

## **Know breath, know life**

One of the acharyas of Ayurveda has said, "Rase sidhe karishyami nirdaridryam idam jagath which means "I am giving this knowledge of Ayurveda to take away suffering from the world". So, the approach of Ayurveda towards life is wholistic.

Life has four characteristics, it exists, evolves, expresses and extinguishes. For this, it depends on five elements: the earth, water, air, ether and fire. To make it easier to understand we can bring in the five senses and its objects: sight, smell, taste, sound and touch. The study of life is Ayurveda ('Ved' means to know, 'Ayur' is life).

According to Ayurveda, life or existence is not a rigid compartment, but a harmonious flow. Even these five elements of which the whole universe is made of, are not tight compartments of defined objects. They flow into one another. Each one of the elements contains the other four.

The subtlest in us is space, which the mind is made up of, and the gross is the earth element, which our bones and marrows, and the skin and the structure is made of. This is further divided into three Doshas — Vata, Pitta and Kapha.

It is a way to understand the physiology, its characteristics and its reflection on the mind.

When an illness arises, it comes first in the thought form, the subtlest aspect, then the sound form, and then the light form, that is, in the aura. It is only then that the illness manifests in the body. Simple symptoms arise in the fluid form, which can be irradiated, and then it manifests in the most gross form, where it needs medication.

In treatments such as aromatherapy, an illness can be cured just through fragrance. It is mostly focussed on the preventive aspect. The holistic approach of Ayurveda includes exercise, breathing and meditation. It is very interesting to notice the relationship between breath and the different Doshas in the body, namely Vata, Pitta and Kapha. These three Doshas affect certain parts of the body more than the other parts.

For example, Vata Dosha is predominant in the lower part of the body — stomach, intestine, etc. Diseases like gastric problems and joint aches are caused due to the Vata imbalance. Kapha dosha is predominant in the middle part of the body. Cough is mainly a result of Kapha imbalance. (Perhaps the word cough has come from the sanskrit word Kapha). And Pitta, affects the upper part of the body ie, the head. Short temper is a sign of Pitta.

Yoga, or breathing techniques like Sudarshan Kriya (The Art Of Living Healing Breath Technique) and the three-stage pranayama (channelising Prana or life force to different parts of the body) have an effect on these three Doshas.

Among different pranayama and other breathing techniques, there are specific breathing exercises for the lower, middle and the upper parts of the body which help bring balance to the respective areas.

How do we bring good health to our system? First, by attending to the ether element — the mind. If your mind is bogged with too many impressions and thoughts, and it is draining you of your resistance power, that is where it is preparing your body for some illness. If the mind is clear, calm, meditative, and pleasant, the resistance in the body would increase. Because it would not allow an illness to come into the body.

The first remedy is calming the mind, coming from the subtlest aspect of creation, the ether. And then comes the air element, the breathing. Aromatherapy, etc comes in this category. Next is the light element; here comes the colour therapy. Before an illness manifests in the body you can see that in the aura of a person. And by energising our system with the prana or life energy one can clear the aura and prevent the illness.

That is what yoga does. The purpose of yoga is, “stopping the sorrow before it arises”. To burn the seed of sorrow before it sprouts. And then comes the water element.

Fasting with water or purifying the system with water can bring a lot of balance in the system. And the final recourse is different medicinal herbs, medicines, and surgery. All this comes when everything else fails or when we neglect these other steps.

Our breath holds a lot of secrets because, for every emotion in the mind, there is a corresponding rhythm in the breath. And each rhythm affects certain parts of the body, physically. You only need to observe it to feel it. For instance, we feel a sense of expansion when we are happy and a sense of contraction when miserable.

Though we feel that happiness or misery and the sensation, we fail to notice the connection.

Knowledge is knowing that which expands. What is that? This knowledge, this enquiry is the study of consciousness, is the study of life, that is the study of prana, the study of Ayurveda. Have you ever counted how many times you breathe in a minute? Breathing is the first act of life and it's the last act of life. In between, the whole life we are breathing in and out, but not attending to the breath.

Ninety percent of the impurities in the body go out through the breath because we are breathing twenty-four hours a day. However, we are using only thirty percent of our lung capacity. We are not breathing enough.

See, the mind is like a kite and the breath, a thread. For the mind to go high the breath needs to be longer. You don't have to take Prozac if you can attend to the breath.

In one minute we breathe nearly sixteen to seventeen times.

If you are upset it may go up to twenty, if you are extremely tense and angry, it could total twenty-five per minute. Ten if you are very calm and happy, two to three breaths if you are in meditation. Deep meditation can reduce the number of breaths you take.

If you observe an infant, you will be amazed at how balanced they breathe. They breathe from all the three sections of the body. As they breathe in their belly comes out, as they breathe out their belly moves in. But the more nervous and tense you are, you will do the reverse. When you breathe out your tummy will come out and when you breathe in, it goes in.

These things, you don't have to go to a school or learn from anybody if you have the sharpness of mind. But our mind is so preoccupied with so many things, so many judgements, so many opinions, and so many impressions in the mind so we are unable to observe, perceive the refined things in nature.

So we need to study. The yoga asanas are something which everyone has done as a child. Have you seen a six month old baby lying on its back with its legs up. And it kicks its legs and head also up, almost like what you do with the ab (abdominal) machine. Then it goes on its back and does the 'cobra' posture in yoga. And if you observe a sleeping child, its thumb and the index finger slightly touch, a formation which is the 'Chin mudra'.

Or go to a zoo and observe the monkeys. Even they do many of the asanas to keep themselves healthy. So these are the things that coordinate body, breath, mind and spirit. And Ayurveda attends to this holistic approach. There are so many points in the body which correspond with different sensations but these are reflections of something which is beyond all this. What is that something? That is the source of life.

Health is... Disease-free body/Quiver-free breath/Stress-free mind/Inhibition-free intellect/Obsession-free memory/Ego that includes all/And Soul which is free from sorrow