

MY SACRED BULL



There's a demon in our psyche

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We all know the remarkable connection between psychology and immune function — in health and illness. Harmony between the two is suggested to denote optimal health and well-being. Likewise, a “sickening” imbalance between them is said to be the cause of a host of diseases, including tuberculosis and AIDS.

While a fall in immune function is often associated with psychological and emotional outcomes, it isn't a “given” result that should also upset physical health. In other words, a plunge in immunological function isn't always a foolproof sign that illness is about to strike — though it most often is.

It's quite easy to suggest that a virus may be the lone cause of a certain illness. Likewise, it is equally clear-cut to think of changes in immune function being the source of disease. The real fact is — diseases have several causes, not just one, or two. No two individuals experience identical changes in their immune function when affected by the same illness.

What does this signify? That illnesses tend to have a far greater impact on the health and well-being “weighing scale” of the elderly, children, and the unwell. Not so much in healthy, youthful individuals. Swine flu is a case in point.

One obvious implication is — a change within our immune system influences our psychological state and our behaviour. In simple terms, merely being ill alters our psychological state and behaviour. It can also lead to common problems such as colds and allergies, while the severity is characteristically represented by a constant feeling of bad health, loss of appetite, depression and lethargy.

It's undoubtedly our inner feelings that assist us to put up with the highs and lows of life. What this means is — we should listen to nature's warning signals at all times,

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no matter the status of our health or illness. We should also consciously reject making sudden leaps of faith. Even in the face of our accepted canvas — the canvas that connects our mind, immunity, and health.

Our immunological parameters are grossly affected by psychological factors and vice-versa. A reduction in natural “killer” cell (our soldiers of immunity) function is related to adverse consequences in disease processes — including viral infections such as H1N1, autoimmune diseases

(AIDS), and some forms of cancer. Consistent low levels of natural “killer” cell activity, for instance, are suggested to intensify infections. Similarly, a fall in white blood cell response can cause heightened illness.

These changes are not byproducts of illness. They are, in fact, stimulated or specific biological mechanisms. These alterations happen by way of a natural blueprint. They aren't a result of mishaps. Is it, therefore, not a quirk of nature that these very causes — psychological and behavioural changes — trigger our body's own healing mechanisms to keep us out of harm's way and also assist us in the process of recovery?

There's a “demon” in our psyche. The good old saying, “It's all in the mind,” exemplifies the expression best. Or, as poet John Milton wrote, “The mind is its own place, and in itself/Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.” It's quite like going back to the beginning of time — but, it isn't an overrated maxim. It's, in effect, a qualified paradigm, an oft-used expression filled with meaning as refined as the computer chip.

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