'s article 'Mercury in Traditional Tibetan Medicine, Panacea or Problem?' in the August 2007 edition of the sMan-rTsis journal). The Bon scholar and lama Khyungrul Jigmai Namkhai Dorje (1897-1955) considered this subject of such importance that the last volume of his four-volume medical commentary, entitled "The practical procedures to make medicines which like a magical wheel make the sun shine clearly" is devoted entirely to the subject. This paper will present an overview of this volume and will focus on the procedures outlined in the text for detoxifying mercury and the making of precious pills.

### **13.08 An outline of the special feature of Khyungrul Jigme Namkhai's medical text and a concise description of its intrinsic meaning (in Tibetan)**

Zhung Karma Gyaltsen, Zhang Zhung Cultural Association (Lhasa, Tibet)

### **13.09 Ancient Tibetan Medicine (in Tibetan)**

Thubten Phuntsog, Department of Tibetan Studies, Central University for Nationalities (Beijing, China)

Among the extant manuscripts, the oldest treatise of Tibetan medicine is a Bon text called *gSo rig 'bum bzhi*. This treatise is a transcription of the teachings on medicine given by Shenrab Miwo, the master of the Bon, edited by his son Chebu Trishe, the first holder of the knowledge contained in the treatise. The information concerning the *'bum bzhi* reveals the existence of a truly ancient medical tradition. Shenrab Miwo lived twenty centuries before Christ. In *The Light of Tise, An History of Tibet and of Shang Shung*, the scholar Namkhai Norbu states that Shenrab Miwo, the Master of the Bon, was born the year of the wood mouse, 1917 years before Christ and lived till the age of eighty two. From that time until

the Buddhist King Trisong Detsen founded the school of Tibetan medicine, for a period stretching over more than 2,600 years, Tibetan doctors practiced medicine on the basis of this treatise, the *'bum bzhi*. This paper will discuss the history of the this text and present an outline of the main features of this ancient system of medicine.

### **13.10 Integrating Tibetan Yoga (rtsa rlung 'phrul 'khor) into contemporary medical settings**

Alejandro Chaoul, Center for Health, Humanities and the Human Spirit, The University of Texas, USA

At the turn of the twenty-first century, a randomized controlled clinical trial using ancient *rtsa rlung 'phrul 'khor* practices from the Bon tradition, was conducted at the world's largest medical center, calling it "Tibetan Yoga." Together with a bio-behavioral team at The University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center (MDACC) in Houston, I developed two pilot studies examining the benefits of a Tibetan Yoga-based intervention program for patients with lymphoma and breast cancer. The results of these studies suggest that these ancient yogic practices are beneficial adjuncts to conventional medicine and contribute importantly to patients' wellbeing and quality of life. The results of the first study led to a publication in *Cancer* and after both pilot studies were completed, the MDACC team was awarded a 5-year grant by the National Cancer Institute to investigate further the benefits of a Tibetan yoga intervention in woman with breast cancer undergoing chemotherapy. Should we consider these benefits solely under the realm of medicine? Have we lost the magic and contemplative/mystical benefits by bringing them to this modern setting? Looking into epistemological questions of the partnership of Tibetan mind-body practices and Western bio-behavioral medicine, this paper suggests that we do not necessarily need to use a reductionist model of solely one or the other side. In other words, there is a possibility of an inclusive dialogue where both kinds of perspectives are integrated.