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Ayurveda: The Ancient Medical Science of Hinduism

From the Bubonic Plague to the Ebola epidemic last year, disease continues to be the most basic problem afflicting humans since prehistoric times. Ayurveda is an ancient well organized system of medicine whose roots originated in the Indus Valley Civilizations more than 5,000 years ago. More than a mere system of treating illness, Ayurveda is literally the Science of Life. In fact, in Sanskrit “Ayur” means life and “Veda” means Science. In Hindu tradition, it is said that Brahma, the Creator, was the divine source of this science and was brought into existence before mankind, supporting the great antiquity of Ayurveda. Ayurveda is a fundamental part of Hinduism and continues to be increasingly popular between both the Eastern and Western cultures, with an ultimate goal to help an individual discover personal knowledge of living.

Some writers say that Ayurveda is thousands of thousands of years old. In his book *Bhartiya Ras Shashtra*, Acharya Vishwanath Dwivedi writes that when language was not written in script, The Guru would make his pupils memorize the Vedas, the 4 religious Hindi lyrics, in Gurukul and this tradition has been passes down for many years before script came into existence. The earliest-recorded knowledge about Ayurveda is found in the *Rigveda* and the *Atharvaveda*, both written in the second millennium BC. The *Atharvaveda* lists eight divisions of Ayurveda: internal medicine, surgery of head and neck, ophthalmology, surgery, toxicology, psychiatry, pediatrics, gerontology or science of rejuvenation, and fertility. A traditional health care system from centuries, Ayurveda is an amalgam of Indian philosophical, psychological, and medical understandings.

Ayurveda is based upon the philosophy that man is a microcosm of the surrounding universe. The five elements of Earth: *prthvi* (earth, solid component), *apas* (water, liquid), *tejas* (radiant energy, body heat, digestive fire), *vayu* (air), and *akasa* (empty spaces inside the body) are also part of the human being. The central theme that human beings are a part of nature, Ayurveda describes three fundamental energies that govern our inner and outer environments: *Vata* (Wind), *Pitta* (Fire), and *Kapha* (Earth), these primary forces are responsible for the characteristics of our mind and body. Our personality is a result of the unique proportion of these forces. If *Vata* is dominant, we tend to be light, enthusiastic, energetic, and changeable. If *Pitta* predominates, we tend to be intense, intelligent, and goal-oriented. When *Kapha* prevails, we tend to be easy-going, methodical, and nurturing. Everyone has these three forces; however, it is commonly believed that one or two elements predominate.

The Ayurvedic concept of treatment is based on the balances and imbalances of the three elements *Vata*, *Kapha*, and *Pitta*. When *Vata* is balanced, a person is lively and creative, but an excess causes a person anxiety, insomnia, dry skin, constipation, and difficulty focusing. When *Pitta* is balanced, a person is warm, friendly, disciplined, and a good leader. When *Pitta* is out of balance, a person tends to be compulsive and irritable and may suffer from indigestion or an inflammatory condition. When *Kapha* is balanced, a person is sweet, supportive, and stable but too much causes, a person may experience sluggishness, weight gain, and sinus congestion. Based on these factors, the goal of Ayurvedic medicine is to return the body to its balanced state using diet, herbs, aromatherapy, massage treatments, music, and meditation.

Ayurvedic Medicine defines good health as a melody of of *sarira* (body), *manas* (mind), and *atman* (self). Ayurveda's focus on the elementary concepts of nature, holiness, and our diet has resulted in increased popularity. Ayurveda forms an integral part of the daily regimen of

hundreds of millions of people worldwide. Its principles are utilized, not only to treat individuals who are ill, but also to prepare balanced meals and construct harmonious environments. Ayurveda is not just living healthily, but living consciously and realizing the purpose and form of one's existence.

Works Cited

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