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21A.215 Medical Anthropology
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QUESTIONS ON FADIMAN, 3-105

Sept. 12, 2005

1. On pp. 9-10, Fadiman describes a Hmong ceremony called a soul-calling, to give the baby a name, which in Laos always took place on the third day,. She makes a point about the baby not being considered to be fully a member of the human race until then.

What might be the function of such a custom? Do we have any customs or beliefs that might be analogous?
2. Describe the Hmong illness etiological system. (What does *etiology* mean, do you think?)
3. What might be the explanations behind some of the Hmong beliefs about disease causation?
4. Describe the views about epilepsy mentioned in the book. What can we learn from them?
5. If a shaman (*Txiv nee*—person with a healing spirit) rejects his vocation, he will die. Why? Any parallels with western medicine?
6. Janine Hilt was the only one who had actually asked the Lees what they thought was the cause of their daughter's illness. What, from a western medicine perspective, would be the value of taking the time to do this?
7. On p. 29 Fadiman describes a character in a Dostoyevsky novel who describes epilepsy as something good. Can you think of other examples of diseases which, in spite of being abnormal, are considered good?
8. What are some of the contrasts in the Lee's understanding of *Txiv neeb*s and their understanding of physicians?
9. What were your reactions to the account on p. 52 of a doctor calling Child Protective Services, accusing parents of child abuse because they refused chemotherapy for their son?
10. Peggy and Neil, usually unflappable, felt enormous rage when they found out that the Lees were making decisions about Lia's medication. Would you feel such rage? Analyze all of its sources.
11. What were the sources of resentment towards the Lees?
12. Analyze the decision to declare Lia Lee to be a Dependent Child of the Juvenile Court, in order to place her in foster care.
13. "Hmong view of health care seemed to me to be precisely the opposite of the prevailing American one, in which the practice of medicine has fissioned into smaller and smaller sub-specialties, with less and less truck between bailiwicks." Describe the Hmong view of health care in terms of this opposition. (Who knows what a bailiwick is?)
14. Why weren't Hmong ideal hospital patients?

15. List as many reasons as you can for why Hmong were the least liked of all recent Asian immigrant groups in California.
16. “Might Neil actually have compromised Lia’s health by being so uncompromising? That latter question still bothers him.” Discuss.
17. Fadiman states on p. 96 that her and May Ying’s qualifications made them a decidedly low-status team, and that this was an advantage. Why? Can we generalize from this finding?
18. “I was suspended in a large bowl of Fish Soup. Medicine was religion. Religion was society. Society was medicine.” (p. 60). Compare and contrast to the US.