



Ahara, Achara Rasayana and Spirituality

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Ahara (food) is the necessary issue of all the living beings. It is stated that “Praninam Punarmoolamaaharam” – the route of all beings is nothing but food itself. In Ayurvedic classics it is mentioned foremost among the three Upasthambas/Subpillars which support the three main Sthambas/Pillars of the body viz. Tri Dosha. It shows the credibility of food. Only proper food is not sufficient to be healthy. The time, place, quantity and manner of food intake are also necessary. Aaharasambhava Vastu Rogaashcha Aaharasambhava – Food taken in proper manner helps in the proper growth of the body on contrary if taken in improper manner leads to various diseases. The mental factor of a man is reflected by the type of food he takes - “Ahara Shuddhou Satwa Shudhihi”. In Bhagavadgeeta also we find the references regarding the three types of food like Satvika, Rajasika and Tamasika.

Achara Rasayana told in the classics has a direct influence in maintaining the spiritual well being. Person has to follow some rules and regulations to maintain both personal and social health. These directly manipulate the spiritual level of a person and have their role in both health and disease. Thus Ahara and Achara Rasayana play a key role in maintaining the equilibrium state of mankind. The complete physical, mental and social well being is obtained through these factors. The detail of the same will be highlighted in the full paper.

Key words: Ayurveda, Ahara, Achara Rasayana, Roga, Swasthyata, Spirituality

Introduction:

Ayurveda is the ancient art of healing that deals with all aspects of a person’s life as an entity.¹ The aim of Ayurveda is to create emotional & physical health and to cure diseases.² It provides guidance regarding food and lifestyle so that healthy people can stay healthy and persons with health challenges can improve their health.³

It was originally known to have been first developed and established by the great sages and Rishis who developed India's original systems of meditation and Yoga, the spiritual sciences.⁴ It not only deals with medical science, but also with the social, ethical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual life of people. According to Ayurveda, a living creature is composed of soul, mind, and body.⁵ The central philosophy is that the mind and body are one and the same, and that physical health can't be achieved without emotional, mental and spiritual health. Both are interrelated. Ayurveda offers a system of natural healing that is very complete both in terms of its treatments and also in its understanding of the human being. It offers a vision of healing for curing disease, for preventative health and ultimately for spiritual liberation.⁶ The Yogis and Siddhas paid equal attention to the bodily existence while one is alive and also the disembodied existence after one dies. As like the Vedas and Darshanas the ultimate goal of Ayurveda is too get Moksha.⁷ For this purpose it mainly concentrates to attain a complete physical, mental and spiritual health. Sushruta defines healthy person as Swastha – a state of total equilibrium where the sensory, mental, emotional and spiritual elements are harmoniously balanced.⁸ Thus health is not only attainment of physical well being but also mental and spiritual happiness. Then only person is considered as completely healthy. Along with the Tridoshas,⁹ Ayurveda also explains Trigunas (Satva, Raja and Tama) and two Manasic Doshas viz. Rajas and Tamas.¹⁰ There are three main causes for the diseases ie – Asatmendriyaartha samyoga, Prajnaparadha and Parinama/ Kala.¹¹ The Atiyoga, Ayoga and Mithyayoga of these three factors are the main cause for all the diseases where as their Samyakyoga leads to health.^{12,13} The first one is directly related to the

Indriyas/Sense organs. *Prajnaparadha* is directly related to the mind and spirituality. *Ayurveda* clearly explains the bad deeds of *Mana*/mind, *Kaya*/body and *Vak*/speech are come under *Prajnaparadha* and should not be done in any condition.¹⁴ The treatment for this is considered as *Dhi vijnana*, *Driti vijnana* and *Atmadi Vijnana*^{15,16} – Self understanding or spiritual healing. The mental health is a state of mental, intellectual and spiritual well being. Among the three kind of mental constitution, *Saatwika parkruti* is the best one as it is *Laghu*, *Prakashaka* etc.¹⁷ This is achieved only when we follow proper diet, dietetics, good conducts and behaviors. *Ayurveda* seeks to remove the root causes of mental illness in a holistic way. Its focus is on prevention through correct diet, exercise, meditation and cultivation of the right attitude. In this regard we find the explanation of *Dinacharya*, *Rutucharya*, *Sadvritta*, *Swasthavrutta*, *Achara rasayana*, *Ahara vidhi vidhana* etc factors mentioned by the great sages of *Ayurveda* for attainment of Physical, Mental and Spiritual health.

Ahara and Spirituality:

Food is correlated to the divine power. It is considered that the food is the root cause of all living creature – *Praninam Punarmoolamaaharam*.¹⁸ Properly taken food helps in building up of the body and mental factors where as improper food habits leads to various diseases. A famous verse from *Veda* refers that “*Ahara Shuddhou Satwa Shudhihi*”¹⁹ - the food what we intake reflects the nature of our mind and if one consume a quality food he will have the clarity of mind. Thus a wise man to get a complete well being should follow some of the rules and regulation of dietetics. *Ayurveda* explains eight types of Dietetic rules among which *Tanmana Bhunjitha* and *Atmana Abhisamikshya Bhunjita*²⁰ – Intake of food by giving due concentration and considering his self are also included. *Ahara* will produce its proper effect only when the mind and self of a person is free from any mental afflictions.

In *Bhagavad Geeta* we find explanation of three types of foods viz. *Satvika*, *Rajasika* and *Tamasika*. Food which is sweet in taste, unctuous, stable and pleasant is considered as *Saatvika* and it enhances the *Ayu*, *Satva*, *Bala*, *Arogya*, *Sukha* and *Priti*. On contrary the *Rajasa* types of food leads to mental sickness like *Dukha*, *Shoka*, *Kama* and *Tamasa* food leads to *Alasya*, *Moha* etc.²¹ *Ayurveda* too mentions some of the articles like milk, ghee, *Shashtika shali*, *Amalaki* etc which are considered as *Hitahara* and are to be practiced daily.²² *Ahara* is said to be *Shadindriya Prasadaka* – Pleasing all the six *Indriyas* viz. five sense organs and the mind.²³ If person take the *Tamasika Ahara* like the food which is kept overnight, devoid of or altered taste, stale, contaminated etc. it covers the mind of a person leading him to darkness.

Na Raagaat Naapi Avijnaanaadaahaaraanupayojayet/

*Parikshya Hitamashniyaat Deho Hi Aahara Sambhavaha ||*²⁴

One should not take food when he is afflicted with *Raga*, *Avijnana* etc. Body is the replica of food what we intake. Thus one should take it only after proper analyzing what is wholesome and what is unwholesome.

Achara Rasayana:

Along with *Ahara* one has to follow good conducts which boost his spirituality. They are explained under the heading of *Sadvritta*²⁵ and *Achara Rasayana*²⁶ in Ayurvedic classics. The same is explained in *Yoga Darshana* in the form of *Yama*, *Niyama* etc.²⁷ *Ahara* and even the medicine give their best effect only when he is pure inside. For this he has to follow good behavioral conducts. A great verse from *Manusmruti* is “...Vasudaiva Kutumbakam” – see the world as your own family then there will not be any jealousy, anger, grief etc towards other people. This feeling of oneness automatically imparts happiness and well being from the core of self. This is possible only when person is broad minded. When he follows the good conducts his *Mana* and *Atma* become *Nirmala* which directly helps him to attain spiritual well being. Some of the form of *Achara Rasayana* and their effect are given below:

Speak the sweet truth.

There is a saying from the Vedic literature that goes, *Satyam Bruyat, Priyam Bruyat*, which means, "Speak the sweet truth. Speaking truth creates *Ojas* in the body, the biochemical correlate of bliss and health. Speaking lies, on the other hand, creates *Ama*, or impurities.

Stay free of anger.

Anger is within everyone in seed form. Like a fire with a small flame, if you put oil on it, it can flare up. By practicing unconditional forgiveness, you can prevent the seed of anger from becoming an uncontrollable wildfire. In practice also forgiveness is very important. Forgiving oneself is also very important. Anger not only creates *Ama* and *Amavisha*—flooding the body with harmful hormones—but it also burns *Ojas*. If you forgive yourself and other people, anger can be prevented.

Be respectful to teachers and elders.

Teachers and elders can teach us invaluable lessons by sharing their wisdom and experience. It's easy to read a book to gain knowledge, but it's often very difficult to apply that knowledge in daily life. An elder or teacher can tell you the practical implacability of the knowledge is. Only wise elders can share such valuable life experiences. They are the best guides. And it is when one respects teachers and elders that they will offer their advice freely. *Ayurveda* mentions that disrespecting the elders or teachers is the cause for various diseases too like *Unmada*, *Kushta* etc.

Eat Saatvic foods such as milk, ghee:

All of these foods are *Saatvik*, meaning they are pure and convert easily to *Ojas*. They are *Medhya*, supporting the physical brain, and enhancing the coordination of mental functions, such as *Dhi*, *Dhriti* and *Smriti* (learning, retention and recall). When the mind remains strong, it is able to effortlessly command the senses, like a skilled charioteer who can guide wild horses without force. The mind that rules the senses, rather than the other way around, makes positive choices and engages in positive behaviors.

Tamasa foods are the opposite of *Saatvik*—they break down the coordination between mind and body and inhibit the experience of pure consciousness. They create darkness rather than light. *Tamasik* foods include alcohol, garlic, onions, red meat, leftovers, and packaged foods, which have little life force.

Gain Vedic knowledge.

The *Vedas* contain pure knowledge, the knowledge of how to enliven pure consciousness and live an enlightened daily life. They reveal the reality of life, and give us the guideposts along the path to enlightenment. Listening to *Vedic* chanting, helps enhance coordination between heart and mind, senses and mind, and aligns our awareness with the laws of nature, so we can live a mistake-free life.

Practice meditation and stay balanced in sleep and wakefulness.

By practicing the Transcendental Meditation technique, you open your mind to pure consciousness, releasing stress and strengthening the intellect to allow you to make healthy choices in life. You'll find yourself naturally growing in positive behaviors without strain or effort. Along with the practice of meditation one has to follow the routine of awakening at *Brahmi muhurta* (before sunrise) and sleeping before ten at night. This allows your body and mind to become attuned with nature's rhythms, creating maximum clarity and alertness during the day and deep rest at night.

Keep the company of the wise.

Even if you are committed to eating *Saatvik* foods, meditating daily etc it can become difficult if, due to social pressures, you find yourself drinking alcoholic beverages or eating *Tamasa* foods. This is why it's important to stay in the company of the wise, to choose like-minded, *Saatvik* friends who will support your desire to follow *Acharya Rasayana*.

Acting according to the situation wisely:

Along with pureness of mind and truthfulness one has to behave according to the situation and place. Even a truth which hurt to others should not be directly spoken but in a wise manner.

Avoiding bad habits:

A person even though has well education and high power if he is addicted to bad habits he will be neglected by the society because of the misbehavior imparted by drinking.

The effect of following *Acharya Rasayana*, *Sadvritta* shall be discussed by giving an example of *Rasayana* therapy. The *Chyavanaprasha Rasayana* when administered to a person having the predominance of *Rajas*

and *Tamas* will help in only curing the diseases like *Kasa*, *Shwasa*, etc diseases and will increase the *Dhatus* of the body.²⁸ Along with this if he follows *Achara Rasayana* by giving due concentration, the same will result in boosting up of *Medha*, *Smriti*, *Kanti*, *Ayu*, *Bala*, *Indriyaprakarsha*, *Varnaprasadana*, *Vaya* and so on.²⁹ *Charakacharya* defines *Nirogi* as – person devoid of any sort of pain, he is the one who follows *Hita Ahara Vihara*, who initiates the work after proper analysis, who controls over his objectives of senses, who offers things to others, who sees every one as equal with love, who always speaks truth, who forgives others mistakes, who engages himself in reading and meditation, who controls his mind and self.³⁰ In this way spirituality helps in two ways – it cures the disease and also prevents it and promotes the health.

Conclusion:

Following the rules relating to eating, sleeping, and celibacy create rejuvenation in a person. In addition, following a *Sattvik* diet and life style, speaking the truth, practicing non-violence, living in harmony with the nature, following social ethics and conducts, are all helps in the complete well being of a person. Following these principles leads to formation of high quality *Dhatus* (tissues) and increases the quantity and quality of *Ojus*, a vital factor for health and immunity. By following these factors the *Satwa Guna* get increases which helps one to realize himself hues attainment of spirituality.

All therapies in Ayurveda aim to provide complete health – physical, mental, and spiritual - so that people can engage in achieving the real goal of life—self-realization. The dietetic rule, *Sadvritta*, *Achara Rasayana* makes it easily possible with its remarkable benefits on health, immunity, and longevity.

“*Mana Eva Manushyanaam Karanam Bandha Mokshayoh*”– for all the deeds of a man the root cause is *Manas*. It promotes him to do either good or bad deeds. If his mind is predominant with *Satva* it leads to good activity. On contrary if it is full of *Rajas* and *Tamas* he will suffer from various diseases and fall into darkness. Thus to have control over one’s mind spiritual understanding is very essential and it is achieved by following good diets, conducts and self realization.

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