

Interview with Keyvan Golestaneh M.A., L.Ac. (Part 2)

Practitioner of Chinese medicine and structural bodywork, healer, yoga teacher, psychotherapist, and anthropological critic

Addiction is a very widespread problem. For example, smoking still seems to be very common, especially in some European and Asian countries where it is increasing. How can we deal with these problems?

KG: Addictions are fundamentally physical, social, and emotional problems and need to be addressed on all three levels. Addictions are actually both a symptom of and a solution to a social psychological and biological problem. If someone doesn't want to quit an addiction, nothing can make a person change his or her mind. If they do want to change, then diet and changing the chemistry of the body make overcoming addictions much easier and more effective. This is not typically addressed. Dietary and physiochemical changes should be done simultaneously with emotional psychological and social work. Acupuncture and herbal medicine can be very useful in eliminating the side effects of withdrawal from addictions. Moral and emotional support is essential. Studies have shown that yoga, for example, helps significantly for those who want to stop an addiction.

Early education and establishing healthy ways to process emotions and manage stress are essential long-term solutions for our addiction-prone society. This is also an example of how culture, society, and the media create the context for future health problems that are lifestyle related.

How important is the environment for health and adopting a healthy lifestyle? Can we do anything in our home or work environment in order to improve

our physical and mental health?

KG: Its absolutely VERY important! This is often a very overlooked aspect of health and illness. You cannot separate people from their environment. Environmentally induced health problems (like asthma, for example) are increasing dramatically in the United States. It's obvious that fresh oxygenated air is necessary but not always available. This situation can be changed through better design of our homes and work places, through governmental regulation, and new technologies like ozone and positive ion machines. Putting more plants indoors can greatly help improve the quality of air and the feeling in an environment. The solutions are available; it's a matter of economic, personal and political will. Here again we can see that health is also a political issue.

In our homes, we have all sorts of products from carpets to building material to cleaning solutions that release toxins into the air. Some enclosed spaces are highly toxic. New non-toxic products are now available if people just look for them. The tap water which is chlorinated and contains fluoride is not conducive to a healthy body. I don't recommend that people drink water that isn't filtered. Common aluminum pots and pans represent another danger because metal particles from them will eventually find their way into the body and potentially weaken the immune system and toxify the body, especially the brain. This creates the conditions for faster degeneration and potential disease. Most popular commercial deodorants people use contain chemicals that are directly absorbed into the body through the skin. Recent research done in the United

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States shows that deodorants with certain chemicals can be linked to cancer, especially breast cancer. We have many illnesses that didn't exist a hundred or more years ago. Why? This is a result of changes in the environment, driven by economic and technological development.

Everybody seems to be looking to feel better. What can we do to feel better in general?

KG: Commercial media is totally oriented towards the ideal of "more is better," and fast-paced change and stimulation. We live in a consumption oriented and driven economy, fueled by pleasure and desire. Long established cultures are being destroyed through popular media. But our health depends on taking control of our lives and what we believe. The mass media does not have that interest.

On a practical everyday level, we should always have pure, clean water, and drink at least six to eight glasses a day (depending on body weight), especially if you don't eat a lot of fruits and raw veggies. (Look at your pets: they drink water all the time because they are not disconnected and desensitized from their body!) Exercise on a regular basis and eat foods that are right for your body type and can be easily eliminated. Reduce stress and stimulation. Breathe deeply. Have satisfying personal relationships and stay connected with what transcends our individual existence. These are the easiest things one can do for one's health. If you follow these suggestions, you will find that even your emotional life balances out and you'll be happier.

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underlying motivation in their actions and the programming of their desire through mass media. They think it's either a matter of free choice, personal desire, or bodily necessity; they think that reality is unchangeable, pre-given and obvious, but it's not. In fact desire is socially generated! Reality is constructed and more and more it's constructed by corporations and popular media. Unfortunately, people don't see and feel the underlying emotional motivation behind their actions and lack self-control. So I think that people must first of all come to terms with the fact that we are feeling

beings and social beings, and not just independent bodies in motion. The self is intricately involved with others in a network we call society and our desires are mediated by others. We can no longer afford to be disassociated from our bodies and the non-human environment, while continuing to think that politics and culture have nothing to do with our health and wellbeing.

There are many popular practices on the market these days, like aromatherapy for example. What's your opinion about them?

KG: Aromatherapy has become quiet popular. Essential oils are very effective topically and internally for bacteria and viruses, but aromather-

apy itself only treats symptoms. So, by itself it is not enough and is not the solution to illness and diseases.

People should look at the specific benefits of specific oils. The quality of the oil is very important. The effect varies based partly on the quality of the oils used. You don't need to be a specialist for that. What is most important is to FOLLOW YOUR INSTINCT. If you are attracted to a particular scent, use it: your body has its own intelligence. There are a lot of excellent books available that can tell you what to do, but they won't necessarily heal you of any specific illnesses, despite

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some popular claims. For example, I had a patient who suffered from insomnia, agitation, nervousness, and bad headaches. One time I gave her some very high quality pure essential rose oil. After she inhaled for about five minutes, she relaxed and her headache disappeared.

What about practices like homeopathy, Reiki, meditation, and prayer?

KG: Science has of course in the past ignored these practices, but is now paying more attention to them, partly because so many people are using them.

Homeopathy is based on the idea that similar substances at extremely lower concentrations (dosages) can heal similar causes or effects. It is a benign, safe practice. It is very popular in some countries (like India, France and England.) It can be very effective if an experienced practitioner has accurately diagnosed what remedy to use. But I believe that not teaching people what the cause of a health problem is and not recommending changes in one's actions or lifestyle means that the problem will likely return or a new one will develop.

Along with diet and exercise, I consider meditation one of the most important practices for people's health and wellbeing. The less stressed a person is, the happier they are and the less likely they are to become ill. Stress burdens the body, complicates the mind and weakens the immune system. Remember, stress doesn't just come from the outside; we produce our own stress. The idea of "positive thinking" (a very fashionable topic these days) is obviously helpful, but not thinking at all is sometimes even better! Meditation helps with this. The body naturally balances itself chemically and energetically when the mind becomes stilled and our awareness drops down into the body. Who says we always have to always be thinking? Meditation can be used as a method for calming the

mind and stilling our thoughts and transcending our separate sense of self. Prayer in its original form was a type of meditation. Research conducted on people who pray on a regular basis shows they have stronger immune systems and get sick less often than those who do not pray. I'm not talking necessarily about praying in a particular religion or as part of a church; you can pray in other places besides a church and don't have to be part of a religion. We think about prayer as a form of "appealing to God" or a higher power; this is a limited popular concept of prayer—one that is very much culturally determined and perpetuated by mainstream institutional religions.

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tion and prayer is that they bypass the mind. Our mind can solve problems, but it can also create them, and much of the stress we experience is emotionally and mentally induced. When someone is happy, his mind is naturally relaxed, his attention is free, and his body chemistry changes for the better. When somebody is in love, the chemistry in his body is totally opposite from someone who is not, especially from a person who is nervous or anxious.

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You are also a psychotherapist. What does that mean and what techniques do you use? Can it be helpful to all people?

KG: I don't practice traditional talk therapy. I developed an experiential method I call "Internal Processing" that is body based but seamlessly integrates mind, imagination, and spirit.

Psychotherapy is a broad practice and is composed of an eclectic mix of methods. It developed in Europe, out of psychoanalysis, which was basically founded by Freud. It's essentially a Western approach to the "soul" and to managing mental health and life problems. Since its development, it has undergone many changes

and has moved away from the medical-based (psychiatric) model to a more humanistic and, in some cases, spiritually-based method. Many important new developments have occurred in psychotherapeutic practices, especially in the United States. The somatic or body-based approach to psychotherapy, which started with Freud's colleague Wilhelm Reich, is an especially fruitful development that I have integrated aspects of into my work. A lot of people have old, stereotypical ideas about therapy, which do not fit the reality of how it is currently practiced. For some people there is a heavy cultural and social bias against using it, but it is no longer what most people think.

Essentially, it started with the idea that talking about your past, your problems, and how you feel could make you feel better and even solve your problems. It could even affect positive physiological changes in bodily symptoms. And in many cases it can relieve people of their personal burden. In most cases, however, talking doesn't create long-term solutions or changes in oneself or life. Problems that people wanted to change didn't necessarily go away. It's my experience and observation that only a change in consciousness and behavior (action) can do that. So my approach involved the body, consciousness and behavioral changes.

People are basically looking to be happy, looking to change a situation in their life, and heal emotional and physical traumas and phobias. People are also looking to maximize their perceived success in life. That's why they go to a counselor or therapist. But a traditional psychotherapy approach has important limitations. Most therapies focus on the interior life of the mind, personality, and emotions—and therapy is basically “problem” oriented. But the context of a person's life also needs to be evaluated and changed. The “transpersonal” or spiritual dimension of life has in the past become neglected. That is now changing. We can't artificially separate the body from the mind or from the

social and non-human environment. So psychotherapy must also become holistic and become part of the WHOLE, as we have defined it here by engaging with other disciplines and approaches in order to transform it self.

You've emphasized the impact of stress. Are there any effective methods for preventing and treating stress?

KG: The most important thing to do, of course, is to prevent stress, but if you can't do that, it's important to do all you can to at least reduce stress. There are many ways to do that. How we respond to life and stress makes a big difference. Many things in life can create stress, from chemicals to relationships; it's not

something that is just outside a person. For example, if you have interpersonal problems with someone then it's better to resolve them. If you don't, then stress will likely continue. Aerobic exercises, deep breathing, yoga, Tai Chi, and most physical exercises are all useful activities for reducing stress. Just find what best fits your personality and body type and do it. Just having a walk (especially in nature) or even lying on a beach can do miracles. Meditation and prayer have proven themselves most effective in reducing bodily and mental stress.

It's just as important to avoid certain activities and certain environments if at all possible: avoiding noise or giving up habits like watching too much stimulating television and over use of computers. I always recommend to people to find time for deep relaxation on a daily basis if possible. In the same way people need to find time to eat and sleep, deep relaxation should be part of your life. It should be an essential part of life.

Is there a certain age at which we can start applying the principles for a healthy life?

KG: The sooner you start cultivating healthy life habits the better. Of course, childhood would be best.

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The sooner one become “emotionally aware and intelligent,” the better one can handle one’s life and live in positive ways. In fact, the ability to manage stress goes all the way back to the mother-baby bonding. It is easier to develop good habits when we are young, because this is when our “core beliefs” and our “self” is formed. But even older adults can develop new healthy habits. I have had clients in their 70s start taking up new practices, who after a couple of months felt much more physically and mentally healthy. They started taking yoga classes and their body changed in a short time. So anything is possible given the will and knowledge. The body and world are plastic and can be changed.

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too much stimulation at an early age. Nowadays, most children watch TV and are connected to the computer for many hours throughout the day. This diminishes their power of concentration, affects their conception of the world, and manipulates their desire. The overuse of computer games is, in fact, a potential danger for young minds. The natural development of the brain in children is interfered with by overstimulation. ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) is on the rise in the United States, and can be correlated to the overuse of television and computers at a very young age along with a diet high in sugar and carbohydrates. Put together overstimulating technology, bad eating habits and an inability to handle emotional stress and you set the stage for adult life and health problems.

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