

## Healing and Curing

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**W**e are told, 'What cannot be cured, must be endured' and 'Prevention is better than cure'. There is also the scriptural assurance, 'We are essentially birthless and deathless entities, free of dis-ease.' If that be so, is there anything which can comprehensively address the question of prevention and cure and take us beyond to usher in lasting peace?

This article is meant for those who pay considerable attention to their physical and mental health. Some of them may be spiritual seekers but their aspiration is not intense enough to ignore the question of health. The others, for whom probably the secular pursuits are more important, will also benefit from the ensuing discussion. For the miniscule minority, the most blessed children of the Lord, the spiritual aspiration is so intense that they cannot pay any heed to the question of physical health and it is to them that we are ever indebted for the highest spiritual wisdom. The Divine takes charge of their whole being including the question of health. They are beyond the purview of the present article.

This discussion may also benefit those who have exhausted the available medical treatment without any improvement. They may have a general intellectual conviction that 'I have a body, but I am not the body; I have a mind, but I am not the mind...'<sup>1</sup>, even if they have not yet felt it or realized it fully. Spiritual healing is easier to achieve provided one has developed a Vedantic understanding of the Real Self. A sense of

harmony between the two selves—the higher and the lower—ensures a general well-being at all levels of human personality.<sup>2</sup> This is the ideal we should try to achieve.

### Spiritual healing

Let us begin by turning to a realized soul like Sri Aurobindo to comprehend the meaning of being spiritual: 'It is spirituality when you begin to become aware of another consciousness other than the ego and begin to live in it or under its influence more and more. It is that consciousness wide, infinite, self-existent, pure of ego etc. which is called Spirit (Self, Brahman, Divine ...).'<sup>3</sup> He further says,

Consciousness is a reality inherent in existence. It is there even when it is not active on the surface but silent and immobile...invisible...It is not...a phenomenon dependent on the reactions of personality to the forces of Nature...consciousness is usually identified with mind, but mental consciousness is only the human range...there are ranges of consciousness above and below the human range, with which normal human has no contact...supra-mental and sub-mental ranges.<sup>4</sup>

The normal average human being, with some effort, can raise the bar and go beyond the human range into the supra-mental which marks the dawn of real awakening.

Healing is the process of restoration of health. A comprehensive connotation of healing implies a holistic understanding of health (not just physical health) which in turn requires an in-depth grasp of human personality. In Ayurveda, for example, the word for health is *svāsthya* which means ‘to be rooted in one’s own spiritual self’<sup>5</sup>. Thus ‘spiritual healing’ implies a process in which the whole being is restored to its pristine health through evolution of consciousness.

It is contextually important to note that ‘healing’ has a different and wider connotation than ‘curing’ as it is understood in the subject of medicine. While curing relates only to the physical body, healing relates to the whole being. Thus ‘not everyone can be cured, but everyone can be healed’ and ‘*healing is purely spiritual*’<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, healing comes from within and curing generally starts from an agent without. Hence spiritual healing includes the concepts of Holistic Health and Integral Health.

It may be noted that it is not our intention to posit spiritual healing as an alternative to the elaborate mainstream medical systems and their treatments. The latter are obviously necessary for common people, who have not been able to lift their mind to the highest spiritual plane on a sustained basis, but, following the assertions of the realized souls and the experiential validity of the seekers, it may be safely affirmed that as an aspirant advances towards the spiritual goal the necessity of such treatments gets reduced, or even if the gross physical body is subjected to the torment of such treatments, the other dimensions of the personality may remain in a state of bliss.

Indian psychology explains how spiritual healing may work. One of the

basic tenets of this psychology is—‘The subtle are the causes, the gross the effects’<sup>7</sup>. It means, subtle body is the cause, gross body is the effect<sup>8</sup>. Spiritual healing helps in curing the subtle body by connecting it with the ever-pure core of human personality (the Ātman which is qualitatively equal to the Brahman), and thereby having a great influence on the gross body. The diseases due to the *prārabdha karma*<sup>9</sup> will be very difficult to cure, but may be healed at the subtle body level; many diseases of the gross body may be prevented if the subtle-body is cured in time. It should be understood that these curing and healing are not the objective of spirituality, though, if the aspirant is rightly focused on the highest aim, these things happen as a by-product, provided the Divine has a purpose to retain the body; or, as per the theory of *samskāra(s)*<sup>10</sup>, the body is required to work out the *prārabdha(s)*.

### How it works

Spiritual healing works for one’s own self, but if applied through powerful thought-currents emanating from a deeply meditative mind in communion with the Supreme, this may work well for others also. It must be noted that in spiritual healing, the patient is supposed to play a central role in the process of healing. Here they ‘are not the passive recipients of treatment, but are vital participants in the pursuit of restoring and maintaining their health.’<sup>11</sup> Thus all healing is self-healing; therefore one needs to take care of oneself. How does spiritual healing work? Mother of Pondicherry explains—‘Peace and stillness are the great remedy for disease. When we can bring peace in our cells, we are cured.’<sup>12</sup>

The profound concept of spiritual healing is supported by the seers and the

thinkers of the West and the East alike. For example,

- Plato asserts—‘No attempt should be made to cure the body without treating the soul...the treatment of a part should not be attempted without treatment of the entirety.’

- Swami Vivekananda firmly believed in spiritual healing. This can be deduced from many of his assertions: ‘Why are Baburam and Yogen suffering so much? Tell them to meditate for an hour at a stretch, “I am the Atman. How can I be affected by disease”, and everything will vanish.’<sup>13</sup>

- Medical researches based on contemporary scientific methods also yield support to spiritual healing: ‘It’s clear from the correlational studies within the epidemiology data that positive relationships exist between religious and spiritual practice.’<sup>14</sup>

### Why spiritual healing?

The common man caught up, in his evolutionary journey, between Divinity and Animality, is constantly experiencing anxiety, only the degree varies from one person to another. He is ‘too conscious to be indifferent, he is not conscious enough to know what will happen. Truly it could be said without fear of making a mistake that of all earth’s creatures he is the most miserable...This torment can come to an end only with a total surrender to a higher consciousness than his own to which he can totally entrust himself, hand over his worries and leave the care of guiding his life and organising everything.’<sup>15</sup> Hence, ‘learn to be quiet and silent...When you are caught in a difficulty...instead of becoming agitated...remain quiet. And according to your nature, with ardour or peace, with intensity or widening or with all these together, implore the Light and wait for it to come.’<sup>16</sup> It is easier said than done. But,

for those who practise silence and *prapatti* (surrender) on a regular basis, it is an opportunity to test their degree of success in maintaining equanimity. To the extent they are successful, they are able to radiate that calm around themselves and others are benefitted. There may be many tips for overcoming fear and anxiety but all of them have temporary and evanescent effect; the spiritual remedy comes from the highest source and therefore yields the best results. Many incidents documented in medical history, particularly those relating to Holistic Health or Integral Health movements, corroborate this truth. The amelioration of Arjuna’s condition at the beginning of the *Bhagavad-Gitā* (BG) is a classic example.

### The measures

The spiritual masters have suggested several measures for the evolution of consciousness. Some of them are briefly highlighted below:

*Food*—By controlling the quality and the quantity of food one can control the body and by controlling the attitude towards eating one can control the mind. Thus, our *Rishi(s)* (seers) have visualized the food as medicine and therefore we are instructed to respect food.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, the process of eating should be seen as a sacred activity (BG, 9.27).

*Sleep*—The experienced practitioners realize that the various states of sleep may be brought under voluntary control, at least to some extent, through the processes like *yoga nidrā*, several relaxation exercises of the mind, esp. prior to sleep, prayer and meditation. Thus a well-regulated sleep helps greatly in spiritual healing.

*Exercises*—In our daily routine there should be exercises covering all dimensions of personality—physical, *prānic*, mental, ethico-moral and spiritual. These should aim

at attaining comprehensive self-awareness including the understanding of one's biological rhythms<sup>18</sup> and synchronizing one's exercises with these rhythms to get better results.

*Confronting the subconscious*—That the largest part of our mind<sup>19</sup> is generally obscure to our daily awareness is accepted and well-documented in both the modern Western and the ancient Eastern psychology. The subconscious mind is the repository of most of our problems as well as solutions. Unless the repressed complexes or past *samskāra*(s) are deactivated,<sup>20</sup> there is no lasting solution to our chronic illnesses. Achieving this deactivation is extremely difficult, dream interpretation and other such psychotherapeutic techniques have got limited success. However 'those who depend on God through intense prayer, may...find that these inner blocks are removed through divine grace.'<sup>21</sup>

*Opening up to the Universal Consciousness*—Man does not live in isolation. This universe is an inter-connected whole. Swami Vivekananda points out, 'each mind is connected with every other mind.'<sup>22</sup> This inter-connectedness needs to be experienced and revived on a daily basis which rejuvenates and repairs the diseased cells of our body through the flow of cosmic *prāna* (vital energy) into them.

*Listening to the Inner Voice*—During the daily exercises, awareness needs to reach each part of the body, so that if any part is not in proper health, we may concentrate on that part and if the concentration is deep enough, an inner voice may suggest the solution.

*Ashtānga Yoga*—The science of holistic living is a comprehensive system, well-documented and popularized, comprising of *ashtānga* (eight limbs or steps) which ensures development at all levels of human

personality.

*The Infinite as the sheet-anchor*—'There is no happiness in the finite. Happiness is only in the infinite. But one must try to understand what the infinite is....'<sup>23</sup> Since our mind is finite and therefore cannot think of the infinite, we need to create a symbol of the infinite and nurture it in our heart. This symbol becomes an anchor in all our distress, and through this symbol the reversal of consciousness can be achieved effectively with relative ease.

*Selfless Service*—When one serves others in body, mind and words *without any selfish desire*, one exudes positive energy and, following the natural laws, one's body and mind get healed in the process.

*Silence*—Amidst the flurry of activities all around, one needs to remain silent within—this is the essence of Yoga. 'This illusion of action is one of the greatest illusions of human nature...Whatever has been done in the world has been done by the very few who can stand outside the action in silence; for it is they who are the instruments of the Divine Power.'<sup>24</sup>

*Purification of emotions*—It is argued that if negative emotions cause illness, positive emotions should cause wellness. Thus, emotional purification (*Chittashuddhi*) is intimately connected with the spiritual healing.

*Right Prioritisation*—To achieve this kind of healing we need a paradigm shift in our thoughts and actions both individually and socially. This shift should be 'from ceaseless exteriorization to periodic interiorization; complex living to simple living; brilliant intellect to pure heart; external innovation to inner discovery; competitive survival-of-the-fittest to cooperative survival-of-all; greed to need; speeding to stilling; market-led globalisation to Spirit-led universalization;

calculative networking to sincere helping; limited earthly orientation to comprehensive cosmic sense; Nature-as-utility to Nature-as-love; freedom of/to to freedom from.<sup>25</sup>

*Integration through right action*—Healing can also happen through mental integration. Thus ‘when our activity is set toward a precise end, our mental and organic functions become completely harmonized. The unification of the desires, the application of the mind to a single purpose produce a sort of inner peace. Man integrates himself by meditation, just as by action.’<sup>26</sup> But, it must be noted that the activity must be *sāttvika*<sup>27</sup> for this integration to result in sustained healing.

### Conclusion

It is a fact that in today’s world, it is not easy to follow all these suggestions but that does not mean that one should not have any

ideal. The real may fall short of the ideal, but that does not justify its banishment. Thus ‘we must have an ideal’<sup>28</sup> and ‘the solution is not by bringing down the higher, but by raising the lower up to the level of the higher.’<sup>29</sup> Once the ideal is set and devoted effort is taken with a sincere prayer, many a time it is seen that the obstacles get removed gradually and the aspirant moves in the right direction. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, ‘If you have a sincere aspiration to the spiritual change in your heart and soul, then you will find the way and the Guide. A mere mental seeking and questioning are not enough to open the doors of the Spirit.’<sup>30</sup>

Spiritual healing is the goal as well as a journey. As one embarks upon this expedition through any one or more measures indicated above, one gradually feels peace within. As the aspirant proceeds valiantly, the Grace descends. ■

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 *Nirvānashatakam (Ātmashatakam)* by Adi Shankaracharya.
- 2 The idea of two selves (Lower Self/Higher SELF or Apparent Self/Real SELF) is a basic concept in Indian spirituality esp. Vedānta, e.g. ref. *Srimad Bhagavad-Gītā (BG)*, verse no. 6.5-6.
- 3 Sri Aurobindo, *Essays-Human and Divine*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication (1999), p. 362.
- 4 Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, Sri Aurobindo Society (1973), vol. 22, pp. 233-235.
- 5 As per Sanskrit etymology the word *svāsthya* (meaning health) may be seen as a compound of ‘*sva*’ (self) and ‘*sthya*’ (established).
- 6 Pravrajika Vrajaprana, *Healthy Mind, Healthy Body*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai (2008), p. 64.
- 7 *CWSV*, vol. 1, p. 122.
- 8 ‘The psychophysical vehicle of the self, the real man, can be comprehended...as the threefold body...Besides the physical body...every individual has two more bodies—the subtle and the causal, which are more potent, though invisible.’ (Swami Satprakashananda, *The Goal and The Way: The Vedāntic Approach to Life’s Problems*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras (1974), p. 49. Extensive details of the constitutions, functions and manifestations of these bodies are available in Indian scriptures esp. *Vedāntic* texts.
- 9 ‘...*karma*, which includes the residual impressions of the past and the impressions of the current actions...can be arranged in three groups: (1) The accumulated (*sancita*) *karma*, the stored up latent impressions of the past that will

- fructify in a future life or lives. (2) The fructifying (*prārabdha*) *karma*, the past impressions that are bearing fruit in the present life. (3) Prospective (*āgāmi*) *karma*, the impressions of the current activities that are accumulating and will fructify in due course. These are also called *sancīyamāna karma* (the impressions that are being accumulated) or *kriyamāna karma* (the impressions that are being created).’ (ibid., p. 139).
- 10 All our volitional actions in the waking state (i.e. *karma*(s)) leave indelible impressions on the mind which are called *samskāra*(s). An individual’s course of life is determined by the nature of the impressions (or *samskāras*) acquired by his *karma* in the present and past existence as well. (ref. *The Goal and The Way*, op.cit., pp. 86-87).
- 11 *Healthy Mind, Healthy Body*, op.cit., p. 51.
- 12 A S Dalal, (compiler), *Living Within- Selections from the Works of Sri Aurobindo & The Mother*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram (2011), p. 1.
- 13 Quoted in *Healthy Mind, Healthy Body*, op.cit., p. 8.
- 14 Dr Marilyn Schlitz, ‘*Meditation, Prayer & Spiritual Healing: The Evidence*’ published in *The Permanente Journal*/ [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/doi/ 10.7812/tpp/ 05.982](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/doi/10.7812/tpp/05.982) (accessed on 25/03/2024).
- 15 *Living Within*, op.cit., pp. 44-45.
- 16 Ibid., pp. 47-48.
- 17 *Taittiriya Upanishad*, verses-2.2.1, 3.7-8.
- 18 ‘...the spiritual aspirant should learn to attune his psychophysical system to his own biorhythms.’—Swami Bhajanananda, ‘Health and Spiritual Life’ in *Healthy Mind, Healthy Body*, op.cit., p. 33.
- 19 Here we are using the word ‘mind’ as an umbrella term to include all its dimensions.
- 20 They may not be fully eradicated but may be deactivated by the *Jnānāgni* (the fire of knowledge and wisdom), ref. *BG.*, verse no. 4.37.
- 21 *Healthy Mind, Healthy Body*, op. cit., p. 36.
- 22 Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (CWSV)*, Advaita Ashrama (1964), vol. 2, p. 13.
- 23 *Chandogya Upanishad*, verse no. 7.23.1.
- 24 *Living Within*, op.cit., p. 61.
- 25 S K Chakraborty, *Values & Ethics for Organisations: Theory and Practice*, Oxford University Press (1998), p. 12.
- 26 A Carrel, *Man The Unknown*, Hamish Hamilton (1961), p. 263.
- 27 *BG*, verse no. 18.23.
- 28 *CWSV*, vol. 2, p. 63.
- 29 Swami Vivekananda, ‘The Future of India’ in *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*, Advaita Ashrama (1990), p. 224.
- 30 Sri Aurobindo, *All India Magazine*, July, 2013, pp. 40-41.

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(continued from page 15)

9 *The Life*, Part 1, p. 282.

10 *The Life*, Part 1, p. 284.

11 *The Life*, Part 1, p. 284.

12 *The Life*, Part 1, p. 287.

13 Rolland’s greatness lies in the fact that he never met Vivekananda and neither did he know any English. His remarkable intuition and superb grasp of world history gave birth to two modern classics

on Vivekananda-Ramakrishna. Indeed the English translation of these two books by F. E. Malcolm Smith, a lady who wrote her doctoral dissertation on this topic, was responsible for making the West aware of Vivekananda-Ramakrishna.

14 *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel*, Romain Rolland, p. 15.

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