

Life, Health and Longevity Through The Science of Ayurveda: A Case Study of Cancer*

By Robert E. Svoboda

Healthy thoughts create health; dark, hopeless thoughts make us lose hope and surrender to disease. Medicine and religion differ only in their field of activity; if our mind and spirit are at peace, our body will be too, but if our consciousness is filled with conflict and frustration, our physiology will descend into disease.

Ayurveda is a good way to begin the study of spirituality as physical health makes mental and spiritual health easier to attain. How healthy we can be depends upon our level of consciousness. The principal word for health in Sanskrit—*svastha*—means “established in oneself.” Ayurveda, a pragmatic science, teaches us how to establish ourselves in ourselves.

Five Great Elements

The universe relies on us to preserve harmony and organization within it by maintaining harmony within ourselves. To understand the body we must first understand the Five Great Elements. All matter in the universe is made up of earth, water, fire, air and ether. Dr. Yeshe Donden, who was at one time personal physician to the Dalai Lama of Tibet, explains the functions of these elements with a vegetable analogy. Earth, he says, gives the foundation for a carrot; water is the cohesive factor that holds it together; fire enables it to ripen and mature; air makes it grow; and ether gives it the space in which to manifest and develop.

The Three Doshas

Three doshas, vata, pitta, kapha, are the active, but waste-products of the Five Great Elements that appear in living beings—vata arising from air and ether; pitta from fire and water; and kapha from water and earth. Vata, pitta, and kapha keep the body healthy only so long as they continuously flow out of it and maintain their balance with each other. It is only when vata, pitta, and kapha go out of balance that they cause disease.

Vata is in charge of all motion in the body and mind. Vata moves the food through the digestive tract. It also

supports the combustion of the food by "blowing on" various organs to induce them to secrete digestive ferments. In the brain, vata is in charge of memory, the movement of thoughts from storage into present-time consciousness and back again.

Pitta is in charge of all transformation in the organism. Digestion of food by the gut, seeing light by the eyes and processing sensory data by the brain are examples of pitta's activities.

Kapha is the stabilizing influence in the body/mind. It lubricates, maintains, and contains, and its various activities, like those of vata and pitta, are interrelated.

When the three doshas operate together harmoniously, the mind functions harmoniously; and when they are imbalanced, the mind becomes imbalanced. Disturbance of these essential forces creates emotional disturbance: aggravated vata produces fear and anxiety; vitiated pitta, anger and envy; and disturbed kapha, attachment and greed. The emotions we feel directly influence our physiology, and fluctuations in our body alter our emotions.

The Disease of Vata

"Disease of Vata" is an umbrella term that includes most of what allopathic medicine calls musculoskeletal diseases. Vata-produced symptoms are much like vata's own qualities (dry, cold, light, mobile, clear, rough and subtle). Disease of Vata is a sort of possession of the body by the demented genie of vata, producing contractures, curvatures, fractures, breaking pains, cutting pains, stiffness, lameness, paralysis, paresis, wasting, tremors, tics, convulsions, exaggerated reflexes, loss of sensation or function, loss of speech, loss of sleep, and obstructions to the channels by tumors and stones (urinary and other). Vata's abnormal functions also include impairment of strength, complexion and well-being, disturbance of the

mind and senses, deformation of the fetus, production of fear, grief, depression and delirium, and obstruction of the vital functions.

When vata penetrates the tissues, it creates characteristic symptoms: vata in blood can cause ulcers, boils and the like; in flesh and fat it causes exhaustion and a feeling of having been beaten with a stick; in bone and marrow, loss of strength in the body, loss of sleep, stabbing pain, especially in the joints, and continual pain all over the body. Characteristic of all forms of Disease of Vata is their tendency to repeatedly flare up after exposure to causative factors and then slowly die down until the next occasion.

The treatment of the Disease of Vata is the treatment of vata. Because the chief characteristic of the Disease of Vata is that it surges and ebbs, a consistent regular lifestyle is the only permanent answer to vata's innate erratic quality. Pain being a prominent symptom in most forms of vata disease, the combination of aversion to pain and concern that it may return inexorably promote deep-seated fear. As with other conditions in which fear is an important factor, reassurance and confidence (in oneself or one's therapist) are essential to the healing process.

Cancer as a Disease of Vata

The hallmark of cancer is the rebellion of cells against the organism's "I"-ness (self-identity), the rebels proliferating wholly on their own—out of control due to repeated immuno-insult. All cancers involve all three doshas, but when a cancer arises out of deranged vata, and its presenting symptoms are identical with one of the forms of vata disease, it must be identified with Disease of Vata, even though all cancers are not a disease of vata.

Dr. Vasudev D. Agate is a professor of anatomy in the ayurvedic college in which I studied. His tribulations began on April 17, 1988 at about 10:15 p.m. while lying on his bed. Suddenly an

intense shooting pain began in the center of the bottom of his left foot, so sharp that he first thought someone had stabbed him. No treatment could relieve his increasingly severe pain. Blood tests showed almost ten times more white blood cells than normal, of which 19 per cent were "blast" cells (immature forms). This report was confirmed by a second test. A bone-marrow biopsy was then performed. On May 2 the bone-marrow report suggested a diagnosis of an advanced stage of acute myeloblastic leukemia (AML), a disease in which, even with chemotherapy, most patients do not survive much longer than a year. Given that Dr. Agate's blast cells had increased to 67 per cent by May 3, the specialists gave him between eight days and two months to live, and said that he might depart in as little as twenty-four hours. They offered him expensive experimental treatments, but unofficially, doctor to doctor, they told him not to bother, just to go home and try to be comfortable until the end came.

With this death sentence from the experts, Dr. Agate gave in to extreme emotional upset and continuous weeping. On May 3, Vaidya B. P. Nanal, Poona's most eminent ayurvedic physician, visited Dr. Agate's home and spent four hours taking a case history. This history indicated that what seemed to be a disease of sudden onset had, in fact, provided ample indications of its intentions. Since April Dr. Agate had suffered from pains in strange locations, such as at the center of the forearm and the center of the palm. He and his wife, who is also a doctor, thought these were due to over-exertion. Ayurvedic medicine stopped the pain temporarily.

Vaidya Nanal had preserved records on Dr. Agate since 1967, showing a "very delicate" vata-pitta constitution, poor nutrition of the marrow tissue (as shown by a detached retina he had after sports, and an episode of sudden temporary blindness), poor nutrition of blood, and a pronounced habit of eating every sort of junk food.

Vaidya Nanal ignored the blood reports, the bone-marrow tests, and the allopathic diagnosis, preferring to look at the case purely with ayurvedic eyes. When vata penetrates the bone or marrow tissues, the result is intense pain in the bones and joints which flits from joint to joint and muscle to muscle, loss of strength in the muscles, loss of sleep and constant pain in the body. These symptoms and the history of poor nutrition of the tissues made the diagnosis clear: Disease of Vata, namely vata-in-bone-and-marrow, with secondary loss of ojas (a symptom of which is extreme fear). The prognosis, thought Nanal, was not good: "If he keeps to the regimen, all will go well, but this is only physical treatment; he also needs the proper mental attitude, and right now he is in a state of terror."

Vaidya Nanal has preserved twenty years of cases of cancer patients who had been completely cured of their cancers with ayurvedic treatment following chemotherapy, surgery, or radiation. Here, there was no question of allopathic therapy, so ayurveda alone would have to suffice. The main aim would be to calm vata and purify blood. Dr. Agate stopped all treatment from other doctors (except for homeopathic cell salts) and began Vaidya Nanal's treatment on May 7 at 7 a.m.

Cancer seems to develop in a particular organ because of that organ's psychological significance. While that organ is sometimes a good place to begin therapy, it is not a good place for treatment to remain, because real health involves the whole organism. Removing the malignancy from the affected body part must be coupled with making that part return to harmony with the whole organism, lest the disease recur elsewhere later. None of Vaidya Nanal's medicine was given with the intention of killing the aberrant blood cells, which, after all, were only the symptoms of the problem, the indicators that allowed us to know that the bone marrow was not healthy. Instead of trying to smash non-functional tissues, ayurveda coaxes

them to begin working again by rekindling their digestive fires and nourishing them. Violence enhances cellular fear; nourishment, cellular confidence.

Dr. Agate's pain gradually disappeared within ten days of commencing treatment, and he began to be able to walk around in his room. After fifteen days, he could walk to the bathroom; after three weeks he walked on his own, without any support. After a month he was able to bathe with his own hands. The migratory pain in his joints was more persistent, but it totally disappeared within three months, as did his constant low-grade fever.

The blast cells in Dr. Agate's blood started returning to normal after about six months, but Vaidya Nanal never even bothered to look at the blood reports; they played no part in his evaluation of his patient. One day in November, during a routine visit, Vaidya Nanal's face displayed a very serious mien, and he told Dr. Agate, "You are responding well, but as long as there is fear in your mind, there will be a problem. I am working on your body only but we must remove the fear. You must now start repeating the Gayatri mantra."

The Gayatri mantra is the premier Vedic mantra—an invocation to the sun. Dr. Agate was at this time somewhat agnostic and had little faith in mantras, but he had tremendous faith in Vaidya Nanal, who had pulled him back from the very door of death, and so he began to repeat the Gayatri mantra 108 times a day, with inhalation, retention of breath and exhalation at specific syllables. It did not take long for the result to show itself: his fear disappeared, replaced by an overwhelming confidence. Now he repeats Gayatri all day long, whenever he has free time, more than 1,000 times daily.

When a mantra is repeated it creates an image, perceived or not, within the mind of its repeater. By repeating the

Gayatri mantra, Dr. Agate created an image of the sun within his consciousness. The sun is a powerful, noble, health-giving, disease-destroying being, whose rays dispel fear and weakness from the heart. This image of the sun, coupled with the vibrations of the mantra, transmitted these positive qualities into Dr. Agate's often negative mind and revolutionized it. Mental imagery, especially visualization, is so powerful that seeing can truly become believing, which is why it must be used with great care. Every thought inexorably exerts its effect on the body; in imagery the end does not justify the means, the end is the means. Visualizing violence, such as attacks against cancer cells, reinforces violence. Cancer cells are, after all, the body's own, and to attack them is to attack the body. There is already too much violence in the world; we need to visualize benign, constructive presences, and with their help create benignness in our own lives.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the Gayatri mantra is not a cure for cancer. Cancer is an allopathic disease and vata-in-bone-and-marrow is an ayurvedic condition. Vaidya Nanal stresses that not only does he use different medicines for different people, even in the same condition, but that he would also have suggested a different mantra for a different sort of patient. Therapy must be tailored to the precise needs of the individual being treated.

Dr. Agate began going again to the Ayurvedic college in July 1988, and resumed his normal schedule of lecturing in mid-August. He continued to oil and heat himself thrice daily (according to Vaidya Nanal's regimen) for about a year and a half, and then only daily because the pain had totally disappeared. Overall, by mid-1991, he had been back to near normal for almost two years.

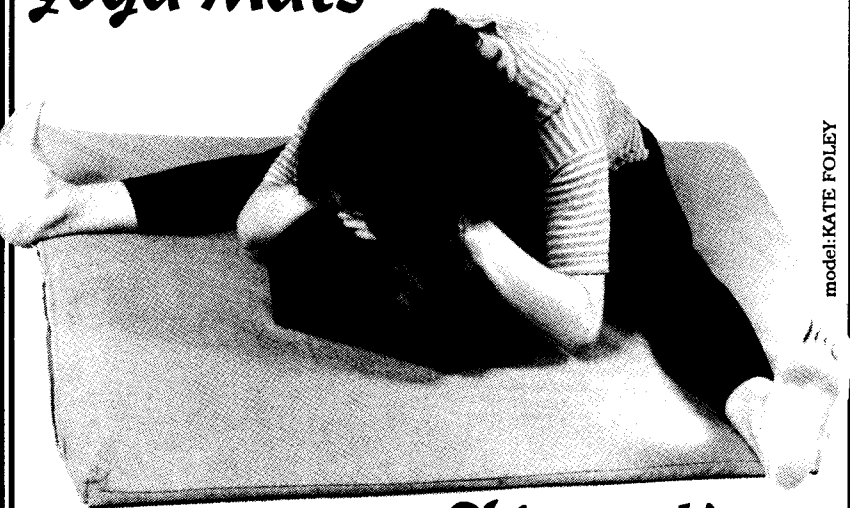
When he did not quickly die, the cancer experts decided they must have made an error in diagnosis. But re-

checking all the blood slides convinced them that the first diagnosis had been correct. Then they said, "Well, it must be in remission. Be prepared, it will return." Vaidya Nanal replied, "I never diagnosed cancer so I have no opinion on whether or not it is in remission. Our way of thinking is totally different from the allopathic approach."

Cancer might as well be called "giving up" since it is a disease in which our "I-ness" gives up its responsibilities and permits a new center of self-awareness to arise within our organism. Dr. Agate's organism "gave up" because of a combination of physical and mental factors. Sometimes extreme physical damage, as by radiation, chemicals, or chronic hepatitis B infection, is alone sufficient to induce surrender even in the most positive, well-adjusted individual by convincing the body's cells that continued life is impossible. Sometimes otherwise healthy bodies are consumed when their minds lose their reason for living. Usually, though, all three sheaths (of Food, Prana, and Mind) are attacked by causative factors when "I" decides to throw in the towel, and all three sheaths require treatment if "I" is to reclaim its birthright. Most important, however, is treatment of the mind, because cancer is an insult on the deepest level of our "our-ness," our existence as an individual, and only healing of that individuality can remove the malignancy from all our parts. *

"Physical treatment for physical diseases" is an ayurvedic motto, but physical treatment alone is rarely sufficient to extirpate all traces of disease from a being because it cannot oust "volitional transgression" from the mind. Only a health improvement plan that redresses imbalances on all levels of an organism qualifies as true Ayurvedic therapy.

Yoga Mats™



model: KATE FOLEY


Shiatsu Mats™

HANDCRAFTED 100% COTTON MATS ♦PLUS!

- ♦YOGA BOLSTERS ♦PRANAYAMA PILLOWS
- ♦ZAFU ♦ZABUTON ♦ZAFU CRESCENT NEW!
- ♦HARA WEIGHTS ♦EYE PILLOWS

QUANTITY RATES FOR 3+TEACHERS

YOGA MATS POB 885044 SF CA 94188 (800) 720-YOGA



* *Ayurveda, the ancient medical system of India, shows how body, mind and spirit interactions can be predicted, balanced and improved, enabling us to live gracefully and harmoniously. This article was excerpted from Ayurveda: Life, Health and Longevity (1992) with permission of Dr. Svoboda and Penguin Books.*