

# The History and Evolution of Buddhist Medicine with Robert Thurman and Dr Nida Chenagtsang

[Robert Thurman]: We are exploring how the Buddha's vision of the total positive reality of Nirvana can be channeled to beings gripped by delusion and ignorance. Translating a "Mantra" as psychotherapy is very fitting: \*Manas\* means mind, and \*Tara\* means to deliver or liberate. It is, quite literally, protecting the mind from its own projections.

## The Buddha as the Opposite of a Black Hole

A black hole is the physical symbol of utter selfishness: everything is sucked in, and nothing can escape. A Buddha is the exact opposite; a Buddha is like a "pulsar" or an exploding star. It is a being who completely expands to embrace everything. They feel that they are us, the building, the floor, the trees—everything. Their joy is perfect because they no longer have to "defend" themselves against the universe or protect a separate "self." From this expansion arises the infinite compassion that manifests as medicine to heal the body and teachings to heal the mind.

## Evolution and the Ethics of the Tigress

Thurman explains evolution from a Buddhist perspective. How does a being move from an animal state to a human one? It is through ethics (\*Shila\*), which is not about following rules but about empathy.

Imagine a tigress hunting. She sees a lame antelope and a pregnant one. The easier kill would be the pregnant one, but the tigress (having recently carried her own cubs) feels a subliminal empathetic connection and chooses instead to go after the more difficult prey. That tiny increment of identifying with another is what allows an individual to evolve into a human form. Human life is an incredibly precious platform, difficult to achieve; it is the result of immense evolutionary effort in developing ethics.

## The Yutok Lineage and the Rainbow Body

Tibetan Medicine (Sowa Rigpa) centers on the Yutok Nyingthig (Heart Essence of Yutok).

\* Yutok the Elder (8th Century): A contemporary of King Trisong Detsen, who organized the Samye (Sanya) conference where doctors from India, China, and Persia compared their knowledge. Yutok is said to have lived to 125 and achieved the Rainbow Body (dissolving his physical form into light at death).

\* Yutok the Younger (12th Century): He also achieved the Rainbow Body. This lineage is not just history; it is a continuous source of help for all beings.

### Meditation on Selflessness

Many believe that "selflessness" means non-existence. Thurman proposes a \*Vipassana\* exercise to clarify:

1. Sit comfortably and breathe.
2. Recall a moment when you were deeply offended or accused of something you did not do.
3. Notice the visceral reaction: "I am innocent!", "This is unacceptable to ME!"
4. That feeling of a fixed, solid, and independent identity is what we call the "absolute self."

By investigating that feeling, you realize there is nothing solid there. It is not that you do not exist; rather, you exist in interdependence with everything else. When you stop struggling to maintain that rigid identity, the doors to liberation and healing swing open.

[Dr Nida]: Thank you, Bob, for this contextualization. It is crucial to understand that healing the body and healing the mind are inseparable processes.