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# Illuminating rlung: The Vital Energy of Tibetan Medicine

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*SIT Study Abroad*

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## Abstract

According to Tibetan Medicine, *rlung* is one of the three principal energies of the human body; *rlung* can be translated loosely as “wind” because its predominate element is air. It is responsible for all movement internal and external to the body, from the circulation of blood to the movement of limbs. *rLung* is the “vehicle” of consciousness, the force which holds and moves the mind. According to the *rGyud-bZhi*, the traditional Tibetan medical text, *rlung* is the beginning and end of disease because of its pervasive nature and its close relationship with the mind; it has the power to spread and strengthen disease. It is therefore important to understand its nature, function, and disfunction as related to the mind and the body in order to maintain health. *rLung* is associated with insomnia, chronic stress and anxiety, depression, heart palpitations and other heart conditions, stiffness in the body, various digestive problems, among many more physical and mental ailments. There are a variety of factors, ranging from diet and lifestyle to season and environment, that create *rlung* imbalance and disease. Primary psychological causes, according to Tibetan Medicine, are desire, excessive thought or mental exercise, and wrong-view. Most, if not all the Tibetan doctors I spoke with related to me that *rlung* is most usually developed in “foreign”(European and American) patients and people who meditate. They continued, saying that it is also becoming much more common in other patients as well.

There are a number of factors contributing to these findings. Perhaps the strongest is the psychological, primarily the increasing stress of modern lifestyles. Allopathic medicine has yet to recognize *rlung*, thus there is no framework in which to know how to take care of it. Because allopathic medicine is the leader of modern healthcare, it is important for it to integrate conceptions of *rlung* as to better diagnose and more holistically treat disorders related to *rlung*. Treating *rlung* in Tibetan medicine is a multi-dimensional process that includes lifestyle changes, medicine, external therapies, and relaxation techniques. Perhaps the strongest treatment is the preventative; learning to become aware of *rlung* and its effects can foster greater understandings in how to maintain healthy *rlung*, and thus a healthy mind and body.

The following study is a result of my stay in Dharamsala, a cultural heart of Tibetan Buddhism and medicine being the headquarters for the the main Men Tsee Khang Clinic and College and the home of the Dalai Lama. During the month of November 2013, I had the opportunity to meet with many Tibetan doctors, Buddhist practitioners and scholars, and people who deal with *rlung* related illness. It is from these meetings that I have gathered a fuller understanding of *rlung* and its effects. I have supplemented this knowledge with readings about Tibetan Medicine and Buddhism written by great scholars.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Kalsang Dechen, who facilitated my interviews with the doctors at Men Tsee Khang. I feel extremely grateful to all the professionals who have given their valuable time imparting their knowledge to me. Finally, I could have not accomplished this project without the support and guidance from Isabelle Onians, Hubert and Nazneen Decler, Eben Yonnetti, and Tenzin Choezom. It has truly been an amazing experience to be able to spend time with such brilliant and engaging people, who have dedicated their lives to sharing knowledge and helping others. I dedicate this work to them.

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## Introduction

*rLung* (རླང) is the “essence of [Tibetan] culture” because it is a central concept in both Tibetan medicine and Buddhism, Dr. Nyima Tsering, a recently graduated Tibetan doctor explained. In Tibetan medicine, *rlung* is one of the three principal energies that compose and govern the body as well as create and develop disease. It is usually translated as the wind humor, since its predominant element is air. *rLung* is associated primarily with the physical faculties of movement and is known to be the vehicle for the mind and consciousness to exist and move. As the seat of consciousness, it is a central part of the Buddhist practice; in order to transform the mind, one must also transform and control *rlung*<sup>1</sup>. *rLung*, while it is essential for healthy physical and mental processes, can become disturbed, through a myriad of causes, and generate disease. Some of these causes are desire and wrong-view, and excessive thought, concentration, and mental exercise. These psychological habits can provoke physical ailments such as heart pain and palpitations, headaches, and circulation problems, along with emotional and mental disorders, such as anxiety and depression. It is important to understand the process in which *rlung* imbalances generate disease. Due to its mobile and unreliable nature and its close association with the mind, *rlung* is described by the traditional medical texts as being the beginning and end of disease. *rLung* has the ability to develop, strengthen, and spread disease<sup>1</sup>. Many meditators develop *rlung* because their practice involves prolonged mental exercise. In addition, *rlung* imbalance is widespread in “Western” patients and becoming much more common as lifestyles become plagued by stress and competition.

With the world rapidly industrializing, lifestyles are generally becoming busier and more stressed; as one meditation teacher from the Tushita Retreat Center puts it, “we have become disconnected with our bodies” and too often live in our minds. This could very well be one reason why *rlung* related diseases are much more common<sup>2</sup>. Many of the Tibetan doctors I spoke with described that many of the foreign (“Western”) patients that visit them have *rlung* related disorders. They relate these to this modern lifestyle and the lack of *rlung* understanding in allopathic practices. Indeed, *rlung* is a part of Tibetan medicine and culture that holds no equivalent in any modern medical frameworks. Modern allopathic medicine does not recognize *rlung* because it cannot be measured empirically through laboratory tests, whereas in Tibetan medicine, *rlung* is known through various diagnostic techniques and is apparent through its functions.

The Tibetan approach to treatment is holistic and penetrates the underlying causes of disease. There are many kinds of treatment available for *rlung* disorder: from diet and lifestyle changes to medication and external therapies such as massage, moxibustion, and compression. Yoga, breathing exercises, and meditation also have a substantial effect in maintaining healthy *rlung*. The highest form of these is Tantra, which has a developed an in depth understanding of *rlung*, its flow through the body, its relationship to consciousness, and the ways in which one can come to control and transform *rlung* to achieve enlightenment.

Integrating conceptions of *rlung* into allopathic treatment and into Western frameworks of health and body “would better serve the people” because it would give a fuller picture of the human body and the diseases that harm it<sup>3</sup>. The purpose of this paper is

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1 Dr. Namdhol Lhamo (Traditional Tibetan Doctor) in discussion with the author, November 2013.

2 Dr. Namdol Lhamo

illustrate what *rlung* is, how it functions and exists in our bodies, so that we may have a better understanding of how to care for it and maintain balance and health amidst the quickly flowing currents of modernization.

## **1. Background in Tibetan Medicine**

### *Buddhism, Tibetan Medicine, and rLung*

Buddhism and Tibetan Medicine are strongly interwoven. When asked about the relationship between Tibetan Medicine and Buddhism, Dr. Pasang Wangdu, vice principal of Men Tsee Khang College, responded “its like asking whats the relationship between the body and the mind...Tibetan medicine without Buddhism is like a bird without wings”. The influence of Buddhism on the medical practice is demonstrated in the religious nature of the main medical text. The *rGyud bzhi*, known as the four Tantras, is the fundamental medical text of Tibetan Medicine. This book is the most studied and the mostly widely referred to text of the whole medical canon. This text is believed to be passed down from Śākyamuni Buddha, himself, as the text begins with "Thus have I heard, at one time...", in the style of a Buddhist Sutra. Indeed, the *rGyud bzhi*, is “considered a divine work”.<sup>3</sup> The foundation of the Tibetan Medical framework is Buddhist teachings.

Buddha taught that ignorance (*Ma rig pa*) is the root of all suffering. Ignorance “refers to a state of mind that not only is not aware of how things actually exist, but also misconceives the nature of phenomena”.<sup>4</sup> It is because of this ignorance, Buddha teaches, that we are born into samsara<sup>5</sup>. Tibetan medicine holds this truth as the main tenant of the practice; disease, in all its forms, is also rooted in ignorance. Tibetan medicine holds that the body is created because of ignorance. We exist in samsara, and thus we are all born with ignorance, and thus disease. Ignorance creates the three mental poisons<sup>6</sup>: desire, hatred, and obscuration. These disturb the three principal energies, or humors, of the body, *rlung* (*loong*), *mkhrispa* (*tripa*), and *badken* (*Baekan*), respectively.<sup>7</sup> When the three energies are disturbed, so too are the body and the mind<sup>8</sup>. As Dr. Yeshe Donden describes it, “basically all disorders have their origin in the mental environment of the past -prior afflictive emotions- and it is these mental factors that are ultimately responsible for all types of disorders”.<sup>9</sup> Tibetan medicine, as Buddhism, teaches that the mind is the creator and destroyer. It can cause both disease and health, depending on the thoughts and emotions that are predominant in one's experience<sup>10</sup>.

The centrality of the mind in Tibetan medicine demonstrates Buddhism's active

3 Fenner, Todd. "The Origin of the Rgyud Bzhi: A Tibetan Medical Tantra

[Http://www.thlib.org/encyclopedias/literary/genres/genres-book.php#lbook=/studies-in-genres/b27/#ixzz2mEsWJbwo](http://www.thlib.org/encyclopedias/literary/genres/genres-book.php#lbook=/studies-in-genres/b27/#ixzz2mEsWJbwo)." *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*: 458-69.

4 Donden, Dr. Yeshe. “Health through Balance: An Introduction to Tibetan Medicine”. Snow Lion Publication. Ithaca, New York. 1986.

5 Samsara is described by Dr. Yeshe Donden as the “cyclic existence, in the round of repeated birth, aging, sickness, and death” (Health Through Balance, p. 26)

6 afflictive emotions

7 The three humors, *rLung*, *mKhrispa*, and *Badken* are actually believed to have their origination in the three mental poisons, desire, hatred, obscuration, respectively.

8 Dr. Tsering Thakchoe (Traditional Tibetan Doctor and scholar) in discussion with the author, November 2013

9 Donden, Dr. Yeshe p.16

10 Dr. Tsewang Tamdin (Visiting Physician to H.H. Dalai Lama) in discussion with the author, November 2013

influence on the science. In addition, this centrality of mind also makes *rlung* such an essential concept in understanding health and disease in the Tibetan framework. As Dr. Tsering Thakchoe points out, “one part [of the creation of disease] is ignorance and the other is *rlung*”<sup>11</sup>. This is because the mind and *rlung* are inseparable. *rLung* is the vehicle in which the mind dwells and is able to move. If we are to train the mind, to induce health and wellbeing of ourselves and others, we must also train and transform *rlung*<sup>12</sup>.

### *The Five Elements and the Three Principal Energies*

Dr. Yeshe Donden describes that “all animate and inanimate phenomena, according to Buddhism, have the same material basis, that is everything is composed of, or exists dependent upon the five cosmic energies.”<sup>13</sup> Tibetan medicine, as most traditional medicines, believe that the universe and all living bodies are composed of the five basic elements. The five elements of Tibetan medicine are earth, water, fire, air (wind), and space. It is important to note that each element indeed has all the other elements within it, but is predominately composed of one<sup>14</sup>. The Explanatory Tantra (*Bshad-rgyud*) describes each element's purpose:

Without the element Earth, no matter can be formed; without Water, there will be no cohesion; without Fire, the fetus cannot mature; without Air, there will be no growth, and without Space, there will be no room for growth (p.46-47).

Earth serves as the foundation, or the substance, of form. Water allows things to mix and adjoin to each other. Fire causes things to mature and to become ripe. Air (wind) moves things and causes them to grow. Finally, space provides the opportunity for growth. All work together in the human body to sustain life<sup>15</sup>.

The five elements make up the three principal energies of life. The three humors, *rlung*, *mkrispa*, and *badken*, are “the basic necessities of our living survival and can also be the causes of disease through imbalance”.<sup>16</sup> *rLung* can be translated as “wind” or “mobile energy” and is composed primarily of air; it is responsible for movement. *mKrispa* is translated as “bile”, is predominately composed of fire, and is responsible for metabolism. *Badken*, or phlegm, is composed of the elements of earth and water and is responsible for the lubrication of the body and the coherence of its parts. Thus the three humors' functions correspond to their predominate elements.

Each humor has unique characteristics that define it. According to the Explanatory Tantra, *rlung* is rough, light, cold, subtle, hard and mobile. *mKrispa* is slightly oily, sharp, hot, light, malodorous, purgative and moist. While *badken* is oily, cool, heavy, blunt, smooth, stable and sticky.<sup>17</sup> These characteristics can be felt in the pulse, indicating one's physiology and suggesting antidotes to imbalances.<sup>18</sup>

Broadly speaking, *rlung* is responsible for the many kinds of movement in the body: respiration, circulation of blood and the other bodily constituents, excretion of bodily wastes, and the actions of the body, speech, and mind. *mKrispa* energy is

11 Dr. Tsering Thakchoe,

12 Dr. Namdol Lhamo

13 Dummer, Thomas G. *Tibetan Medicine and Other Holistic Health-care Systems*. London: Routledge, 1988. Print.

14 Dr. Namdol Lhamo

15 Donden, Dr. Yeshe p. 47

16 Dr. Namdol Lhamo

17 p.79

18 Dr. Nyima Tsering (Traditional Tibetan Doctor) in discussion with the author. November 6, 2013



associated with maintaining bodily heat, inducing appetite, digesting food, and clearing complexion. *Badken* lubricates and connects the joints, induces sleep, and promotes physical and mental stability and tolerance<sup>19</sup>. Each humor has five main types that perform different functions throughout the body.<sup>20</sup>

Each of the humors correspond to one of the three afflictive emotions. Delusion, or obscuration, “involves a heaviness of mind” and so it is related to *badken* (refer to its characteristics). Hatred and anger are associated with heat and increase blood and bile in the body and so relate to *mkrispa*.<sup>21</sup> Desire causes the mind to move constantly and thus is related to *rlung*. These correspondences, in part, governs the humors' location in the body. The Explanatory Tantra describes this relationship:

Delusion being reliance upon brain is located in the brain. Since *baekan* arises from delusion, *baekan* is dominantly located in the upper part of the body. Another channel extends in the middle part of the body to form the aorta and its subsequent branches. Due to anger being reliance upon blood in the vessel, and *tripa* arising from anger, *tripa* is dominantly located in the middle part of the body. The last channel branches downward to form the male and female secret organs. Desire being reliance upon the secret organs and *loong* arising from desire, *loong* is dominantly located in the lower part of the body(p.62).

While all of the energies are located from head to toe, they have predominance in specific areas and parts of the body. *rLung* resides primarily in the bones, skin, ears, and the colon. *mKrispa* is predominately located in the stomach, blood, sweat glands, eyes, and skin. *Badkan* resides in the chest, throat, lungs, head, nose, and tongue<sup>22</sup>. Imbalance in the humors can causes diseases particular to the areas they dominate. Imbalances in one humor or part of the body can also disturb another. The three humors work together to ensure proper functioning of the mind and body. Balance between them is essential in order to maintain health.

#### *Causes and Conditions of Imbalance and Disease in Brief*

Cause of disease is very comprehensive in Tibetan Medicine. As previously discussed, the farthest and root cause is ignorance. Ignorance is with us all the time, like a shadow, because we exist in samsara. Immediate causes are related to imbalances or disturbances in *rlung*, *mkrispa*, and *badken*. But these causes will not manifest as diseases until they come in contact with the proper conditions. Just like a seed you sow in the ground, disease won't grow unless you supply it with the right conditions. In order for an imbalance to manifest into disease, one has to come across certain conditions. Conditions include personality, diet, age, lifestyle and behavior, seasonal influences, and mental conditions (evil spirits). Of these, diet and lifestyle are the two main conditions.<sup>23</sup>

19 The Explanatory Tantra p. 76

20 “The five types of *loong* are life-sustaining *loong*, ascending *loong*, pervasive *loong*, fire-accompanying *loong* and descending *loong*. five types of *tripa* are digestive *tripa*, color-transforming *tripa*, accomplishing *tripa*, sight *tripa* and complexion-clearing *tripa*. The five types of *baekan* are supporting *baekan*, decomposing *baekan*, experiencing *baekan*, satisfying *baekan* and connecting *baekan*.” (p.74-75 of Explanatory Tantra)

21 Donden, Dr. Yeshe, p. 38

22 Dr. Namdol Lhamo

23 Dr. Namdol Lhamo

## 2. rLung

The only permanence is change itself. Life is ever-moving and ever-changing. In our lives we experience constant growth and change as we move from life to death. Our mind, too, is a flowing river, changing from one moment to the next. All movement is *rlung*.<sup>24</sup> It exists both internally and externally to the body and “is the driving force” of all movement and change, according to Dr. Namdol Lhamo. While *rlung* can be translated as “wind”, this is not a comprehensive translation because it connotes only the wind in regards to weather.<sup>25</sup> But this translation pertains because *rlung* is a force, like wind, that moves and as itself cannot be seen. *rLung* should be understood, more so, as an energy. *rLung* can be compared to Chinese *Ch'i*, which is the uniter of *yin* and *yang*, or Ayurvedic *Vata*, “the king of the doshas”; all of these are “the primordial all-pervading universal energy”<sup>26 27</sup>.

*rLung* allows us to exist as sentient beings. Mental consciousness needs to be amalgamated to a body to become a being. *rLung*, being the vehicle of the mind, helps unite the mind to the body<sup>28</sup>. It provides the basis for our thoughts to wander, our understandings to grow, and our minds to learn. It sustains our very life, moment to moment. *rLung* is movement.

*rLung* is a vital concept in Tibetan health-care. *rLung* is understood as both the beginning and end of disease because of its movement faculty and its close relationship to the mind.<sup>29</sup> In fact, “most often Tibetan physicians try to understand the body through the various *rlung* functions and also through the forms of *rlung* disharmony in the pathological sense”.<sup>30</sup> Let us move to understand more of *rlung*'s relationship with the mind and in the body.

### *rLung and the Mind*

The mind is that which cognizes and which is clarity. The mind cognizes because its main function is to perceive and know objects. The mind is clarity because is it formless and because it actually has the power to perceive and to know. Thought, awareness, mind, and cognizer can be considered synonyms. Mind includes both mental (conceptual) and sensory awareness and subtle and gross mind. Gross mind is our everyday waking mind. Subtle mind only manifests during sleep, at death, and through deep meditation. Although the mind lacks form, it is very much related to form, related to body. The mind, in its various forms, is located throughout the body on the mount of the different winds.<sup>31</sup>

“The mind is to be seen as stream of procession,” in constant movement.<sup>32</sup> *Rlung* is

24 Dorjee, Pema, Janet a, and Terence Moore. *Heal Your Spirit, Heal Yourself: The Spiritual Medicine of Tibet*. London: Watkins, 2005. Print. (p.161)

25 Dummer, Tom. p. 148

26 Dr. Vibhor Sharma (Ayurvedic doctor) in discussion with the author. November 2013

27 Chinese medicine believes that the body is composed of yin(heat), yang(cold), and ch'i; Ayurvedic believes the body is composed of three main energies, Vata, Pitta, and Kapha (air, fire, earth, respectively)

28 Dr. Namdol Lhamo

29 Dorjee, Pema, Janet Jones, and Terence Moore p. 164

30 Khangkar, Tsewang Dolkar. *Tibetan Medicine: The Buddhist Way of Healing*. New Delhi: Lustre, 1998. Print. p. 25

31 Gyatso, Geshe Kelsang. “Understanding the Mind: Lorig, an Explanation of the Nature and Functions of the Mind”. Tharpa Publications. London, UK. 1993.

32 Drungtso, Tsering Thakchoe. *Healing Power of Mantra: The Wisdom of Tibetan Healing Science*. Dharamsala: Drungtso Tibetan Healing & Astrological Centre, 2008. Print. p. 143

what allows the mind to move. Dr. Nyima Tsering, like many of the doctors I spoke with, explained that the relationship between the mind and *rlung* can be understood as that between a rider and a horse. The mind is the rider and the horse is *rlung*. Only the rider has no legs in which to move himself and the horse has no eyes in which to perceive. Thus the paralytic mind and the blind horse need each other in order to function; without *rlung*, mind cannot move, without mind, *rlung* cannot perceive. The mind has the power to lead and train the horse, or misuse and exhaust it. The horse has the ability to run wild without any sight to where its going or stay where the rider does not want. When I asked Dr. Tsewang Tamdin where the mind and *rlung* ride, he answered, “Everywhere! They ride to physical body or to empty space, or your mind can [move] somewhere else, to the U.S, [for example]. You can cover miles and miles in one single second!” Tsewang Dolkar Khangkar, explains that “since vital energy (*rlung*) serves as the basis for mental and sense consciousness, linking the mind inseparably to the body, it is essentially an element of the mind, but yet not the mind itself”. But there are some aspects of the mind that are undifferentiated from *rlung*. Dr. Tsering Thakchoe explains that “subtle mind and [subtle] *rlung* are the same, inseparable. He continues, explaining that they, together are the owner of a house, the house and the property being the channels and essential drops<sup>33</sup>, respectively.

#### *Types of rLung and Their Functions*

There are five main types of *rlung*; they are the life-sustaining *rlung*, ascending *rlung*, pervasive *rlung*, fire-accompanying *rlung*, and descending *rlung*<sup>34</sup>. They are located throughout the body and are responsible for different functions corresponding to their location.

Life-sustaining *rlung* can be considered the “main *rlung*”, while the others are supporting<sup>35</sup>. Life-sustaining *rlung* is located at the crown of the head and moves through the throat and chest areas of the body. Some believe that it also resides in the heart. It is associated with swallowing, breathing, spitting and sneezing, and burping. This *rlung* also controls the mind and can sharpen sensory sensation and thinking. It helps to hold the mind in tact; if this *rlung* is disturbed, one can develop insanity. Life sustaining *rlung* can be sub-divided into five secondary *rlung* types, that correspond and support the five sense awarenesses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Life-sustaining *rlung* (as all *rlung*) exists on a spectrum of gross and subtle<sup>36</sup>. Gross life-sustaining *rlung* “maintains the relationship and acts as the link between the body and the mind and is responsible for sustaining life”.<sup>37</sup> Subtle life-sustaining *rlung*, which is the subtlest *rlung*, is the type of *rlung* that travels with consciousness after death into the next life. This is the first *rlung* energy

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33 Essential drops are the most essential nutrients required by the body as part of immune system (Dr. Tsering Thakchoe)

34 *Srog-zin rlung, geng-du rlung, kyab-che rlung, me-nyam rlung, and thur-sel rlung*, respectively

35 Dr. Tsering Thakchoe

36 As discussed previously, *rlung* is characterized as rough, light, cold, subtle, hard and mobile. Here, subtle “denotes its capacity to move everywhere”(Dr. Yeshi Donden p.48) . Within this understanding, all *rlung* is subtle. But there exists a spectrum of *rlung* energy, ranging from very gross to very subtle. Gross *rlung* can be associated with the kinds of *rlung* that govern gross-physical processes. These can be felt as the movement of breath, the pulse of the heart, and the movement of limbs. Subtle *rlung* is only known by great meditators (Dr. Nyima Tsering, 11/6/2013).

37 Drungtso, Tsering Thakchoe p.155

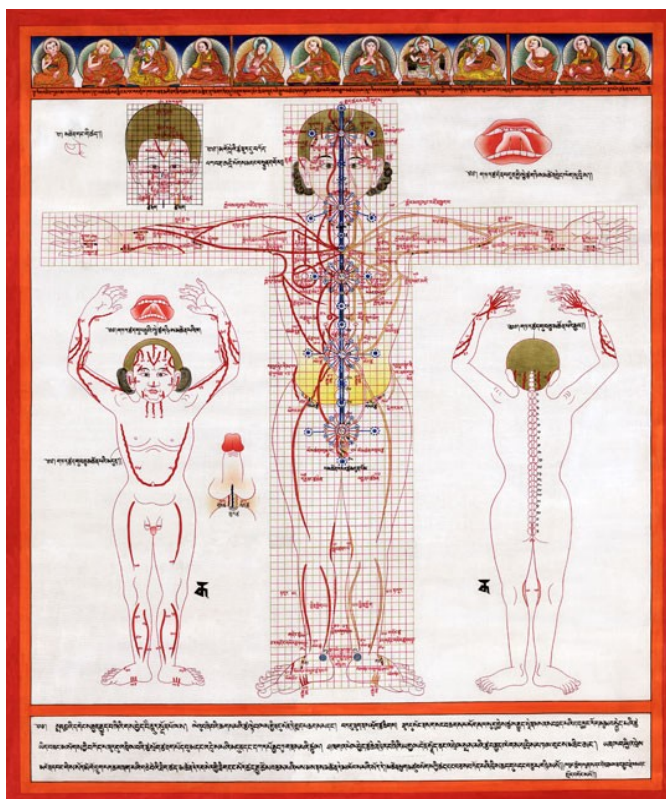
that is present during conception. When we die, gross *rlung* dissolutes into this subtle *rlung*<sup>38</sup>. All the other kinds of *rlung* originate from life-sustaining *rlung*.

Ascending *rlung* is located in and around the chest and moves around the nose, larynx and tongue. It is essential in the production of speech and it promotes general strength and complexion. Ascending *rlung* supports diligence and sharpens memory.

Pervasive *rlung* resides in the heart, yet it pervades the entire body. There is no place in the body that pervasive *rlung* does not function. It is associated with the movement of limbs and the opening and closing of body orifices. Walking, stretching, dancing, and flexing all have to do with pervasive *rlung*.

Fire-accompanying *rlung* is located in the stomach and moves throughout the entire digestive tract. It is responsible for the digestion of food and the separation of nutrients from waste. It is also responsible for metabolizing food into the essential bodily constituents (nutritional essence, blood, muscle, fat, bone, marrow, and regenerative fluid).

Finally, descending *rlung* is located below the navel, in the area of the rectum, and moves throughout the large intestine, the urinary bladder, the genital area, and the thighs. This *rlung* is responsible for the excretion of regenerative fluids, menstrual blood, urine, and feces. This *rlung* aides in the birthing process as well.<sup>39</sup>



*Illustration 1: Tibetan Medical Thangka:  
Interconnecting Blood Vessels and Subtle Channels*

38 Dr. Namdol Lhamo

39 The Explanatory Tantra p. 77-78

### *rLung, Channels, and Chakras*

If the mind and *rlung* are a rider and a horse, one can consider the channels as race tracks.<sup>40</sup> There are said to be about 72,000 channels, or *tsta*, located in the body. *rLung* and other vital substances flow through these channels to nourish all parts of the body. There are both subtle and gross channels. All originate from the navel during conception.

The three main subtle ones are *dbu-ma*, *ro-ma*, and *rkyang-ma*. *dbU-ma* is the first channel formed at conception; it is from this central channel that all the others branch from. *dbU-ma* is the middle channel and runs from the tip of the sex organ to the top of the head from which it then bends down in an arch and ends at the eyebrows. *dbU-ma* is portrayed as blue and is highly associated with subtle life-sustaining *rlung*. During death, everything, including consciousness and the subtlest *rlung* dissolute towards the central channel and then finally to the heart. *Ro-ma* is located to the right of the main channel and is strongly associated with masculinity, the sun, heat, and blood. It is portrayed as red. *rKyang-ma* is located to the left of the central channel and is associated with the feminine, the moon, and the white channels (nerves). It is portrayed as white. Both of these run from the eyebrow to the navel.

Black and white channels, two of the main gross channels, are part of the three main channels. The white channel is associated with the brain and the nervous system. It connects our body internally within the organs and externally with the limbs, muscles, ligaments, and joints. The black channel is a kind of life channel which immediately includes blood vessels, veins and arteries. The black channel is primarily associated with the heart and the liver.

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40 Dummer, Tom p. 37

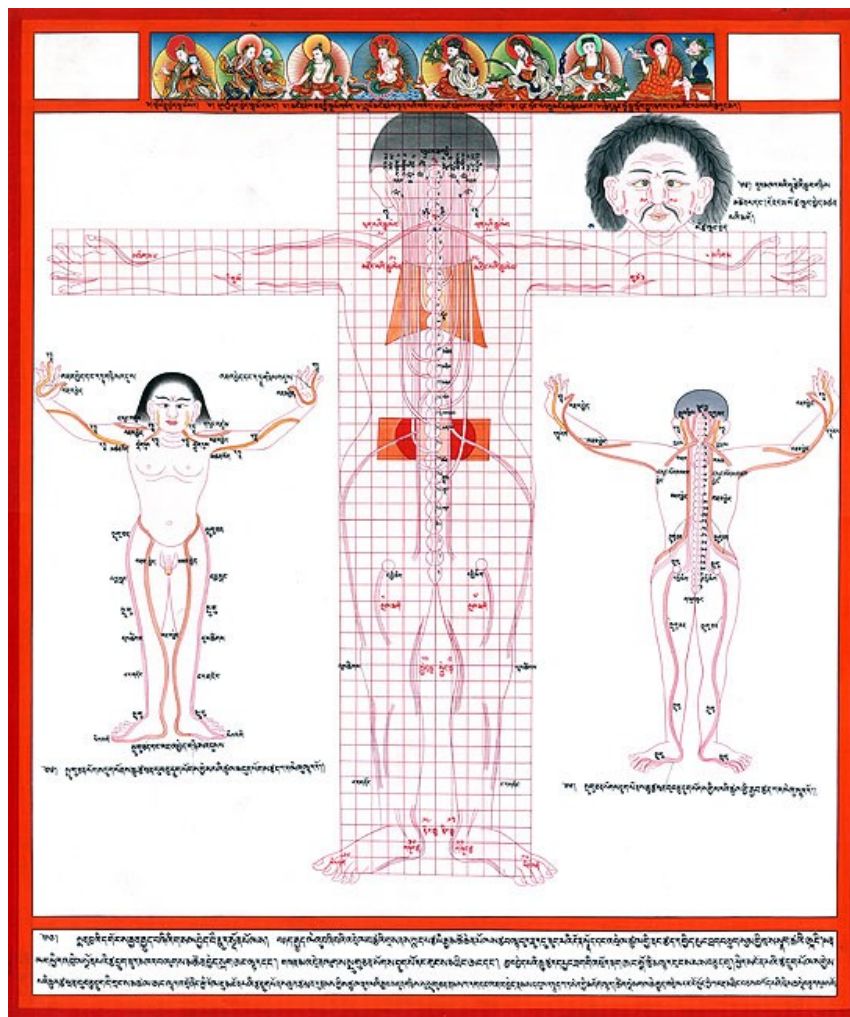


Illustration 2: Tibetan Medical Thangka: The White Channels

*Khorlo*, or chakras, are the places in the body which channels intersect. There are many chakras throughout the body, the main being at the crown, throat, heart, navel, and genitals. These chakras are at the intersections of the three main channels. The five different *rlung* energies resides at these chakras, respectively.<sup>41 42</sup> If our channel and chakras are clear, we experience good health because of there is proper distribution of *rlung* vital substances throughout the body<sup>43</sup>.

#### *rLung Imbalance and Disease*

According to the text, there are 63 different kinds of disease caused by *rlung* imbalance. There are more *rlung* related diseases than the other energies because of its characteristics. There are three main kinds of *rlung* disease; those caused by increases of *rlung*, those caused by deficiencies of *rlung*, and those caused by disturbances of *rlung*. The first two can be described by the metaphor of a glass of water. One doesn't want the glass to

41 Dr. Namdol Lhamo

42 Drungtso, Tsering Thakchoe p.148

43 Dr. Tsewang Tamdin

be too full or too empty. If it is too empty, one's body will not be nourished. If there is too much, it will overflow and make a mess in the surrounding area. If there is too much accumulated *rlung* in one part of the body, it will disturb other parts of the body.<sup>44</sup> A disturbance of *rlung* is a mix of these. Disturbance usually means that *rlung* leaves its own place and flows into another place, resulting in the overflow, blockage, divergence, and disruption of the healthy flow of *rlung*. What is most commonly meant by disturbed *rlung* is that *rlung* as become increased in the wrong area. I will here focus mainly on increased and disturbed *rlung* as these are the most common.<sup>45</sup>

People experiencing deficient *rlung* would experience disorders such as low blood pressure and hypoglycemia. Deficient *rlung* causes lack of energy and digestive problems such as indigestion. Concentration could become weakened and the mind could become very dull and unstable. Memory also becomes unclear. People with *rlung* deficiencies can also become very quiet.

Excess *rlung* can manifest as tremors, abdominal distension, constipation, dizziness, insomnia, and impairment of the sensory organs. Excess of *rlung* in the body can also cause high blood pressure and heart disorders. Those with disturbed *rlung* can also suffer from insomnia and dizziness. They can experience sharp pains all over the body, especially in the joints and during movement. A person suffering from disturbed *rlung* feels restless, inconsequentially talks, and often sighs. Depression, stress, and anxiety are all very common manifestations of excess or disturbed *rlung*.<sup>46 47</sup>

Of course, *rlung* disease largely depends on the kind wind it affects. For example, blockage in the descending wind would cause irregular menstrual cycles, whereas disturbances in pervasive wind would cause joint pain, stiffness in the body, and heart disease. Imbalance in one wind can cause imbalance others; when *rlung* increases, it increases in its own location and then takes the place of other winds and manifests as disease. For example, blockage in descending wind would cause it to move in reverse and could effect the other kinds of *rlung*<sup>48</sup>. This is why constipation can cause problems in the heart and the mind.<sup>49</sup>

Wind imbalance works in a similar way in regards to the other humors. If one has a hot disease (bile), *rlung* has the power to flare it up just like strong winds can spread a forest fire. In the same way, if someone is suffering from a cold disease caused by phlegm, *rlung* can strengthen the chillness of the disease.<sup>50</sup>

Stress, depression, and anxiety, three of the most common causes and symptoms of *rlung* disease can cause further disorder in the body. Dhang<sup>51</sup> is depleted by these strong emotions. With that depletion, a person can become even more sensitive and irritable, lose physical and mental energy, and have lessened appetite. These consequences further the

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44 Dr. Namdol Lhamo

45 Dr. Tsering Thakchoe

46 Dr. Tsewang Tamdin

47 The Explanatory Tantra p. 113-116

48 Dr. Namdol Lhamo

49 Dr. Twewang Tamdin

50 Dr. Namdol Lhamo

51 “The supreme vitality, which is the most refined and subtle part of the bodily constituents. It is responsible for clear complexion, vitality, splendor, health and longevity. Although located in the heart, its effects spread throughout the body”. (The Explanatory Tantra, Glossary of Tibetan Terms)

severity of the already experienced disorder.<sup>52</sup>

*rLung* can incite and strengthen disease in all parts of the body because of its pervasive and mobile nature. Although the most commonly, *rlung* disease affect the pervasive *rlung* and life-sustaining *rlung*. Furthermore, *rLung* is most commonly increased or disturbed, rather than decreased<sup>53</sup>. The most common *rlung* is general stress, depression, anxiety, insomnia, circulation problems, and digestive disorders<sup>54</sup>.

### *Cause and Conditions of rLung*

The main thing in understanding the causes and conditions of *rlung*-related disease is to think of *rlung*'s characteristics: rough, light, cold, subtle, hard and mobile. Everything must be done according to ones own constitution, one's physical and mental state. Everything which is going in excess is not healthy. When one develops habits that excessively put them in contact with externalities of the same nature, *rlung* becomes increased; when one comes in contact with that which is of opposite nature, *rlung* can become decreased<sup>55</sup>.

*rLung* disease stems from a variety of causes and conditions, mainly dietary habits, age, environment, and lifestyle/behavior. Foods with bitter and astringent tastes, light potencies, and cold temperatures will increase *rlung*. Strong brewed tea and coffee are bitter in taste and will increase *rlung* just as spicy foods do. Many raw vegetables and white rice are light and cold in nature will also induce *rlung*. The older the person is, the more likely he would develop *rlung* problems. People who are exposed to high altitudes, cold temperatures, and windy places are more likely to develop increased or disturbed *rlung*. In regards to lifestyle, people who fast for long periods of time, over-exert themselves in physical exercise, or experience excessive vomiting, diarrhea, or bleeding will develop increases or disturbances of *rlung*. Disturbance and blockage of *rlung* often occur when one forcefully suppresses or expels natural urges such as flatulence, yawning, breathing, sneezing, feces, urine, or tears. In addition, indulging in too much sexual activity or inconsequential talking can also agitate *rlung*.

The fundamental cause of *rlung* disease is mental. Desire and attachment are highly correlated with *rlung* disturbances. This is because these mental poisons cause the mind to be in constant movement, wanting one thing to the next or having the mind always return to the object of desire. Strenuous mental exercise and excessive thinking can also cause *rlung* disease; that is why stress is so highly associated with it.<sup>56</sup> Intolerance and impatience can also cause *rlung* imbalances.<sup>57</sup> Through time, these external and internal causes and conditions, among others, can develop into minor and chronic *rlung* disorders.

### **3. Who is Getting rLung and Why?**

#### *Meditation and rLung*

Dr. Namdol Lhamo described that even yoga masters can develop *rlung* problems because they can over-exert or do the practice wrong. She continued saying that many

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52 Dr. Namdol Lhamo

53 Dr. Tsering Thakchoe

54 Dr. Nyima Tsering

55 Dr. Tsering Thakchoe

56 Dr. Nyima Tsering

57 Dr. Tsewang Tamdin



people express that they do lots of meditation, but still are not happy or healthy. Meditation can require extensive amount of mental exercise and concentration; if done wrong, it can result in negative *rlung* imbalances. Dr. Tsewang Tamdin describes this process:

When people meditate, they must go according to their stage and have a proper teacher. Of course, it depends on the person's expectations [and] thoughts; some people go very slow, steady, stage by stage, and they don't feel [many] problems because there are no disturbances or interruptions. And if there are, they can ask the gurus how to handle them. Some people's expectations are too high; they think that what they study can give results in very short period. This is very impossible. They want to be Milarepa<sup>58</sup> [and attain] these kinds of enlightenment. [They can experience] delusion, hallucination, and hyposensitivity, reactivity, sensitivity, and cause imbalance in [their] thinking. [Through time] it can become a disease and cause mental problems [like] insomnia. Then these create physical problems later on.

Meditation can be very helpful in treating *rlung* disorders (see next chapter), but if it is not done properly and give a sense of calm, it can have the opposite effects<sup>59</sup>.

One Geshe described that shamatha<sup>60</sup> meditation, as opposed to analytical meditation, more commonly causes *rlung* imbalance. According to him, this was because it more easily results in wrong-view, which leads delusion, which feeds desire. During retreat, one can lose track of right-view; in addition, the insight they gain from doing retreat is hard to translate into everyday life and so they can experience confusion and stress. Analytical meditation, on the other hand, can be applied to any situation and therefore constantly keeps *rlung* “in check”. When one practices analytical meditation, one remains in a very calm, rational state of mind. He admits though, that one can develop *rlung* if one is “too analytical”.

#### *rlung, the Perceived West, and Modernity*

“*rlung* is quite common in Western culture,” Dr. Tsering Thakchoe and many other doctors explained to me. Dr. Jigme Gedun explained how most commonly his Tibetan patients will suffer from heart and knee problems because of their love for oily and buttery foods; he continued that Indians usually come in with back pain and obesity because they mostly eat spicy, oily, and very sweet kinds of food. When I asked him what foreigners (people from America and Europe) come in for, he hesitated as if he was going to offend me, “...mostly mental”. This sentiment was also shared by Dr. Nyima Tsering and Dr. Tsewang Tamdin who both explained that 90-95% of their foreign<sup>61</sup> patients have some kind of physical or mental *rlung* disorder.

They attributed this in part to diet; in their perspective, these foreigners take too much tea and coffee that increase *rlung*. In addition, they often eat raw vegetables and salads which can lead to *rlung* disturbances.<sup>62</sup> Dr. Jigme attributed it to the different family structure common in the West; he explains, “I've heard that in Western countries, at the age of eighteen, they must leave their parents”. He continued later, “if a westerner lost his work, he would probably get depressed...but if a Tibetan lost their work, he would have his family [to support him]”. He was implying that social relationships in the “West” were not

58( Rje-btsun Mi-la-ras-pa ) One of Tibet's most famous yogis

59 Dr. Tsering Thakchoe

60 Calm-abiding mediation

61 Inferring those from “Western” cultures (including but not exclusive to the U.S., Canada, Europe, Japan, and Australia); I will use quotations for “West” as I find difficulty identifying what is “Western” (as opposed to “Eastern”).

62 Dr. Tsering Thakchoe

as conducive to supporting *rlung* (e.i. warm, close, supportive). Dr. Tamdin expands on this,

After 17, you have to go on your own life and there becomes a gap between the parents and child, then [the child's] habits of thinking become “my own, my own”. This creates a lot of pressure... also, there are certain times (deadlines) that something needs to be done. Time is very different [in the West], they think time is like money, so they have no rest. Mentally they are very busy. Of course, this creates a lot of destruction inside. Very negative thoughts, fear, and anxiety [about time][creates] a lot of stress. On top of that stress,[they] work too much, ten hours! [In order to do that,] you have to drink a lot of coffee. So all these things induce *rlung* problems. That's why I say 95% are suffering from it. But when they have *rlung*, they don't know how to care of *rlung*, how to calm down oneself and how to maintain *rlung*.

Many doctors commented on the mental atmosphere of their foreign patients. Beyond the stress that Dr. Tamdin talks about, they comment that the Western emphasis on the individual, the “I”, gives rise to strong egos. This egoistic thinking causes much delusion which leads to desire, causing *rlung*. Ego leads to comparison thinking; one begins to always look to see what other people have, what is external to them, and so are ever happy with what they have or who they are.<sup>63</sup> “Their thinking is different,” Dr. Jigme described to me, “they have very good knowledge, but that's only one part...[the other part to knowledge] is internal”. He continued explaining that his Western patients did not know how to take care of *rlung* or calm the mind, partly because they have no existing framework of understanding it, a sentiment that Dr. Tamdin shared earlier. Of course, these perspectives are generalized and cannot be applied to all people living in “Western” cultures; but I think they are significant insights to the imbalances these kinds of lifestyles can create.

“Nowadays, [life] is becoming more and more stressful because of industrialization, technological advance, and more competition. *rLung* is becoming more and more common,” Dr. Namdol Lhamo explained. Dr. Choephel Kalsang expands on this, “[we are seeing] an increase of *rlung* because of how [the patients] live; nowadays its a stressful life, people have different stress from their jobs, and stress is always there, *rlung* is always there”. Furthermore, the “excesses of chemicals in the environment with much building construction, mining and industrialization, plus stress, says (Dr. Choedhak), can cause major Wind disturbances (the humoral basis of neurosis and nervous diseases), ubiquitous in our time”.<sup>64</sup> “These days,” Dr. Tamdin comments, “many Tibetans are developing *rlung* because lifestyles are changing...they are going towards Western lives...and suffering from mental imbalances”. This increase of *rlung*-related disorders found by the doctors could very well be related to the growing adoption of “Western” values, practices, and lifestyles through the processes of globalization.

#### **4.Treatments for *rLung***

Treatment in Traditional Tibetan Medicine is very comprehensive and highly personalized; it has a multidimensional, holistic approach to healing that includes everything from medication and external therapies to changes in lifestyle and mentality. The following is a very generalized overview of common treatments and treatment sites associated with *rlung* disorders that are caused by increased or disturbed *rlung*. The treatments for *rlung* according to the medical text includes the use of sesame oil, eating warm, oily, sweet, sour, and salty foods, staying in a warm, dark place, spending time with

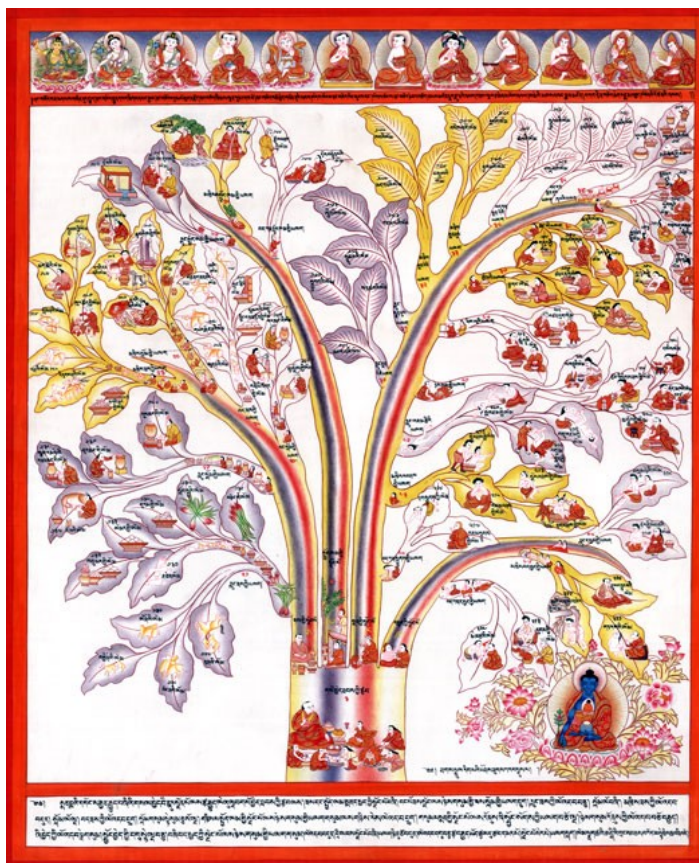
63 Dr. Tsewang Tamdin & Dr. Jigme Gedun

64 Dummer, Tom. p. 94

loved ones, engaging in pleasant conversation, sleeping comfortably and engaging in external treatments like massage, compression, and moxibustion.<sup>65</sup> In general, any endeavor to “de-stress” is beneficial to *rlung*.

#### *Diet and Medication*

Once again we must think of *rlung*'s features: rough, light, cold, subtle, hard and mobile; those things opposite to these features will help control *rlung* accumulation and build-up. Foods that are warm and oily in nature will combat the cold and light nature of *rlung*. Many doctors recommend that patients with *rlung* disorder eat warm, heavy, and nutritious foods like meat broth, brown rice, garlic, onion, and sesame oil. Medication is given on the same basis; medicines that have tastes and potencies that are opposite to the problem are given. Some common *rlung* medicines include Akar 8 and 35 and Bimala (vimala); which medicines are given depends on the patient's symptoms and accompanying disease( hot or cold).<sup>66</sup>



*Illustration 3: The Root of Treatment: the first stem is diet, the second, behavior; the third, medicaments, and lastly, external therapies.*

<sup>65</sup> The Explanatory Tantra, p. 277; Dr. Tsewang Tamdin

<sup>66</sup> Dr. Namdol Lhamo

### External Therapies

External therapies, including massage, compression, moxtabustion, and acupuncture, are also widely used for *rlung* treatment. Oil massage is one of the best therapies because oil is heavy and the sensations of massage are warm and smooth, all opposite characteristics of *rlung*. Head massage is very important because the brain is the reservoir of the nervous system, which is highly related to *rlung*. Ears are also important massage sites for *rlung* because they are the “sensory doorways” to the pathways of *rlung*. Various kinds of warm compression are also beneficial in treatment.<sup>67</sup> During compression, herbs are wrapped in cloth and dipped in warm oil and then pressed to various points of the body correlated with *rlung* (see illustration below). Herbal water and steam baths are also used as part of *rlung* treatment. Moxtabustion is also used as therapy; the Tibetan word for moxtabustion is *Metsa, me* meaning fire and *tsa* meaning to produce. During moxtabustion, herbs are burnt directly on the skin at different points of the body based on the “psycho-physical formation of natural energy passages (*gSang*, points, channels)”(see below).<sup>68</sup>

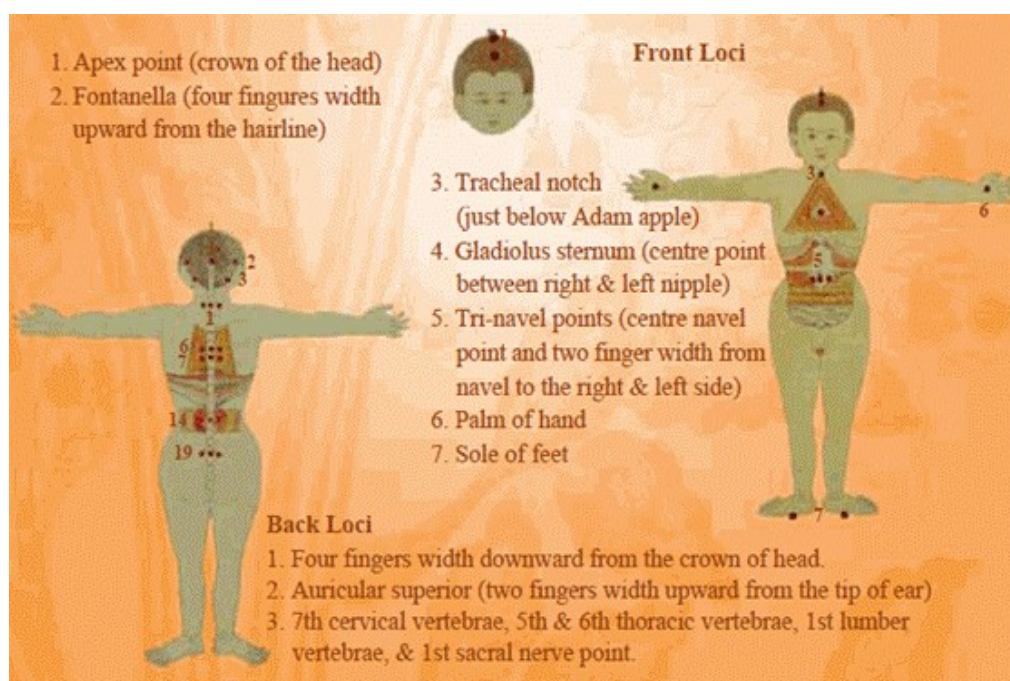


Illustration 4: Important *rlung* points

Important sites for moxtabustion and other therapies include the heart and the crown of the head. The point at the crown of the head is the main point of the whole body; this is the point where life sustaining *rlung* is predominately located. This topmost aperture controls all of the body systems. This chakra point is directly connected with all the channels and all the chakras. When you treat this point it brings relief to the whole system

<sup>67</sup> Dr. Namdol Lhamo

<sup>68</sup> Arya, Pasang Y. "Tibetan Moxtabustion." *TME*. Tibetan Medicine Education Center, Nov. 2009. Web. 01 Dec. 2013. <http://www.tibetanmedicine-edu.org/index.php/tibetan-moxibustion>.

and frees the flow of energy and *rlung* throughout the body. This point is also the main suture that connects the lobes of the brain as well. This crown point is used during Gold Needle Therapy, which is said to free up all the channels in the body.<sup>69</sup> The heart is another important site for the various kinds of external therapies. Both Buddhism and Tibetan medicine understand the heart chakra to be the main location of the mind; it is at this point which the subtlest *rlung* and consciousness remain compact together. The heart also has the opening for mental consciousness to pass through. Because the heart and mind are very interconnected, it is an important site for *rlung* treatment.<sup>70</sup>

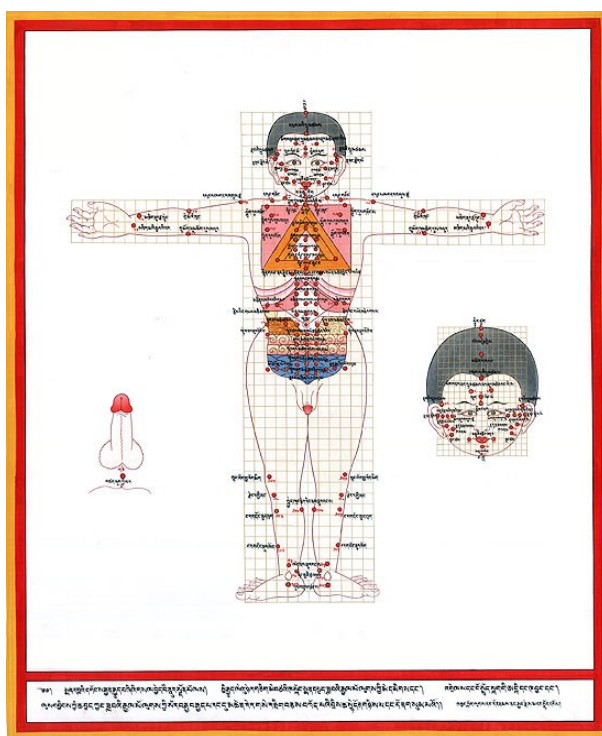
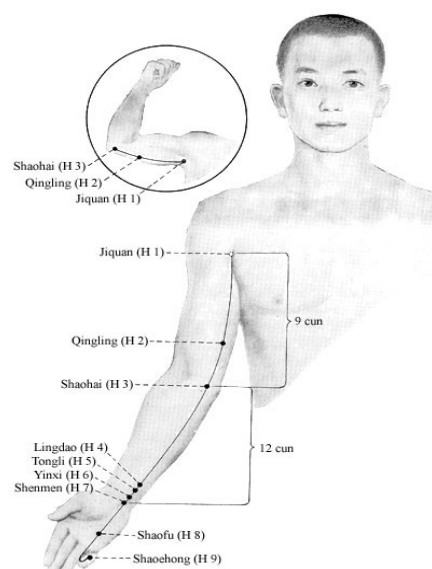


Illustration 5: Moxtabustion Points



The Heart Channel of Hand-Shaoyin  
Illustration 6: The Heart Channel  
in Chinese Acupuncture

Acupuncture can also be used to treat *rlung*. Dr. Jigme, who practices Chinese acupuncture, described acupuncture needles as a police officer who clears a traffic jam, the needle acts to release the blockage of *rlung* and other energies. Acupuncture is based on the organ channels, which interestingly match up to Tibetan-moxibustion points. To treat stress related *rlung* disorders, Dr. Jigme explained, he most commonly uses points along the heart meridian.

#### Retraining the Mind and rLung : Meditation, Yoga, and Tantra

Many of the doctors commented on how a simple change of attitude would benefit *rlung*. If a person is always “looking up, at the beautiful house and car” they will always be unhappy with the life they have; they must realize that many people are suffering, with no food and no home. If they think like this, they will be more grateful about their life and

<sup>69</sup> The Crown chakra point is also where consciousness is said to leave the body at death.

<sup>70</sup> Dr. Namdol Lhamo & Dr. Jigme Gedun

have more peace.<sup>71</sup> Acceptance of your situation, seeing it as a challenge to growth and not as “the end of the world” is a positive way of thinking that will decrease stress. Ven. Tenzin Namdrol writes that one “need[s] to make friends with [the conditions that cause *rlung*], to try and face them, instead of putting [their] head in the sand”. Lama Ropa Rinpoche explains that *rlung* tends to arise when one is bored and tired of their work, but force themselves to work through it.<sup>72</sup> That is why people, no matter their work, should realize the importance of it, fill it with meaning, and do it with love.<sup>73</sup>

“If you cannot control your mind, you are susceptible to all kinds of diseases,” Dr. Tamdin explained to me. *rlung* disease is strongly related to the atmosphere of the mind. That is why meditation, breathing exercises, and yoga are commonly suggested to treat *rlung*. Dr. Tsering Thakchoe recommends mindfulness meditation because this helps you to have control over the body, speech, and mind. Mindfulness, he explains, is cultivating awareness and clarity to be able to control the mind. Prāna healing is also a method which promotes mind and *rlung* health; Dr. Thakchoe describes Prāna healing as the practice of purifying the mind. During this practice, the patient focuses on invoking positive energy through special visualizations, and cleanse themselves of negativity and sickness.

Yoga and breathing exercises relax all the systems. They can bring relaxation to the flow of energy (*rlung*) and other bodily components, and can boost up the immune system by strengthening metabolic heat.<sup>74</sup> Yoga helps control and cleanse the channels that *rlung* is not properly circulating through. All yoga is essentially good for the mind and the organs because it calms them.<sup>75</sup> One breathing technique used specifically for controlling channels and eliminating obstacles within them is called Prānāyāma; during this exercise, the practitioner sits with a straight back and uses his thumb and ring finger to open and close his nostrils, exhaling roughly through the right nostril and inhaling smoothly and slowly through the left nostril and then repeating the process<sup>76</sup>. Following this exercise one should practice the five Yantras: Massaging (Nyewa), extending the ankles (Longshed), Rotating the Arms (Pungkor), Closing the Armpits (Chenbep), and Stretching (Nyongwa). Each Yantra helps to overcome different *rlung* imbalances and strengthens the function of each. (A complete description of these can be found in the book noted below)<sup>77</sup>

The highest forms of these practices is Tantra. Not many people use “Tantric medicine” because it requires much dedication and commitment. If you don't keep commitment, then one might develop wrong perceptions about the process which can be dangerous.<sup>78</sup> Tantric mediators concentrate on the three subtle channels, *dbu-ma*, *ro-ma*, *rkyang-ma*. In the normal person, *rlung* is dispersed throughout the body, which is known as the vital energy of past actions (*las-kyi-rlung*). The Tantric practitioner mediates on the

71 Dr. Jigme Gedun

72 Cayton, Amy, ed. *Balanced Mind, Balanced Body: Anecdotes and Advice from Tibetan Buddhist Practitioners on Wind Disease*. Portland, OR: Education Dept., Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, 2007. Print.

73 Dr. Tsewang Tamdin

74 Dr. Namdol Lhamo

75 Dr. Tsewang Tamdin

76 Women should practice this in the opposite way

77 Namkhai, Norbu, Adriano Clemente, and Andrew Lukianowicz. *Yantra Yoga: The Tibetan Yoga of Movement : A Stainless Mirror of Jewels : A Commentary on Vairocana's The Union of the Sun and Moon Yantra*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2008. Print. p. 78-90

78 Dr. Tsering Thakchoe

chakras, the intersection of the three channels in order to bring her mind and *rlung* closer and closer from the side channels to the center channel. When “vital energies and subtle mind enter, abide and dissolve within the central energy channel of the body, [...] the non-conceptual inner radiance arises, for which reason it becomes known as the vital energy of pristine cognition(*ye-shes-kyi rlung*)”. This is considered the “perfect stage of meditation”.<sup>79</sup>

Of course, whenever we adopt something, from diet changes to yoga and meditation practices, one must do it very systematically so that no big changes happen to the psychological or physical systems. If one seeks to adopt yoga and meditation practices, it is important to approach a very reliable and good teacher and learn it properly: how to maintain body postures and keep mental states, etc.. The most important to be patient in the systematic approach that is appropriate for our level.<sup>80</sup>

### **5. Conclusion: Integration of *rLung* into Allopathic Practices**

During my stay in Dharmasala, I met quite a few travelers who turned to Tibetan medicine after having no success with allopathic methods. Dimitriy Bechthold, a German traveler I met while living in Dharmasala, had earlier in life suffered from brain trauma and sequentially experienced memory loss, severe headaches, and shortened attention span; but allopathic medicine in Germany did not recognize any problems, nor offered him any treatment. He related to me that through a few years of taking Tibetan medicine and treatment, his condition has significantly improved. Another man, who I met at the Men Tsee Khang therapy center, explained to me that he had suffered from heavy congestion and had trouble breathing for most of his life. Doctors could not tell him why he was experiencing this, nor could give him any options for relief. Many people suffer from *rlung*-related diseases but cannot receive treatment because of the absence of *rlung* concepts in allopathy. Dr. Tsering Thakchoe admits that while allopathic medicine is dominant in most parts of the world, it cannot solve all problems and that there are some things that traditional medicine can handle better. If understandings of *rLung* were integrated into allopathic medicine, “they would be able to serve the patients better” by adopting a more holistic conception of health and treatment.<sup>81</sup>

There are many challenges to this shift in practice. In many parts of the world, “religion, philosophy, medicine, and indeed politics now exist as separate entities”. Tibetan medicine is inseparable from its religion and is “indivisible from Buddha Dharma”. This “connotes in many Western minds (and especially those concerned with 'scientific' medicine), an esoteric and metaphysical basis, and therefore is unacceptable”.<sup>82</sup> Probably the biggest hinderance to integration is the fact that *rlung* has yet to be empirically measured or clinically tested. *Rlung*, at present, can only be felt during pulse diagnosis, a practice absent in allopathy. Allopathic medicine is based only on that which can be observed and tested.<sup>83</sup> Allopathic medicine is still growing in their understanding of the relationship between the mind and body, whereas Tibetan medicine understands the

79 Karma-glin-pa, Sambhava Padma, Dorje Gyurme, Graham Coleman, Jinpa Thupten, and Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead [English Title]: The Great Liberation by Hearing in the Intermediate States [Tibetan Title]*. New York: Penguin, 2007. Print. Glossary of terms

80 Dr. Namdol Lhamo

81 Dr. Tsering Thakchoe

82 Dummer, Tom p. 241

83 Dr. Namdol Lhamo and Dr. Tsewang Tamdin

interrelatedness of mind and body as the fundamental tenet of the practice. This is another reason why allopathy has not accepted *rlung*, or similar concepts, in a mainstream way.

As all things change, so too will the medical paradigm of our time. “People never thought that scientists and religious leaders would come together to discuss [their fields], but now there exists the “Mind and Life”<sup>84</sup> conferences,” Dr. Tsering Thakchoe illuminated. Allopathic medicine is already taking huge steps in the integration of mind-body medicine and understanding the effects of stress and negative thinking. “According to the mind-body or biopsychosocial paradigm, which supersedes the older biomedical model, there is no real division between mind and body because of networks of communication that exist between the brain and neurological, endocrine and immune systems,” said Oakley Ray, Professor Emeritus of Psychology, Psychiatry and Pharmacology at Vanderbilt University (Nashville, TN, USA). A number of US medical schools and health centers now have departments dedicated to mind-body research and treatment. Understanding how emotions influence physiology is quickly becoming a mainstream concept.<sup>85</sup> Modern science is always making huge leaps and discoveries; perhaps it is just a matter of before *rlung* is one of them.

*rLung* is truly like wind; though it cannot be seen, its effects are widely felt. As *rlung* disorders become more widespread across populations, it is important that an understanding be forged in mainstream consciousness.

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84 The Mind and Life Institute was founded by his holiness the Dalai Lama to foster dialogue between neurology, psychology, and physics and Buddhism

85 Brower, Vicki. “Mind-body Research Moves Towards the Mainstream”. *Embo Reports*. Vol.7 (4). April 2006. p. 358-361.



## **Appendices:**

### *Methodology*

I chose to conduct my research in Dharmasala because it is the headquarters of Men Tsee Khang and is home of many of the most learned Traditional Tibetan doctors in the world. My original plan for researching this topic was to “shadow” a Tibetan doctor during the entirety of my stay in Dharmasala. Within the first week of being there I found this is be more difficult to organize than I had originally planned. Many of the doctors were too busy to host me and others were in and out of transit. What I had managed to do was forge relationships with a couple of doctors by meeting them at their clinics during slow times and inviting them out for tea or dinner. These interactions were crucial in learning more comprehensively about *rlung*. In addition, the administration at Men Tsee Khang organized three interviews for me with experienced doctors and educators. I was able to contact and interview a handful of patients suffering from *rlung* related disorders, but I think it would have been more beneficial to interview more about their dietary and behavioral problems to have a more tangible picture of what *rlung* looks like. Finally, I was able to contact only a couple of meditators about their experiences with *rlung*. Many were too busy to talk in depth. In addition, they were not at all apt to talk about Tantric practices, and so much of my information about such came from doctors and people unversed in the practice, which is why I put this in the Suggestions for Further Research section. Many of my secondary sources used were by recommendation of the people I was able to speak with.

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Illustrations 1-3 and 5 from Dharmapala Thangka Centre:<http://www.thangka.de/Table-Medic.htm>

Illustration 4 from Tibetan Therapeutics: Tibetan Wellness Products form the Medical Institute of H.H. The Dalai Lama

[http://www.tibetan-therapeutics.com/index\\_files/Page2987.htm](http://www.tibetan-therapeutics.com/index_files/Page2987.htm)

Illustration 6 from [www.wingchunkwoon.com](http://www.wingchunkwoon.com)

**Glossary of Tibetan Terms***English**Wylie*

Ascending wind	<i>geng-du rlung</i>
Bile humor	<i>mKhrispa</i>
Buddhism	<i>nang chos</i>
Central Channel	<i>dbu-ma</i>
chakra	<i>Khorlo</i>
channel	<i>stsa</i>
Descending wind	<i>thur-sel rlung</i>
desire	<i>'dod chags</i>
Explanatory Tantra	<i>Bshad-rgyud</i>
Fire-Accompanying wind	<i>me-nyam rlung</i>
The Four Medical Tantras	<i>rGyud bzhi</i>
humor	<i>nges pa</i>
ignorance	<i>Ma rig pa</i>
Left Channel	<i>rkyang ma</i>
Life Sustaining Wind	<i>Srog-zin rlung</i>
mind	<i>sems</i>
Pervasive wind	<i>kyab-che rlung</i>
phlegm humor	<i>Badken</i>
Right Channel	<i>Ro ma</i>
Supreme vitality	<i>mdangs</i>
wind humor/vital energy	<i>rlung</i>

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**Suggestions for Future Research:**

The nature of *rlung* is very complex and is in need of much further research. Its relationship with meditation, especially Tantric meditations, can be further explored. There exists practices in which advanced meditators can actually retain *rlung* and consciousness in their bodies after they are pronounced clinically dead. *rLung* as understood and experienced by Buddhist practitioners would be tremendously illuminating. In addition, spirits and their effects on *rlung* is also an area of needed study. Furthermore, a cultural comparison could be conducted between the Tibetan, Chinese, and Ayurvedic understandings of *rlung*, *ch'i*, and *vata*, respectively.



*Illustration 7: The author with Dr. Jigme Gedun at the Mcleod Ganj Men Tsee Khang Branch Clinic*