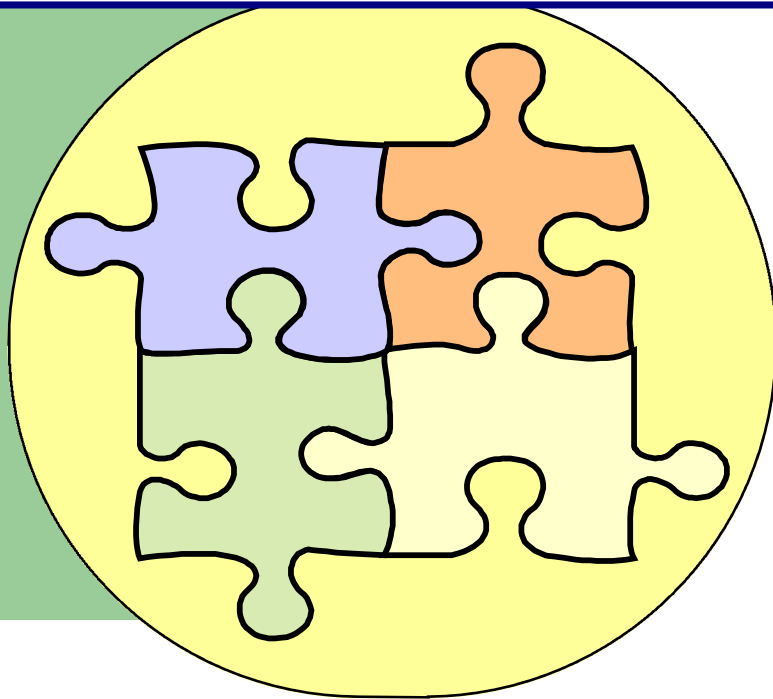


InDialogue. . .



*Newsletter N. 13
May 2022*

*Interfaith-Dialogue and
Health Ministry*

CMS
GIPAO

InDialogue

Dear readers,

This current issue of “In Dialogue” focuses on the ministerial area of Health as a unique space of interreligious and ecumenical dialogue. The first image which comes to our minds when it comes to health and dialogue is the intense dialogue of life and witness to the Gospel values such as faithfulness, compassion and tender care in the service we offer in our health structures. However, sickness, being intrinsic to the human condition, is a reality which generates an extremely interesting philosophical, theological and spiritual research we are called not only to engage in dialogue with but also to learn from it.

First section: Dialogue of Knowledge: Health Matters. In this section, we offer an overview of the concept of health and some major health issues such as abortion, new reproductive techniques and contraception in Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism.

Second section: Spirituality of Health in the World’s Religions. In this section, we look at the relationship between healing, holiness and wholeness in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism.

Third section: Dialogue of Life. In this section, sr. Maria Villa Sesma shares her experience of dialogue between Christians and Muslims in her years of service in Egypt and sr. Elisabetta Raule speaks about dialogue through her experiences at the hospital of Bedbeja, Tchad.

We wish you: a Happy reading! The Committee .

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Dialogue of Knowledge-Health Matters:

A Glimpse of Health Issues in Different Religions

If there is a ministerial area which constitutes a genuine, spontaneous and non-necessarily articulated space of inter-faith dialogue that is definitely **health**. In my years of service in Ethiopia, I have witnessed how sisters involved in health were in touch with the whole local community, since inevitably sooner or later we all fall sick. What is more, sickness and death are an intrinsic part of the human condition, as the Covid-19 Pandemic has tragically reminded us during the last two years: *“we have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed”* (Pope Francis, 27 March 2020). The fragility and sense of helplessness we experience while being ill force us to trust somebody else’s hands, knowledge and expertise, regardless their colour, faith or culture. Yet, this privileged space of encounter and dialogue is not to be taken for granted since it can equally become a place of misunderstandings and interreligious and/or inter-cultural insensitivity, when the Western or Westernized mentality gets in the way of our missionary vocation. Let us give a look at how other religious traditions understand health and health issues. The English word **‘health’** etymologically derives from the old English *‘hael’* or *‘hal’*, which meant **‘health’**, **‘whole’** (uninjured) and



The Hindu *Om* Symbol symbolizes the breath of the Universe, all-encompassing symbol of life which represents the union of mind, body and spirit.

‘holy’ (blessed). The verb **‘to heal’**, which also comes from *‘hal’*, means **to restore to a state of wholeness, soundness of integrity**. In Latin, there are two words connected to the concept of health, *‘salus-utis’* and *‘sanitas-atis’*. The first refers to the **good physical state** of something and the idea of preservation whereas the latter is a philosophical concept related to **reason and common sense, purity, correction and good taste**. The etymological roots of the word health point out that in the West the concept of health had in its origins a broad meaning, which included not only an **absence of disease** but also **an equilibrium in individuals’ life**, and between themselves and their social, physical and metaphysical environment.



JUDAISM has a long history and concern for health and healing. Starting from the Hebrew Bible and continuing through Jewish legal literature, including Mishnah and Talmud, the principles of the **sanctity of life and respect for the body** has always informed Jewish life and encouraged attention to the healing arts. Jews consider **the body a vessel**, which God loans to human beings until they die and it returns to the Creator. Consequently, God governs the use and the care of human bodies

through the rules articulated in the Jewish law. Physicians' duty to heal emanates from God's imperative **to preserve and protect all what is his**, that is, all God's creatures. Taking care of one's body is a *mitzvah*, commandment, because one's **body is a channel of the soul** and the means by which **one prays to God**. Some of these rules are good hygiene, sleep, exercise and diet. Regarding **dietary laws**, it is worth underlying that for Judaism body pleasures are God-given and enable human being to live a life of holiness. Therefore, the Jewish dietary system, *Kashrut*, is meant to instil a **divine dimension** on the act of eating, which is done as animals. *Kosher*, meaning fit, denominates foodstuff deemed fit or proper for eating, while *treif* denominates disallowed foodstuff. For instance, meat from ruminant mammals such as cattle and goats is generally allowed as well as fish with fins and scales. Moreover, the Talmud forbids mixing meat and milk in any individual meal. It is widely argued that *Kashrut* has a health component since many of the proscribed animals carry disease or uncleanness.

Classical Jewish thinking holds that **life begins and ends with breathing**, when the souls enters and departs from the body. The Hebrew word for 'soul', *nefesh*, is linked to breathing. A soul then is a 'breathing being'. Since life begins when the newly born starts breathing independently of her mother, **abortion** is not considered

infanticide but rather a **feticide, loss of a foetus**, and not a capital offence. Potential life is not equivalent to an actual life. **Abortion is permitted in some circumstances and required in others**, when the life or health of the mother is at risk. However, based on the development of the foetus, abortion is permitted for more reasons during the early periods of the pregnancy, especially during the first forty days after conception or first semester. Furthermore, **regarding new reproductive systems**, since Judaism prizes children and procreation, rabbinic authorities have generally speaking allowed **artificial assistance in having children** with some punctual reservations or objections. Finally, **female methods of contraception are permitted** and even required in some circumstances.



**'Peace & Love Hamsa
heals the world'** by Jewish
artist Mishka Jaeger

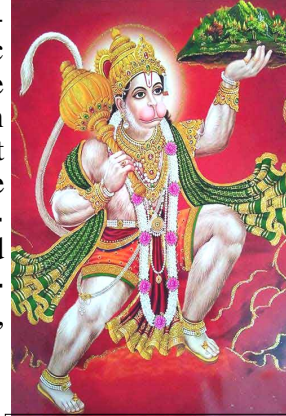
In ISLAM, after faith, **health and well-being** are understood to be the greatest of **God's blessings** since Allah created humans beautifully and in an environment of well-being. What is more, healing is a reflection of the message revealed in the Qur'an: "We have revealed of the Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy for those who have faith" (17:82). Healing requires an act of faith in Allah. Personal **healing is a transaction involving the divine domain**. The result is that both the caregiver and the patient operate within a conglomerate of ethical values and Islamic expectations, which are called *adab*. The *Hadith*, Prophet's sayings and actions, sets out **specific physical and spiritual guidelines** for cleaning oneself **before the prayer**, practices believed to maintain a well-rounded society. The *Hadith* underlines that the **life** Allah gives is one **to enjoy** as long as one lives it **with moderation**. Therefore, **vigilance** is an important element to examine whether one's daily activities and attitudes are acceptable to Allah. Moreover, Muslim diet is governed by *shari'ah*, which determines pure or impure foods and drinks. For instance, eating pork is strictly impure like eating meat not properly bled. Yet, dietary laws differ from group to group (or school to school). Islam teaches that believers should regard their **illness as a benefit from**

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God, in effect substituting the spiritual benefits of illness for those of Ramadan. However, although those who are ill are exempt of Ramadan fasting, the sick might attempt to keep it by all means. In the Muslim world, an **embryo does not become human until ensoulment occurs, after 40 or 120 gestation days** (depending on the school of law). All schools of law **condemn abortions which take place after ensoulment**. Moreover, foetal rights are also recognized. For instance, if a pregnant woman is condemned to death, the sentence will be carried out after the child has been born and properly cared for by a wet nurse. Abortion after ensoulment might be allowed only if the mother's life is threatened by carrying the foetus to term. In Islam, **an existing human life takes precedence over what is not yet a human life**. In cases where the foetus was deemed not able to survive birth, where the woman is too small to give birth, or where the foetus is the result of rape, classical Islamic physicians like al-Razi or Ibn Sina have accepted abortion for medical reasons. Furthermore, **new reproductive techniques are positively welcomed** since the family unit has a central place in Islam. Finally, **contraception is a more controversial practice**. On the one hand, traditional methods were known and practiced at the time of the Prophet. It seems to be **accepted if there are good reasons for it like having a child still suckling or lacking the necessary means**. On the other hand, some schools encourage having children following the mandate of the Prophet: "So reproduce and increase in numbers".

HINDUS health beliefs and practices might be dated back to 5000 BCE when sages looked for solutions to the problems of **poor health and disease**. During the early stage of development, sickness was viewed as a punishment from the gods. However, by the sixth or fifth century BCE, the Indian medical system had evolved into his current form, known as *Ayurveda* or the Science of life and longevity. In *Ayurveda* terms, **health is the balance between body, mind and spirit. It is about diet and exercise**. It consists of the way we see the world and speaks of the quality of our souls. *Ayurveda* promotes a **balanced living** by **reducing stress** and taking time to love, laugh, eat, play, work and

establish meaningful **relationships** with other human beings. A healthy body consists of harmonic balance between the three basic elements of the body wind (*vata*), fire (*pitta*) and water (*kapha*). In general, Hindus have a great aversion to contact with blood, urine, dead bodies, etc. Most Hindus are **lacto-vegetarians and avoid animal products, except milk**. Beef and pork are strongly avoided among those who consume meat. **Fasting is observed** during certain days of the month or year, related to personal deities.



God Hanuman associated with **good body & good health in Hinduism**. He is worshipped to get rid of diseases, deformities & pain

Although **abortion** is disapproved in Scriptural texts and most Hindus believe that the **soul exists at conception**, it is **available on demand** in modern India. The pregnancy termination act of 1971 provides for restrictions, which can be interpreted very liberally. What is more, according to Young William “many Hindus are disturbed by the use of **selective abortion as birth control** (128)”. The overwhelming tendency towards male foetal sex selection in India has been strongly denounced by Hindu religious leaders. **New reproductive technologies** are **acceptable** due to the value attached to procreation and the practice of *niyoga*, ancient form of artificial insemination. Finally, there seems to be a **positive attitude towards contraception** in the *Vedas*, scriptures. However, some Hindus might be wary of it since contraception seems to encourage behaviours against family values such as extramarital or pre-material relationships. Nonetheless, Hinduism favours a case-study rather than a priori approach to ethics in order to **contextualize decision-making and avoid polarization**.

BUDDHISM also approaches health from a **holistic perspective**. Health is the **harmonious balance** of the body, mind, emotion and spiritual dimension and **not just the absence of disease**. The correct understanding of the meaning of life and the right practices of the teachings of Buddha bring out this harmony and health. Hence, the Buddhist concept of health is **closely connected to spirituality** and underlines the intrinsic

connection between mind and body. **Disease is the result of ignorance**, leading to craving desire, impurity and indulgence which lead to disharmony at the physical, emotional and spiritual levels. However, the Buddhist holistic concept of health does not preclude the **utilization of Western medicine** since Buddhism promotes every possible means for good health. Nonetheless, it is important that disease is not simply viewed as physical symptoms. Furthermore, while vegetarianism is encouraged among all Buddhists, **most in the**



Medicine Buddha

Theravada tradition do not practice vegetarianism. A strict Mahayana Buddhist avoids eating fish and meat. Buddhists who worship Guan Yin, goddess of mercy, do not eat beef. Some also avoid eating food prepared with onions and garlic due to the belief that they arouse the base senses.

Regarding abortion, there is a tendency towards **prohibition** among **Theravada Buddhists** and more **accommodating approach** among **Japanese and Western Buddhists** in the US. Traditionally, abortion has been considered a **violation** of the first precept **against destroying life**. However, **debate** has arisen in recent years regarding when **human consciousness enters the embryo or foetus**. When the body lacks consciousness, being does not exist. Therefore, there is no being at conception. Yet, there are those who believe that being exists at conception. However, more than the emergence of the being at conception or not, many believe that **intention** must be taken into consideration. The demands of **Buddhist compassion** in certain circumstances, such as **unwanted or unsafe pregnancies might justify an act of abortion**. Most Buddhists would **place responsibility** for the final decision about abortion **with the pregnant woman**. Given the lack of orientation in the ancient texts regarding **new reproductive technologies**, Buddhist ethicist Damien Keown observes that “**use of donor gametes would not be acceptable**, and IVF using **the couple’s gametes could only be allowed** in

the simplest cases where the embryos **were immediately implanted**” (93-94). Therefore, such practical restrictions would probably preclude IVF. for Buddhists. Finally, **natural contraceptive methods** have been permitted since ancient times. Some **modern methods may be considered** permissible as long as they do **not function as abortifacients**. The lack of clear guidance from textual sources has created **disagreement** over the normative Buddhist stance on contraception. On the one hand, since **conception represents a life seeking rebirth**, many Buddhists would be **reticent to block** it; on the other hand, the lack of an imperative to procreate leads other Buddhists to approve of contraception in certain circumstances. (Sr. Laura Diaz Barco, Ethiopia)

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The Buddha taking care of a sick monk from ‘The Life of the Buddha in Pictures’

**There is a healing in the universe.
There is a fabric that holds things together.
When it is ready...in its own good time,
Shall it not bind together...all of us?**

From The Wave by Clair McDermott



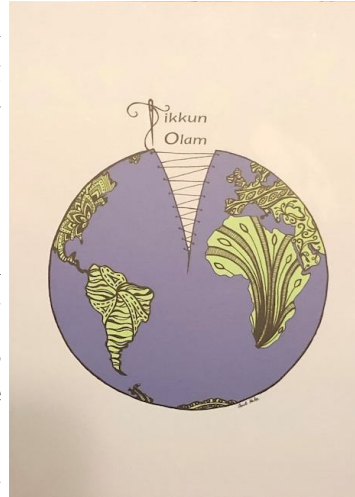
WENS SANA IN CORPORE SANO: ON HEALING, WHOLENESS AND HOLINESS SPITUALITY OF HEALTH & WORLD'S RELIGIONS

The intrinsic relationship between **healing, wholeness and holiness** is underlined in most of the world's religions. However, western approach to health has been highly influenced by Plato's dualistic understanding of the person: **the mind/soul versus the body**. Yet, at the beginning of the 20th century, eminent members of the psychoanalytic movement such as Sigmund Freud and Karl Jung, among others, started to challenge the medically assumed dogma that for every condition of the body, there is a physiological cause. Their main claim is that **the way people think and feel influences their total, including physical, health**. Therefore, Freud and Jung argue that it is necessary to listen to patients in order to discover their deepest needs and what really pains them in the context of the whole person. What is more, the notion of **holism**, first proposed in 1926 by statesman Jan Smuts, 'assumes that persons must be looked at in terms of a total configuration, rather than in terms of fragmentation and reductionistic analysis' (Ellison and Smith 1991:35). Paradoxically, the holistic understanding of the human nature is profoundly biblical.

Both the **Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament** words for **flesh**, (*basar, sarx*) refer to the **whole person**, as well as those for **soul**, (*nephesh, psyche*) and **spirit** (*ruah, pneuma*). 'The biblical man', Mork affirms, 'is not a dichotomy of body and soul [...]. He is not an irreconcilable opposition of flesh and spirit, but a unity in which the spirit leads' (1967:142). What is more, the biblical term *shalom*, which occurs more than 250 times in the Hebrew scripture, includes the notion of fulfillment, wholeness, completeness, harmony and well-being. While sickness and death are interpreted as the result of sin and render the patient unclean and unholy, *shalom* or well-being entails **the restoration of the fourfold relationship**: with God, with the others, with the creation and with one self. *Shalom* entails **equilibrium**: a person harmoniously at

peace within and without. Although the Fall prevents individuals from fully experiencing *shalom*, they are equipped to gradually achieve higher degrees of it.

In this regard, **mystical Judaism** has an extremely interesting theological concept which is *Tikkun Olam*, generally translated as **repairing, mending, restoring, healing or bringing to completion the world**. In order to make room for creation, God contracted the divine self and the divine light became contained in special vessels,



some of which shattered and scattered in the created order. While most of the light returned to its divine source, some light got trapped in the broken shards, which represent evil empowered by the divine sparks of light. Those divine sparks can be **retrieved and restored to God** in this world **through humble ethic-spiritual actions and encounters**. Gestures of **compassion**, *hesed*, righteousness and justice towards the Other bring about **healing, wholeness and holiness**. Healing the world, *Tikkun Olam*, entails **becoming God's partners in the act of creation**, treating one another with care and respect, caring about the environment and ultimately **restoring the brokenness of the world** and by so doing restoring the relationship with God.

Jesus' public ministry exemplifies the intrinsic connection between healing, wholeness and holiness. **The healing of the woman with an issue of blood** (Mk 5:21-43) comes in handy because the narrative underlines that the efforts of many physicians were vain (v. 26). Her ailment seems to be **beyond the physical**. This anonymous woman not only has been seriously ill for twelve years, but she is also ritually impure (cfr. Lev 15) and socially ostracized since her touch would also render others ritually impure. She desperately **searches for wholeness and holiness** in order to be accepted in society. Her story is carefully intertwined with **Jairu's daughter's story**, a twelve year old girl in the brink of death just

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when she is about her childbearing years. The association of both female figures is poignant. The constant flow of blood, which is one's life force, inevitably hampers the woman's capacity for conceiving children. It is the woman's faith which brings about her healing; metaphysical healing leads to physical healing.

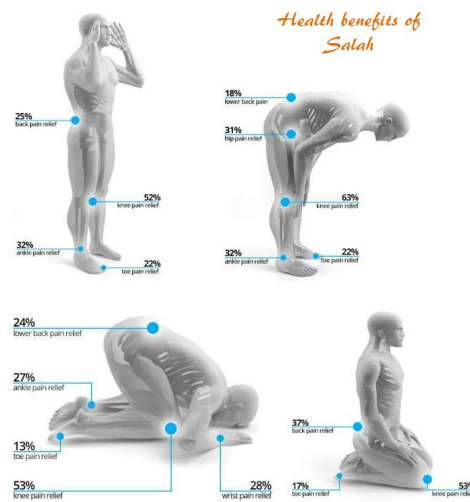
Immediately, Jesus addresses the woman as **daughter**; she is raised back to **life**, '*talitha kum*', and **her relationships healed and restored**. Interestingly, the **solution** to her predicament **comes from her own self, will and faith**. She has the courage to approach Jesus from behind and touch him. The desire to be whole again leads her to wholeness.

What is more, the woman with the issue of blood also speaks to us about the way we deal with illness. We usually are under the impression that sickness is an external force which invades our body and that we play a passive role in it. However, our style of life matters. **Healthy habits and positive attitudes** towards others help us to **be and feel whole**. '*The unexamined life is not worth living*'; this principle attributed to Socrates is an encouragement to **discipline our body, our mind and our emotions**. The examined life requires allocating **time and space for introspection and self-examination**; a time set aside to **'touch' the divine** within us and attempt to make sense of ourselves and the world around us; a time to examine our virtuous life and **feel loved and reenergized** to resume the journey towards holiness and wholeness, *shalom*. It is worth noting that in traditional Semitic philosophical systems such as the Jewish, the Islamic and the Ethiopian, **the heart**, rather than the mind, is **the seat of wisdom**, compassion and spiritual discernment. Striving to live a virtuous ethical life is in itself a journey to healing, wholeness and holiness.

Conversely, **in Islamic medicine**, psychiatry has been an important element since the 8th century. Al-Balkhi emphasized the need for physicians **not to ignore psychological aspects behind physical illnesses**, believing that most physical ailments had a psychological basis. Modern Muslims describe health as a 'state of **complete physical, psychological, social and spiritual well-being**' (Khayat, 1999). .

What is more, Scholars discuss **the spiritual and physical** enhancing aspects of Muslim **ritual prayer (salat)** and meditation (*dhikr*). *Salat*, performed at five daily appointed times, includes various gestures: standing, raising and lowering arms, bowing, sitting on shins, prostration and head rotation. The therapeutic aspects of *salat* have been examined in relation to its promotion of psycho-physical well-being.

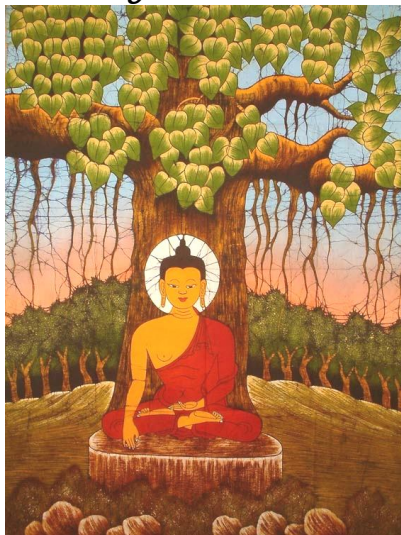
Furthermore, it has been noted the correspondence between *salat* and **Indian yoga, in that both require a unification of body and mind.** Ritualized body movements stimulate affective states. A case in point is *Dhikr*, a meditative-based practice which can be performed either individually or collectively. *Dhikr*, rather than incorporating a single standardized form, comprises many features, some of which have been borrowed from older religious traditions like the use of the **rosary or the verbal or silent chanting, wazifa**, of one or more of the Divine Names. Prolonged and repetitive ritual body movements, while enabling individuals to intensify their **state of communion with the sacred Other**, may lead to **psychological equilibrium**, produce a state of calmness, reduce stress hormones, activate endogenous opioids, which



reduce **the pain** and even enhance the immune system.

Eastern religions are also known for having a **holistic spirituality**, understanding of the **human being** and, therefore, approach to **health**. Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism believe human existence is part of an **ongoing cycle of multiple lifetimes (samsara)** the circumstances of which are governed by **one's deeds or actions (karma)**.

The quality of one's present life is determined by the quality of one's past life (especially moral life). The aim is to transcend the cycle of continues rebirths and attaining **liberation**, which Hindus called *moksha*. The collection of **methods to attain moksha** is called **yoga**, from a root which means "to join". Any system of belief and practice which unites the



seeker with the ultimate reality (*brahman*) can be called yoga. Although one of the most famous Indian's poets considered the body as the main instrument for attending *mokṣa*, the Hindu religious tradition associates the word **yoga with the control of the body as well as the mind**. Meditation and mindfulness, central to Buddhism, have a very **positive impact on health**, as previously argued from Muslim perspective. Moreover, good health is the result of good *karma* in the past. **Good deeds lead to good health**, while bad deeds in this or previous life bring illness. Any patient is encouraged cultivation of a wholesome

mindset through **contemplation of the *dharma* and consideration of one's own spiritual virtues**. In Hinduism persists the idea that illnesses may be caused by extra-medical or even magical sources such as the evil eye, curses, etc. Therefore, Hindus, have an extraordinary confidence in mantras, yogas, divine or saintly interventions to cure ailments.

Last, but not least, it is absolutely vital to say a word about the **African Traditional Religions**, in which healing, wholeness and holiness play a massive role. **Healing** is a part of the complex religious attempt to bring the **spiritual and physical** aspects of the universe as well as **human beings** who live in it, into a **harmonious unity and wholeness**. In African traditional medicine, **illness** is not caused by germs but by the **breach of natural laws**. The restoration of this law through rituals, and in most cases payment of fines, will help **to restore**, maintain and correct **human disorder**. Human actions and activities are capable of breaching moral codes and societal harmony, resulting to breakdown of the spiritual, emotional, social, environmental or biophysical conditions. Therefore, in African traditional medicines, sickness and ailment are addressed through physical, psychological, social, economic and several other avenues, which are mostly ignored in Western medicine.

What about us, Comboni Missionary Sisters, **crossing the threshold of our 150 years of history? What has the encounter with World's Religions said to us about healing, wholeness and holiness?** In *Laudato Si*, Francis emphasizes "how everything is interconnected" (n. 138).

The Jubilee year necessarily invites to do an exercise of self-examination. The question is not only whether we have genuinely engaged in dialogue with the concept and practice of health present in the realities where we live and serve but also whether we have learnt something and made it our own.

In my opinion, sometimes we carry a certain degree of skepticism towards the unknown which might hinder our interest towards the Other, especially in an extremely delicate field such as health. Moreover, we have to comply with official rules and regulations, put in place to assure high standards. However, professionalism and quality service are not necessarily at odds with interest, humble respect and desire to be evangelized by the encounter with the world of the Other. I have always found fascinating how Ethiopian Christianity engaged with existing beliefs and practices. For instance, traditional healing scrolls, believed to purge evil spirits and alleviate spiritual symptoms, were transformed into Christian artifacts by incorporating Christian texts and angelic figures. The scrolls are ritually prepared by deacons and function as domestic icons. Religion heals not only by the way of miracles but also by the



Detail of Ethiopian healing scroll

way influences individual's thoughts and emotions. **What role does spirituality plays in our service?**

The art of healing give us the **opportunity** to connect with the most **intimate and fragile** part of the person; to 'touch' the divine present in each one of us; to **reveal God's tender face** through gestures of kindness and care. Ultimately, the art of healing is a precious and unique **space for the proclamation of the Gospel.**

(Sr. Laura Diaz Barco, Ethiopia)

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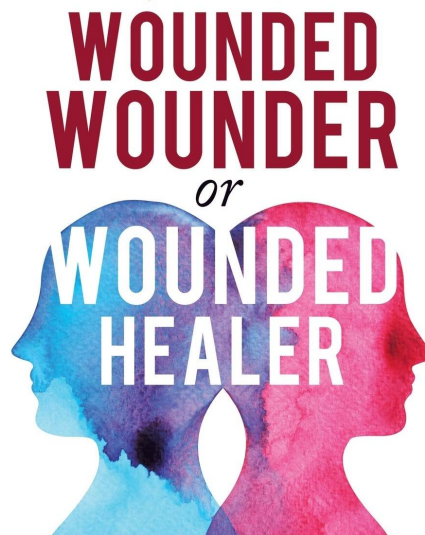
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ON TREATING PAIN: THE WOUNDED HEALER

Jung proposes a revolutionary approach to Western healing practice through the mythical archetype of the **Wounded Healer**. The Wounded Healer is the **one who knows how to heal** because he has also suffered. The healer is called to explore his own wounds in order to become more emphatic. According to the Greek myth, the centaur **Chiron**, greatly skilled as a doctor, gets badly injured with one of the poisonous Hercules' arrows and is doomed to continue healing in agony. Parallels of the Wounded Healer are found in African Shamanistic traditions, the ideas of the medieval Moslem physician Al-Razi and a Jewish Talmudic story. What is more, **Jesus Christ** is the Wounded Healer par excellence, the Crucified one. Empathy, capacity to enter someone else's feelings, and sympathy, compassion towards somebody else's pain, are essential virtues to accompany someone in pain and reduce the isolation and solitude which illness might cause.

However, these virtues are to be cultivated, first and foremost, by exploring one's own wounds. The humility which arises out of awareness of one's fragility and wounds is a necessary tool to be present to patients in a non-judgmental way.

"One who knows his lot to be the lot of all other men is a safe man to guide them. One who recognizes all men as members of his own body is a sound man to guard them" (Laotzu).



Dialogue of Life and Health

Encountering the Other in the sick

I am Sr. Maria Villar Sesma Gomez and I am currently living in Egypt. I arrived for the first time in this land in September 1980. At that time, I worked in many different places: in our clinics, in the Public Hospitals of Edfu and Aswan and in the Leprosy Centre of Abuzaabel. After years of service, I left Egypt for 15 years in order to work in Peru as missionary animator and vocation promoter. Then, I came back to continue ministering in the area of health. For the last 3 years, I have been working in Aswan at the clinic in which Sr. Giuseppa Scandola used to work. I always ask her protection and help.

Everyday circa a hundred people from the periphery and the villages around Aswan come to our clinic. In general, our patients are very poor and 90% are Muslim.

The Mission in the Muslim world consists of a daily dialogue of life. Although we cannot talk about Jesus, we can create fraternity by respecting others' beliefs and ideology, by loving them as brothers and



sisters, sons and daughters of the same Father (God). When one embraces this attitude, life becomes easier and more beautiful and chances of working together for the poor and needy multiply.

In one of the villages where I worked, a group of Christian and Muslim women used to teach together other women how to take care of their babies (Mother and child care formation).

Another group of women, bearing in mind the need of preventing incidents which might provoke burns, used to come around with me to the different villages to raise awareness. The

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people of the villages marvelled at seeing them working together for the common good.

I am glad and I thank God for granting me daily chances of serving him and taking care of him through the brothers and sisters I come across. Even if at times we might meet fanatic people, in most of the cases, people are humble and trust us greatly. We love and respect each other. Visiting the families of Muslim or Christian patients creates strong bonds of fraternity. I remember a Muslim chief I used to pay daily visits for a long period of time in order to cure his wounds. Once the Lord restored him to health, he started calling me 'my sister'.

I have always tried to love every one. I have been living

my service with all my physical and spiritual capacities, convinced that I am serving God in all these people. I feel that I am proclaiming the Gospel with my life, even if I do not always manage.

Pope Francis emphasizes the significance of respect towards the other. I believe that respect is the only way to meet each other and evangelize.

God, Father of all, has many different ways to draw his children to himself. and dialogue.

My greatest desire is to contribute with my small seed to make possible We will create a more fraternal and welcoming world where everybody could live in peace only through respect God's dream that "all may be one".

(Sr. Maria Villar, Egypt Province)



Taking care of the sick, supporting hope and growing in faith among peoples and religions

I am sr. Elisabetta Raule, I am a medical doctor and I have been working in Chad for the last 11 years. I give thanks to the Lord every day for having called me to this life. I am also grateful to the Comboni Missionary sisters for accepting me and giving me the chance of proclaiming the Gospel through both what I am and my profession as medical doctor.

Since I was a child, I felt the desire of serving the Lord in the sick and of committing all my life to Him and to the poor. My family transmitted me a firm Christian faith during my childhood. Then, I understood that I could not keep the gift of faith only for me. I feel privileged because the Lord allowed me to meet the Comboni Missionary sisters, who asked me to go first to Mozambique and later to Chad.

Chad, located in the middle of the Sahara desert, is a landlocked country like South Sudan. In Chad, there are approximately 200 diverse ethnic groups, some of which are nomads and others are Arabs. Apart from Arabic and French, which are the two



national languages, there are many other local languages. People from different cultures, ethnic groups and religions strive to live together. Muslims are the majority (55%), followed by Protestants (25%), Catholics (15%) and followers of the African Traditional Religion (5%). This polyhedral reality hosts our community of Bebedjia which is fully dedicated to the service of the sick in the hospital of the dioceses of Doba. The hospital is an extraordinary space of encounter of different cultures, religious traditions and peoples who arrive from far, even from foreign countries. Sickness is what unites all the people who come to the hospital. We try to bear witness by welcoming and caring for all of them regardless of their background. We also promote collaboration and respect among the hospital staff members. This is a

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great challenge! We start the day praying together in the wards. This is a tough and poverty-stricken reality. Most of the patients arrived in the hospital in grave conditions, after having visited the sorcerer. Nonetheless, being here in the midst of suffering as a sign of hope is indeed God's grace.

I spend many hours in the middle of the sick. Pregnant women share with me their delicate problems. I feel fortunate to be a consecrated woman and a medical doctor because I manage to create intimacy with them, to know their secrets, to understand them better in order to alleviate their suffering. In my service, I face many challenges which often times make me worry. Although I carry the big responsibility of taking vital decisions about patients' lives, I trust the Lord, who sustains me. Being constantly in touch with life and death leads me to deepen my experience of faith.

The country is continuously marked by tribal conflicts among farmers (mostly Catholics and Protestants) and cattle-raisers (nomads and Arabs, mostly Muslims). On the top of that, last year the President, who had been in power for more than 30 years, was killed. As a result, Chad is currently involved in insecurity. A military government has been recently sworn in. This transitory government is formed by the very same people who had the President killed. The youth find it difficult to study and even more difficult to find a job. However, despite the challenges, this people have a profound faith in God's Providence. Their faith is already a sign that the Kingdom of God is in our midst.

(Sr. Elisabetta Raule,
Tchad Province)

