

Dosha for Life

Chapter 1:

What is Ayurveda? Directly translated Ayurveda means 'The Science of Life'. It is one of the oldest forms of healing the world has known, with its origins dating back 5000 years to the Vedic sages who lived that part of the Asian subcontinent now known as India, and is one of the most profound health practices in the world. Ayurveda is a system of preventative healthcare and healing and a philosophy for living. It cures not by simply treating the symptoms but by removing the causes of disease and, critically by balancing the physical and spiritual elements of our lives. The objective is to achieve balance as an individual, as one whose emotional life, whose intake of food, whose output of energy and whose attention to the daily act of living is also extended to take in the wider concept of a harmonious universe.

Recent years have seen an increase in popularity for many holistic health disciplines and Ayurveda is no exception, with a steady increase in the number of practitioners, schools and opportunities for therapies but something is being ignored in many of the variations of treatments and teachings now becoming available. A core premise is in danger of being lost. As fundamental today as it was 5000 years ago is the central concept of balance and harmony between all living things. Within Ayurveda the Earth is seen to be an interrelated whole, a vast living organism. We share the same atomic and molecular structures and the same building blocks as all life forms and what happens to one part affects the whole. Our world is a wonderful living entity; the atmosphere that we live in, the oxygen, the weather systems, the natural resources, the earth and the sea, the animal and plant life are all connected. Changes to the seasons, to the natural and built environment create cross currents of influence that affect all around us. Loss of this sense of connection to our environment has led to the malaise that is damaging the planet and most human relationships.

In the steady acceleration of our pace of life we have become disconnected from our sources. We have forgotten how to be aware, how to respond with intuition to our surroundings and how to take care of ourselves. We have become accustomed to taking pills and whole arsenals of chemical supplements, and we have buried the intuitive responses to health that were once central to a way of life. Searching for outside guidance has become the norm. We are losing touch with the natural rhythms and cycles of nature and with the creative act of living in harmony with these powerful forces.

The thinking mind has enabled mankind to create complex structures, systems and technologies, but it has also created war, slaughter and destruction on a grand scale. On a smaller scale we damage and inhibit ourselves and our loved ones on a daily basis through patterns of thought and behaviour that corrode wellbeing. In our technological age we see increasing evidence of downsizing and restructuring in industry, rising stress levels on workers who take on the jobs of three people with less job security. The speed of today's society seems to have increased whilst our transport systems have slowed down, national health waiting lists create anxiety in the sick - the list goes on and on. Such stresses and distractions have disconnected us from the most important aspects of life.

Ayurveda teaches us how to rediscover critical knowledge and awareness of the natural forces and rhythms that compliment and strengthen our human experience, through delicious nutrition using natural herbs and spices, through enhanced levels

of self awareness involving practical daily activities and through attention to our total environment to bring about radical changes in outlook and in health.

How are we linked to all life forms and to our environment?

Despite all the technological advances in our world and any amount of material success we are all made from the same elements as ancient men. Progress in science and corresponding levels of human brain activity, of reason and thought have allowed us to develop in certain ways. We have advanced from ancient man in our capacity to identify and use a wide range of resources, to break the constraints of our immediate surroundings and time zones, and in our use of knowledge. We have vast reservoirs of information at our disposal. None of this alters the fact that we are natural beings in a natural world, regardless of any technical advances.

Ayurveda sees the world composed of 5 elements, ether / space, air, fire, water and earth. Each and every living thing is composed of these elements. These five elements are within all living things in the form of vital energies that can fluctuate according to our state of balance as individuals and the seasons of nature, thus affecting health. We consists of trillions of cells that themselves contain the same ingredients as every other living thing. This may be hard to believe, but it's true. Scientist have known for a long time that things aren't what they seem and that the real differences between things isn't what they are made from but how they use the basic ingredients. Life is now recognised, at the quantum level, to consist of pulses of energy that differ in frequency between life forms, "non-living" matter and between different levels of awareness. At the sub-atomic level we have the same ingredients, as a flower, or a bird, a rock or a drop of rain. We have the elements of earth, water, fire, air and space within our bodies in the form of acids, enzymes, fluids, tissues, and the movement and function of muscles and organs. These elements and our pulse of life are sustained by nutrition in the very broadest sense and we get that from food, from our breathing and from the attention we give to ourselves. We flourish when given the right kind of attention and wither when given the wrong kind.

Challenging assumptions

Contrary to a popular saying we are not just what we eat; we are also what we think and what we do. Just as importantly, we have a distinct individual body type that governs our physical and emotional health and outlook and the way we respond to things around us. This body type never changes; it helps to underpin our identity and affect our behaviour throughout our lives. We can recognise this fact, work with it to feel and look better or we can ignore our true nature, fight it and be continually stressed and unhappy. How do we make the best of this natural gift of a body type? By paying attention and getting to know ourselves. **The key factors that influence our quality of life for good or bad are food, exercise and activity, our home and working environments and the way we use our mind and senses. Dramatic changes to our outlook, health and energy happen as a result of what we put into our hearts, minds and bodies.**

Our bodies rebuild themselves many times throughout our lifetime. Cells from every organ are renewed by the food that we eat. Every breath we take and every mouthful that we swallow contributes to this building process. Every taste, every sight and smell, in fact every sensory experience connected with food rebuilds or damages our cells and imprints itself into our emotions and the sensory experience of being alive. From these basic building blocks we create ourselves on an hourly and daily basis. Then we use our thinking mind to continue the process of creation or destruction,

with influences from our upbringing and our relationships. The good and the bad, the healthy and the unhealthy aspects of our lives all originate from the processes that go on within us and from the way we co-operate with our bodies or try to fight them into submission.

Body types or Doshas

People come in so many shapes and sizes, colours and weight that it seems obvious that we shouldn't all eat and do the same things to make us healthy and happy. We are all individuals with different tastes and experiences and there are more variations in people-types than there are Atkins Diets and GI diets and all the other fashions and fads. We see the more extreme visible signs every day when we go to work or go to the shops. We see "thinnies" and "fatties" and some "in-betweenies" and we see redheads and darker swarthier types and short and tall people and all the sizes in between, but they only reveal half the picture. The physical differences can be important clues but they don't tell us about emotional characteristics, about behaviour, or why some people never gain weight and others can never shake it off, or why some are constant worriers and others struggle to rouse themselves into action. We suffer from all kinds of ailments yet despite this wide range of people-types, the differences in how we react to food, to our surroundings and to each other are treated by the mainstream health industry in broad brush strokes. Even a headache is usually dealt with by a very limited range of options centred on paracetamol or aspirin, blanket-bombing the symptoms and avoiding the cause which could have been anything from anxiety, tiredness, de-hydration or reaction to food just to name a few possibilities that could all be treated by holistic methods.

So yes, there are great differences between people, but fortunately there is also a map to guide us through the maze of types and help us to make sense of what might at first seem to be a random collection of individuals. There are common factors formed from the five elements of **ether / space, air, fire, water and earth** and these elements form unique balances within each individual to create their body type or dosha. No two people are exactly the same; we all have the same ingredients, but in differing quantities and with Ayurveda we learn how to recognise the balance of elements that make our dosha and how to respond to their dynamics.

Body type, attitude and behaviour are all linked. We think, look and act in repeating patterns throughout our lives and this behaviour is always linked to something fundamental within our personality and within our cells at the deepest level, emanating from the five elements and their balance within us. In Ayurveda our body type or dosha provides the key to understanding what we are, allowing us to examine and fine-tune our diets and lifestyles to create health, strength and energy for life. We each have a unique collection of experiences and memories that have helped to make us what we are – or at least what we think we are. However, underlying these experiences our dosha is distinct and unchanging, providing us with default patterns from which our responses originate. We may gain or lose weight, change jobs, clothes, hair style and colour, but underneath these superficial differences our dosha and its inherent traits, fixed before we were born, will always govern our initial state of mind and our emotional and physical responses to life. We are not the victim of our dosha and, most importantly, we can create ourselves to be the best we can be by choosing to learn about and to work with this fundamental natural resource.

Our doshas have clearly defined characteristics and specific nutritional, emotional and spiritual needs. Our preferences for food, colour, tastes, textures, sounds and activities are founded upon this cellular make-up. When we put the wrong kinds of food into our body, when we labour away with thoughts and activities in environments that don't suit us, we may as well be taking poison – on a daily basis. When we are

ignorant of these characteristics, we ignore our whole foundation and who we really are. Certain kinds of foods are more useful to us than others; we are also better suited to certain sounds, textures, colours, smells, oils and environments. We react physically and emotionally to the changing seasons and climate in different ways according to our dosha. How we function and behave, how we respond to these elements in our daily lives, and how our emotions fluctuate are all affected by this metabolic template within us. When we live, eat and do things that go against the best interest of our body type we are actively damaging everything that we are!

So what is a body type? What is it that actually makes a body type or dosha?

There are many factors that determine doshas and we will give you clear guidance in identifying and understanding your own. We have chosen to illustrate this work through three case studies, each one typical of one of the three main doshas. In many ways they represent the extremes, since they are unusually high in the qualities of one particular dosha, a rare occurrence, but for this reason they provide greater clarity to you, the reader. Most people are combinations of the three doshas, one dominant with varying percentages of the other two. As we work through the case studies some of you will immediately begin to recognise your own more obvious physical and emotional qualities and this will be the start of your education. Later you can work through the questionnaires in Appendix A to establish your own unique mix of dosha characteristics.

Ayurveda defines three main doshas created by the energy forces of **ether / space, air, fire, water and earth** within us. Ether and space are inextricably linked and form one element that is the first universal element from which all life originates. Ether constitutes the potential condition for all life, for creation, for action. Seemingly the most abstract condition, that which is not in our grasp, ether is within every cell of our bodies. The other elements are in many ways easier to understand when we consider the natural world. They are all present in all of us and we shall describe their function in greater detail in chapter two. Each of these forces exists in an unequal balance within each individual and that state of dynamic tension creates our dosha, formed from a combination of the three main doshas. They are known by the Sanskrit names of **Vata, Pitta and Kapha** and have particular work to do in our bodies. We need them all to function together.