Wednesday, 11 December 2024

Why Diseases?

Yesterday, I was talking about a sutra that I was trying to translate. The sutra says: **sukha, satnam, arugula.** What is called sukha is nothing but another name for health. The same sutra continues with vikaro buchha, which means that pain is nothing but being sick. Vikara or imbalance, or diseases, are the real pain. So, both pleasure and pain are sensations.

Let me take you deeper into this idea. Pleasure is transmitted by neurochemicals—certain neurotransmitters, hormones, enzymes—about 10 substances, produced from your brain, glands, adrenals, and different parts of your body, especially from the brain-endocrine system. This system is responsible for the feeling of joy, the sensation we often call pleasure.

In physiology, this joy sensation serves as a kind of feedback mechanism, a reward. It's like when you train a dog—you reward it with a treat when it obeys you. This reward system is there to tell you, "You're doing the right thing." Now, we may have misused this system, but originally, the purpose of these substances—dopamine, melatonin, serotonin, gamma, and others—is to reward you when you're on the right path.

So, when physiologically you are performing the right things, your body rewards you with these substances, giving you a feeling of contentment, gratitude, and goodness. This is all created in your autonomic system. This is how your system communicates with you, telling you that you're on the right track.

Now, let me circle back to something I mentioned earlier—many actions that you perform are unconscious. These are not things you consciously control. In medicine, they call this involuntary function or autonomous functions. This is governed by your autonomic nervous system, which includes both the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. These systems don't function according to your will. They just do their job—this is what I call the automatism of life.

Life is sensing. It's like a program your body is running. You keep sensing the external and internal environment, and based on this, you decide whether to enter fight mode or flight mode. Your nervous system decides—either it switches to a relaxed mode or a fight mode, and a series of physiological reactions are triggered in both. This is not under your control.

There is a part of you, an unconscious you, that is responsible for all of this. There is someone inside you who decides how many times your heart should beat per minute. This happens without your conscious awareness. You don't need to tell your heart to beat. It just does. But it's being controlled by this unconscious you.

This unconscious you also manages other involuntary actions—like hormone secretions and enzyme releases. Just think about something as simple as swallowing saliva. We don't think about it, but it's a very complex process. The saliva secreted into our mouth shouldn't go into your windpipe, right? It needs to go into your stomach. This is a very delicate process where the throat opens into both your windpipe and your esophagus.

If you look at the physiology of swallowing, it's an intricate system, and it's happening automatically. Yet, we often don't realize how complex this action is. But you're doing it every day without even thinking about it.

Let me give you an example. We're currently treating a patient with motor neuron disease (MND). This disease causes the motor centers in the brain to degenerate, and it affects the small reflexes that we take for granted. For instance, this patient can't close their eyelids properly, and when saliva drips, they can't even close their mouth. They live in constant fear of choking on their own saliva. This is something we take for granted—just the ability to swallow without thinking about it. This is a perfect example of how we should not take small, seemingly simple actions for granted.

When something comes near your eye, you blink reflexively. It's automatic, and you don't need to think about it. But in some cases, like in MND, patients can't do this. If a mosquito comes near their eye, they cannot blink. They become anxious because they can't protect their eyes in the way they once could. They can't carry out these small, reflexive actions that we rely on daily.

So when you see a patient like this, you truly begin to understand how blessed you are to be able to do things that might seem trivial. These reflexes are all blessings that we take for granted. We have so much to be thankful for.

Another example I often give is the simple act of standing. Standing is a miracle. Why? Think about the number of bones and vertebrae in your body that have to align perfectly to maintain your posture. It's not easy to balance a heavy mass at this height. Without your balance center in the brain, it would be impossible. It's a miracle how the skeletal system keeps you upright.

Unlike other animals, humans stand on two feet. We don't have a wide foundation like four-legged animals. The way we are built, with just two feet as the foundation, makes it impossible to stand without the intricate balance system in your brain. If we were quadrupeds, like dogs or cows, this would be a different story. But to stand on two feet requires a finely-tuned, miraculous system. And if you understand this, you'll start seeing the beauty in the smallest things we do.

Now, let's talk about the topic for today:

Why do we experience diseases?

We often experience subjective sensations—pain, discomfort, joy—through our senses. But when it comes to our health, these sensations become clearer. We may experience something

subjectively, but when we need an objective answer, we seek external validation, whether through a doctor's diagnosis or medical tests.

When we feel pain, we know that something is wrong in the body. In the same way, when we feel pleasure, we feel that everything is in harmony. These are sensations. But what happens when those sensations become negative? This is where we encounter the issue of disease.

Dukha—which in Sanskrit means suffering or pain—is equated with being sick or diseased. Pain and illness are intertwined, but the important thing to understand is that disease is a message. It's the body's way of telling you that something is wrong, something needs to be fixed.

You may experience discomfort or even pain, but rather than ignoring it, your body is asking you to listen. When we talk about inflammation, we're talking about the root cause of many diseases. Inflammation is a language the body uses to communicate distress, a sign that something is wrong.

This brings us to the idea of pathophysiology—the study of how normal physiological processes go awry in disease. Every symptom or sign of illness is a language of life. This is the unconscious self trying to get your attention, to tell you something is out of balance.

Is vomiting a disease? No. Vomiting is a process by which your body expels something harmful, something it doesn't want. The same goes for diarrhea or fever. These are efforts your body makes to eliminate what it perceives as harmful. They're not diseases, they're protective mechanisms.

Diseases exist to tell you that you are doing something wrong, to warn you to stop. And often, the only person responsible for this is you. You are the one who is making choices that cause the imbalance, whether it's bad food, unhealthy habits, or stress.

Life should be a beautiful harmony between your conscious self and your unconscious self. When both are in balance, you experience health. But when they are out of sync, that's when disease arises. The key is to listen to the signals your body gives you, to learn from them, and to make the right choices.

Remember, life is a continuous dance between the conscious and unconscious self. Both are working together to help you evolve.

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