

Ayurvedic Medicine

Dr med. Bertrand Martin, © Foundation Ling, Feb. 1992

Ayurveda (in Sanskrit, science of life) represents the oldest known medical system and most complete of current traditional medicines. It is recognized by the historians as the precursor of Chinese and Tibetans medicines and finds its origin in ancient India, more than five thousand years ago. The first great treaties of Ayurveda date from the classical period (Vagbhata, Susruta and Caraka) and describe in a very detailed manner the diseases, their causes, their symptoms, the means of preventing them and of curing them. They are complete and precise in the description of the drugs, their preparation, their action and their administration. One also finds there the description of the principles of acupuncture, of osteopathy and certain surgical operations.

Today, Ayurveda is very widespread in India where it imposes itself again after independence of the country, and it is estimated that 50% of the Indian population is looked after by Ayurvedic Medicine, which is subsidized only by 2,5% of the national budget for health. This shows on one side the great interest of the Indian population for traditional medicine, on the other side, the interest of this medical system from the economic point of view. Ayurveda expands now in the whole world and its effectiveness is recognized in certain fields where modern medicine remains sometimes unsatisfactory. It can also become a significant complementary approach in the fields where modern medicine is powerful.

The concept of Doshas is in the heart of Ayurveda. It is about of three basic metabolic principles, controlling the operation of the organism and of nature as a whole. One can also speak about three groups of laws of operation of nature. These three principles are: VATA (catabolism / elimination / movement), PITTA (metabolism/transformation/energy), and KAPHA (anabolism/structure/form). According to Ayurveda, health is the result perfect balance at all levels of life and it is acquired while allowing that the laws which control it function normally (in other terms, by balancing the Doshas). The evaluation of the imbalance of Doshas makes it possible to locate the fundamental cause of the disease, and to correct it by balancing the organism and by stimulating the capacities of self cure.

Another key-concept of Ayurveda is that of constitutional type or psycho-physiological constitution (Prakriti). The various constitutional types are based on Doshas. Although the three Doshas are present in each one, their relative importance varies, which makes it possible to determine 7 basic psycho-physiological constitutional types, characterised each one with psychic and mental specific qualities that an experienced doctor can determine and use to promote health. These types are: Vata, Pitta, Kapha, Vata/Pitta, Vata/Kapha, Pitta/Kapha, Vata/Pitta/Kapha. The knowledge of the psycho-physiological constitution of the patient makes it possible to prescribe treatments adapted not only to a given disease, but also to the constitution of the patient, which increases the efficiency of the treatment. Thus, patients suffering from the same disease, but with different constitutions, can receive different treatments.

Ayurveda has as a basic concept a global approach of health. Its field extends from unmanifested fields of conscience to its multiple expression in matter. Thus, for Ayurveda, the primary cause of all diseases is at the level of conscience and its goal is to restore balance between consciousness, the body and the environment by using a score of main strategies.

The approach of the body and its physiology is done through various ways:

- individualized nutritional guidelines according to the disease and the constitution of the patient;
- techniques of physiological purification and regeneration of the body (Pancha Karma) allowing a deep balancing effect and rejuvenation of the body. This therapy includes Abhyanga (ayurvedic massage with medicated oils), Shirodhara (induced relaxation), Swedana (sauna), Vasti (medicalized enemas) and other techniques which are given in specialized clinics and require a deep knowledge of Ayurveda;
- drugs and tonics containing medicinal plants and minerals [these traditional drugs, composed of many plants, were used during millennia and do not have in general side effect; the various active substances present are natural and balanced between them, acting in a holistic way;
- Mind-body integration techniques (Hatha Yoga) increasing the integration of consciousness and body, and balancing the functions of the various physiological systems;
- massage techniques of the centres of energy (Marma therapy), currently used instead of acupuncture, abandoned by Ayurveda;
- many other strategies, not to mention musico-therapy (Gandharva-Veda) or science of the various sound frequencies and their effects on the body, the therapy using colours, aromatherapy, etc.
- The behavioural approach consists in guidelines inducing the patient to respect daily and seasonal rhythms, personal hygiene and practices leading to healthy life . The effects of biological rhythms are felt at all the levels. An adequate behaviour allows the biological rhythms of the person to get harmonised with those of nature, so that life is lived in agreement with natural laws, thus avoiding useless tensions and aggressions on physiology.
- Lastly, the approach on the level of consciousness by meditation makes it possible to get the experience, through a simple mental technique, of a deep, calm and peaceful

state of consciousness, source of a great physical and mental wellbeing, source of regeneration and balancing effect on both body and mind. This level of consciousness is obtained while allowing the mind to enter into silence. In the course of meditation, increasingly calm levels of consciousnesses are experienced, going to consciousness itself in a perfect and beneficial inner silence. Once one took the habit to live this inner silence, one can enliven and stimulate at the level of silent consciousness all its latent capacities, in particular the capacities of auto-cure, without which any treatment would be useless.

In fact, the goal of Ayurveda is not only look after and cure diseases, but also to prevent them. The principal goal of Ayurveda is to promote an ideal state of health, designed not only in terms perfect balance and of optimal functioning of the body, but also as a state of bliss, self realization and happiness at all levels of life. The goal is therefore to reinforce the natural resistance of the body to imbalance and disease, increase vitality, rejuvenate physiology, increase longevity, promote the full potential of physical and mental health of the individual, and to develop the level of conscience from which natural balance, creativity and happiness merge.

A fragmented approach of health is no longer wished today. Life is "holistic" by nature, and health can result only from the integrated development of all fields of life: consciousness, body, behaviour and environment. Notable progress was made in this direction in Occidental World, but a science which allows a global vision of man, its development, its relations with the universe, is still needed there, a knowledge integrating the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of human being, of matter and consciousness. In fact, the goal of Ayurveda is to integrate individual consciousness with universal consciousness, the physical body with its environment. That is possible while acting on all levels of life, by restoring balance and physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.