

BOOK 1: INTRODUCTION TO AYURVEDA

1. Introduction to Ayurveda

In this book, we discuss some key and basic concepts that will help you better understand how in Ayurveda medicine, the interplay between [mind](#), body and [soul](#) is central. We also discuss the cycle of birth and rebirth, how and why we need to get out of this cycle and more importantly, how can one free oneself from the vices of will and greed in this life itself.

A healthy thinking and a healthy body purify the [soul](#) and make one happier and comfortable.

You shall encounter a number of terms (eg [dosha](#), [Agni](#), [Mala](#) etc). These will be explained in details in the Topics that follow. You can check the meaning in the [Glossary of Terms](#) Section.

1.1. Introduction

Ayurveda is one of the most ancient systems of medicine in the world. The Vedas, the oldest scriptures on Indian knowledge and culture, are the source of Ayurveda. The system has subtly imbibed the Indian subcontinent culture as a lifestyle, defining [health](#), diet, behaviour, rituals and social interactions.

Historical evidences show that Ayurveda was not limited to India alone. It spread out to many countries, which later on modified it as per their needs and resources. Thus, modified Ayurveda became the system of medicine of those countries.

Definition of Ayurveda

The word Ayurveda is made up of two terms: ‘Ayu’ and ‘Veda’. ‘Ayu’ means life and ‘Veda’ means knowledge or science, thus the word *Ayurveda* stands for the *science of life*. Ayurveda is thus not just a system of medicine but it deals with all aspects of life along with [health](#) preservation, [disease](#) prevention and cure.

That (science) is designated as Ayurveda where advantageous and disadvantageous as well as happy and unhappy life along with what is good and bad for life, its measurement and life itself are described”. (Charaka [Samhita](#), Sootrasthana, chapter 1, verse 41)

By "*advantageous life*", Ayurveda means the social utility of an individual who is selfless, wishes and strives for welfare of all, is peace loving and honest, is committed to one's duties, is knowledgeable, has good memory so as not to repeat mistakes and duly honours every individual. On the contrary, disadvantageous life means social uselessness of a person.

Happy and unhappy lives pertain to one's own self, that is, one's outlook for the quality of own's life. It encompasses having or not having the following: an ideal mental and physical [health](#), habits, self discipline, enriched with essential worldly commodities, good physical strength and psychological resilience.

Moreover, by *Life*, Ayurveda does not mean human life only; it also has texts on [health](#) of various animals and botanical lives around mankind as Vrikshayurveda (Tree Ayurveda), Ashwayurveda (Horse Ayurveda) etc. where Ayurveda details basic principles of Horticulture, Veterinary etc. These concepts though are not much developed these days.

2. Philosophy

Watch video: URL: <https://youtu.be/M8iqQc9T6Z4>

3. Definition of Health

Sama Doshah Sama [Dhatu](#) Sama [Agnishcha](#) [Mala](#) Kriyah

Prasanna Atmendriya Manah Swasth Ityabhidheeyate .

Balanced [Dosha](#), [Agni](#), [Dhatu](#), [Mala](#), happiness of [soul](#), [mind](#) and sense organs is called [Health](#). Ayurveda lays greater emphasis on prevention of diseases than their cure.

Thus, [health](#) is not merely a freedom from diseases. A person is healthy only when his [mind](#), body, sense organs and [soul](#) are in the state of perfect equilibrium.

Another definition of [health](#) is a balance among [Tridosha](#) (vata, pitta and kapha).

Imbalance among the three is called [Disease](#). One more definition of [health](#) is having a healthy [Agni](#) while a breach in [Agni](#) is called [illness](#).

The main objective of Ayurveda is to maintain a [disease](#)-free state. Ayurveda shows us two approaches to achieve this state:

1. by maintaining the status of a healthy person,
2. by managing the unhealthy (diseased) condition of an ailing person.

If, regardless of the cause, a person falls ill, this will bring about a weakness in Dhatus (tissues). Keeping the Dhatus in a balanced state will restore the body, [mind](#) and spirit to a healthy state.

Sushruta, an eminent ancient scholar and the author of *Sushruta Samhita*, the surgical text, has defined the state of [health](#). According to his teachings, a person whose [Dosha](#), [Agni](#) (digestive fire), [Dhatus](#) (tissues) and [Malas](#) (excretory functions) are in balance and his [soul](#) and body – [Indriyas](#) (higher functions) and [Mana](#) ([mind](#)) are happy, then the objective of Ayurveda is understood as achieved.

Ayurveda regards each individual as unique. 'Health' is termed as '[Swasthya](#)' in Ayurveda - one who stays in his '[Sva](#)' (self). This '[Sva](#)' involves the total personality of a man including consciousness ([Atma](#)), body ([shareera](#)) and [mind](#) ([Manas](#)). '[Sva](#)' also denotes '[Prakriti](#)' or constitutional make-up which differs from person to person. This is quite different from the conventional definitions with ideal height -weight ratio, heart rate, blood counts etc.

An analytical approach towards this definition of [health](#) is essential in order to clarify various related facts. For a better understanding, EISRA (European Institute of Scientific Research on Ayurveda) examines the elements of a healthy state and puts them as normalcy of

1. Doshas and their functions.
2. [Agni](#) and its functions.
3. Dhatus and their functions.
4. [Malas](#) and their functions.
5. [Atma](#) (spirit)
6. Indriya (senses)
7. [Mana](#) ([mind](#)).

3.1. Doshas and their functions

Balance or normalcy of the Doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha) has been given topmost priority for keeping the body healthy, because the development, maintenance and degeneration of a body are dependent upon the Doshas. One is able to know about the normal status of the Doshas, only by observing their relevant functions. Therefore, normalcy in the functions of the Doshas and their analysis have been considered an important criteria to judge the normalcy in bodily functions.

A brief explanation of the normalcy (the physiological functions) of the Doshas is as follows-

1. **The physiological functions of Vata:** Enthusiasm in work, maintenance of respiration, initiation of physical and mental activities, maintenance of movement of Doshas in the body, balancing of all Dhatus and expulsion of faeces and urine, are normal functions of Vata.
2. **The physiological functions of Pitta:** Vision, digestion, regulation of body temperature and lustre of body.
3. **The physiological function of Kapha:** Good immunity, maintenance of smoothness of body, proper functioning of joints, tolerance, power and preservation of [Bala](#) (strength) are normal functions of Kapha.

We discuss these three doshas in details in Topic 3.

3.2. Agnis and their functions

[Agni](#) is essential for the digestion and metabolism of food. It is the main function of [Jatharagni](#). Its other functions include protection of other [Agnis](#). Due to this fact, a well functioning [Jatharagni](#) keeps other [Agnis](#) in a similar status. Similarly, a diminished [Jatharagni](#) will cause other [Agnis](#) to become sluggish. Even a nutritious diet will not be beneficial to the body until it is converted into a form assessable by the body, and this will only be done by the normal functioning of [Jatharagni](#).

The role of the other [Agnis](#) like [Dhatwagnis](#) and [Bhootagnis](#) are also important for the formation and development of the Dhatus and for assimilating the Panchabhautik (five basic elemental components).

One can assess the status of all these [Agnis](#) by observing their functions, which can be graded into four states:

1. an **excellent** state by all three Doshas in balance,
2. an **irregularity** by excessive Vata,
3. an **exaggerated** state by excessive Pitta
4. a **low** state by excessive Kapha.

The main criteria for diagnosing the normalcy of [Agni](#) is: food taken in the morning and digested up to the evening, and similarly, food taken in the evening and digested overnight until the morning. Excretion of [Mala](#) should be normal and there is a feeling of hunger and thirst and lightness of the body.

We discuss [Agni](#) in more details in Topic 8.

3.3. Dhatus and their functions

In our body, there are seven prime Dhatus (body tissues). These seven Dhatus are

1. [Rasa](#) (plasma),
2. [Rakta](#) (blood cells),
3. [Mamsa](#) (flesh), [Meda](#) (fat),
4. [Asthi](#) (bones),
5. [Majja](#) (bone marrow)
6. [Shukra](#) (semen for men)
7. Ovum (for female).

The main function of the Dhatus is to maintain the body. Their normal functioning leads to a healthy status of the body. Although [Dosha](#), and [Mala](#) maintain the body, these seven Dhatus

are given the definition of *Dhatu*. Principally, they uphold the body by maintaining and nourishing it; hence Dhatus and their normal functions are essential for being healthy.

3.4. Malas and their functions

Mala is considered an important parameter of *health*. *Mala* contaminates the body so should be excreted in *time* from the body. These excretions follow a definite process. On their way from formation to excretion, *Malas* also give nutrition to other *Malas*. This process resembles the nourishment of Dhatus by food nutrients. So by giving nutrition to *Mala* by maintaining a definite amount in the body, the *Malas* help to maintain the *homeostasis*.

3.5. Atma (soul), Indriya (Sense organs) and Mana (Mind):

Happiness of *Atma* (spirit), *Indriya* (higher functions), and *Mana* (mind) are the mental and spiritual aspects of good *health*.

Atma denotes spirit or *soul*. *Health* does not relate to the body only but also to the mental and spiritual well-being. A person with an irrational, antisocial mindset and mental *illness* cannot be considered healthy.

EISRA emphasises that the proper function of *Dosha* and *Dhatu*, the normal excretion of *Mala*, and the happiness of *Atma*, *Indriya* and *Mana*, together define *health*. The proper digestive power (*Agni*) actually helps in nourishment of *Dhatu* and excretion of *Mala*. The happiness brought about through *Atma*, *Indriya* and *Mana*, are of utmost importance for complete *health*.

4. Aims of Ayurveda

Ayurveda describes in detail how to maintain this tool called Human Body and *Mind*.

The fundamental objectives of Ayurveda are :

1. Preservation of *Health*
2. Remedy from diseases

The **preventive** aspect has been regarded as superior to **curative** one and the curative part for diseases is detailed in chapters by all writers.

Mokhsa is the ultimate goal of Ayurveda as a philosophy. This is to get rid of the cycles of birth and rebirth i.e. *Liberation*. The human body is a tool in pursuit of the *Moksha*; an unhealthy body and *mind* cannot attain superior concentration and dedication towards achieving *Moksha*.

5. Definition of Life

A consortium of Body, Senses, **Mind** and **Soul** is termed as Life. This is also known as **Nityaga** (the one passing on constantly). Age is a measurement of this life.

Another definition mentions that a Tripod of **Mind**, **Soul** and Body holds Life. A combination of these three is called **Purusha** (Human Being) and this **Purusha** is the prime subject of attention in Ayurveda.

Life as per Ayurveda can also be studied from another angle, called **Prana**. By **Prana**, Ayurveda means a wholesome combination of the following 12 entities -

1. **Satva**
2. **Raja**
3. **Tama**
4. **Vayu**
5. **Agni**
6. **Soma**
7. Five sense organs
8. **Atma**

Here, **Satva**, **Raja**, **Tama** are the mental **Guna** (qualities) and **Vayu**, **Agni**, **Soma** represent Vata, Pitta and Kapha respectively. A deficit in any one among these causes diseases and gross deficiency may mean death.

We learn more about Gunas in Topic 4.

6. Vedic Origin of Ayurveda

The origin of Ayurveda is believed to be divine. It is believed that **Lord Brahma**, creator of this universe, along with the creation, also advised the tool called Ayurveda to keep intact the life quality and span.

Lord Prajapati acquired this knowledge from Lord Brahma. This knowledge of Ayurveda was passed on to two brothers, God Duo **Ashwin Kumars**, who were the **divine physicians**.

Among the Gods, **Lord Indra** acquired this knowledge from Ashwin Kumars. Hitherto, this knowledge was available to Gods only and not to the human beings.

When mankind started suffering with diseases, one saint named **Bhardwaj** went to Lord Indra and requested for a solution to these diseases. Lord Indra taught him Ayurveda which Bhardwaj in turn, preached to his followers and it spread on the planet **Earth**.

This description has a mention in Veda where **Atharwaveda** has detailed Ayurveda. This is why Ayurveda is called an **Upaveda / sub-Veda of Atharwaveda**. A lot of description is also found in Rigveda.

6.1. Introduction to Four Vedas & their origin

Vedas, the earliest documented knowledge on human wisdom and socialism, are manuscripts of the Indian religious testimonies and form the core of **Vedic culture** traditions. In Sanskrit, the word means *Knowledge or Truth*.

Origin

The Vedas were taught orally for thousands of years and were passed on from teacher to disciple in **Gurukuls** (Residential System of education and training) for centuries before first being written down, which has led to some estimates that the earliest parts of the Veda may date back to 2500-2000 BC.

According to tradition,

- the hymns of the **Rig-Veda Samhita** were collected by Saint Vyasa.
- Hymns which were particularly chanted during religious and social functions of the community were compiled by Vaishampayan under the title **Yajus mantra Samhita (Yajur-Veda)**.
- Jaimini is said to have collected hymns that were set to music and melody - **Sama-Veda**.
- The fourth collection of hymns and chants known as **Atharva Samhita (Atharva-Veda)**, having magic, **health**, Ayurveda and miscellaneous topics is ascribed to Sumantu.

As per the Muktikopanishad, the four Vedas had 21, 109, 1,000 and 50 branches, respectively, having a total of approximately 100,000 verses in their 1,180 branches.

At present, only 20,379 verses are available; 10,552 verses of Rigveda (arranged in 10 sections called mandal), 1,975 verses of Yajurveda (in 40 chapters), 1,875 verses of Sama veda (in 21 chapters) and 5,977 verses of Atharvaveda (in 20 chapters) are available. These verses are in praise of celestial gods and goddesses and are called **Samhita**. There are the same number of branches (1,180) called the **Brahman**, and the same number of branches (1,180) called the Aranyak which have the same number of (1,180) Upanishads.

This whole collection is called the **Vedas**, and are acknowledged to be the world's first recorded scripture. The Vedas are the oldest, consistent and complex systems of knowledge detailing medicine, sociology, astrology, astronomy, music, dance, ritual practices etc.

The core text of the Vedas is known as the **Samhita**. However the Samhitas are supplemented by many commentaries and explanations. The most developed of these commentaries, the **Upanishads**, detail and simplify the rituals recorded in the Samhitas. Thus the Vedas are designed like a work of classic brief literature supported by elaborate footnotes and introductory essays explaining the hidden complexities.

Thus, the four Vedas **Rigveda**, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda are divided into four sections each:

1. **Samhita**: Contains the **mantras** and hymns
2. **Brahman**: The ritualistic teachings
3. **Aranyaka**: The meditational section
4. **Upanishad**: Mystic and philosophical section, known as **Vedanta**, or the end of the Vedas, implying the culmination of Vedic thought.

7. Goals of Life

In order for an individual to realize the Supreme Self, one needs to identify the reasons and objectives as to why one came into being on this **earth**, and fulfil them. The ancient seers clearly articulated the objectives of mankind as Purushartha **Chatushtya**: '**Purusha**' means an individual or person, and '**Artha**' means objective or pursuit. '**Chatushtya**' means quadruple. They articulated four Purushartha as -

1. **Dharma** : Righteousness, Duty
2. **Artha** : Wealth
3. **Kama** : Desire
4. **Moksha** : Liberation



An individual can have self-realisation by balancing and fulfilling these four objectives. These four objectives are not independent of each other and should not be viewed in a stand-alone manner. The activity of fulfilling one objective should also support the fulfilment of the other objectives.

By maintaining a balance between the definition and fulfilment of the four purushartha, a symbiotic evolution of the individual self takes place. Exclusive pursuit of one purushartha creates an imbalance in a person's life and prevents the person from reaching the ultimate destination of life. As a person progresses through the evolution of the [soul](#), one finds that some of the objectives eventually lose their place and importance to make way for the others. For example, the desire to earn wealth may diminish and disappear, or a person may come to the realisation that there is no more material desire that they need to pursue, and hence more room is created for the pursuit of the ultimate objective, [Moksha](#).

7.1. Dharma

A person is born to perform certain duties. The [soul](#) houses itself into the physical abode, that is the body, which is most suitable to perform these duties. The physical work that a person needs to do, the duties of the person on this [earth](#) are termed as the [Dharma](#) of the person. [Dharma](#) can roughly be translated as the rightful duty of a person. This is the true calling of a person, what they are born to do.

Examples of a person's [Dharma](#) are to be an ideal son, parent, doctor, teacher, writer, warrior or priest, etc. Sometimes a person's [Dharma](#) is decided by his/her birth, but it need not necessarily be so. A person's [Dharma](#) can be a combination of things, and as a person progresses through life, different stages of life may call for different Dharmas and purposes.

Tuning into the inner guide of the heart allows a person to identify one's [Dharma](#), one's true calling.

7.2. Artha

[Artha](#) is the pursuit of material wealth, which brings material comforts to a person. People sometimes believe that the paths of spiritual growth and pursuit of material wealth are mutually exclusive, or even that a spiritual seeker needs to be in poverty. But this is not necessarily true. If one is in poverty, in a state of constantly worrying/focus about how to support and feed, how can one pursue spirituality?

One can focus the attention to the goal of union with the Divine only when there are no worries. The point is that one should have enough means for a trouble-free livelihood but should not be taken away by material greed. Greed is endless and is an obstacle in the attainment of [Moksha](#). The important thing to remember is not to be attached to the possession or attainment of wealth.

7.3. Kama

Kama is defined as desire. Desires are of various types such as sexual needs, to be loved, to be wealthy, powerful, recognition, service, etc. This **Kama** Purushartha advocates that one's desires in this lifetime need to be fulfilled, without harming anyone in the process or being enslaved by these desires.

For a person to evolve spiritually and to reach the ultimate destination, the barrier of desires needs to be crossed. This can be done either by fulfilling the desires, or by sublimating them. One should use these desires judiciously and within acceptable social limits. Suppressing desires is not recommended because this pressure is likely to rebound and one may abuse and overuse such desires when the **mind** is weak. Once a person experiences these desires, he/she detaches himself /herself from such desires and looks forward to the higher goals in life (such as social service etc) which leads to the next Purushartha, **Moksha**.

7.4. Moksha

Moksha literally means freedom, liberation, realizing of the Self, and is the ultimate destination for this human birth. It is the stage of realization that each person (Jeewatma) is the same as the Supreme Self (Paramatma). It is the experience of the cosmos within one's self. It is the experience of union, oneness, Ekatvam, with the Universe where one needs not take reincarnation to settle the **Karma** dues of earlier lives as believed by Hindu mythology. There are many spiritual paths leading to the ultimate destination **Moksha**. The path can be difficult to navigate, and the path may not always be visible. With deeper insight into oneself and around, one can discover / invent the way to attain **Moksha**.

More importantly, one can attain **Moksha** from greed and attachment by a proper training and care of **mind** and body so that this very life is blissful and happy. Such reference is a derivative of the original idea of **Moksha** from the cycles of birth and rebirth.