



Previous articles have presented some ideas of Prāṇa so we can now move towards presenting a more complete picture of how Āyurveda sees the human body.

This article looks at how Ayurveda sees the types of bodily tissues and waste products as vital to the effective construction and working of the body.

YOGA AND INDIAN THOUGHT

Yoga is a word that has, within Indian thought, many meanings. To define the word Yoga is very difficult as the word is so adaptable.

To the Vedantin the word Yoga means union with, or coming to know, God. This is why the Vedantin interpretation of the Yoga Sūtra by Isherwood and Prabhavananda is titled 'How to know God'.

To the follower of the philosophy of Sāṃkhya the concept of God is not a factor or issue in the process of release or union. With this philosophy the emphasis is on freeing oneself from a effects of Duḥkha (See Āyurveda and Yoga Part IV). God does not come into the question, form a part of the goal or act as a catalyst in the process. Perhaps the Yoga Sūtra interpreted from the viewpoint of Sāṃkhya would be titled "How to Know".

In other words how to know what is the distinction between Purusa (Spirit) and Prakṛti (Matter). This is summarised as Prakṛti–Purusa–Viveka. Through the study of the principles of Sāṃkhya one cultivates Viveka or discernment between the principles of spirit and matter. Hence Viveka can mean to see both sides (See Part IV Āyurveda and Yoga.)

For the Yogin the Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali is regarded as the primary source of Yoga psychology and philosophy. Within its tenets the idea of linking with God does not arise. Here Yoga is defined as the ability to contain the activities of the psyche in order to link with and to facilitate an enhanced quality of awareness within our everyday actions.

In fact the whole philosophy of Patanjali revolves around the basic idea that our troubles have their roots in the psyche or Citta. It has the capacity to act as a servant or as a master. This Citta has the capacity to focus or distract.

This Citta has the capacity to make you feel well or unwell. It has the capacity to make you feel happy or sad.

Patañjali tells us that the locks which bind us to particular modes of behaviour are in the Citta. However, so are the keys and operated correctly this Citta that produces suffering or Duḥkha can also free us from suffering. The Yoga Sūtra offers many keys to help unlock the psyche from its habitual patterning. There are alternatives to help one person in different situations or alternatives to help different people in the same situation.

This is why the Yoga Sūtra is regarded as a great companion to the practitioner of Yoga and every effort should be made to absorb, if possible through a teacher who has themselves studied the Yoga Sūtra, the proposals given to help in the reduction of our confusion and its consequent refinement of our awareness.

ĀYURVEDA AND YOGA

Āyurveda relates the different aspects of the individual to the ideas and intentions of Yoga.

The Caraka Saṃhitā, Sārīrasthāna CI v138–139, defines Yoga as:

“Happiness and suffering are felt due to the contact of spirit, sense organs, psyche, and the objects of the senses. Both these types of sensations disappear when the mind is concentrated in the spirit and the powers in the mind and body are attained. This state is known as Yoga according to sages well versed in this science.”

Broadly speaking, Āyurveda stands for knowledge of life and is an inquiry into that that which keeps the body alive. This inquiry is not just an extension of our life span but also about protecting the vitality of the individual.

This vitality, expressed in Indian thought as Prāṇa, is the focal point of both Āyurveda and Yoga. Previous articles have presented some ideas on Prāṇa so we can now move towards presenting a more complete picture of how Āyurveda sees the human body.

ĀYURVEDA AND ANATOMY

Āyurveda defines the body as “that which gradually decays”. It is seen as having five elements (panca bhūta), ether, air, fire, water and earth. The five elements are an expression of three greater principles (tri doṣa) Air, Fire and Water.

These three principles govern the biological, physiological, psychological and pathological functions of the body and mind. They act as stabilisers for the normal function of the body, when out of balance they contribute to the disease process. However, we see ourselves as flesh and blood. So what, according to Āyurveda, is the human body composed of?

THE SEVEN DHĀTU OR TISSUE ELEMENTS

The human body consists of seven basic and vital tissues called Dhātu. The Saṃskṛta word Dhātu means that which assists the body or which enters into the formation of the basic structure of the body.

So Dhātu is “that which constructs” and these seven are responsible for the entire structure of the body. They maintain the functions of different organs, systems and vital parts of the body and play an important role in the development, nourishment and protection of the body.

The seven Dhātu are:

- 1 Rasa (chyle) containing nutrients from undigested food it provides nourishment for the various tissues and vital organs in the body.
- 2 Rakta (blood) is nourished by Rasa, it governs oxygenation in all tissues and vital organs and thus is vital for life.
- 3 Māṃsa (muscle) is nourished by Rakta and covers the skeleton, allows joint movement and contributes to the strength of the body.
- 4 Meda (fat) is nourished by Mamsa and maintains the lubrication and oiliness of all the tissues, contributing to the firmness of the body.
- 5 Asthi (bone) is nourished by Meda and gives support to the body structure.
- 6 Majjā (marrow) is nourished by bone, fills the cavities and pores of the bony spaces.
- 7 Śukra (reproductive tissue) is nourished by Majja, contains the ingredients of all tissues, contributes toward strength and vitality and is responsible for reproduction.

One can see from the above that the Dhātu are interdependent, with each Dhātu nourishing and transforming into the next. Here the principle of Fire helps in the process with the digestion of food and its conversion to chyle, blood, muscle, fat, bone, marrow and sperm or ovum.

When one Dhātu is defective, it affects the successive Dhātu, as each Dhātu receives its nourishment from the previous one. This is why Āyurveda places such importance on eating food appropriate to your constitution, and on having an effective digestive fire to help with metabolism and assimilation. Wrong food and / or poor digestion contribute to the toxins in the body through impurities and unassimilated foods that are absorbed into the blood and enter the general circulation. These toxins eventually accumulate in the weaker parts of the body causing clogging, stagnation, or contraction. From this nourishment to the tissue cells is reduced with a resulting impairment in function and an opportunity for the disease process to manifest.

Guṇa Quality	Doṣa Principle	Bhūta Element	Dhātu Tissue	Mala Waste
1) Rajas Motion	1) Vāta Air	1) Ākāśa Ether 2) Vāyu Air	1) Rasa Chyle 2) Rakta Blood 3) Māṃsa Muscle	1) Puriṣa Faeces 2) Mūtra Urine
2) Sattva Light	2) Pitta Fire	3) Agni Fire	4) Meda Fat 5) Asthi Bone	3) Svedha Sweat
3) Tamas Inertia	3) Kapha Water	4) Ap Water 5) Pṛthvī Earth	6) Majja Marrow 7) Śukra Sperm/Ovum	

According to Āyurveda food taken into the body should be either effectively assimilated or effectively eliminated. So what are the waste products of the body?

THE THREE MALA OR WASTE PRODUCTS

The body produces three waste products of Mala. A Saṃskṛta word, Mala means any bodily excretion. The three primary ones are:

- 1 Puriṣa – Faeces
- 2 Mūtra – Urine
- 3 Svedha – Sweat

The appropriate production and efficient elimination of these is vital to health. The three excretory systems play an important part in the correct processing of solids and liquids and the waste products are not only food refuse but also substances eliminated from the tissue cells of the body.

Thus a proper functioning of the bowel is necessary in maintaining the health of the Dhātu. If there is an imbalance in the bowel, disease may occur not only in the gastro-intestinal tract but also in other parts of the body.

However, excessive elimination or diarrhoea can strip the body of nutrients and lead to a serious depletion of health. Conversely we can survive with constipation with only mild symptoms such as distension, headaches, flatulence, pain in the body and bad breath. By ignoring these symptoms we again provide the soil for the seeds of disease to manifest.

Urine is another Mala through which many waste products are eliminated. Even though excessive passage of urine is considered a disease in Āyurveda, it is always advised that a person should take an adequate quantity of pure

water, both in summer and winter. To ensure effective elimination the Mala of sweating is essential for the health of the skin and to regulate body temperature.

Proper exercise and herbs can be prescribed to help an individual to sweat and eliminate waste products. However, excessive sweating is seen as a disorder that can reduce body temperature, circulation and cause dehydration. So, although the Mala are waste products and are usually expelled from the body, they too have their actions and functions in the balance of the body. Either excess Mala or deficient Mala can allow disease to develop.

Summary

We now have a more complete picture of how Āyurveda views the individual.

We have introduced:

- 1 The three Guṇa or qualities of Motion, Light and Inertia
- 2 The three Doṣa or Principles of Air, Fire and Water.
- 3 The five Bhūta or elements of Ether, Air, Fire, Water and Earth.
- 4 The seven Dhātu or tissues of chyle, blood, muscle, fat, bone, marrow and reproductive tissue.
- 5 The three Mala or waste products of stool, urine and sweat.

These groups are linked with the three qualities and the three principles manifesting as the five elements (See Āyurveda and Yoga Part III). Further, the seven tissues are composed of the five elements. For example earth predominates in muscle and fat, water predominates in lymph and chyle, fire predominates in blood, air predominates in bone and ether predominates in the porous tissue of the bone. These Dhātu or tissues remain in the individual in a particular proportion and any change in their balance can lead to disease. The Mala or waste products ensure that a balance is maintained between effective elimination and effective assimilation. The interdependence of the groups is illustrated by the example of Apāna or excretory energy of the Air principle being responsible for the efficient discharge of Mala or waste products (See Āyurveda and Yoga Part VI).

We can see that long ago Āyurveda developed and refined ideas on how the body operates and the importance of correct functioning of the various aspects of the individual. The science placed great emphasis on the preventative and curative aspects of food, exercise, attitude and environment. All of these were seen to combine to sustain a quality which permeates one's life and actions. Much emphasis was placed on the effects of food on the three principles and seven tissue elements in the individual.

Furthermore Āyurveda was one of the first sciences to appreciate the interaction between health and disease, disease and food, and food and health. It will be from this point that the next article will explore the question of diet by examining the concepts of elements and taste in food.