

## SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF AYURVEDA

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## ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is very much concerned with spirituality. After study of Ayurvedic text books, we find that its root is very deep in spirituality. Many matters of spirituality on soul, mind, re-birth and salvation have been described by Acharyas. Some spiritual aspects have not been directly described in Ayurvedic texts but mentioned in Vedic texts and to know its utility in Ayurveda, these aspects have been included in the syllabus of BAMS i.e. *astangyoga, sad-chakras, Ida Pingla* and *Sushumnanadis, Panch-kosh* theory, etc. Apart from physical health, we can achieve mental, social and spiritual wellbeing to know these spiritual dimensions of Ayurveda. We can reduce corruption and violence to propagate these aspects in the society.

**Keywords:** spirituality, soul, mind, *astang yoga, sad-chakras, nadis*.

## INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is a holistic healthcare system caring body, mind and soul i.e. physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. Acharya Charak has explained that *satva*(mind), *atma*(soul) and *sharir*(body) are like a tripod<sup>1</sup>. In the definition of health, Acharya Sushrut has described about physical, mental and social wellbeing. Unlike modern medicine, Ayurveda is concerned with our soul also. Ayurveda tells us about purpose of life, karma and formation of this universe. Ayurveda also deals with salvation and reincarnation<sup>2</sup>. In Ayurvedic text books, we find that only spiritually grown person can write such matters about diagnosis and management of diseases. Acharya Charak has depicted about formation of fetus<sup>3</sup>, its month to month growth<sup>4</sup> and fetal anomalies caused by defects in sperms and/or ovum<sup>5</sup>. To know the spiritual values, Central Council of Indian Medicine has included *astangyoga, shad-chakras, Ida Pingla*

*and Sushumnanadis, panch-kosha* theory in the syllabus of BAMS. I think some other spiritual aspects like seven bodies and *aura* should be included in the syllabus.

## REVIEW

Acharya Charak has described that life is a combination of *sharir, indriyas, satva*(mind) and *atma*(soul)<sup>6</sup>. He has further described that *satva, atma* and *sharir* is like a tripod. Thus, soul is considered as an important component of our life. Ayurveda cares not only body and mind but soul also. Thus, it provides holistic approach of healthcare caring body, mind and soul. Many descriptions have been explained in Ayurvedic texts about the soul. Acharya Charak has written that *atma* is *sakshi* and *kshetrajna*. He has further written that *atma* is *nishkriya*(inactive) and *chetan*(conscious)<sup>7</sup> but *mana*(mind) is *sakriya*(active) and *ache-tan*(unconscious)<sup>8</sup>. If mind combines with *atma, indriyas* and subject, then one gets

knowledge. If mind does not combine with *atma*, *indriyas* and subject, then one does not get knowledge. Thus, presence and absence of knowledge is characteristics of the mind<sup>9</sup>. There are two properties of the mind- *anutva* and *ekatva*<sup>10</sup>. *Chintan, vichar, uhya, dhyeya, sankalpetc.* are subjects of the mind<sup>11</sup>. To operate all the *indriyas* to be involved in them, to stop itself from bad subjects, *uhya* and *vichar* are functions of the mind<sup>12</sup>. Acharya Charak has depicted that *yoga* provides salvation<sup>13</sup>. *Atma* with mind and four *mahabhutas* (except *akash*) goes from old body to new body and this movement of *atma* from one body to another body can be seen only by *divya-drishti* (divine eye)<sup>14</sup>. *Atma* enters into fetus with mind.

Acharya Charak has explained that whatever present in microcosm or man that is also present in macrocosm or universe<sup>15</sup>. He has further mentioned that person who sees the *lok* within himself and himself within the *lok*, gets *satyabuddhi*. He understands that all the *lokas* are within himself and he is the only root cause of all the worldly problems. He becomes free from worldly desires then gets salvation<sup>16</sup>. Acharya Charak has described that one who does not enter into *antaratma* of the patient with the lamp of knowledge and wisdom, he cannot treat the diseases<sup>17</sup>. *Acharrasayan* is a special contribution of Acharya Charak in the field of *Ayurveda*. He has described many spiritual works in *acharrasayan*<sup>18</sup> in which some are as follows-

*Dharmashastraparam-* to follow Vedic texts because they provide conscious and enlightened life.

*Adhyatmapravanendriyam-* to be involved in spiritual activities.

*Tapasvinam-* to be focused on the task.

*Dan nityam-* to do charity regularly.

*Devarchneratam-* devoted to serve deva, bramhan, acharya, etc.

In Ayurvedic text books, many diseases like *kustha* are said to be happened due to various sins. *Daivavyapasrayachikitsa* (divine therapy) has been described in the management of many diseases like *jwar*<sup>19</sup>. Acharya Sushrut has explained that if the patient of *kusthadies*, he gets *kustha* again in the next birth also<sup>20</sup>. Probably, *atma* with *lingasharir* having causative factors of *kustha* enters from previous body to the next body and these factors cause *kustha* in the next body also. This is a proof of description of reincarnation in *ayurvedic* texts.

Some spiritual aspects have not been explained directly in *ayurvedic* texts but these have been explained in other *Vedic* texts. These spiritual aspects have been included by Central Council of Indian Medicine in the syllabus of BAMS to know its importance and utility in *Ayurveda*. These spiritual aspects are as follows-

*Astangyoga*<sup>21</sup>-

Like *astang Ayurveda*, *astang yoga* has been explained by *Patanjali*-

1. *Yama* (moral codes)

- *Ahimsa*- nonviolence
- *Satya*- truthfulness
- *Asteya*- nonstealing
- *Bramhacharya*- celibacy
- *Aparigrah*- nonpossessiveness

2. *Niyam* (personal disciplines)

- *Shauch*- Purity
- *Santosh*- satisfaction
- *Swadhyaya*- study of Vedic literatures which leads to self realization

- *Tapa*- austerity and observances for body and mind
  - *Ishwarpranidhan*- surrender to God
  - 3. *Asana* (yogic posture)-It provides physical and mental equilibrium
  - 4. *Pranayam*(yogic breathing)-It provides physical and mental health
  - 5. *Pratyahar*-withdrawal of senses from external objects
  - 6. *Dharana*- concentration on objects
  - 7. *Dhyana*- meditation
- Undisturbed flow of thought around the object of meditation
8. *Samadhi*- salvation
- State of super bliss, merging of individual consciousness into universal consciousness, union of *shiva* and *Shakti* in *sahasrar chakra Sad-chakras*<sup>22</sup>-

There are seven main *chakras* in the human body- *Muladhar*, *Swadhisthan*, *Manipur*, *Anahat*, *Vishudh*, *Ajna* and *seventh Sahasrar Chakra* lying in a straight line from bottom to top in the spinal column.

1. *Muladhar Chakra*- This is located in pelvic plexus at the base of our spine. This is base *chakra* and it is root of awareness of the divinity in our lives. The seat of *muladhar* is coiled *kundalini* which is a vital power. This *chakra* is associated with adrenal glands, excretory system of body and spinal column. Its element is earth. It helps in relating to opposite sex physically, mentally and spiritually. It is accountable for fight and flight response. When this *chakra* is underactive people have conditions such as constipation and body pain. When the *chakra* is overactive, individuals tend to become materialistic, greedy, hypertensive, asthmatic, obsessed with being secure and resistant to change. Concentration and meditation is needed to rectify this *chakra*. *Chakra bhan-*

*dasan* and *yoganidra* are required to balance this *chakra*.

2. *Swadhisthan Chakra*- This *chakra* is axis of our sexual and creative energy. It covers all the creative sides like art, music, emotions, story-telling, business etc. Its element is water. It governs reproductive system and associated organs. This *chakra* is used to treat sexual problems. It also focuses on liver, kidneys and lower abdomen. It is responsible for assimilation, procreation, lymphatic systems and menstrual secretions. When this is underactive individuals can get disease like diabetes, blood cancer etc. and when this is hyperactive individuals tend to become emotional. *Ardh-matsyendrasan* and *nakra-kriyas* are done for improvement of this *chakra*.

3. *Manipur Chakra*- This *chakra* is solar plexus which is related to will power, dynamism, assimilation and digestion. This is associated with pancreas and adrenal glands. It governs stomach, liver, gall bladder and spleen which manufacture and emit enzymes, acids and juices needed for digestion. This *chakra* is said to radiate and distribute *prana* in the rest of the body. Its element is fire. It lies in center of the body and is associated with many ailments. Hence, this *chakra* is commonly used for the treatment of many diseases. *Dhanurasan* and *vajrauli mudra* are done to activate this *chakra*.

4. *Anahat Chakra*- This is heart *chakra* which is concerned with no longer attachment to worldly pleasure, honors or humiliations. This is associated with thymus gland. It governs blood circulations, heart, lungs, liver and hands. Its element is air. If it is underactive, causes asthma and heart problems and if it is hyperactive, causes problems

with love. *Ushtrasanand bhujangasanare* done to activate this *chakra*.

**5. Vishudh Chakra-** This is throat *chakra* which is associated with thyroid and parathyroid glands. It governs the respiratory system including bronchial apparatus. Its element is akash. When this *chakra* is underactive individual may suffer from cold, cough, thyroid problems and lack of communications. When this is hyperactive individual tends to speak in an authoritarian manner. *Halasanis* done to balance this *chakra*.

**6. Ajna Chakra-** This is third eye *chakra* which is associated with pituitary glands, hypothalamus and CNS. It governs the lower brain, left eye, ears and nose. It helps in thought formation and visualization as well. The two physical eyes see the past and the present while the third eye reveals the

insight and the future. *Ida* and *Pinglaare* time bound and upto the fifth *chakra*, *yogi* is also time bound. If this *chakra* is underactive, individuals develop negative thoughts causing bad karmas and lack of energy. If this *chakra* is hyperactive, individuals become disillusioned, live in a fantasy world and suffer from hallucinations. *Yoga mudra* is done to balance this *chakra*.

**7. Sahasrar Chakra-** This is head *chakra* which is associated with pineal gland which is a light sensitive gland that produces melatonin. It governs upper brain and right eye. In this particular stage, there is no activity of the mind and no knower, no knowledge, nothing to be known. Knowledge, knower and known, all become unified and liberated. *Matsyasanis* done for this *chakra*.

**Table-1**

<i>Chakra</i>	<i>Sthana</i>	<i>Vriti</i>	<b>Colour</b>
<b><i>Muladhar</i></b>	Between rectum and genitals	Creative thinking, emotions and pleasure	Red
<b><i>Swadhasthan</i></b>	At the root of genitals	Doubt, lack of faith, false knowledge	Orange
<b><i>Manipur</i></b>	At the nabhi	Shyness, jealousy, desire, laziness, sorrow, ignorance	Yellow
<b><i>Anahat</i></b>	Chest of cardiac region	Hope, protection, anxiety, effort, power, consciousness	Green
<b><i>Visuddha</i></b>	At the root of neck	Origin of seven kinds of voice	Blue
<b><i>Ajna</i></b>	On the forehead between eyebrows	Trigunas	Indigo
<b><i>Sahasrar</i></b>	At crown	Universal consciousness	Violet

*Ida, Pingla and Sushumna Nadis*<sup>23</sup>-

The spinal column is called *merudand*. There are two nadis on either side of the spinal column called *Ida* and *Pingla* and a hollow canal called *Sushumna* lies between

them. *Kundalini Shakti* sleeps at lower end of *Sushumnain* a trance sleep (*yoga nidra*). *Ida* starts from the right testicle and *Pingla* from the left and they both meet the *Sushumna* at the *muladharchakra*. *Ida* flows

through the left nostril and *Pingla* through the right. *Ida* is cooling while *Pingla* is heating. *Ida* and *Pingla* indicate time while *Sushumna* is the devourer of time. *Yogi* defies death by devitalizing *Ida* and *Pingla* and taking the *prana* through *Sushumna* to the crown of the head or *Brahma-randhra*. When the *kundalini* enters the *Sushumna*, the *prana* also enters the *Sushumna* along with *kundalini* and its progress is characterized by supernatural visions, acquisition of special powers, knowledge, peace and bliss. Regular practice of *Uddiyana Bandha* is a powerful *yogic kriya* to awaken *kundalini*. The practice of *yogasana*, *pranayama*, *muद्रas* and *Bandha* is required regularly to awaken *kundalini*.

There are different opinions about the positions of chakras in the body. Doctors dissect the physical body but they are not able to find the centers, lotuses and so forth. Some say that chakras are situated only in the astral body and others say that chakras are developed during the course of meditation and they are not in the astral body. Reality is that the chakras are in a dormant state in the *pranamaya kosha* of the astral body which can be opened by deep meditation.

#### *Panch-kosha*<sup>24</sup>-

There are five material sheaths that envelope the soul like concentric rings. Each sheath is more subtle than preceding one and each succeeding sheath controls the activity of preceding sheath. These sheaths are as follows-

1. *Annamaya Kosh* or Food Sheath
2. *Pranamaya Kosh* or Vital- Air Sheath
3. *Manomaya Kosh* or Mental Sheath
4. *Vigyanamaya Kosh* or Intellectual Sheath
5. *Anandmaya Kosh* or Bliss Sheath

#### 1. *Annamaya Kosh* or Food Sheath-

The physical body is known as food sheath. The physical body arises out of food, exists in food, after death goes back to become food for other organisms. This organ consists of five organs of perception and five organs of action. Personality of the individual depends on the condition of this *kosha*, the formation of which continues life after life. The physique in the next birth is decided by the state of *annamayakosh* of earlier births. Living through this layer, man identifies himself as a mass of skin, flesh, fat, bones and filth. Purification and development of this *kosh* is possible through *upawasa*, *asana*, *tatva-suddhi* and *tapashcharya*. All medicines prescribed in allopathy act on this *kosh*.

#### 2. *Pranamaya Kosh* or Vital- Air Sheath

This contains all the *pranavayus* in the systems, energy channels (*nadis*) and energy centers (*chakras*). This sheath represents internal physiological functions of the body. It contains 5 faculties-

*Prana*- perception

*Apana*- excretion

*Samana*- digestion

*Vyana*- circulation

*Udana*- thinking

This sheath controls and regulates the food sheath. *Pranayama*, *acupuncture*, *reiki* and magnetotherapy seem to be working on this *kosha*. Homeopathy medicines in moderate potencies act on this *kosha*.

#### 3. *Manomaya Kosh* or Mental Sheath

This is psycho-emotional *sheath*. This *sheath* decides whether a person is emotional or unemotional, sensitive or nonsensitive and easily or uneasily movable. Mind along with five sensory organs is said to constitute this *sheath*. This *sheath* controls both the

previous sheaths. Aromatherapy, music therapy, colour therapy and homeopathic medicines in higher potencies act on this kosha.

**4. VigyanamayaKosh** or Intellectual Sheath  
This sheath is full of intelligence. This is the level of cognition, conditioning or de-conditioning of one's core beliefs. This is the seat of ego. This sheath is composed of intellection associated with the organs of perception. Meditation and psychotherapy works on this sheath.

**5. AnandmayaKosh** or Bliss Sheath

This is the innermost of all the sheaths and controls the intellectual sheath. It consists of desires before they become manifest into thoughts and actions. This sheath has its fullest play during deep sleep.

Apart from these five sheaths, there are two sheaths also- *chittakosh* and *sat kosha*. Development of all seven sheaths is necessary for complete spiritual evolution.

**Table-2**

Body	Kosh	Stage	Parts of the body	Type	Realm
<b>Sthul</b>	<i>Annamayakosh</i> or food sheath	Organic body	10 organs(5 <i>gyanendriyas</i> +5 <i>kar-mendriyas</i> )	Eat, drink and be merry	Mineral
<b>Sukshma</b>	<i>Pranamayakosh</i> or vital air sheath	Energy body	All vital air routes	Vitality seeker, health conscious	Plants
<b>Sukshma</b>	<i>Manomayakosh</i> or mind sheath	Psychic body	6 organs(5 <i>gyanendriyas</i> + <i>mana</i> )	Philosopher, socialist	Animals
<b>Sukshma</b>	<i>Vigyanmayakosh</i> or intellectual sheath	Intellectual body	6 organs(5 <i>gyanendriyas</i> + <i>buddhi</i> )	Sage, scientist	Human
<b>Casual</b>	<i>Anandmayakosh</i> or bliss sheath	Body of joy	--	Self and God realized	Divine man

*Aura*<sup>25</sup>-

*Aura* is an energy field emanating from the surface of a person or object. This emanation is visualized as an outline of cascading colour and may represent soul vibrations. Modern metaphysics identify the *aura* as electromagnetic fields. The existence of electromagnetic fields around every object is a scientifically proved fact. Scientists say that *aura* may be seen by naked eyes but this ability weakens with age. Focused training may improve the ability to see *auras*.

*Auras* vibrate to different colors, sounds and light frequencies. The color spectrum

varies with one's physical, *emotional*, mental and spiritual states. *Auras* of our body can be recorded by Kirlian photography. To know conditions of *aura*, we can detect diseases occurring in future and can be managed before manifestations. Acharya Charak has explained seven types of *prabha*. This *prabha* can be correlated with *aura*.

Seven Bodies<sup>26</sup>-

We have seven bodies- physical, *etheric*, *astral*, mental, spiritual, *cosmic* and *nirvanic* body.

**Table-3**

Body	Chakra	Experience	Element	Sense	Growing age
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<b>Physical</b>	<i>Muladhara</i>	I move	Earth	Smell	0-7
<b>Etheric</b>	<i>Swadhisthan</i>	I am vital	Water	Taste	7-14
<b>Astral</b>	<i>Manipura</i>	I feel	Fire	Sight	14-21
<b>Mental</b>	<i>Anahata</i>	I think	Air	Touch	21-28
<b>Spiritual</b>	<i>Visuddha</i>	I know	Space	Hearing	28-35
<b>Cosmic</b>	<i>Ajna</i>	I see	Manas	Intuition	35-42
<b>Nirvanic</b>	<i>Sahasrara</i>	I am	Being	Consciousness	42-49

Acharya Sushrut has described very minute structures and functions of our body like formation of skin by blood, seven layers of skin, their thickness and diseases of each layer and their management. Acharya Charak has described that fetus is formed in the uterus due to union of *shukra* (sperm) and *shonit* (ovum). He has explained about development of fetus month by month. He has further described that defect in sperm and/or ovum leads to defect in the fetus. He has mentioned the cause of birth of male, female and intersex baby and also the cause of twins. They knew about internal anatomy and physiology of our body without advanced diagnostic tools like USG, CT-SCAN, MRI, etc. It is possible to see these microstructures and microfunctions without any microscope in the state of fourth body. Acharya Sushrut has explained that *the parts of body that can be seen through naked eyes are less, those that cannot be seen are infinite. The knowledge of those unseen parts like Atmacan only be had by the eyes of meditation and eyes of knowledge*<sup>27</sup>.

Our Acharyas have described *rasa, guna, veerya, vipaka and prabhava* of millions of plants. It is not possible to know medicinal properties of so many plants by clinical trials. It is possible when plants tell their properties themselves. It is said about Lukman that he asked plants about their medicinal properties and plants replied. A person of

fourth body can talk to plants. These are spiritual dimensions of Ayurveda which will be understood by science in future.

## CONCLUSION

Modern medicine considers human body as a complex biotic machine. It treats the disease not the patient. Some people feel that something is lacking in the management of modern medical science even after having ultra-advanced technology in medicine and surgery. Modern medicine treats the disease but does not care the patient causing iatrogenic disorders. Many parts of body can be replaced by modern surgery i.e. kidney transplant, liver transplant, heart transplant, etc. Now, scientists consider that human is more than this physical body and therefore, only physical wellbeing is not sufficient. Ayurveda emphasizes on prevention of diseases rather than treatment. Acharya Charak has described first to maintain the health of a healthy person then, management of the diseases of the diseased person. He has described various methods for prevention of diseases such as *dincharya, ratricharya, ritucharya, swasthivrita, acharrasayan* etc. To spend some amount on prevention we can save very much amount which is spent on treatment. In treatment also, we can save very much amount to follow Ayurvedic methods of diagnosis and management. Thus, we can prevent physical, mental and

social problems to adopt these preventive media.

Thus, to do spiritual growth and to adopt Ayurvedic methods of diagnosis we can reduce dependency on instruments and laboratories leading economic management of diseases. By spiritual growth, we can reduce corruption, terrorism, criminalism and violence in the society causing social well-being which has been mentioned in the definition of health by WHO. Thus, apart from physical well-being, we can achieve mental, emotional, social and spiritual well-being to follow these spiritual dimensions of Ayurveda. It is required to popularize these aspects of Ayurveda in the society to make this planet healthy, happy and peaceful.

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