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“Chapter Four: A Rough Explanation of How Mantras Work”

The learned authority Ju Mipham Namgyal Gyatso stated, “Thus, since the magical efficacy of mantras is unimaginable, if one exerts oneself properly (in their use), all sorts of sicknesses will surely be pacified.” He taught with great confidence that the power or efficacy of mantras is unimaginable and that if one authentically accomplishes their practice one will have the power to pacify any illness whatsoever. We can see too that great qualified physicians and powerful ngakpas of the past achieved visible and tangible results through mantra practice and the stages of mantra healing training. For example, when uttering the necessary specific recitations and visualizations for the joining of broken bones they would say mantras onto pieces of slate and see whether they could join the pieces together or not. If they could, their mantra-power was authentic and they would say mantras for patients. They would also utter mantras over quicksilver and would drink it directly without any harm. They could lick metal that had turned red-hot with their tongues and having actualized their tongue mantra-power they would (then) lick patients. At birth, mantra butter [i.e. blessed butter previously eaten by the mother] comes out stuck to the baby’s head in a directly visible way. When saying mantras for poisoning, at first when poisons reached the liver (the urine) would go black. If they said mantras over it and it turned red this was a sign that the mantras had worked and that they would be able to perform mantra healing. Thus, when we investigate phenomena such as these, we can see that the power or efficacy of mantras is difficult to fathom with the (conceptual) mind, beneficial, and of a scientific nature. For this reason, mantra healing is something more than just mere mental or conceptual imputation devoid of benefit, and no one can say that it is just fruitless superstition or blind faith.

When it comes to putting mantra healing into practice, one absolutely has to understand the reasons why or the basic mechanisms through which mantras produce results. However, explanations about how mantras function have only rarely appeared in any of the books that have been written from ancient times until the present in either the New or Old translation schools (of Tibetan Buddhism), nor is it particularly easy to express the many subtle key-points relating to interdependent origination in a way that accords with either our vocabulary or with (ordinary) human understanding. Nevertheless, I think that, if you are someone who uses mantras, it is important to at least understand a little about how mantras work, or to at least put some thought and investigation into the subject. If one doesn’t do any research into the way that mantras are efficacious one will never be able to become someone who understands the essence or ultimate meaning of the tradition. It is difficult to accomplish medical treatment or cures without a genuine tradition or system of instruction, so I shall offer some discussion here on how mantra healing works in a simple and clear fashion.

Generally speaking, mantras’ efficacy depends solely on the efficacy of interdependent origination. Everything that exists in this world arises solely on account of interdependent origination. We can see then that to explain the efficacy of mantras as interdependent origination accords with the basic structure of reality, and given that effects arise in dependence on causes and conditions, if one has gained mastery in the gross and subtle meaning of interdependent origination one will without a doubt be able to realize the ultimate significance of the power of mantras with little trouble at all. However, since I myself have no confidence to explain the ultimate meaning of interdependent

origination, as befits the circumstances, I will explain the way in which mantras work and are effective only generally, using easy to understand language. The way that *rlung* or winds move, the way that benefit arises from the sending out and taking in of breath, the way that vocal utterances and (words of) truth come to be efficacious, the way in which subtle and gross elemental constituents are efficacious, the way that the mantras of the mind-bound meditational deities work – these heal both oneself and others. Mantras most definitely benefit the healing of both one's own and others' illnesses.

One: How benefits arise through the movement of winds in the body

The manner in which the breath and the *rlung* or *loong* or vital-energy 'winds' of one's body flow generates benefits, and this is the primary way to balance one's own elemental constituents and treat one's own sickness... The way in which wind flows from the nose on the gross level of one's bodily constituents is (as follows): it flows through the pharynx and trachea via the cavities of both the mother and son channels of the left and right lungs, which is to say that, external air or breath is inhaled and the essence of the wind (travels) through the hollow spaces of the lungs and goes into the blood, and the stale or impure, residual wind extracted from the blood vessels is expelled through the lung cavities. This expelling from within the lungs constitutes the successive stages of the exhalation and inhalation of breath. In general, this takes place about fifteen times per minute. This breathing is an indispensable constituent of the body. In the context of emergency or first aid medical treatment, when one checks to see if there is any danger to a person's life, of the three principal things that one must check – whether the person is breathing, whether there is a heart-beat, whether there is brain-function – we can see that the breath is the most precious support for life. The scope and beneficial power of respiration does not merely extend to the lungs, but also to the brain and the heart, and so on, and the functioning of the most important parts of the body depends upon the functional elements of the breath. Given this, it is obvious then that the breathing techniques taught as part of mantra healing are capable of (generating) distinctive results, both curative and preventative in nature. On the subtle level of the giving and taking of breath and elemental constituents, how the (rlung) flows is that the karmic winds flowing from the nose (go) from the 'emanation' chakra at the navel and are inhaled and exhaled through the (right) ro ma channel and the (left) rkyang ma channel. Together with this, the subtle *rlung* of earth, water, fire, air and space also flow in connection with each of the channels and chakras. On the level of the vital-essence of the *rlung*, the various colours of the elements – white, yellow, red, green, and dark blue – are also manifested. In this instance, (if we) distinguish the left and right nostril, from the left nostril there's the flow of solar *rlung* which has the nature of means, and there's the flow of lunar *rlung* from the left nostril which is of the nature of wisdom. According to the day, each of these (exhibits) 10 462.5 movements or fluctuations. For each of the elemental winds of earth, water, fire, air, and space there are said to be 360 lesser transference movements, and if you add up the simultaneous fluctuations of the *rlung* of the body elements, there are said to be 1800 greater transferences or movements. The wind that flows from the middle of the two nostrils or in the central channel is primordial wisdom *rlung*. This moves 675 times a day. This being so, in one hour the karmic winds or breath have 900 fluctuations and in 24 hours the wisdom winds have 2100 – counting 32 (ordinary) breaths as (equivalent to) one (movement of) karmic wind, in 24 hours the wisdom wind has 675 fluctuations. This is from the perspective of an ordinary, non-diseased (body). For those with illnesses breath doesn't flow perfectly, or else since breathing doesn't happen as it should, this leads to illness. Reciting the three Vajra seed-syllables (OM AH HUNG) balances the breath and resolves sickness. In this way, seeing as (reciting) multiple mantras in the style of a 'Vajra-song' is connected to how *rlung* flows and how the channels and subtle

constitution operate, such recitations have the greatest power to balance the elements and constituents of the body and mind.

As an example of how the way in which breath flows generates results, if, taking the mantra-syllables OM AH HUNG, one intones OM when one inhales, AH as one abides (or holds the breath), and HUNG as one exhales, the three-fold arising, entering and abiding of the rlung flows in the proper way, and as a result this is greatly beneficial for the body. Through the good qualities of the proper movement of the constitutive elements, five winds, as well as life-bearing and upward-flowing (winds), bodily illness is cured (and) the constitutive elements are balanced. It (also) endows one with the good quality of mental happiness. These are the reasons that what are called the three Vajra seed-syllables are extolled by all mantra-holders or ngakpa as the highest of mantras. Moreover, intoning 'HA' and expelling HA! with a strong sigh for diseases of the vital and heart-winds, for mental discomfort, memory loss, mental agitation or anxiety directly expels stale rlung in the life-force channel(s) from out the body and thereby cures disease. Conversely, the benefits for fever of saying HAAAA slowly and softly with a short, long breath, of intoning it together with the vapour of one's breath, are such that whatever is inside is expelled with the aid of the breath. Likewise, if one intones "AH AH AH" – the single syllable AH – seeing as this is the root sound or vibration of the channels and chakras of the throat, by means of this sound, and through the 'sound abode' channel/root syllables, the constituents of the body are balanced, the channels, winds and drops are relaxed together with the syllables, and manifestations of bliss naturally arise in the body and mind, and so on. Since the many mantras taught in the context of mantra healing are connected with the movement of the breath and wind beneficial effects are quickly produced for the body and mind.

Two: How results arise through vocal production or speech

The conditions or factors through which the voice or speech is produced are the head, the tongue, the palate, the throat, the teeth, the lips, the nose and the breath. Through the exertion of these, speech emerges, and further, words are produced through the root phonemes and the interdependent link of the gathered winds. The location from which the phonemes arise is shown below:

[Diagram]

1. *Throat*
2. *Nose*
3. *Head*
4. *Chest*
5. *Palate*
6. *Tongue*
7. *Teeth*
8. *Lips*

When words are produced from the voice, the channels and syllables are induced or activated through the *loong*, and the body is benefited by the production of mantra sounds.

For example, if one pronounces the syllable 'KA', the sound of this 'KA' arises from within the head and its sound-wave or vibration flows into the brain via the subtle channels or nerves and resolves disturbances of the elements in the head. The other Tibetan consonants follow a similar pattern.

Since the body, speech, and mind exist indivisibly, they are able to both help and harm one another. Speech and mind is both helped and harmed by the body – for example, if the body's nervous or 'white channel system' is diseased, this can make one mute. Or else, if one is afflicted by a bodily illness, the nature or condition of one's mind is uncomfortable and disturbed. The power of the mind can bring both help and harm to the body and speech as well. For example, when the mind is heroic or proud, one's tone of voice becomes higher and one's body stretches out. When one feels defeated or in anguish, one's voice breaks and one exhibits weak or unhealthy bodily complexions. Actions of

the voice also influence the body and mind. If one expresses oneself verbally too much, one's wind increases and as a result of this *loong* diseases arise and one's body and mind become unwell. One's own mind and the minds of others are made sick through harsh words, and conversely, expressing pleasant words can gladden others' hearts. Mental illnesses are also treated through communicating with words. Thus, treatments for both physical and mental diseases are taught in the Tibetan tradition of *Sowa Rigpa* and since mantra healing is predominantly based on the power and activities of the speech, winds and mind, it can be identified as a form of medical treatment that aligns with both of these aspects of body and mind.

Three: How mantras effect results through the power of the subtle and gross elements

The psycho-physical aggregates of the human body are a single web, an interconnected mesh composed of the gross and subtle elements. Worldly phenomena are endless, yet all of them derive from the foundation of the elements. The elements emanate magically from the mind of the 'All-Creating King' [a poetic term in the *rdzogs chen* or Great Perfection meditation tradition for the universal creative principle which makes everything possible]. Through the power of the interdependent origination of the five elements that shine forth from the expanse of non-awareness, both objects and subjects are made manifest. Given that these arise in connection with the five outer sensory qualities and five inner sensory 'doors', and through the power of the five elements, the sense faculties of subjects can be either harmed or helped by the forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and sensations of objects. In similar fashion, just as subjects can be helped by objects, the power of mantras works as well through the subtle elements via the five 'doors' of the senses. Balancing and re-calibrating effects are produced from the subtlest aspects of the elemental constituents of the body and mind, through the power of the inter-dependent links of the form and color, sound, touch, smell, taste, and the inner significance of mantras.

The power of color: color is an important mode through which the elements manifest. It is the origin or essence of the elements. The elemental constituents of either body or mind can be controlled through the power of color. The elements of earth, water, fire, air, and space are born from the colors blue, white, yellow, red, and green. The subtle and gross elements derived from these make up the aggregates of the human body, and on account of this the colors are a way of combining the elements and bringing them into co-operation or opposition. Because of this, colors can (re-)calibrate^[1] the inner elements. For example, the color red is the fire element and has the power to cure cold *bedken* or phlegm diseases, just as the color green, being of the air element, also cures any proliferation of the earth element of *bedken* that might arise. Colors have an influence on both the body and mind. The color red generates mental aggression and conceit, and it likewise increases blood temperature and the proliferation of *tripa* or bile element in the body.

In this way, the power of color is important for some mantras (as well). Through colors mantras are invigorated and thereby resolve disturbances of the bodily and mental elements. The written designs of protective mantra circles or amulets require special colors and when one meditates on mantra-syllables one must concentrate on the color of the mantras without (mental) agitation or disturbances. The ultimate reason for this is likewise because of the power of color.

The power of form: most represented or semiotic phenomena depend on form and form comprises our appearance or manifestation (in the world) and the most immediate given phenomenon or property of phenomena. There are diverse kinds of outer, inner and secret forms. Outer forms are the various externally appearing forms that are perceived as objects by the sense-consciousness of our

eyes. So, for example, the basic or root-shapes which arise – the sphere, crescent, triangle, and square – are the gross shapes of the four elements. Further, by virtue of the interdependent connections of form, effects can be generated (from) the very nature of *dharmata*, from the ultimate (level of) reality. The four root shapes represent the four (tantric) ritual actions of pacifying, expanding/increasing, magnetizing, and fiercely subjugating. Inner forms are those handful of inner-body channels and elements which exist as letters or mantra-syllables. If one concentrates on these syllable-forms as specific points of mental focus or awareness, one can expand the elements and pacify disturbances. For example: if one focuses on the syllable RAM at one's navel, the RAM will balance the elements connected with the navel(-center). Regarding secret forms, these don't really possess any concrete form per se. These comprise 'ultimately empty forms' and are the highest of forms. Practicing mantra healing through visualizations that rely on form, colour, and light produces the benefit of ripening and expanding the efficacious power of the essence of the elements. When it comes to secret forms, these don't really possess any concrete form per se. These comprise 'ultimately empty forms' and are the highest of forms. Practicing mantra healing through visualizations using forms, colors, and lights produces the benefit of ripening and expanding the power of the essence of the elements. There are many kinds of mantra healing treatments (involving) the function of shapes: different types of circular amulets like protective and reversing/warding circles, the many kinds of esoteric inscriptions, conjoined or subscript letters, and mantra print-blocks. The power of these mostly comes from mantra-syllables drawn in various elemental shapes and various animals. As such, by embodying the powers of both mantras and shapes and whatever ritual substances befit the situation as one, results are produced in a way that resembles how different kinds of ingredients are mixed together to make a medical formula.

How results are effected through sound: sound is the origin of the elements and all outer and inner elements are linked with sound, and so these are born from sound. In the Great Perfection tradition, the three-fold 'sound, light, and rays' are understood as the source or beginning of the elements. Light is produced from the primordially existent sound and all of the elements emerge from this light's rays or waves. Thus, everything is produced from sound. This then is the power of sound. The power of mantras enters into sounds and balances the bodily elements. Sound can bring about transformations inside the body. For example, something like an ordinary or common song can bring either joy or irritation to the mind. If a state of irritation arises in the mind one's heart may become unwell and breathing may be difficult. Music or melodies introduce sound-waves to the brain, and is capable of heightening human body function. For example: when certain patients with paralyzed or spastic limbs listen to certain kinds of music they (regain) their ability to walk or sit better than before. From this we can understand clearly that sound produces results in the body and mind. For this reason, the wrathful sound of PHET/PHAT! stirs up the subtle elements of patients' bodies and grants serenity (in the face of) fear. Along with this feeling (of serenity) it brings about changes and reversals in the bodily elements. When one hears the sound and gets a fright, one's heart-beat accelerates and one's breath (comes out) like a wheeze. The sound of clapping too, can repel sickness and obstacles, open up the channels and chakras, and so on. That fact that such things generate effects via the subtle functions of the elements shows that sound is a part of healing.

In some ancient texts of Tibetan medicine is also taught that if one hears the cry of an animal this helps with recovery from sickness. The esteemed Ju Mipham Namgyal Gyatso states that "if one hears a mad dog barking or the call of an owl it can help to cure poisoning. Hearing the call of a Tibetan snow grouse or partridge also helps. Hearing a snow grouse's call helps cure pollution caused by dirty things". Alternatively, if one listens to the sound of running water, it is easier to give birth or pass urine. When one listens to the sound of rain or waves it relaxes one's body and mind.

Thus, whether sounds are actively or passively, consciously or unconsciously grasped by sensory awareness, intelligible or unintelligible to the mind or a bit of both, they possess a natural and inherent healing power. In short then, mantras' primary power derives from sound. The power of sound waves or sound vibration-waves, by permeating various ritual substances like water and salt, is able to treat illness. Since water and other such things have the power to hold sound-waves, results are effected through the water-element of patients' own bodily fluids.

How healing through smell is efficacious: generally, in the context of mantra healing, scent-treatment is when one says mantras over different kinds of medical ingredients such as frankincense, and fumigates with these. In the case of the gross bodily elements, in the Tibetan medical texts the nose is described as 'the door to the brain': the power or efficacy of substances reaches the brain through smell and the elemental constituents of the 'white channels' (nerves) and blood vessels of the brain are balanced, and in this way, beneficial effects are spread all over the body via the lungs and blood vessels,. In the case of the subtle (bodily elements), the 'smoke' or vapour of the mantras and (incense) substances are inhaled into both the right and left channels, and the power of the mantra along with the smell generates effects via the *loong* in the three middle, right, and left channels and the five channel-chakras.

In Tibet, for example, there are many incenses and aromatic substances that are 'perfected' or 'accomplished' (i.e. ritually consecrated or purified through sadhana practice) by monastic communities and powerful *ngakpas*. For example: the incense of Mindroling (i.e. a Nyingma monastery) is very well-known in Tibet. Accordingly, incense substances such as De'u mar Kola 25 and Agar 15 dissolve obscurations and restore (bodily) constituents extremely well. Incense for clearing the air and *sahng* substances bring real benefits: they not only cure physical and mental illnesses but also purify the atmosphere.

How healing through taste is efficacious – generally speaking, the six tastes arises from the five elements. Sweet is born of earth-water; sour from fire-earth; salty from water-fire; bitter from water-air; spicy from fire-air; and astringent from earth-air. The outer elements enter inside the body through food and drink and augment the inner elements. The power of the six tastes is an indispensable and substantive component of the strength of the body. So-called 'taste healing' is a method of medical treatment that depends on the six tastes and whatever (other) tastes are appropriate. In this case, the potency (*ngar*) of mantras is tied to the six tastes and cures disease. The pure (tantric-vow or samaya) substances that liberate through taste', 'accomplishing medicine' (medicines blessed in the course of medical sadhana practices), 'corrupted or impure mantric (substances)', 'vase water' (blessed water for asperging), mantra water, and the like are well-known in Tibet. These are experienced through the tongue's sense of taste – through the faculty of the tongue the power of the mantra substances (moves) through the blood vessels and permeates the blood, by means of which, along with the body's strength and all its internal organs, the elemental constituents are balanced. Thus, due to having consumed medicinal (substances), medicine spreads through the blood vessels and results are effected.

Healing by touch – it's said that beneficial effects are produced through seeing, hearing, recollecting, and touching mantras. Results are effected merely by recollecting mantras in one's mind and by touching them. If one touches one's body with mantra water, mantra syllables, mantra amulets or mantra threads, and so on, demonic provocations and the obscurations of illness are dissolved and one's body and mind are made blissful. Mantra power is absorbed into the mind and body via the skin and through the small openings in the fine hairs on the body. If mantra syllables do not touch the body directly, even if the mantra power touches the body through the elements and *rlung* by means of mantra-bearing prayer flags (of both the small string and larger vertical flag-pole variety) it's still beneficial.

The power of words of truth – in Buddhist texts one finds the profound path of the Secret Mantra. If one recites the mantras of the three roots of the Creation Stage and perfects the practice of the channel-and-winds meditations of the Completion Stage the channels of the throat-chakra will open. If the sixteen channel ‘petals’ (or radial, supplementary channels) and the eight secret channels of the enjoyment chakra of the throat have been opened, it is said that, since the vital-energy *rlung* and speech have been accomplished, all and anything that one says will be attained without impediment. As such, the latent efficacious power of speech-and-wind in one’s body will be made manifest. If one attains mastery over the speech-and-wind in line with the power one has to control one’s winds and mind, one will be able to transform the powers or functions of the subtle elemental constituents by means of one’s speech. If one has opened one’s throat channels, through experiencing the spontaneous overflowing inspiration or realization of the expanse of primordial awareness, as with the venerable (yogis) Milarepa and Shabkar Tshokdruk Rangdrol, the words of religious songs, oral advice, prayers and the like will come forth naturally and spontaneously without one having to think about them. The power of ‘words of truth’ is described as ‘accomplishing whatever one utters’. For example: whatever Drukpa Kunleg said took place or was accomplished just as he (said it). For this reason, (his) prayers were also efficacious. When it comes to prayers, beings who have obtained efficacy in speech have made aspirational prayers and supplications perfectly and then written them down. If others, believing in these beings, follow after them and pray, they will also be able to get results. When plagues and disputes have arisen powerful *ngakpa* have written prayers and when recited, these have brought benefit. There are very many mantra healing rites (like this).

How results are effects through visualization, or meditative concentration (on some object – *dmigs pa*) – if one masters one’s winds and mind, one will be able to have control over/transform all of the outer and inner elemental constituents of the body. In general, when one concentrates on an object, the power of one’s *rlung* and mind is expanded. One’s *rlung* effects results through the movements of the subtle winds. For example, having visualized a blazing blue HUNG syllable at points of discomfort in one’s body – at which points one focuses on one’s sickness as having the nature of grass-husks, dirt etc – and having then recited HUNG HUNG HUNG HUNG, one contemplates that one’s different sicknesses burn up and are destroyed. In the Tibetan Secret Mantra texts one generates as one’s own *yidam* or personal meditational deity, and from there, there are a great many different stages of visualization that happen. These principally work through meditative concentration. The basis of (this) meditative focus is the various forms and lights (one holds or concentrates on) in one’s own body and accordingly, this is one of the highest methods for generating and increasing the vital-essence aspect of the elemental constituents. By clarifying one’s visualizations, recalling pure-vision, and firmly maintaining (‘divine’) pride one restores the power of one’s mind and thereby brings the elemental constituents into balance. When (patients) have treated illnesses through visualization they have recovered, and today’s foreign doctors have conducted research and have verified that when (patients) have practiced meditative concentration/visualization they have gotten better. If one has meditated and practiced visualization, various changes occur in one’s brain cells which can be seen with computers, which can be thought of as one aspect of the manifestation of the movement of subtle winds. If a person, having manifested their *rlung*, concentrates on another person’s body, results may also be effected. For example: when a patient has a stomach illness, if a mantrin imagines there’s a small hole in the patient’s stomach, and if he visualizes that blood, pus, and impurities come out of it, this benefits the patient. In Tibetan tantric tradition, if one does *pho ba* or ‘transference’ practice for someone as soon as they die, signs that (the consciousness) has pierced through the aperture of Brahma at the crown of the deceased person’s head appear [this usually entails small holes appearing, or blood or other fluids leaking out of the corpse’s skull]. Medical treatment by means of visualization appears extremely frequently amongst mantra healing practices, and its beneficial efficacy is something that can be readily seen and felt.

How results are effected through devotion of the mind and the power of belief – since of the two, body and mind, mind is most important, the elemental constituents of the body and disturbances of the humours can be healed by the mind's power. Recovering from illnesses through faith and belief is a reality, and in the context of mantra healing, faith and belief [or translated differently 'devotion and confidence'] having been stimulated in the mind, improve sicknesses through the power of the subtle winds and mind. In sum, patients recover from their own diseases as a result of their own minds. Given that many sicknesses appears as harmful manifestations in the likeness of mentally-imputed demonic disease, healing these through belief and faith is thought of as an extremely profound method.

Even if, in whatever context, with whatever it may be – tantric rituals, medical treatments and procedures, or even surgery and so on – patients have generated belief or great confidence from the depths of their hearts but it brings no benefit at all to these procedures, by calming the nerves of their own brains, the power of patients' thoughts can still help with sickness. Furthermore, the subtle winds are conducted by the power of the mind and other elemental constituents are balanced by the force of the flow of the winds. Blissful feelings devotion, belief, and so on are positive emotional states (*tshor snang bzang ba*) and as such balance the subtle and gross elemental constituents of the body. Likewise, undesirable feelings (incite) provocations and turmoil which disturbs the winds, and then (all of) the elements, from the subtle to the gross, become unbalanced and are agitated. The genuine effecting of results through the power of the mind is therefore important to every contemporary method of medical treatment.

When it comes to doing mantra healing to treat the diseases of others, the way that results are effected in other people through the flow of breath is similar to (the descriptions above). The power of mantras enters into water and medicines and makes them efficacious. Patients listen to the sound of the mantras recited by doctors and by the strength of these benefits arise. (Likewise), the beneficial powers of the inner meaning and forms and signs of the consecrated esoteric designs and so on have been keenly demonstrated.”