

A TIBETAN HEALING CULTURE IN HUNGARY: PRANANADI

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ABSTRACT

This MA research paper seeks to analyze the adoption of a Tibetan alternative healing method known as Prananadi in Hungary. It is based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with Prananadi practitioners. The project focuses on the relationships of three analytic units: 1. Organizational structure & dynamics, 2. Bodily practices, and 3. Knowledge production. The first analytical unit includes organizational structure, hierarchy, and also the characteristics of the internal relations between the people within Prananadi: practitioners, teachers and their assistants. Their relations to the people outside of the organization will be examined: their patients, and other people working within medicine; as well as its dynamic aspects, which include the global diffusion of ideas from the East. The second basic category is the bodily practices, also known as embodiment, which includes elements of phenomenology. The knowledge production constitutive element addresses the question of how knowledge is produced and spread within the organization; there are also other related aspects, like the migration of knowledge from Tibet to Hungary and its relation to secrecy, training and authority. My argument is that the way knowledge production, bodily practices and organizational structure and the dynamics of Prananadi in Hungary is produced and represented in relation to each other and to other medicines is unique. The resulting healing culture draws on a hermeneutic practice of medicine predicated on secret knowledge, and there are no other healing techniques or culture, which has similar combinations of these three elements.

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INTRODUCTION

A young girl in her twenties did not feel very well so she went to a doctor who consequently sent her for an MRI scan. It turned out that she had 'sclerosis multiplex'. There is no known cure for this illness. Her doctors subsequently told her they can only slow the process of the illness but cannot cure it. She then came across a Prananadi practitioner who treated her for a year and a half. When she returned to the doctors there was no sign of her illness. Her doctor was very impressed but confused, and said "According to official medicine, it is impossible." This happened years ago. The young girl became a healthy woman who now is a healthy mother with two healthy children.

There are many stories like the one above which show gaps within classical medical frames and makes people open up to alternative healing techniques. Up until now there have been no studies conducted into Prananadi practices.

The aim of this MA project is to analyze the adoption of Prananadi, a Tibetan alternative healing method and culture as it is currently active in contemporary Hungary. The MA project is based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with Prananadi practitioners.

My argument is that three analytical units of knowledge production, bodily practices and organizational dynamics of Prananadi have a special combination which makes Prananadi in many aspects a unique healing technique in contemporary Hungary. The result is a dynamic healing culture predicated on a hermeneutic practice of healing by symbols which involves secrecy and revolves around the notion of life energy.

Information on Prananadi

“Prananadi is not only a healing technique, but a lifestyle.”
Botond, an interviewee.

Since there are no study books available on Prananadi and the masters who teach Prananadi differ slightly in their forthcoming explanations, I have instead quoted from the official Prananadi website, which was created by the Hungarian leader of Prananadi about basic information and its history. The latter is also explained from my field notes, which I wrote on the Prananadi level 1 course. In relation to my questions about centralization of Prananadi, and how it differs from other alternative healing methods, I use quotes from interviewees.

Basic Prananadi information from the official website written by the Hungarian leader:

Prananadi means: absolute energy channel, universal vitality channel. The origin of the method is from 6,700BC when natural healing among people appeared and when humans were taught the healing power of plants, stones and water. This was a time when humans learnt use of energy and healing by symbols. Prana is the original fountain of every type of energy. Every level of life's manifestation depends on resonance and the quality of the intook and the not-used Pranana (absolute energy). Prana is a complex energy system without which the physical body cannot exist. Prana (life-energy), which comes through everything, is in continuous and never ending motion, resonance, and flow. By their vortical movement they connect to each other and create energy-centers in the whole universe, the solar system, and can be found anywhere. The effect of Prananadi is that it supports life-processes and has an effect on some of the levels of life-manifestation. It adapts to every living (creatures) and non-inert individual pretenses. It supports the process of self-development. It has positive effects on healing processes, soothes pain, it helps to beat dejection caused by fear, resentment, anger, depression, anguish, anxiety. It helps fighting back strong physical and psychological strains. It has a positive effect on our relationships to other people. It facilitates creativity and performance. It fosters self-recognition and easier adaptation. In 3000 BC written materials appeared about natural healing methods.

Prananadi does not belong to any religion; therefore anyone can learn it and ask for its usage. In 2004 I protected the Prananadi name and technique at the Patent Office, so we can keep this ancient tradition clear within European law and from mixed with other things than the technique itself. (*prananadi.hu*)

Up until recently, it was nearly impossible to find any relevant information using the internet about Prananadi due to their continuously changing website about the organization.¹ Prananadi spreads solely from person to person by word of mouth.² Among Prananadi practitioners it is only ethical to heal people without any expectation of why or how it works. They can never sell healing for money.³ Prananadi seems to be a closed system with an informal, although at first sight hierarchical, social structure. There are however courses at different levels which build on each other. Anyone can practice Prananadi from as early as they are able to concentrate, level 2. from eight years old. In Hungary, as the Hungarian leader of Prananadi once replied to me, “There are nearly 48,000 Prananadi practitioners”. I met people who practice Prananadi by chance through a friend of mine at the end of 2007.

¹ The Prananadi website is continuously changing. At the beginning in the early 1990's they used to be very open and forthcoming giving out much related information on Prananadi. However they departed from this openness and only recently has there appeared once again further background information on Prananadi. The website today does not provide as much enlightenment in to this subject as it used to other than the only printed book have always published.

² From around the beginning of 2010 the renewed Prananadi website shows no more contact information other than the 'usual' email address of the Hungarian Prananadi leader, which could lead people on a Prananadi course, but it lacks basic information on courses including their cost or locality.

³ I learned in one of my fieldwork analysis on going for Prananadi treatment as a patient that despite this philosophy there are practitioners who give a different impression.

The history of Prananadi

The origin of this method is 6700 BC. It was the time when natural healings among people appeared, and the time when humans were taught about the healing effects of plants, stones and water. It was the time when humankind learnt the usage of the energy & healing with symbols. From the official website

The history of Prananadi is taught on one level 1 Prananadi course according to which it originates from the pre-religious time, 6700 BC. Tibet was the first who preserved it. In 1972 there was an expedition from the U.S. to explore the Chinese, Indian, and Tibetan cultures. They could only get into Tibet with their Chinese guards, but Tibetan people only opened up for them when they got rid of the guards. When their money was tight, their time was up and the expedition finished. One of them, an American with German origin, went back to Tibet (through Nepal this time) to explore more in the area; he incidentally came across with Prananadi practices. It was extremely difficult to get into a monastery to study this healing technique, but eventually he managed; and ended up studying there for eighteen years, and reached twenty-one levels. Following that, he taught it in Germany then in the U.S. under a different name for thirty-eight people. One of them was the Hungarian leader. According to the same teacher, the Hungarian leader has got permission to teach it in Hungary under the original name Prananadi.

According to the Hungarian leader's website, he has been teaching Prananadi since 1993 in Hungary; it first had the name Tibetan-Reiki; in order to not to get mixed with other practices, they changed the name into Prananadi, which they

choose themselves.⁴ Nowadays, some of the Hungarian teachers occasionally do some courses in Canada and in the U.S., however they primarily teach in Hungary. Every year about 30 people goes to Nepal for seven to ten days to study further with the monks. As I am not on a high enough level within Prananadi studies so that I could know about it directly. There are stories around the heart of Prananadi which tell of an interesting switch.

The answer to my question, “who is the master of the Hungarian leader”, from Botond a practitioner, was:

Well, he is the one who could answer that question. It used to be in Tibet. But now, as much as I heard, this knowledge is not in Tibet anymore. Even the Dalai Lama left Tibet. Similarly, to Buddhism or Zen, Prananadi has been spread all over the world and the knowledge of Prananadi is only in Tibet in traces. People do say that it will go back to Tibet again, and maybe it will happen from Hungary.⁵

Agi, another interviewee for the question how does Prananadi differ from other alternative healing methods, said the following:

The difference which Prananadi has in comparison to other healing methods is that it is secretive, and everyone has the possibility to develop, with the courses. You can be a healer but also a teacher. At other techniques, this two is much more insular. For example, if you want to learn to be able to use acupuncture, you have to go to Germany, to take classes, enroll into a school, where you study for years; and of course you have to pay an awful lot of money for it. But you either a student or you heal, one or the other. In Nadi,⁶ this two are both included.

⁴ He does not refer to the others on his webpage. There is a kind of mismatch of information is an interesting aspect within Prananadi masters, and probably could be related to the live-chain of information within Prananadi practitioners.

⁵ When the interviewee talked about Tibet, meant the area of Tibet, including Nepal.

⁶ Nadi is a nickname for Prananadi within practitioners.

This paper is organized as follows: Following the methodology in Chapter 1, in Chapter 2 I describe three analytic units: Organizational Structure & Dynamics, Bodily Practices, and lastly, Knowledge Production. The first, organizational structure unit is about the hierarchy and characteristics of the internal relationships between the people within the Prananadi Practitioners organization as well as their relationships to the people outside of the organization i.e. their patients, and other people working within medicine. This also includes its dynamic aspects, the global diffusion of ideas from the East, and the changes I have seen in the last two and a half years. The second chapter has at its core the bearing on bodily practices and touches elements of phenomenology, embodiment, bodily memory and the absence of mediation in Prananadi practices. The final part of chapter 2 is about knowledge production and the constitutive element and is where I talk about how knowledge is gained and spread within the organization. Here I also talk about related aspects of the practice such as the migration of knowledge from Tibet to Hungary.

Chapter 3 is about the dynamics of the relationships of all of the three elements. I will describe how they interact with one another and show that I found this interaction creates an affirmative reverberation circle. I will then talk about the possible hidden forces, which maintain this unique dynamic between the analytical units.

Throughout the paper I will highlight aspects which support this hypothesis by showing unique common features of the Prananadi organization; contradictory evidence will also be discussed. Finally, in the conclusion of my paper I will

summarize why I think the hypothesis is supported by showing the relationships of the above mentioned three constitutive elements supporting them with relevant information.