

Ayurveda – The Wisdom of Life

Ayurveda is an ancient holistic system of medicine and natural healing from India, and is the oldest known form of healthcare in the world.

We can find historical evidence of Ayurveda in the ancient books of wisdom known as the Vedas, written over 6,000 years ago, of which only a small portion is available to us from that time.¹

Tibetan medicine and traditional Chinese medicine both have their roots in Ayurveda. Early Greek medicine also embraced many concepts originally described in the classical Ayurvedic medical texts. Ayurveda has been used and practiced throughout the subcontinent, Indonesia and many other countries in the surrounding region for thousands of years, although it was often suppressed during various occupations in those areas.

Recently the western world, particularly Europe and the United States, has become increasingly fascinated with and interested in Ayurvedic medicine.

The Science of Life

The word Ayurveda roughly translates as “The Science of Life.” It is merger of two Sanskrit words: ‘Ayu’ (the root of ayur & ayus) which means ‘life,’ and ‘Veda’ which means a combination of ‘science, knowledge and wisdom.’

According to Ayurveda, first noted by the ancient Ayurvedic scholar Charaka: *human life is the combination of mind, body, senses and soul.*

Ayurveda sees that the senses and the mind work in conjunction with one another and greatly influence our physiology.

Ayurveda is not just a medical system. It sees human beings as an integral part of nature. It believes that human beings should live in harmony with nature just as the animals and plants do, and utilize the laws of nature to create health and balance within. It adheres to this focus in guiding human beings to maintain health by using the inherent principles of nature to bring an individual back into equilibrium with his or her true self.

The ancient texts reveal that Ayurveda was also originally used as a regime to remove obstacles on one’s path to Self-Realization. At some point the medical aspects began to take priority over the spiritual forms of healing.

Today, these spiritual aspects of Ayurveda have taken a back seat to the medical focus. As Ayurveda becomes more commercially viable, the spiritual aspects may continue to lose ground. Yet there are



a growing number of practitioners who employ these spiritual therapies and find better results than limiting their approach only to the medical, physical realm.

Understanding Ayurveda

Ayurvedic wisdom offers life-enhancing practices as well as herbal medicinal preparations for the health and well being of the whole human being: body, mind, and soul. It is much more than just a system to treat symptoms or physical illness.

Ayurveda describes three fundamental energies that govern our health and well being, and are seen both in our internal and external environments. Called 'doshas' these three energies are known as:

- Vata (Air/Wind)
- Pitta (Fire/Sun)
- Kapha (Earth & Water)

Ayurveda sees these primary forces in a unique combination in every individual, and as relating to the characteristics of our mind and body. Every individual has a unique proportion of these three forces that shapes our nature.

These doshas also have the characteristic of being: movement (Vata), transformation (Pitta) and structure (Kapha). We are all made up of unique proportions of Vata, Pitta and Kapha. The ratios of the doshas vary in each individual. Because of this, Ayurveda sees each person as a special mixture that accounts for our diversity.

Ayurveda gives us a model to look at each individual as a unique makeup of the three doshas (and sub-doshas), and thereby design treatment protocols that specifically address a person's health challenges.

Herbs are often recommended to supplement the nutritional requirements on a regular basis to build and maintain a healthy physiology. As some of the Ayurvedic herbs are now recognized to be the most potent and powerful adaptogens on the planet -- and since stress is now known to be a significant factor in over 80 percent of all illnesses -- these herbs are essential in any health program designed to promote and maintain a healthy human body.

When any of the doshas become aggravated, thereby upsetting the natural harmony for the individual, Ayurveda suggests specific lifestyle and nutritional guidelines as well as specific medicinal herbs to assist the individual in reducing and rebalancing the dosha that has become excessive or out of balance.

Ayurveda goes into great detail to describe the medicinal attributes of many herbs and their correct usage to compliment and hasten the healing process, and to strengthen the body's organs and systems.



Ayurvedic Herbs: Controversy Over Pharma Attempts at Patents²

Growing awareness in the west of the efficacy of Ayurvedic herbs and formulations has led to controversy and battles with the western pharmaceutical companies trying to patent these herbs.³

Only recently discovered in the west, Ayurvedic herbs such as Neem, Ashwagandha, Tulsi, Shatavari, Turmeric, Amalaki and Brahmi as well as traditional preparations such as Triphala and Trikatu have long been known to have significant medicinal value without adverse side effects.



Several pharmaceutical companies and academic institutions in the west have come into conflict with Indian academic institutions and traditional Ayurvedic practitioners over the intellectual property rights of herbal products researched by the western agencies.

The Ayurvedic practitioners have known about the efficacy of such products for centuries, and so contend that they carry precedence with regards to patent rights on such products.

Free Trade Industrial Agriculture Rules Threaten the World's Farmers

Per the World Trade Organization Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights Agreement:⁴

“Indian farmers, traditional practitioners, and traders will lose their market share in local, national and global markets. For example, recently the U.S. government granted a patent for the anti-diabetic properties of karela, jamun, and brinjal to two non-resident Indians, Onkar S. Tomer and Kripanath Borah, and their colleague Peter Gloniski. Yet the use of these substances for control of diabetes is everyday knowledge and practice in India. Their medical use is documented in authoritative treatises such as Wealth of India, the Compendium of Indian Medicinal Plants and the Treatise on Indian Medicinal Plants.

If there were only one or two cases of such false claims to invention on the basis of biopiracy, they could be called an error. However, biopiracy is an epidemic.

Neem, haldi, pepper, harar, bahera, amla, mustard, basmati, ginger, castor, jaramla, amaltas and new karela and jamun have all been patented. The problem is not, as was made out to be in the case of turmeric, an error made by a patent clerk. The problem is deep and systemic. And it calls for a systemic change, not case-by-case challenges. The potential costs of biopiracy to the Third World poor are very high since two-thirds of the people in the South depend on free access to biodiversity for their livelihoods and

needs. Seventy percent of seed in India is saved or shared farmers' seed; 70 percent of healing is based on indigenous medicine using local plants."

Obtaining Potent, Efficacious, Organic (Heavy-metal Free) Ayurvedic Herbs



It has been mostly individual practitioners who procure, grow, dry and prepare these herbs and preparations in an effective, potent manner, whereas commercially available Ayurvedic products have been of substandard quality.

It is only recently that a few companies have started producing high quality organic Ayurvedic herbal products, most notably, ORGANIC INDIA Pvt. Ltd. Headquartered in Lucknow, UP. North India.

Ayurveda Moving West

Clinical practice, research and education in Ayurvedic medicine remain the most authentic in India. However, attempts are being made by westerners to export the essence of Ayurveda to complement their own medical systems, where the pharmaceutical industry and allopathic medicine predominates.

As a result of regulations in medical practice in Europe and America, the most commonly practiced Ayurvedic treatments in the west are massage, dietary counseling and herbal advice.

The NAMA (National Ayurvedic Medical Association-USA) is one of several groups seeking to set standards for Ayurveda in the west.

There are 26 schools in the US and dozens in Europe which are teaching 500+ hour courses for proficiency at Ayurvedic Health Practitioners, certified but not licensed.



In the United States, the NIH NCCAM expends some of its \$123 million budget on Ayurvedic medicine research. In addition, the National Institute of Ayurvedic Medicine, established by Dr. Scott Gerson, is an example of a research institute that has carried out research into Ayurvedic practices.

Dr. Gerson has published part of his work on the antifungal activities of certain Ayurvedic plants in medical journals. Other notable researchers on ayurveda in the West include Dr. Bala Manyam, the Maharishi Ayurveda group in Fairfield, Iowa, and Dr. Mano Venkatraman at the University of Washington, Seattle.

Ayurveda is a Recognized Medicine

Ayurvedic practitioners are regularly appointed as an “Honorary Ayurvedic Physician” to the President of India. Every year on the occasion of Dhanvantari Jayanti, a prestigious Dhanvantari Award is conferred on a famous personality of medicine, including a doctor of Ayurveda.

Ayurveda is a statutory, recognized medical system of health care like other medical systems existing in India. Ayurvedic medicines have to be approved, registered and licensed by the Central Council of Indian Medicine {CCIM}, which governs and recommends policies for the research and development of the system.

In India, practitioners in Ayurveda undergo five and a half years of training, including one year of internship in select Ayurveda medical schools, where they earn the professional doctorate degree of Bachelor of Ayurvedic Medicine and Surgery.

¹ According to India's Council for Research on Ayurveda, the Ayurvedavatarana (the "descent of Ayurveda") or origin of Ayurveda is said to be a divine revelation of the Hindu deity Brahma, as he awoke to recreate the universe. It was revealed to the gods through the means of the divine physician Dhanvantari who emerged from the churning of the celestial ocean. This knowledge was passed directly to Daksha Prajapati in the form of shloka sung by Lord Brahma, and this was in turn passed down through a successive chain of deities to Lord Indra, the protector of dharma. According to this account, the first human exponent of Ayurveda was Bharadvaja, who learned it directly from Indra. Bharadvaja in turn taught Ayurveda to a group of assembled sages, who then passed down different aspects of this knowledge to their students. According to tradition, Ayurveda was first described in text form by Agnivesha, in his book the Agnivesh tantra. The book was later redacted by Charaka, and became known as the Charaka Samhitā. Another early text of Ayurveda is the Sushruta Samhitā, which was compiled by Sushruta, the primary pupil of Dhanvantri, sometime around 1000 BCE. Sushrut is known as the Father of Surgery, and in the Sushrut Samhita, the teachings and surgical techniques of Dhanvantri are compiled and complemented with additional findings and observations of Sushrut regarding topics ranging from obstetrics and orthopedics to ophthalmology. Sushrut Samhita together with Charaka Samhitā, served as the textual material within the ancient Universities of Takshashila and Nalanda.[29] These texts are believed to have been written around the beginning of the Common Era, and are based on a holistic approach rooted in the philosophy of the Vedas and Vedic culture. Holism is central to Ayurvedic philosophy and elements of holism is found in several aspects of Ayurveda.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayurveda>

² For more information, please visit: <http://content.herbalgram.org/bodywise/HerbalGram/articleview.asp?a=1242>

<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2007/20070617/spectrum/main1.htm>

<http://www.iahf.com/piracy.html>

http://www.navdanya.org/articles/basmati_battle.htm

³ In December 1993, the University of Mississippi Medical Center had a patent issued to them by US Patents and Trademarks office on the use of turmeric (US Patent No. 5,401,504) for healing. The patent was contested by India's industrial research organization, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (C.S.I.R), on the grounds that traditional Ayurvedic practitioners were already aware of the healing properties of the substance and have been for centuries, making this patent a case of biopiracy. After a complex legal battle, the US PTO ruled on August 14, 1997 that the patent was invalid because it was not a novel invention, giving the intellectual property rights to the principle back to the traditional practitioners of Ayurveda. R. A. Mashelkar, director-general of the CSIR, was satisfied with the result, saying: “This success will enhance the confidence of the people and help remove fears about India's helplessness on preventing bio-piracy and appropriation of inventions based on traditional knowledge.” <http://www.iahf.com/piracy.html>

⁴ International Forum on Globalization, FREE TRADE INDUSTRIAL AGRICULTURE RULES THREATEN THE WORLD'S FARMERS: The World Trade Organization Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights Agreement. By Dr. Vandana Shiva, http://www.ifg.org/pdf/int%27I_trade-shiva_WTO.pdf_1.pdf