

## TOWARDS A HOLISTIC PARADIGM

A paradigm is a world-view, a belief structure. There are quite a few to choose from, although you wouldn't think it from what is available in the mainstream. We usually get quite attached to our own, and very easily think it is the only one. In fact, we usually don't even see it as a 'paradigm'; it's just how things are. If we do recognize it as a paradigm, we like to think it is the only sensible one. Here we will begin to explore the various shades of the meaning of holism. This is intended as an introduction, a call to arms – or at least, to thinking. I am not answering all the questions here, but rather aiming to develop our concepts of what holistic medicine can mean. There is a lot of dilution going on of the meaning of 'holistic' as mainstream medicine tries to incorporate holistic ideas into its practice. This is good and worthy and will probably lead to less suffering for people being treated within that system; at the same time we need not settle for this dilution as if it meant that there is nothing much more to it.

Deeply holistic paradigms can challenge our existing belief structure if we are educated in the West – as I have said, Western orthodox medicine is unique in the world for not considering the spirit. Spirit is a difficult thing to define – yet somehow, we know what it means. One great description I have come across came via my teacher Eliot Cowan,<sup>304</sup> world renowned healer in the Five Element tradition:

Think of where your body has been today – all the movements it has made from when you woke up to the present moment. Even if it's early in the morning, your body will have been active all the time in one way or another. Now think of where your mind has been – where you have ranged in your thoughts. You will see that the movements of the mind so far exceed those of the body, that really there is no way for the body to keep up with the mind – the mind is too fast for the body to grasp. Well, your spirit is to your mind what your mind is to your body – the mind simply has no way to grasp the spirit, the spirit is too vast, too fast, too beyond, for the mind to get more than a now and then glimpse of it. Yet many of us have had experiences where we came close to feeling things in our spirit – highs, peak experiences, moments of deep peace, deep joy, connection, serendipity.

Thomas Moore also writes eloquently of the soul or spirit in his books.

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<sup>304</sup> To find out more about Eliot Cowan's work you can take a look at *Plant Spirit Medicine – The Healing Power of Plants*.

## Causes of disease

For most systems of medicine in the world, the spirit is in charge, healing must happen *in* the spirit and healing comes *from* the spirit. At heart, holism says that a person is a whole, and also is a part of the greater Whole. Because we are deeply connected both within ourselves and with everyone and everything else in the universe, all these influences, within and without, affect us. You are your body, but you are more than your body: your thoughts and feelings affect your physical reality far more than you may realize. You do not exist in isolation: your relationships, from the beginning of your life to the present, have formed and continue to form you. If your family is sick, you are affected. If your community is sick, you are affected. If your society is sick, you are affected.

As we said above, infections are one classic cause of disease; one would think this would be a straightforward case, micro-organisms like bacteria, viruses, fungi, yeasts or parasites (nits, worms), have got into the body and are using us as a host, causing problems to us. But go a little deeper, and you will want to know – what happened to upset our balance so that micro-organism got in and caused trouble? If you get a bunch of people and literally paint cultured cold virus directly onto the membranes in their nose, only a minority of them (20%) will get the cold.<sup>305</sup> You cannot change this figure by giving them wet feet or blowing cold air down their backs. It seems quite a low figure, doesn't it? (Although there is reasearch that shows gettings chills can double your chance of catching a cold).

Louis Pasteur, the father of modern microbiology, said on his deathbed, 'le terrain c'est tout' (the terrain is everything). In other words, it's not the infectious organism that causes the disease, but the condition of the person affected. Unfortunately, Pasteur's followers were already excitedly rushing off on the path of finding something to kill the invading organisms, and this is the path which orthodox medicine is still stuck on. The result of all this is MRSA and other 'super bugs', an increase in allergies and other signs of impaired immunity, plus the as yet unknown effects of pharmacological pollution.

Do you get a cold if someone with one sneezes on you? Why is that? Is your immune system really so low – is it to do with what you eat, with high stress levels? Why are you stressed? Is it from your life now, or because emotional trauma in your childhood has left you more vulnerable to stress? Is it simply because you believe you will get a cold? Is it because you really need a few days in bed to rest and take stock? Is it that your immune system is in good enough shape to throw up an acute illness, to help you detox...creating a fever and lot of copious mucous is one way to give your body a good clear out? In other words, is it a sign of weakness to get this cold, or a sign of strength?

To be truly holistic, a physician or healer must make space to think about and try to understand all the factors operating on a person's life (whilst realising that, at least on the conscious level, we can never understand everything, and that understanding is not the only

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<sup>305</sup> Deepak Chopra *Quantum Health*.