

PHYSIS: THE BEST FRIEND WITHIN



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Many of us are blessed with several friends we trust, value and respect. But not many know that our truly best friend lies within us. The name of this friend, who we never see, whose existence we are not even aware of, but who is absolutely indispensable, is *Physis*. This friend acts solely in our best interests, and is deeply dedicated to our health and wellbeing. It is the driving force behind inner healing, or our powerful capacity to cope with the many threats to health and wellness encountered in daily living.

Tibb believes firmly in the reality of *Physis*. *But what is this so-called “internal best friend”?* *Physis* is often referred to as our “*doctor within*”. It is the inborn, built-in mechanism, present in all living creatures, which restores and maintains internal harmony and wellbeing. Tibb usefully describes *Physis* in nautical terms. It sees it as the helmsman of the boat – our body – which it is steering across the stormy and unpredictable sea of life. It is impossible to keep to a straight course, as the boat is buffeted from one side by a surge of pathogenic organisms, from the other by squall of environmental toxins, and from ahead by a gust of poor diet. The helmsman is forced to make many changes, and in rapid succession, in order to keep the boat on the right course, which is our normal state of health. Otherwise the boat will be driven off the straight and narrow course, into the treacherous white waters of illness.

Although the idea of *Physis* is central to Tibb, it is by no means unique to it. It is prevalent in other traditional medical systems, especially Ayurveda and Chinese traditional. It is also a component of more recent complementary healing systems like Naturopathy and Homeopathy. This in itself, plus the fact that the idea has survived for millennia, gives the concept impressive credentials.

Alas, *Physis* is not a concept readily accepted by modern science. There are a number of reasons for this. One is that it cannot be isolated, analysed or measured. “*If it cannot be quantified, it does not exist*”, so the dictum goes. Another is that it does not fit well into their model of health and disease. In this, the body is viewed purely in physical mechanical terms, albeit extremely complex, and disease occurs when one component or other of this machine misfires or begins to break down. Treatment in modern medicine

therefore revolves around dealing with the faulty part, possibly by replacement, but usually by drugs which stimulate the faulty part back to normal, or suppress its excessive activity.

Even so, Physis is a beautifully simple and appealing concept, with a myriad of practical aspects. For one, like a true friend, we should support and enhance its beneficial effects. This means not behaving in such a way that Physis is impeded or damaged. In practical terms, this means adhering to the Lifestyle Factors which govern the person's wellness, such as keeping to a reasonable, sensible diet, getting plenty of regular physical exercise and getting a good night's sleep. It also means not exposing ourselves to toxic substances, including cigarette smoke and certain drugs, which are known to damage one very important part of our Physis, namely the immune system.

Physis, as a good friend does, takes a very active role in protecting us from threatening forces. For example, if we inadvertently eat food which has gone off, the toxic nature is detected and the threat it poses is assessed. Physis then moves into action, by bringing into action the "Physis reflex" – in this case forceful and immediate vomiting. There are numerous examples of these protective reflexes, whose role is to ensure survival.

One thing that Physis does not appreciate is rapid, brutal changes to our behaviour. For someone who has traditionally been a couch potato, and wants to improve their health, suddenly taking up road running is often an insult to Physis, and does the body no favours. Another is abruptly consuming large amounts of supplements, whether vitamins or minerals like calcium or iron. These too are an unexpected shock to Physis. The best approach is "*start low, go slow*" for any hopefully beneficial changes to the person's behaviour to succeed in the longer term. The "*quick fix*" is not part of Physis' repertoire.

Physis certainly shows what a true friend is when dealing with chronic disorders like diabetes, arthritis and heart disease. Conventional drugs are generally excellent in relieving the symptoms of these disorders, but are not very effective in reversing the underlying disorders. Worse still, they often have an opposing, negative effect on Physis. Measures which support inner healing are more likely to succeed, especially if they are well tolerated over time. Herbal medicines, detox methods, cupping and massage are examples.

We generally take good health for granted, especially when young. Without it, however, life for most is grey, miserable and pointless, and probably short. So it is in our very own interest to support our best friend in keeping the process of inner healing up to standard. One realistic way is to make ensure aspects of our lifestyle do not cause it damage, or our behaviour threaten it. In this day and age, where we are surrounded by many, many threats to health, from a bad diet and lack of exercise to environmental poisons and poor quality air, our friend Physis really needs all the help it can get.