

On Falun Gong's Views on Health Issues

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According to media reports, since 1995, there have been over 1000 cases of Falun Gong followers' deaths due to their rejection of treatment and medication. Why do they refuse treatment or medication? What responsibility does Falun Gong have in regards to followers' refusal to seek treatment and medication? This essay analyzes Falun Gong's Views on Health Issues from three aspects: confusion of concepts – natural karma and supernatural karma, conflict between treating illness and eliminating karma, and Dharmakāya' healing power and “spiritual vampire”; as well as the internal relations between these views and its students' rejection of medical treatment.

1. Confusion of concepts – natural karma and supernatural karma

From the perspective of etymology, “karma” is a concept from Indian religions and Buddhism referring to behaviors with emotions. It is a neutral concept in ethics. As the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* put it, “Those who do good become good; those who do evil become evil.” Buddhism uses this term to mean that a purified body, mouth and mind bring happiness and the easing of pain..¹ (p357) Generally, Buddhism believes that illnesses are caused by “karma”, and classifies illnesses into three categories according to different types of karma: disharmony of the four elements; the effects of karma; and attack by demons. Modern religious studies categorize the first as caused by natural factors, and the latter two by supernatural factors.

Traditional Buddhist views on health issues state that most illnesses are caused by natural karma, or improper way of life or habits. This karma causes disharmony of

¹ YAO Wei-qun, Introduction to Buddhism [M], Beijing: Religion and Culture Publishing House, 2002.

the four elements and therefore sickness in bodies. Natural illnesses caused by natural karma can be treated in natural ways without violating any supernatural principles. But in *Zhuan Falun*, Li Hong-zhi interprets the concept of karma in a sense closer to witchcraft. First, karma is turned from neutral actions into physical, ethically negative, “black matter”. “Here’s what we’ve seen. Why do people have health problems? The root cause of their problem and all their misfortune is karma, that black-matter karmic field.” (*Zhuan Falun*, 251) This “black matter” cannot be explained by modern science, as it is in essence supernatural and is not matter in a physical sense. Second, “karma” is turned into an “evil being” in “another dimension”. “Let’s just talk about what’s most common. When a person has a tumor somewhere, an infection somewhere, a bone spur somewhere, or whatever, in another dimension there’s a being crouching at that place. In a deep dimension there’s a being there.” (*Zhuan Falun*, 251) Li Hong-zhi believes that the evil being in another dimension is the fundamental cause of people’s illnesses and that the being has two forms: “One of them is really, really small, high-density tiny beings. They’re something like a cluster of karma. The other is as if it’s transported through a conduit, but it’s pretty rare, and all of it is accumulated through the generations. That also happens.” (*Zhuan Falun*, 251)

Due to the witchcraft interpretation of the Buddhist term “karma”, *Zhuan Falun* separates and antagonizes natural and supernatural karma. No matter how many times he has revised it in his later lectures, as long as he does not abandon the physical and witchcraft interpretation of “karma”, Falun Gong’s views on illnesses will mislead its followers into believing that there is an absolute conflict between practicing Falun Gong and medical treatment.

2. The conflict of treating illness and eliminating karma

Buddhist scriptures champion the power of medicine and state that illnesses caused by natural “karma” should be treated in normal ways – with rest and medication. It is to say that if bad present karma can cause a present retribution like illnesses, then good present karma can cure the present retribution. *Vinaya Pitaka* has many loving stories such as Buddha feeding a sick monk medicine, and monks taking

care of sick monks. It is also mentioned in *Vinaya Pitaka* that Buddha allows sick monks to take nutritious products that are not usually allowed such as honey and candy. *Mohe Zhiguan* talks about the disharmony of earth, water, fire and wind causing corresponding symptoms: skinny and weary body, diarrhea, colds, fever and nausea and quick breaths. According to the symptoms and causes, they can be treated through medication, resting and exercise. *Xiao Zhi Guan* discusses other treatment methods including treating mental illnesses with breath regulation and the highest wisdom. Furthermore, for congenital diseases caused by supernatural karma, positive treatment such as diet, self-help and sleep can bring benefits and restore health.

Li Hong-zhi's description of "treatment" is quite dramatic – it is a fight with the supernatural being in another dimension: "Human beings are the weakest while that being is fierce, it controls your mind, plays you like a puppet on strings, and can even take your life easily. ... If you really did reach it, it would hurt your hand instantly, and that would be a real wound!" (*Zhuan Falun*, 116) Normal human beings and normal treatment is powerless in front of this supernatural being, but Falun Gong has a magical power against it. "To subdue it you need an ability where you extend your hand and "Bam!" pin it there. After it's pinned, we have another ability that used to be called the Great Soul-Catching Method, and that ability is even more powerful. It can pull out a person's whole master soul, and instantly that person won't be able to move. That ability targets specific things, and when we grabbed, we specifically aimed at those things." In the end, treating illnesses and the elimination of diseases is entirely reliant on practicing Falun Gong.

As for going to the hospital, *Zhuan Falun* believes that it "postpones the fundamental causes of illness to the later life or afterlife, but does not affect karma". The only way to eliminate karma is "cultivation": "Those who cultivate eliminate viruses and karma automatically. Taking medication subdues karma, but does not cleanse the body, and therefore cannot treat the illness. Only if you can pass this challenge can you become a better being." For Falun Gong followers, eliminating karma and treating disease are the absolute opposite of each other. Not only do medication and treatment not help in eliminating karma, but they are also shameful

indications that the follower is at the low level of normal beings. Thus, the more advanced the students believe they are, the more extremely they oppose medicine and treatment. The medical doctor and Falun Gong leader in the medical circle, Feng Li-li, who passed away in 2006, could only take painkillers secretly in her worst days. A main Falun Gong figure in Germany, Zhu Gen-mei, insisted on treating her illness with cultivation and refused to be treated before she passed away in 2007.

3. Dharmakāya' healing power and "spiritual vampire"

Buddhism believes in positive retribution for kind actions and negative retribution for evil actions. It teaches that everything is one's own doing and cannot be suffered by others, and that power cannot change others' retribution. Regarding the treatment of illnesses caused by retribution, Buddhism also believes that the seeds of retribution have to be watered by sorrow and love to come to fruition. Therefore, if one disciplines oneself to abandon greed, anger and stupidity, the retribution that has not been produced can be reduced or avoided. For illnesses caused by realized retribution, Buddhism encourages disillusion through seeing emptiness in all and giving up fear for karma and illnesses.

On the one hand, in *Zhuan Falun*, Li Hong-zhi elaborates on the horror of "retribution illnesses" and states that doctors and qigong masters can postpone karmic retribution, but cannot eliminate karma or illnesses; but, on the other hand, he claims that he can remove karma and illness from his students. According to *Zhuan Falun*, his Dharmakāya and the Falun that he places in students are the keys to eliminating karma and illnesses. The "Dharmakāya" can protect the beings of cultivation: "I can do that, because I have countless Dharmakāya which have my enormous divine Fa-power, and they can display their great divine powers and great Fa-power." As to the so-called "Falun": "What our practice does is cultivate a Falun at the lower abdomen, and I personally place it in students during my classes." The "Dharmakāya" and "Falun" can cure students' illnesses by eliminating karma and evil things, and can look after the beings of cultivation all day to "avoid evil thoughts". He says that students' illnesses and pain are left to hone their loyalty, kindness and tolerance. Thus, Falun Gong students cannot go to the doctor and have to suffer the pain; otherwise,

they are doubtful of and disloyal to Li Hong-zhi.

Another major difference between Falun Gong and traditional Buddhism is that Buddhism promotes treating diseases through confession, to ask for creditors' forgiveness in previous lives, or through practicing Buddhism to pay them back with virtuous deeds and turn them from enemy to friend. It is to say that Buddhism teaches people to be good and do good to treat illnesses. But Falun Gong's logic is to benefit oneself at the cost of others. It may seem that Falun Gong students are practicing the virtue of "tolerance" but this kind of "tolerance" is based on a witchcraft thinking – taking other people's virtue for one's own when they misbehave, and transferring the black karma to others. *Zhuan Falun* stresses the importance of such opportunities: "Of course, his intention wasn't good, or else he wouldn't have given you virtue. But he did create a chance for you to improve your character." Professor James R. Lewis calls these evil teachings "spiritual vampirism", which is the dark side of tolerance that Falun Gong promotes. Professor Lewis points out that Li Hong-zhi's teachings encourage his followers to "seek persecution" (if not public martyrdom). The secrets to the transfer of karma are the spiritual fuel to the followers' active pursuit of persecution. What is actually happening is that practitioners are attacking policemen – not vice versa, because the practitioners seek to take the police's "de" (virtue, good karma) by attacking them.²

From the above analysis of these three aspects, it can be concluded that Falun Gong's views on health issues have significant shortcomings in core concepts, logic and morality. Hence the author believes that Falun Gong holds indisputable responsibility for the deterioration of conditions or death of its followers due to their refusal to receive treatment or medication.

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² James R. Lewis, *Sucking the 'De' Out of Me*, Kaifeng.com, Aug 25, 2015.