

AYURVEDIC MEDICINE, ITS APPROACH AND ITS

PRINCIPLES - Ayurvedic Medicine - Prof. R.H. Singh / © Ling Foundation, Lausanne, December 1995

Ayurveda is one of the oldest medical sciences in the world. Its origin goes back to the Vedas, the oldest known knowledge. It survived through two sets of authentic texts, each consisting of three books, namely:

1. The three great books (*Vrihatrayi*): *Caraka Samhita* (500 BC) *Sushruta Samhita* (500 BC), and *Samhita of Vagbhata* (600 AD), 2. Les trois petits livres (*Laghutrayi*): le *Sârangdhara Samhita* (1300 ap. J-C.), *Bhâva Prakâsa* (1600 ap. J-C.) et *Mâdahava nidâna* (166 ap. J-C.).

All these texts were originally written in Sanskrit and form an encyclopedia dealing with of all aspects of life, man, health, illness and treatments therapeutic. The approach is essentially philosophical, holistic and humanistic. Ayurveda is more oriented towards life and health than to disease and therapy. It represents a total science of life and describes the health of the human being as a whole and holistically.

Ayurveda represents a complete medical system of promotion, prevention and therapeutic. It has been practiced since ancient times in the form of eight specialties medical services, namely:

- internal medicine (*Kasyachikitsa*)
- surgery (*Shalya Tantra*)
- otolaryngology and ophthalmology (*Shâlâkya*)
- pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology (*Kaumârabhritya*)
- psychiatry (*Bhutavidyâ*)
- toxicology (*Agad Tantra*)
- nutrition, rejuvenation and geriatrics (*Rasayana Tantra*)
- sexology (*Bâjîkarana*)

Thus, from ancient times, Ayurveda was already a highly developed medical system.

The approach:

Knowledge and wisdom regarding the different aspects of Ayurvedic medicine classic are very rich. It is amazing to think of the methods and instruments that have been used to discover such advanced knowledge. These methods were certainly not only simple experimental physical methods. The methodology has certainly been intuitive, due to experience and the direct perception of reality. Ayurveda, like all the others knowledge systems of ancient India made its discoveries through the most sources subtle, that is *Prâmana*, that is to say:

- direct perception (*Pratyaksha*)
- logical inference (*Anumâna*)
- direct testimony (*Aptopadesha*)
- experimental evidence (*Yukti*)

In light of the nature of ayurvedic knowledge, it is suggested that all studies and currently directed research to revive this great science should follow three main methodological parameters, namely:

- Historicity
- Linguistics, and
- Comparative evaluation with modern Western medical science.

If we examine Ayurvedic concepts in their historical perspective with a correct linguistic interpretation, while observing the same reality in the light of knowledge contemporary, it is not too difficult to understand the original meaning. Comparing the two approaches, Ayurvedic medicine and contemporary medical science, one can see that they are very different. If we compare the two approaches without taking into account their differences, there is a good chance of being mistaken. The obvious differences between Ayurveda and Western medicine are as follows:

- Ayurveda is essentially a science of direct experience (1) while the Modern medicine is an experimental science.
- Ayurveda has a holistic and global approach in contrast to modern medicine who has an analytical approach.
- Ayurveda is functionally oriented (physiological) whereas medicine modern is oriented towards the structure or organ.

In other words, modern medicine does not believe in a function unless it is relationship with the structure, whereas Ayurvedic medicine considers the organism as an indivisible whole that must function as a whole and exist as a whole.

Fundamental Principles :

The Continuum of the Microcosm and Macrocosm: Ayurveda is based on the Laws of Nature. The theory of the continuum of the microcosm and macrocosm (*Loka-Purusha Samya*) is the most important Ayurvedic principle. The human being is the replica of the Universe in miniature. The individual and the universe are both essentially consisting of the five basic physical factors or elements (*Pāncabhautika*), namely:

- *Akasha* (Ether / Space)
- *Vāyu* (Air / Movement)
- *Teja* (Fire / Radiant energy)
- *Jala* (Water / Cohesion Forces) and
- *Prithvī* (Earth / Mass)

The individual (*Purusha*) and the universe (*Loka*) are constantly interacting and exchanging matter with each other so as to maintain their normality and homeostasis. This exchange respects the law of *Sāmānya* and *Viśeṣa* (homologous versus heterologous) according to the principle simple that says that similar matters or homologues increase what and similar, while dissimilar or heterologous matters diminish similar ones. The interaction and exchange between the universe and the individual (*Loka* and *Purusha*) occur in a natural way when the man breathes air, drinks water, consumes food. As long as that this interaction is optimal and balanced, the man enjoys optimal health. When this harmonious interaction ceases, the disease sets in. That's why the basic principle of any Ayurvedic treatment is to restore

harmony between *Loka* and *Purusha*, from restore the normal balance between the five elements (*Panca Mahābhūtas*) in the body and the spirit by restoring homeostasis.

The theory of *Ayu* and *Panca Mahābhūtas* :

Ayurveda conceives life (*Āyu*) as a four-dimensional entity comprising the physical body (*Sharira*), the senses (*Indriya*), the psyche (*Sattva*) and the soul, the conscious element (*Ātmā*). Thus, the individual life is a highly dynamic psycho-physico-spiritual unit in constant exchange with the cosmos.

We have already said that the gross physical body consists of the balanced combination of five elements (*Panca Mahābhūtas*). The theory of the five elements is essentially a physical theory. The five elements represent the five essential aspects of the subject, namely:

- The mass, represented by the Earth (*Prithvī*)
- Cohesion forces, represented by Water (*Jala*)
- Radiant energy, represented by Fire (*Teja*)
- The movement, represented by the Air (*Vāyu*)
- The represented space, by Ether / Space (*Ākāsha*)

The theory of the three *Doshas* :

The five physical attributes are grouped into three main biological constituents of the human body called three *Doshas*: *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*. The functions of the whole body can be explained by the three *Doshas*. *Vāta* is the biological product of the predominance of movement and space (Air and Space). *Pitta* is the product of the predominance of radiant energy (*Agni*/Fire) while *Kapha* is the product of the mass and cohesive forces (*Prithvi* / Earth and *Jala* / Water). Thus, the theory of the three *Doshas* of Ayurveda is essentially a biological application of the theory of the five elements (*Panca Mahabhuta*) of Hindu physics. Sometimes the three *Doshas* are understood as the three conceptual entities developed by Ayurveda theorists to explain the human physiology in a holistic and unique way. Apparently, the human body whole consists of a solid mass of substratum where an intense and constant exchange takes place chemical activity as well as an energy pool in constant motion. These three *Doshas* coexist in a predetermined proportion and function in a complementary manner, one relationship to the other, in the interest of the overall function of the whole organism, despite their opposite functions and properties. From the above, the solid substratum of the body is called *Kapha*, the chemical properties are called *Pitta* and the movement energy is called *Vata*. The existence of the three *Doshas* can be felt in the whole body and can also to be screened at the molecular level. Each cell of the body consists of a mass of substratum, a chemical metabolism and an operating energy. These are the *Kapha* aspects, *Pitta* and *Vata* respectively of the cell. The proportion of the three *Doshas* must remain balanced. The three *Doshas* must remain in an appropriate and normal proportion. This proportion varies from organ to organ / tissue to tissue / cell to cell. For example, a nerve cell or neuron may have a higher proportion of *Vata* (movement) compared to the other two *Doshas*, whereas the cells of an endocrine gland such as those of the thyroid gland have more *Pitta* (energy), and relatively inert cells of bone tissue such as osteocytes, or muscle cells, have more *Kapha* (mass and cohesion) than the other cells of the body.

The psychophysiological constitution (*Dosha Prakriti*) :

The relative proportion of the three *Doshas* is very important. *Dosha Prakriti* is the relative proportion of the three *Doshas*, genetically determined and within normal limits. A variety of prenatal factors develop a particular "pattern" of relative predominance of any one of the three *Doshas* in an individual's constitution, and this normal, genetically determined predominance is responsible for the individual's total personality, representing the sum total of its physical, physiological and psychic aspects. So, the *Dosha Prakriti* is an important point for the understanding of human life, health, illness, disease, disease prevention and health promotion, as well as therapeutic needs of patients. The ayurvedic texts describe in detail the aspects physical, physiological and behavioral aspects of people with different psychophysiological constitutions.

The three *Gunas* :

The five elements (*Panca Mahabhûtas*) are represented in the Psyche of an individual in terms of three *Gunas* at the level of the Mind (*Manas*), namely *Sattva*, *Raja*, *Tama*. Space (*Ākāsha*) is represented by *Sattva Guna*. Air and Fire (*Vāyu* and *Teja*) are represented by *Raja Guna*, while the Earth and Water (*Prithvi* and *Jala*) are represented by *Tama Guna*. *Tama* represents mass and inertia, while *Raja* represents the dynamics and the activity. *Sattva* represents a state of complete equilibrium. So, the three *gunas* are the psychic equivalent of the three *Doshas* at the body level. According to the predominance relative and genetically determined one or other of the three *Gunas*, the psychic aspect of an individual varies. This variation is classified into three Psychic Constitutions (*Manas Prakritis*) main, subdivided into sixteen subcategories or characters. In principle, a Average normal individual represents a combination of the sixteen categories. However, one categories can predominate and give an individual a special character that becomes then his mental type or *Manas Prakritis*.

Self-healing power (*Swabhaaparamvada*) :

Ayurveda proposes a theory self-healing natural and spontaneous by his doctrine called *Swabhaaparamvada*. according to Ayurveda, the human body has the inherent and unique power to defend itself against the disease and to heal spontaneously when sick. The body heals itself and any aggression to health can be followed by a natural cure. The essential role of medicine is to assist nature.

Basic causes of the disease :

However, despite its very great ability to resist naturally to the disease and despite his immunity (*Vyadhikshamatva*), the man suffers a variety of physical and mental disorders that require medical intervention. We will therefore describe the causes of the disease as conceived by Ayurveda. Ayurveda proposes as the root cause of any disease the lack of harmony between Man and his Environment, the interaction between the Microcosm (man) and the Macrocosm (universe) named *Purusha* and *Loka* respectively. Fundamentally, the *Loka-Purusha* interaction takes place at three levels:

- *Kala* (time factor) and its chronobiological influences.
- *Buddhi* (human intellect), the main source of knowledge, and
- *Indriyārtha* (objects of the five sense organs), information source of the macrocosm

(universe) to the microcosm (man).

The normal functions of *Kala*, *Buddhi* and *Indriyarta* are important attributes of life process. But their malfunction is considered the primary cause of the disease. Imbalance (*Ayoga* / absence, *Atyoga* / excessive use, *Mithyayoga* / use perverted, abnormal) of time, intellect and the functioning of the senses are considered as the root cause of all diseases. All causes of known diseases and described by different medical schools are secondary to these prime factors that are essentially environmental factors. So, the cause of the disease according Ayurveda rests in the environment. The means of healing must then be sought in nature.

Evolution of the disease and rhythms of the *Doshas* :

When an individual is indisposed because of the aetiological factors set out above, the disease process evolves in the form of a

Tridoshic arrhythmia and a vicious *Doshas* that can lead to an irreversible diathesis giving rise to a fully developed disease. *Sushruta*, one of the leading classical ayurvedic physicians, describes six stages in the course of a disease that are specific stages that can be mediated by appropriate therapeutic treatments. These stages, numbering six, are called *Shatkriyakala* (the six stages of time), namely:

- *Sancaya* (stage of accumulation of *Doshas*)
- *Prakopa* (vascular stage of *Doshas*)
- *Prasara* (stage of dispersion of *Doshas*)
- *Sthana Samsraya* (*Doshas* fixation stage in other locations)
- *Vyakti* (manifestation stage of the disease)
- *Bheda* (stage of transition to chronicity and complications of the disease)

The precision with which are described the different stages of the progression of the disease in relationship with the necessary therapeutic interventions is a concept unique to Ayurveda and demonstrates the intensity and great observational capacity of ancient physicians. The philosophy that is at the root of the concept of *Shatkriyakala* is the need for early diagnosis of the onset of the disease and the appropriate therapeutic intervention and in time so that the development of the disease can be reversed to normality without waiting to cure that the fully developed disease does not manifest itself. An ayurvedic doctor will want detect the early signs that appear when the germ of the disease comes to be sown. In fact, the *Sancaya* stadium (stage of accumulation of *Doshas*) is the stage where the disease is in the germ state.

***Agni* and *Āma* :**

In the context described above, it is often asked why *Doshas* begin to accumulate, where rather what is the main factor responsible for trigger of *Kriyakala*. Among many factors, *Agni*, digestive power and fire metabolic rate of the body, is considered the most important factor. There are thirteen types *Agnis* in the body, responsible for the digestion of food and metabolism in different levels. When *Agni* is weak, many unwanted by products of digestion and metabolism are produced and accumulate in the body at different levels, from the lowest level at the molecular level, from the local level in the Digestive tract systemic level of tissues and cells. Such degradation products are called *Āma* and act as toxic and antigenic material. The presence of *Āma* creates a state of *Āma* (stale) in the body that is characterized by an increased obstruction and a viscosity of the body's channels called *Shrotas*. Such a state allows the accumulation of *Doshas* (*Sancaya*) which represents the first stage of *Kriyakala*,

and the sequence of events that follows is a mandatory phenomenon. It is in light of this phenomenon that Ayurveda insists categorically on the fact that all diseases are the product of a weak *Agni*, and therefore that the fundamental principle of treating all diseases in Ayurveda is to restore and fortify *Agni*, ie digestion and metabolism.

Ayurvedic Diagnosis :

The diagnosis in ayurvedic medicine is not always done in order to give a name to a disease, but is done more for the purpose of describing a morbid process, to describe the mode of vitiation of the *Doshas* and *Dushyas* (place where the morbidity is manifested, either the organs) or the *Shrotas* (channels) incriminated, and to describe the quality of life, health and personality of the patient. All this requires an anamnesis and a complete examination of the patient.

Ayurveda has a dual approach to diagnosis, namely:

- Examination of the patient, or *Rogi Pariksha*
- Examination of the disease, or *Roga Pariksha*.

Rogi Parikshâ concerns essentially the determination of the constitution of the patient and his state of health and vitality. It's not about diagnosing a disease. The importance determines the constitution as well as assess the health status of a sick person is a concept unique to Ayurveda (2). Ayurveda proposes to undertake this part of the clinical examination keeping in mind that such information regarding the patient are always of great help to presume a diagnosis, a prognosis, as well as to decide a general line of treatment. *Caraka*, the greatest authority on Ayurveda, describes a ten-step methodology for conducting the clinical examination, namely:

- *Prakriti* (psychophysiological constitution),
- *Vikriti* (susceptibility to disease),
- *Sar* (tissue quality),
- *Samhanana* (compactness of the body),
- *Pramana* (anthropometric measurements),
- *Sâtmya* (adaptability),
- *Sattva* (mental strength),
- *Âgni Shakti* (digestive power),
- *Vyâyâma Shakti* (physical strength),
- *Vaya* (age and speed of aging).

Roga Pariksha or examination of the pathology, is done in order to diagnose the present disease. This is usually done in three steps:

- Anamnesis of the main complaints and history of the disease,
- General examination of the patient in eight stages, including pulse, urine examination, stools, tongue, skin, etc.
- Whole Body Systemic Review, including the thirteen main channels (*Shrotas*), distributed over the six main parts of the body (*Shadangas*), ie the head, the thorax, abdomen and extremities.

Pulse interpretation is one of the most important aspects of clinical examination. The ayurvedic doctor who has acquired the necessary experience and knowledge is supposed to know a lot about the health of his patient by interpreting the pulse. Many doctors claim to rely entirely on this interpretation to make their diagnosis, although classical Ayurveda does not have such claims.

Promoting health and preventing disease :

Ayurvedic medicine has an approach essentially to prevent disease and promote health. However, she also provides an extensive system of curative medicine for the treatment of diseases, while adapting an original holistic approach. In accordance with the four dimensional concept of life (*Ayu*), Ayurveda conceives a definition of health in four dimensions. *Sushruta*, defines health (*Swāsthya*) as a state of equilibrium (*Sama*) of the three *Doshas*, thirteen *Agnis* (managing the metabolism), seven *Dhātus* (tissues) and *Malas* (excreta). The individual is then in a state of total biological balance, while being in a state of sensory, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being (*Prasanna*). Thus, Ayurveda presents the most complete definition of health for the first time in history. The ayurvedic texts describe a comprehensive plan of health measures for the preservation of health, code of conduct popularly known as *Swastha Vritta*. This code includes daily health routines (*Dinacaryā*), driving for the night (*Rātricaryā*), conduct in relation to the various seasons (*Ritucaryā*), etc. Details about the style of life, diet, exercise, personal and social hygiene (*Sadvritta*) have been described. Full information is available on nutrition and dietetics. Ayurveda also describes in detail the role of periodic biological purification measures and consumption of fortifying remedies (*Rasayanas*), for the promotion of health and to increase longevity, improve immunity (*Vyadhikshamatva*) or resistance to diseases.

The therapeutic approach :

The purpose of curative treatments of Ayurveda is to restore the balance of *Doshas* because, according to Ayurveda, a disease is due to nothing but imbalance of *Doshas*, or in other words, loss of homeostasis. Therapies tending to restore equilibrium then consists in:

- increase insufficient *Doshas*,
- reduce excess *Doshas*, and
- preserve balanced *Doshas*.

It is possible to do this by having a proper diet, medications and therapies drawn of nature and based on the principle of *Sāmānya* and *Vishesha* (homologous versus heterologous).

According to the classical doctrine of *Samanya* and *Vishesha*, a similar or homologous received from the outside enriches the similar matter in the body, and a dissimilar matter or heterologous diminishes its counterpart in the body. The concept of *Sāmānya* / *Vishesha* in Ayurveda is considered the fundamental basis of any therapeutic action. He represents the law of nature functioning, and this principle is adopted by the doctor for his treatments.

The three therapeutic currents :

Ayurveda describes three currents of intervention primary therapies that may certainly be complementary, but which most of the

times are used specifically for specific categories of disorders. The three conventional therapeutic currents are :

- Divine Therapy (*Daiva Vyapâsraya Cikitsâ*)
- Rational Therapy (*Yukti Vyapâsraya Cikitsâ*)
- Psychotherapy (*Sattvâvajaya*)

Divine therapy is especially indicated in so-called *Karmaik* diseases, ie diseases caused by actions in past lives, where no cause is detectable in this life, and where no rational therapy is effective. Divine therapy is often practiced according to Astrology. The stars, the precious stones, the *Mantras*, *Japa*, prayers, etc. are usual therapies in this area. It's a kind of astrotherapy. It is neither a psychotherapy nor a biological therapy. Ayurveda describes psychotherapy (*Sattvâvajaya*) separately as well as biological therapies (*Yuktivyapâsraya Chikitsâ*). Biological therapy is a rationally planned therapy that takes into account the doctrines of the five elements (*Panca Mahâbhuta*), the three *Doshas*, the three *Gunas*, *Agni*, *Âma*, etc., following the principle of *Samayana* and *Vishesha* (homologous versus heterologous).). It is essentially a rational biological therapy aimed at restoring the balance of homeostasis (*Dhātu Sâmya*).

Ayurvedic rational therapy :

This ayurvedic rational therapy is conducted in two stages:

- *Samshodhana*, or purification therapy, and
- *Samshamana*, or healing therapy.

1) The purification therapy (*Samshodhana*), popularly known as *Panca Karma*, aims to purify the body from the most rudest level to the most subtle level, and to "clean" the channels (*Shrotas*) of the body to allow the free flow of nutrients, drugs and metabolites. The living human body consists of innumerable channels named *Shrotas*. As a result of poor health, various disorders, these channels that we can follow up to the level of pores in the cell membranes, block, "Clog". Ayurveda claims that these channels must be purified by *Samshodhana* (purification), to allow the body to heal itself spontaneous recovery, as well as allowing drugs to reach their target easier. Thus, the purification therapy (*Samshodhana*) represents a condition first for all kinds of drug therapies and specific therapeutic interventions (*Samshamana*). Many procedures are described under the term *Samshodhana Karma* (purification action) and are practiced in two forms:

1. External purification by application of oils, sweating and massage, where the therapist uses oil baths, the heat and the physical pressure of the massage as therapeutic instruments to soften and mobilize impurities (*Malas*). External cleansing measures liquefy impurities from the body, bringing them into the gross channels of the body (excretory system) from where they are expelled using the purifying procedures of *Samshodhana Karma*. Thus, external cleansing measures such as the application of oils, sweating and massage are considered preparative measures for the more important internal purification therapies.

2. The internal purification measures consist of emesis (*Vamana*), purgation (*Virecana*), oily enema (*Anuvasana Vasti*), non-oily enema (*Asthapana Vasti*) and nasal irrigation (*Shirovirecana*). These therapies are popularly known as *Pancha Karma* or five-point therapy.

In principle, the purification treatment (*Samshodhana Karma*) is followed by treatments specific treatments (*Samshamana*) consisting of a rationally planned diet, medicines and daily routines. When formulating a treatment plan (*Samshamana*), the ayurvedic doctor takes into account the patient's constitution (*Prakriti*) and the peculiarities of its tendency to disease (*Vikriti*) quantified by the mode of vitiation of *Doshas*, tissues (*Dhâtus*), digestive power (*Agni*), etc. He uses the composition *Pancabhautic* medications and diets, including their taste (*Rasa*), qualities (*Guna*), power (*Virya*), effect after digestion (*Vipâka*) and specific effect (*Prabhâva*), and follows the law of *Sâmânya* and *Vishesha* (homologues versus heterologues).