

Personal mandala of health



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Good health is considered important by many people. This is reflected in the way we wish each other 'long live' or 'may you be blessed with good health' during occasions or significant events and in the huge amount of resources spent on health and wellness maintenance. Unfortunately, 'health' has often times been mistaken to be limited to the absence of illness. More than the freedom from debilitating effects, however, good health should give people the active capacity to engage in productive activities and enables human beings to achieve their fullest potentials. (Hancock 1982) Thus, far from the fixation over the physical and biological aspects, there has been increasing interest on a more holistic view of health that goes beyond curing sickness or preventing it from occurring, one that actually seeks to establish contexts and environments that let people and other species achieve and maximize all aspects of their being. (Vanleeuwen, et al. 1999; Earp & Ennet 1991; Knight

The development of better strategies for health promotion has also gained significance at a time when many of the diseases plaguing supposedly modern economies such as ours are traced to the influence of lifestyle and unhealthy environmental conditions. (Earp & Ennet 1991) Today, many people suffer not only from the variety of illnesses manifested biologically but psychosocially and psychologically.

The state of our health is further reflected not only in the state of ecosystems within our immediate vicinity but with the entire world. Until recently, people did not care much on whether the next generation of human beings would survive to inherit the world until persistent environmental problems forced them to confront the trade-offs of industrialization. There is

much evidence that we human beings are responsible for the unhampered degradation of natural ecosystems; this has come to haunt us in the global disaster called climate change which directly threatens this planet with impending doom.

In the midst of these problems, one's perspective of health and wellness must therefore evolve from the myopic sense of the individual into one that takes into account the entire relationship of beings and organisms in the planet. Today's notions of health must not only focus on the promotion of practices and awareness that benefit the human population but must also account for the impact of human activities on environmental balance. (Hancock 1982, 1983; VanLeeuwen, et. al. 1999)

Necessarily, this translates into a radical overhaul of many of our existing beliefs, habits, and practices and may even be considered revolutionary as such ideas challenge the status quo and mainstream culture (Hancock 1982, 1993). The Mandala of Health formulated by Hancock (1993), for instance, integrates the concept of health with human and community development that urges us to look at health as a function of the interrelationship between the environment, economic situation, and community development. These factors are seen as necessary spheres from which health concepts, practices and public policies for health promotion must be evaluated against.

More than a prescription, the mandala of health urges us to question whether prevailing conditions within and around us would actually promote or hamper the attainment of humanity's health goals and if existing conditions of the environment, of communities, and of the socio-economic status of majority of the populations. Upon reflection, therefore, the questions of

class, race, environment and gender ultimately surface when we attempt to examine closely how the development of healthy individuals, communities, and environment is linked to social justice. (Knight) It is with this keen sense of critical awareness that we understand the limitations of existing public health promotion programs in addressing serious health problems.

The Mandala of Health brings us out of our comfort zones and forces us to reevaluate not only our lifestyles but our attitude towards health, which has been largely influenced and molded by consumerist culture. It gives us a framework to analyze how, to a very large extent, we have often times been guilty of the reductionist tendency to view our personal health goals as an end in itself rather than as a process. It challenges the prevailing biomedical framework which solely relies on the thorough knowledge of the human body but does not address the environment where it is situated.

Clearly, there are abundant ideas on how the concept of health may be approached and problematized but their impacts in practical life—or in how its audience have actually taken up such ideas and employed them to work remains to be seen. Undoubtedly, the greater challenge does not lie anymore in figuring out the framework from which health should be established but in taking courage to implement the practical ways from which the mandala of health may be realized.

On a personal level, I would like to raise the mandala of health to the higher challenge of human aesthetic and value sense. I think that the mandala of health is actually about balance, simplicity, and respect which is demonstrated in the way the original version of the concept was illustrated by Hancock (1993). These three concepts are interrelated in many ways, and

may be utilized not only to present a general idea of how health can actually be achieved but also to reiterate the things that people actually know already but either chose to ignore or simply shrug off as nonsense.

It stresses the importance of balance because it addresses the main problem of humanity's penchant for excesses that lead to psychosocial, biological, physical, and behavioral stresses on the human constitution. It is no surprise that today's biggest health trend is stress management and stress reduction, or that many people spend money on diet fads while neglecting physical activities and ignoring the development of healthy eating habits. It addresses the problem of social justice by stating the need for equality in resource distribution.

Likewise, the concept of balance necessitates that we consider the impact of our decisions and activities on the scale of our families, communities and immediate environments, necessitates the conscientious approach to events, phenomena, and problems, and urges us to carefully weigh between the benefit and risks on both the macro and micro levels. The concept of balance is thus intimately related to the idea of simplicity: in many ways our needs are actually simple enough but in many instances we fail to acknowledge that indeed they are, and fall trap into thinking that we will be happy—and healthy—with having too many things all at once.

Simplicity is a key to health not only because it gives us stillness and rest from want, on a pragmatic level it also reduces the energy consumption in this planet expended by the need to produce more and more things than the human population can readily consume at any given time. Respect, on the other hand, stresses the need for the realization that we are not the center

of the universe and that rights are not exclusive to human beings as a species.

The concept of balance is related to respect in this aspect, all our decisions must take into account not only the benefit of our actions on the sustainable life of human beings in this planet but also those of other living beings. In the end, health is not only determined by the interrelationship of the concrete factors and systems that influence how we function physically, mentally, and spiritually but also by the highest ideals enshrined in the value systems of human beings that enable us to discern what is true, good, or just and makes us one with nature. While this is perhaps the simplest framework, yet is perhaps the hardest to practice in real life.

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