

## Ayurveda A Holistic Treatment Born of a Holistic Vision

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**Abstract:** *In this paper the author presents a detailed and comprehensive study of the fundamentals of Ayurveda. He points out that this system is neatly and intimately intertwined with the religious, philosophical and cultural traditions of India. In particular, he brings out the holistic and wholesome approach of Ayurveda. According to this system, the source of disease is in a complex interconnected web of factors in the body, mind and spirit. Hence treatment aims fundamentally at bringing about a harmony between the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual dimensions and functions of humans.*

**Key Words:** *Ayurveda, Holistic Approach, Harmony, Samkhya, Yoga*

“The whole of suffering which cleaves mind and body has ignorance for its basis, and conversely, all happiness is found in clear scientific knowledge.”

- Charaka

Ayurveda is a practical science of life rooted in the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. It is not a doctrine of mind-boggling ideas, but a way of life in tune with the *rtam* (eternal dharma) of the universe. Ancient seers sought solutions to the problems of the body, mind and soul through Ayurveda. It treats the human being as a ‘whole,’ who is a combination of body, mind and soul. Ayurveda is by all means a truly holistic and integral medical system. Diet, medicine,

behaviour and whatever is beneficial for a healthy long life are the principal contents of this system of medicine.

For Ayurveda, the body-mind dichotomy is artificial. *Anima sana in corpore sano* (A sound soul in a sound body) is the original finding of Ayurveda. Happiness and health are founded on the basis of well-balanced mind and body. The chief concern of Ayurveda is the attainment of an equitable 'psycho-physiologico complex' which may be termed 'homeostasis.' Primitive '*vaidyas*' (physicians) gave equal importance to mental and physical health. For mental health proper ethical life (*sadvrta*) is essential. Discipline of the mind and adherence to values (*dharma*) are considered pre-requisites for mental health and physical salubrity.

## The Origins of Ayurveda

A short historical overview of the traditional Indian medical system will enable us to situate our study of Ayurveda in its proper historical and philosophical framework. Dhanvantari is the father of Indian medicine. He looms in immemorial past. Indian historians claim that *Dhanvantari's* descendants, Charaka and Susruta lived even prior to Hippocrates (460 – 370 B.C.). Lack of chronology in ancient India renders us helpless to establish the date of the growth and development of ancient Ayurveda.

It is an accepted fact that one of the most ancient written documents of human thought is *Rgveda*. *Veda* means sacred knowledge. Along with the Vedic literature there arose medical treatises also. The very name the Fifth Veda, Ayurveda, signifies the ancient origin of Indian medical science. Ayurveda, it is defined, is the knowledge concerning the maintenance of life.

*Atharvaveda* (2000–1500 B.C.) contains medical treatises. Ayurveda is also considered the *upaveda* (supplementary *veda*) of *Atharvaveda*. The very word *chikitsa*, meaning treatment and cure, is found first in *Atharvaveda*. The treatments prescribed in *Atharvaveda* are:

<i>Niyama</i>	– ascetic penances
<i>Mantra</i>	– utterance of sacred verses which produce units of energy
<i>Mani</i>	– wearing of amulets and using diamonds
<i>Mangala</i>	– fumigation of sacred wood-cuttings and horns
<i>Upavasa</i>	– fasting
<i>Prayashchitta</i>	– purificatory rites and ablutions

Atharvaveda also contains a narration of the human anatomy, description of medicinal plants and classification of diseases. Therein we also see references to wandering physicians (*charan vaidyas*) and *vaidyas*, who are well versed in medical treatment. According to the Puranic mythology, the first exponent of Indian medical science is the creator Lord, *Brahma*, Himself. He revealed the curative science to *Indra*, the king of gods, and *Aswinikumaras*, the twin gods who are the divine physicians. *Indra* revealed the *Salya chikitsa* (surgery) to *Divodasa*, the king of Kasi. *Indra* also revealed *kaya chikitsa* (internal medicine) to sage *Atreya*. Charaka represents the *Atreya* School of physicians. Susruta follows the *Dhanvantari* School of surgery. Both of these ancient medical branches finally culminated in the classical work *Charaka Samhitha* and were complemented by *Susruta Samhitha*. Susruta is deemed to be the Father of Surgery. The American Society of Surgeons is named after Susruta.

*Bhela Samhitha*, *Kasyapa Samhitha* and *Agnivesa Samhitha* are prior to *Charaka* and *Susruta Samhithas*. Other notable contributions of Indian medical science are *Ashtangahrdaya* of Vagbhata and *Madhava Nidan* of Madhava (700 A.D.). Veterinary science also was in an advanced position in ancient India. Eminent kings like Udayana and Dasaratha were great elephant charmers. More than three hundred ancient books are listed in *Hasti Ayurveda* alone. Ayurveda texts were translated into Greek by Caiods (300 B.C.), Tibetan and Chinese (300 A.D.), Persian (700 A.D.) and Arabic (800 A.D.). The *Unani* System, to a great extent, was founded on Ayurvedic knowledge.

*Charaka Samhitha*, the ancient treatise on medicine formulated by sage Charaka, defines ayurveda as follows: “That is named Ayurveda

(the science of life) wherein is laid down the good and bad life, happy and unhappy life, and what is wholesome and what is unwholesome in relation to life and also the span of life” (Charaka Samhitha – *Sutra Sthana*, 1: 41). The aim of Ayurveda is to improve health, to increase immunity and to cure disease by establishing the equilibrium of body-elements.

Jainism and Buddhism were the breeding ground of Ayurveda in ancient India. Both of these religious communities cherished the doctrine of *ahimsa*, *maitri* (friendship) and *karuna* (compassion). Budha and Jaina envisaged a casteless national community and instituted monastic life as the model. The Jaina *bikshus*, Buddhist *sramanas* and eminent Buddhist scholars like Harsha, Amara Simha, Nagarjuna, etc., are pioneers in propagating Ayurveda in India and abroad. Jaina monks and Buddhist communities alike organized efforts to make Ayurvedic treatment as widely available as possible. The Ayurvedic motto of *maitri* and *karuna* was found embodied in Buddha and Jaina. Their disciples too were incarnations of kindness. The episode of *Vasavadatta* and *Upagupta* is evocative. Those monks planted medicinal herbs along the sides of streets to be used freely by all. During that period, many hospitals were instituted and the art of nursing enunciated by Charaka was practiced by the monks themselves. The greater map of ancient India that included Tibet, Indochina and Indonesia to the East and extended to the West through Afghanistan and into Persia, was not fabricated by military conquests or invasions or commercial exploitation, but by the devoted humanitarian *yogis* and monks who carried with them the sacred knowledge of physical and spiritual healing.

Nagarjuna, the famous Buddhist logician, wrote the most notable commentary of *Susruta Samhitha*. The medical glory of India was at its zenith during the Buddhist period. Ayurvedic Physicians were invited to the Middle East for consultation and were put in charge of hospitals there.

The *Siddha Vaidya* branch of Indian medicine, which deals with pharmaceutical chemistry, is an independent branch, and later it was incorporated into Ayurveda. It is believed that Nagarjuna laid the foundation of alchemical preparations of *kasa* (concentrate) medicine.

A number of preparations like mercury, sulphur, and certain poisonous substances were introduced into the medical treatment. *Rasa Sastra* branch of medicine contributed in these pharmaceutical preparations.

Banares, Nalanda and Takshasila were the ancient seats of Indian learning and many philosophers and scholars arrived at these seats of learning from distant countries like Greece, Rome and China.

## **The Weltanschauung of Ayurveda**

The weltanschauung of ayurveda, as envisaged in *Charaka Samhitha*, can be articulated as follows: “There is no end to the learning of Ayurveda. Hence you should carefully and constantly devote yourself to it. You should increase your skill by learning from others without jealousy. The wise regard the whole world as their teacher, whereas the ignorant consider it to be their enemy.” Ayurveda, the science of positive health, has three perspectives:

- Achievement of positive health for the individual
- Protection of health of the masses
- Ultimate liberation

The Ayurvedic ethics is summed up in Susruta’s dictum: “He who regards kindness to himself and to humanity as his supreme dharma and treats his patients accordingly, succeeds best in achieving the aims of life and obtains the greatest happiness.”

## **The Scientific Fundamentals of Ayurveda**

### **The *Pancha Mahabhutas***

The entire approach of Ayurveda is based on the basic urge in the body for the protection of life. Body is the synchronized conglomeration of the Five Great Elements (*pancha mahabhutas*), viz., earth, water, fire, air, space or *akasa*. Two types of substances are essential for creation – material and immaterial. There must be an immaterial essence and material form in every living organism. When the variations and combinations of *pancha mahabhutas* are well balanced, the body is intact.

There are three primary qualities behind all material forms in nature. The human body also essentially has three qualities (*gunas*): *sattva*, the life force, is the cause of intelligence and good actions in humans; *rajas*, energy, provides the power for action; and *tamas*, inertia, is the resisting principle in the body. Each of the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, space or *akasa*) possesses its characteristic quality. The five elements of the body and their respective qualities in relation to the result and related sense organs are given in the table.

Element	Quality	Relation to Organ of	Medium for the
<i>Prithivi</i> (Earth)	Smell, solidity	Density of particles	Nose – smell
<i>Apas</i> (Water)	Taste, fluidity	Liquidity	Tongue – taste, talk
<i>Tejas</i> (Fire)	Appearance, heat, colour	Conversion	Eye - vision
<i>Vayu</i> (Air)	Touch, vibration	Propulsion	Skin - touch
<i>Akasa</i> (Space)	Sound, nonresistance	Refraction	Ear - hearing

### ***Tridosha* Theory: The Three Biological Humours**

Exponents of Ayurveda explained all body functions in relation to the happenings of the universe. The sun, the moon and the wind are the factors common to both humans and nature. The sun is the energy of conversion represented as fire in the body, and it is related to the thermogenic humour called, *pitta*. The moon is the agency of cooling represented in the body as the combination of earth and water, and it is related to the cohesive humour in the body called *kapha*. The wind is the principle of movement or propulsion represented by the combination of air and space in the body, and it is called *vata*. Thus *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha* are the basic humours in the body. When these three get vitiated in the process of thermonuclear like reactions in the body, in effect, the *trigunas* produce bad residues. Therefore, the *tridoshas* are nothing

but the natural output of the inter-reactions of the humours of the body. The body propels these bad residues through various cleansing ducts and pores. Due to climatic changes, intake of food, strain or other calamities, the elimination process may slacken and that may result in the vitiation of the humours. That state is called *tridosha*.

All the activities in the human body are grouped into three basic functions of creation, preservation and destruction. *Tridosha* theory relates these three functions to three humours. *Kapha* is responsible for growth and reproduction of cells and maintains the element of creation in the body. *Pitta* helps transformation and preservation of the body through digestion and organizes body activities. *Vata*, the principle of propulsion, controls the process of destruction in the body. This theory evokes the cogency of the Indian trinity (*Brahma*, *Vishnu*, *Maheshwara*) being adored in human form. The universe is the macrocosm while man is the microcosm.

The ancient Ayurvedic scientists have again subdivided the body constituents into eight *dhatus* (layers of tissues) and their waste materials. The eight *dhatus* are ever present in the body. They are maintained in a particular equilibrium. When this particular limit is crossed, discrepancies set in the body system and disease is born. Whenever mad cells in any one of the eight layers of tissues violate the equilibrium in growth, cancerous growth of a particular tissue takes place in the body.

Just as the three humours keep their purity by eliminating vitiated residues and preserve the body in balance, seven out of eight *dhatus* also eliminate their excess waste materials because health is maintained only when these excess waste products are properly thrown out. Excess accumulation of *dhatu* waste leads to disease. Only the waste material of *sukra dhatu* is preserved in the body in the form of *ojas*, and it is the mainstay of personality. *Ojas* or *thejas* is the byproduct of *sukra dhatu*. There is *sukra dhatu* both in man and woman. In woman it is the white discharge and in man it is the semen, which is the medicine of male germ cell. Herein lies the secrecy of *brahmacharya* – a *brahmacharin* is endowed with a high degree of *sukra dhatu* and the imperishable byproduct, *ojas* and *thejas* renders him more effulgent like Viswamitra before Menaka in the Puranas. Thus diligence and austerities naturally became the catchwords of both Indian *samnyasa*

and Ayurveda. Waste materials of the other seven *dhatus* are regularly discharged and destroyed. The character, functions and waste products of the eight *dhatus* are given below:

Name of Dhatu	Character	Function	Waste Material Formation
<i>Rasa</i> – plasma	Circulating nutrient fluid	Nutrition	Mucus – <i>kapha</i>
<i>Rakta</i> – blood	Hemoglobin containing fluid	Oxygenation	Digestive secretions, bile
<i>Mansa</i> – muscle & nadi – nervous system	Muscular tissues with nerves	Movement supply nutrition	Exudations from ear, eye, nose, etc.
<i>Meda</i> – fat	Lubricating fat deposits	Lubrication	Sweating of the body
<i>Asthi</i> – bone	Supporting accommodating structure	Support	Nails
<i>Majja</i> – bone marrow	Filling bone cavities	Production of white corpuscles	Subtle exudations of lubrication
<i>Sukla</i> or <i>Sukra</i> – white <i>dhatu</i>	Nourishing reproductive cells and systems	Reproduction	<i>Ojas</i> which is not eliminated from body
<i>Tvak</i> – skin	Body cover	Protection from bacteria and viruses	<i>Loma</i> and <i>kesa</i> – hair

Ayurvedic treatment is based upon the ascertainment of the individual constitution. The unique power of the system is that it treats the living individual as the most important factor. Ayurveda regards disease as a complication of constitutional imbalance. The body and mind are both considered to be the abode of diseases and conversely of well-being. The cause of well-being is their harmonious and concordant interaction. The cause of disease, psychic or somatic, is either errone-



ous or excessive interaction. The morbidity of the body is remedied by medication, fortitude and concentration. Ayurveda regards disease more as a product of how we live than as an attack from outside. The physical constitution of an individual depends upon the following:

- Condition of the sperm and ovum at conception
- Nature of the season and the condition in the uterus
- Food and other regiments adopted by mother during pregnancy
- Nature of the elements comprising the fetus

The type of the constitution and the classification of humour (*dosha*) dominance are most important in the examination of health and disease. Therefore an elaborate study on *prakrti* (constitution) had been conducted by ancient *vaidyas* (physicians).

### ***Panchakarma***

Certain purificatory procedures (*sodhana*) for the equilibrium of the body humours (*vata*, *pitta*, *kapha*) to restore the homeostatic balance are prescribed in Ayurveda. These *sodhanas* are categorized in the *panchakarma* section of Ayurveda treatment. The effects of *panchakarma* on the hormonal profile, the metabolic markers and the immune-status of patients are today's hot topics of discussion among the rich health mongers of India and abroad.

The fivefold purification therapy termed *panchakarma* is a special form of treatment in Ayurveda. These courses of treatment eliminate the excessive *tridoshas*, humours, from the body and keep it sound. The body naturally tries to throw out the unwanted or excess substances through excretory valves. The main secretion sites of these *doshas* are in the digestive duct: stomach for *kapha*, small intestine for *pitta* and large intestine for *vata*. *Panchakarma* enhances this natural process and excess *doshas* are removed from the body.

### **Five Procedures of Panchakarma**

1. *Vamana* – Herb induced emesis. *Vamana* causes an effect on the tissues of the digestive system and helps elimination

of excess *kapha*. This treatment-course is prescribed in early spring or winter season.

2. *Virechana* – Herb induced purgation. In order to eliminate excess *pitta*, *virechana* is given in summer, and this procedure, properly administered by selective purgative herbs, causes an indirect effect on the total colouring material in the body and improves the functioning of the small intestine.

3. *Asthapana Basti* – Medicated decoction enema. The process is advised to alleviate the aggravation of *vata dosha*. During rainy season *vata* is prone to vitiate. Therefore, for gastric complications resulted by *vata dosha*, medicated enema is prescribed.

4. *Anuvasana Basti* – Medicated oil enema. This is meant to nullify excess *vata dosha*. This basti contains operating substances. During its long contact with the membranes of the large intestine, it separates the sticky layers of solid fecal matter and enhances absorption and nutrition of all tissues.

5. *Nasya* – Nasal intake of medication. *Nasya* clears the sinuses and thereby improves the sense organs as a whole.

The above mentioned purificatory techniques should be carried out according to the excess of a particular *dosha* prevalent in a particular disease under the experts in Ayurvedic treatment. If *doshas* vitiated are removed at the proper time, even acute diseases can be arrested. In chronic diseases, various toxins stick to the organ tissues. Unless these toxins and excess *doshas* are first removed by *panchakarma*, the treatment cannot benefit the patient.

Apart from these treatment-courses, modern *vaidyas* have developed various procedures related to *panchakarma*. Some of them are mentioned below:

1. *Charaka basti* – Bathing the umbilical region with medicated oil or herbal decoctions. This improves digestion and alleviates constipation.

2. *Thalam* – Applying herbal paste mixed with oil on the head. It cures insomnia, improves eyesight, helps in treating skin disorders and relieves headache.
3. *Greeva basti* – Bathing the back of the neck using warm medicated oil or herbal decoction. *Greeva basti* helps cervical spondylosis, chronic pain in the neck region.
4. *Netra dhara* – Pouring herbal decoctions in a continuous stream over the eyes. *Netra dhara* soothes and relaxes eyes, prevents cataract formation and improves eyesight. For the right glow of the face and for complexion, facial treatment also is in vogue.

### ***Snehana and Swedana (Oleation and Sudation)***

These are therapies related to *panchakarma*. The advantage of oleation is that it makes the *panchakarma* courses less exhausting to the patient. *Snehana* (oleation) protects the gastro intestinal tract, which has to produce and eject more *dosha* secretions. Moreover, the oleation loosens the vitiated *doshas* which are sticking to the walls of the minute *dosha* ejecting channels and creates centripetal force for elimination.

Substances like ghee or sesame oil is used for oleation according to the constitution of the patient, disease, and predominance of the *doshas*. For *vata* humour sesame oil is usually chosen and for *pitta* and *kapha* ghee is used. Light diet or fasting is also recommended. Oleation is done on a daily schedule of gradually increasing dosage, until the signs of maximum oleation appear on the body.

Sudation is a therapy by which a person is made to sweat. Generally it is done after oleation. During sudation therapy, the channels for *dosha* excretions to the intestines and pores on the skin are widened so that the *dosha*-secretions can be brought easily for elimination through bowels. Sudation also helps liquefy the *doshas* so that their propulsion is carried out with minimum resistance to the delicate tissues of the gastrointestinal tract. There are four types of sudation: applying medicated poultices comparable to antiphlogistic treatment, direct application of heat by heated cloth, steam bath with steam prepared from medicated herbs, and taking bath with the water in which hot decoctions of various herbs are mixed. After sudation, the patient should be given a light

massage and bath and then take short rest. Primary practices of Panchakarma and its modus operandi are elaborately stated in source books of Ayurveda.

## **The Philosophy of Ayurveda**

Charaka says, “The science relating to life is regarded by philosophers the most meritorious of all sciences, because it teaches mankind what constitutes their good in this life and life after death.” The philosophical vision implicit in the Ayurvedic practices has been drawn from a wide spectrum of sources.

## **Ayurveda and the Sankhya System**

The dominant philosophical influence found in Ayurveda is that of the Samkhya Yoga system. Being *Samanatantras* (similar doctrines) and having common ontology, epistemology and teleology, both schools of philosophy are coincidentally considered here. The first aphorism (*sutra*) of Samkhya states that the object of philosophical enquiry is to avoid three sets of human suffering:

1. *Adhyatma* - the sufferings caused by the internal causes like anxiety, fear and diseases.
2. *Adhibhautika* - the sufferings effected by external elements and
3. *Adhidaivika* - the sufferings produced by immaterial and spiritual causes.

These goals of the Samkhya philosophy are also the supreme targets of Ayurveda. Knowledge of Samkhya categories leads one to the portals of happy life. Practical knowledge of medical science leads a person to a state of soundness in body and soul. While the Samkhya system offers a discursive method of acquiring knowledge and thus removing the sorrow of life, Ayurveda places rules and regulations of good life at the disposal of all. Medications for improving health and various methods of treatment for ailments are other sovereign bequeaths, left to the generations by ancient physicians of Ayurveda.

*Prakrti* (Nature) and *purusha* (cosmic consciousness) are the basic principles of the Samkhya system. *Trigunas* in *prakrti* are always

in a state of flux. Twentythree categories of existence are elaborately treated in Samkhya and Ayurveda alike. The transformation and evolution of *prakrti* is the genuine principle of Samkhya that has tremendously contributed to the Ayurvedic explanation of the body function and health. The Ayurveda view of the evolution (of sense organs as shown in the chart and formation of organs of labour) from five gross elements coincides with that of the Samkhya system of thought.

The Samkhya system considers *purusha* as a separate entity from *prakrti*, but Ayurveda develops this idea and considers the individual soul as an entity derived from *purusha*, and the soul is not a separate entity for Ayurveda; the soul is united with the body which is an evolute of Prakrti.

The *parinamavada* (theory of transformation) upheld by the Samkhya system is in tune with the Ayurvedic vision of bodily existence. *Prakrti* is the composite of life force (*sattva*), energy (*rajas*), and inertia (*tamas*) and is undergoing constant changes. The multilevel combinations and dissolutions of these *trigunas* bring about the changes in the cosmic body and the individual body at every moment. As per this law of transformation, Ayurveda also upholds that the human body is the domain of creation, growth, preservation and destruction; and this is the central theme for prescribing treatments in the Indian arena.

Yaska, (200 B.C.) the great Vedic lexicographer and commentator, ascribes six dependent stages of existence (*shadbhavavikaras*). Every living being, according to Yaska, has to undergo the six phases of consequences, viz., originates (*jayate*), exists (*asti*), changes (*viparinamate*), grows (*vardhate*), disintegrates (*jiryate*) and dies (*mriyate*). Yaska's vedic commentary, the *Niruktam*, evinces his grasp of the mutually connected Samkhya-Yoga philosophy and Ayurveda.

## **Ayurveda and Yoga**

Yoga discipline and ethics as such are incorporated into Ayurveda. The very definition, *Yogah citta vrttinirodha* (bridling of mental machinations), is the golden rule of the Indian physician and patient alike. Yoga philosophy contributed to Ayurveda by providing methods of

postures, *mudras* and meditation techniques for increasing life force (*sattva guna*) in the body. Prescriptions of diet and behaviour to acquire mental restraint are largely the same for Ayurveda and Yoga. Both Ayurveda and Yoga emphasize methods of happy living and keeping health. Thus, Ayurveda and Yoga, mutually incorporating the techniques for human well-being, still contribute immensely to the nations.

Ayurveda, being a practical science, should naturally be the forerunner of any established philosophical system. If this can be accepted, one can say that the Samkhya and Yoga philosophy might have evolved out of the Ayurvedic vision of being and living. The origin of life, the physiology of living beings and the anatomy of the human body are seen independently perfect in Ayurvedic milieu. At present, the mutual interpenetration and amalgamation of Ayurveda and Samkhya-Yoga philosophy can be found.

### ***Anekantavada – Doctrine of Probability***

From the standpoint of diagnosis and treatment, Ayurveda teaches the law of probabilities. Ancient Indian physicians are of the opinion that one cannot definitely know all the factors of a disease. Hence, one's approach should be always capable of modification. The Jaina doctrine of probabilities to reach a conclusion (*syadvada* and *anekantavada*) has close connection with the Ayurvedic principle. Jaina thinkers state that the law of uncertainty is the norm to make a correct statement on any subject matter. They teach that any number of points of view on any subject is always possible.

### **The Sermon of Love**

Buddha renounced the throne of an empire in search of a solution for human sorrow. He realized that desire is the cause of sorrow and exhorted the masses to overcome desire. For Ayurveda, disease is the cause of human suffering. It is overcome when the causes of disease are removed. Ayurveda reinforced individual health through medicine and nursing. Buddha tried to remove the sorrow of the masses through his sermon of *maitri* (love), *karuna* (compassion) and *ahimsa*. His followers accepted Ayurveda as the medium for imparting service and

love to the masses. The famous Ayurvedic principle of universal friendship and ahimsa, *atmavat sastatam pasyet api kitapipilikam* (one should see even an ant or termite just like one's own self), resonates the Buddhist world-vision.

## **A Holistic Vision of Health**

The World Health Organisation defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity.” Ayurveda, too, emphasizes the promotion of positive health and teaches people to attain physical, mental and social health by practicing sound conduct, ethical behaviour and good eating habits. Charaka's advice sums up the social concern of life: “He alone can remain healthy, who takes regulated diet and exercise, who deliberates all his action, who controls his sensual pleasures, who is just, truthful and forgiving and who can get along with his kindness.”

Today the allopathic medical practitioners by and large have chosen the anatomic and physiological changes for diagnosis and therapy, and have abandoned the neurohumoral factors of the human body that concentrate on the psychophysical balancing. This is called *dhatu samyakriya*, the core of the Ayurvedic concept of health.

For Charaka “The healthy life has three main pillars – a balanced diet, proper sleep and a healthy sex life and mental hygiene.” For Susruta “One whose three body humours (*vata, pitta, kapha*), digestive function, body elements (*sapta dhatus*), and excretory functions are harmonious and whose self, mind and senses are cheerful – he is healthy.” Both definitions focus on the homeostatic harmony in the Ayurvedic vision of health and convey the wholesome, holistic concept of the same.

## **The Four Pillars of Treatment**

The same holistic vision of life and person is also followed in the Ayurvedic vision of treatment where treatment is considered as an integral activity comprising of the physician, the drugs, the attendant, and the patient.

## **The Qualities of Physician**

Being the knower of diseases and drugs, the physician occupies the chief place. He is also the instructor of the attendant and the patient and the prescriber of medicine and discipline. A clear grasp of therapeutic knowledge, wide practical experience, skills and purity of mind and body are the desiderata in a physician. Charaka says: "He is the best physician who knows the science of the administration of drugs with reference to climate, and who applies the treatment after examining each and every patient individually." He adds: "That is the right medicine which makes for health and he is the best physician who relieves people of disease."

## **Drugs, Their Potency and Sources**

Drugs are categorized in three groups - those derived from animal, vegetable and mineral. It is stated that "a drug that is not understood perfectly is comparable to poison, weapon, fire and thunderbolt, while the perfectly understood drug is comparable to ambrosia." Even an acute poison is converted into excellent medicine by the right method of preparation. But even a good medicine may act as an acute poison, if imperfectly administered. Therefore the intelligent person who desires health and longevity should not take any medicine prescribed by a physician who is a stranger to the art of treatment application.

## **Qualifications of the Nurse**

Knowledge of nursing science, skill, experience, affection for the patient, and mental and bodily cleanliness are the chief requisites of an attendant, according to Ayurveda.

## **Dispositions of the Patient**

Obedience to the instructions of the physician, recollection, courage and ability to describe his/her ailments to the doctor, are the dispositions required of a patient.



## **Intimate Proximity between the Physician and the Patient**

The noble vision of Ayurveda is again manifested in its classical statements regarding the relationship between the physician and the patient. The following are some important ayurvedic texts highlighting its vision of the relationship between the physician and the patient.

- “The physician should regard all his patients as if they were his own children and vigilantly guard them from all harm, considering this to be his highest dharma.”
- “Those whose compassion for all creatures is great and who are devoted to truth are ever zealous in putting down false doctrines.”
- “The patient who may distrust his own parents, sons and relations should repose an imperfect faith in his own physician and put his own life in his hands without apprehension of danger. Hence a physician should protect his patient as his own begotten child.”
- “Whoever having been treated by a physician does not recompense him, whether or not there be a previous understanding for remuneration, that man is beyond redemption.”

## **Ayurveda Today**

Today medically literate people are becoming more and more aware of the detrimental effects of drug therapy. Nowadays they are convinced that in modern medicine treatments are palliative rather than curative. Ayurveda, Yoga and meditation are presently becoming the chief attractions of the West. Younger generation in the West and the East are interested in alternative life style and cultures. They are in search of something more spiritual than what the society has to offer. Thus, the quest for alternative medicine and Indian holistic methods of treatment has become more and more popular. In this age of ecological concern, natural therapies through a spiritual approach to life is becoming ever more important. Founders of Ayurveda, Danvantari, Charaka and Susruta are in a way *avatars* (incarnations) of succour for people of all ages.

The source of disease is in a complex interconnected web of factors in the body, mind and spirit. Sages of India recognized that treatment is harmonizing the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual

faculties of humans. They thought that otherwise the relief is temporary. Depression and stress deteriorate the body system and reduce the system of immunity. Therefore, Ayurveda gives emphasis on psychological support. Ancient physicians exhorted people to cultivate a positive attitude towards life. Instead of seeing disease as a trouble, Ayurveda teaches us that disease is the byproduct of our own past actions. In a way, the sages believed that disease is the result of accumulated carryover of our past, or the aftereffect from the unresolved *karmam* (actions) of our ancestors.

Treatment is washing away of the grime of the past actions, that is, sticking to our souls which cause the ‘dis-ease’ in the body. Prayer, fasting, vigil, and recital of the divine names are purification rites for soul and body. Yoga exercises with accent on *pranayama* also contribute to improve the healing power of the body.

In *Charaka Samhitha* and *Susruta Samhitha* we find declarations which are the crystallization of their accumulated experience derived from observation and the application of logic. Even today Charaka and Susruta are authorities, and their teachings have universal appeal. The ever-increasing demand for herbal therapy and the Ayurvedic treatments of *panchakarma* is the proof of the validity and cogency of Ayurveda today. Charaka, the father of physicians, says, “Health is the supreme foundation of Dharma, wealth, enjoyment and salvation; Diseases are the destroyers of health, of good in life, and even life itself. Thus has arisen the great impediment to the progress of humanity.” This statement is more pertinent today. Therefore it is high time that the ever-relevant Ayurveda be propagated through nations and generations.

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