Medicine’s Missing Dimension

Filling the void by contemplative religious practice

K H Wilson, M.D.
Duke University Medical Center
wilso003@mc.duke.edu

Western Medicine Approach
Giraffe Dance
Being Ill Then and Now

**Hunter Gatherers**
- A “life thing”, a “death thing”
- Loss of control
- Self less solid
- Place in cosmos
- Who will I become?
- Will they still want/need me?

**Us**
- A “life thing”, a “death thing”
- Loss of control
- Self less solid
- Place in cosmos
- Who will I become?
- Will they still want/need me?

Which approach better addresses these concerns?
Why Shamanism Would Be Difficult For Physicians, Nurses

- Not as powerful at curing
- Requires shared cultural beliefs
- In our culture might require charisma

Meeting Biological Expectations

**Patient’s concern**
- Life thing, death thing
- Loss of control
- Self less solid
- Place in cosmos
- Who will I become?
- Will they still want/need me?

- Address the “life thing” and the “death thing” in ourselves
- Recognize our own lack of control
- Realize the fluidity of our “selves”
- Feel our place in the cosmos
- Watch ourselves continually change
- Gain awareness of our need to be needed
The Contemplative Path

- Belief systems relatively unimportant
- Insight-based meditation and teacher central
- Explore and see truth about conditioned self
- Liberation from self
- See limited nature of all words and concepts
- Liberation from words and concepts
- Deeper self
  - Touches God, Buddha nature, love, Tao, original self, true self, transcendence
  - Experiences suffering differently
  - Has better access to compassion, wisdom

Although the wind blows terribly here, the moonlight also leaks between the roof-planks of this ruined house.

Izumi Shibiku
Similarities With !Kung Healer

- No special social status
- Kia fearsome like death
- Person in Kia unattached to likes and dislikes
- Everyday self is transformed
- Whole cosmos is the context
- /Num, compassion, wisdom arise beyond discursive mind
- Engagement in present moment

Differences From !Kung Healer

- Kia is temporary and specialized
- Emotional drama vs peace
- Trance versus awareness
This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
Some momentary awareness comes  
As an unexpected visitor.  
Welcome and entertain them all.  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
Who violently sweep your house  
Empty of its furniture.

Still treat each guest honourably.  
He may be clearing you out for some new delight.  
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
Meet them at the door laughing,  
And invite them in.  
Be grateful for whoever comes,  
Because each has been sent  
As a guide from beyond.

Rumi
Stranger
When no one listens
To the quiet trees
When no one notices
The sun in the pool.

Where no one feels
The first drop of rain
Or sees the last star
Or hails the first morning
Of a giant world
Where peace begins
And rages end:

One bird sits still
Watching the work of God:
One turning leaf,
Two falling blossoms,
Ten circles upon the pond.

Thomas Merton

http://ipadventures.com/