

## **Ayurveda and Pandemics**

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### **How Can Ancient Culture Inform us about Modern Pandemics?**

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In a scientific age, what can a 5000-year old system of natural medicine called Ayurveda (pronounced eye-er-vay-dah) that originated in India teach us about maintaining mental and physical health during a global pandemic?

Ayurvedic Medicine incorporates health education, herbal medicines, diet, body treatments and behavior modifications that are based on knowing one's individual mind-body type, sensitivity of the effect of habits on the mind and body, and a deepened awareness of the effect that we all have on the social and physical environment. It includes individualized diet plans, exercise, meditation, and lifestyle suggestions that are unique to each individual. It's not just a cookie cutter approach because we are all so different. The results of incorporating Ayurveda tools can be seen as a stronger immune system, significant reduction in stress, and improved mental health.

Ayurvedic Health Care is a comprehensive body of knowledge that focuses on prevention. It also addresses disease and acute conditions. In the past 30 years, Ayurveda has made a resurgence in the world. In the United States, approximately 751,000 people received Ayurvedic treatment, according to a 2004 National Center for Health Statistics study. It has become a popular alternative health care system throughout Europe, North American, and Australia. Studies show that over 80% of households in India and Nepal still use some form of Ayurveda. While it is not licensed in the USA yet, many licensed M.D.'s, nurses, physical therapists, chiropractors, massage therapists, yoga teachers, and psychotherapists are trained in Ayurveda and incorporate it into their practice. Over the past 25 years, a variety of Ayurvedic certificate programs and schools throughout the USA have become available and NEIU now also offers an Ayurveda Health and Wellness Coach Training program as a way to train individuals to educate the public about staying healthy and preventing illness.

Ayurveda recommends a healthy lifestyle based on the unique mind-body type of an individual and also includes ways to be self-referral. Self-referral means being intimately aware of self, body, and actions and relationship to yourself, others, and the world. It teaches one how to live intuitively and in harmony with the laws of nature for maximum health and growth. The wisdom of Ayurveda offers a supportive role to health because it is all about attuning to one's innate intelligence that guides our every habit and behavior.

Attuning to one's self and others is something that one can learn and experience in a short time because it is already inherent within each person. Problems occur when we become distracted from that innate wisdom. It means culturing awareness that everything you say, do, eat, and purchase matters to yourself and to the environment. When you eat something, Ayurveda recommends it without distractions like watching TV, talking on the phone, doing business, studying, or other multitasking activities. In Ayurveda, it's not just what you eat that's important, but it's how you eat, and how you digest the food. Next time you have a meal, notice if you feel

tired or energetic after you eat. In addition, before you purchase something, hold the item in your hand and think about who produced it. Where was it produced? What was the impact on the environment? And yes, it may mean you decide that you do not want to purchase this item after all. It may mean you need a different brand or it may mean that you will live without that product.

Ayurvedic Medicine is not only a system to sustain one's health but it is ultimately about the health of the planet and the species that inhabit the delicate ecosphere. It is about deep interconnection with everything, the plants, the seasons, cycles of day and night, every species that occupy the earth that work together to create a healthy ecology. This pandemic is offering us an opportunity to look at all aspects of our lives, our actions and our interdependence.

According to a recent message about the Corona pandemic, from Dr. Vasant Lad, an Indian author, Ayurvedic physician, professor and director of the Ayurvedic Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico, says that 'epidemics are written about in the ancient textbooks of Ayurveda called the Charaka Samihta" The Charaka Samhita dates back to the 4th century BCE. Dr. Lad mentioned that the Charaka Samhita texts say that during the time of an epidemic, it is a time to go within oneself. It's recommended to follow the Ayurvedic daily routine to increase immunity which includes the following suggestions: drinking hot water upon waking in the morning, and then tea during the day with cardamom, cinnamon, and tulsi (holy basil) to keep the digestion ability strong. Avoid any cold foods and drinks which dampen digestive ability and clog the system, practice breathing techniques called pranayama to strengthen the respiratory system. In addition, do gentle yoga poses called suryanamaskar (sun salutations) to create physical strength, practice meditation to reduce stress, and eat healthy, warm, and easy to digest food such as mung dahl, basmati rice, vegetables cooked with digestive spices of cumin, coriander, fennel, and ginger.

The Shaka Vansya Ayurveda Lineage, a living tradition that is decades old with its roots in Sri Lanka, recommends at the first sign of a sore throat, gargle with ½ tsp turmeric and ½ tsp pure salt mixed in 1/2 cup warm water. Stir and gargle every 2-3 hours to try to kill the infection (which starts in the throat) - this will strengthen the body so the virus doesn't spread.

According to Ayurveda, the stress in collective consciousness can be so intense that it explodes into an endemic, war, or other collective crisis due to violating the laws of nature. According to the late renowned Vedic scholar, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and founder of Maharishi International University which offers a fully accredited Masters Degree in Ayurveda, says "All suffering in life is due to the violation of the laws of nature". The famous Ayurvedic physician Dr. Brihaspati Tri Guna, said " the quality that gives rise to the prevalence of viruses and leads to epidemics is *greed*. Human greed, collective greed, the greed of leaders, the greed of citizens-greed in all its forms gives rise to epidemics".

A similar explanation according to Dr. Arun Sharma, the Charaka texts say there is a whole chapter on pandemics translated into English, called Community Destruction. He said that pandemics are caused by humans due to ignorance of the knowledge of life and that this causes fear and anxiety, also called pragaparada. Due to fear and anxiety, humans begin to

fear lack, and start to over produce or over consume, leading to attachment and greed, which leads to actions that destroy or harm the environment" So according to Charak, to cure for pandemics is being introspective about the understanding of life, and right action or dharma. The pandemics is a type of collective karma for harming nature.

British primatologist, activist, and anthropologist, Jane Goodall blamed human behavior for the coronavirus pandemic, calling it "our disregard for nature," according to [Agence France-Presse](#). She continued, saying it is "our disrespect of the animals we should share the planet with" that led to the current pandemic. This statement is aligned with ancient vedic science that suggests we live in harmony with the earth, with all its species and practice ahimsa or non-violence. It is clear from industrialized farm factories, where animals are tightly caged in crowded environments for their entire life for human consumption creates suffering among millions of animals throughout the world. In addition, the pollutants that go into rivers, lakes, and oceans harm sea life and non sustainable farming that bombards the environment with toxins that causes harm.

And most importantly, in the midst of the chaos, comes the inquiry, "how can you be calm in the eye of the storm"? The answer to this question will be highlighted on an Ayurveda Health and Wellness Coach Certificate Course taught by long time Ayurveda Health Practitioner and psychotherapist, Rose Carol. She will be teaching, along with guest practitioners a 10-Month program at NEIU starting in June 2020. The course includes ten in-person weekends plus guided home study and practicum experience. For more information please contact her 847 636 2744 [www.ayurvedahealthcoach.com](http://www.ayurvedahealthcoach.com) and register at [neiu.edu/cape](http://neiu.edu/cape)