

Can The “Fourfold Cause Of Matter” According To Theravāda Buddhism Provide New Insights For The Clinical Setting With Psychosomatic Patients In Myanmar?

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to present the Theravāda Buddhist approaches for an explanation of the somatic factors in psychosomatic diseases. It tries to raise the awareness of persons working in the health field about the patient’s subjective explanations of their symptoms. Many psychosomatic patients will refer to the Buddhist teachings looking for the causes of their disagreeable bodily feelings. In a literature review of the Sutta Piṭaka and Abhidamma Piṭaka and the popular commentary Visuddhimagga I examine the “fourfold cause of matter” (*catubbidho paccayo*). This gives the necessary background information. These fourfold causes should not be confused with the Four Noble Truths - which contain the essence of the Buddha's teachings - or with the four elements (earth, water, wind, fire), that are used as explanation pattern for unbalance in traditional Burmese medicine. A very recent work from the year 2017 by Pyi Pho Kaw discusses the causes of illness in the Burmese Buddhist medical system. Here also the link between these four causes of matter and possible symptoms is reinforced. I add some own impressions in an unsystematic way, collected as participant observer in Myanmar. The findings result in the author’s conviction that there is a model of explanation that is not widely known yet. The Visuddhimagga is for almost all the Saṅgha members a basis of their teaching to the lay persons. About 90% of the patients and of the medical staff in Myanmar are Buddhist. Thus it can be assumed that there is some common basis for interaction. It is concluded that there should be further discussion how to react in case the patient points out that he believes his symptoms are related to the “fourfold cause of matter.”