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TAPOVAN Normandy, Hameau de Anneville,
76540 Sassetot-le-Mauconduit - France



TAPOVAN 9, rue Gutenberg 75015 PARIS Tel. 01 45 77 90 59
web site : www.tapovan.com.fr

Ayurvedic approach to Psychosomatic conditions

By Nikolaos Kostopoulos

We are living in an era that modern medicine has reached a crucial point. It has started looking closer into the two main control systems of the human body :

The brain and the chromosomes or genes.

In the brain research new imaging methods, are helping to understand how the brain keeps our endocrine, immune and all the other systems in such harmonious multi-directional cooperation. The relationship between Mind and Body becomes clearer . We know now that our intellectual and emotional state affect our physical state and our physical state has an effect on how we think and feel.

In the other main research project, the Genome project, the target is to identify all the DNA-bases in the totality of the human chromosomes that give the guidelines for production of proteins. It is different proteins that make a muscle cell or a nervous cell what they are and govern their function.

As these projects are progressing we are encompassing more and more questions. We find much more difficult to really understand the control systems of the human life than the mechanistic components of it. We find that genes are like switches that regulate extremely diverse functions and the brain is not just a fixed predetermined organ as we thought in the past. It will take much longer to understand how these systems are working and the practical use of this knowledge will not be as simple as we think.

Our hope that it would be easy to resolve the mystery of the human function becomes as difficult as the astronomer's duty to unravell the mysteries of the sky.

Under these findings and under the ever increasing problems that daily medicine faces such as: antibiotic resistance, re-emergence of infectious diseases, increase of mental disorders, increase of stress related disorders, increase of allergies ,as well as the ever increasing cost of highly-technological medicine it is becoming more obvious that prevention is the area where medicine has to invest more energy for the good of humanity.

Now prevention in modern medicine is a general term and it means that one should : avoid smoking, drinking excessive alcohol, eating too much meat, avoid stress, take more exercise and other general rules that are very true but do not answer some basic questions.

Why would a human being indulge in a lifestyle that is a recipe for disease ?

Is it enough to say to a patient not to get stressed and to take more exercise ?

Do we really know why young people use more drugs and alcohol than before ?

It is lack of knowledge and answer in these deeper questions that make the mind turn into the science of Ayurveda.

Ayurveda is composed of two words AYU meaning life and VEDA meaning science So Ayurveda means : The Science of Life.

"Ayurveda is the science wherein are laid down what is wholesome, unwholesome, good, bad, what is happy and unhappy life, and what is measure in life"
CA. SU. Ch.1 sl.41

It is very clear that Ayurveda deals

with energies and areas that are much broader than simply disease. It is linking physical, mental and spiritual levels in a much more holistic model of health.

This way of approaching health and disease is becoming more an art of being than mere administering of medications or analyzing of chemicals.

Wholesome and unwholesome can be understood in a modern way as dealing with issues as nutrition, in a physical level, with impressions and ideas in a mental level and with a deeper reasoning that gives the knowledge for what is appropriate or inappropriate for a Human Being .

In this way preference for organic food, avoidance of stimulants, proper education, proper company, avoidance of harmful lifestyle, development of creativity and so many other aspects of human activities become a necessary component of health.

Good and bad touches an other facet of the human mind. However old fashioned these words sound they relate with one of the most serious disorders of the modern society that affects everyone: STRESS. Stress related disorders are taking the form of an epidemic nowadays and stress is linked to the six leading causes of death and psychosomatic conditions:

- 1) Heart disease
- 2) Cancer
- 3) Lung ailments
- 4) Accidents
- 5) Liver cirrhosis
- 6) Suicide.

Happy and unhappy life is targeting the stress problem even more directly showing that

whatever the circumstances of life might be it is very important that one feels happy.

Now can a human being be happy if he or she acts against one's own nature ?

Are the genes and the nervous system anything else than a grosser reflection of the human nature ?

Measure in life. This includes a very interesting principle that guides our life from a molecular to a deep mental and spiritual level.

All the basic investigations represent exactly this principle. There is a normal reference range or a measure for each chemical beyond which we diagnose a disease, eg. : Diabetes, Liver failure, Hypercholesterolemia etc.

On a more functional level there is a measure for the function of every system beyond which disease arise. Let's look at the nervous system. Proper measured electrical activity regulates the everyday life functions, as diverse as eating , exercising , praying meditating, remembering etc Unmeasured activity creates diseases as stress, insomnia, headaches, or to the extreme even diseases as epilepsy defined as excessive stimulation of a group of neurons in a synchronised way.

If we apply the principle of measure at a behavior level we have: measure in talking, listening, seeing, sleeping, measure in physical movement, sexual activity, measure in concentration and relaxation, etc..and the combination of all these can be related to so many diseases that affect a vast percent of humanity.

So in a simple sloka we find such concentrated knowledge of the brain ,the genome and their relationship with the rest of the universe. We find as well the ways of handling these principles that neither denies personal responsibility nor scientific approach nor a deeper meaning in Human Life.

"Vata,pitta and kapha are the pathogenic factors in the body; passion and intellectual error,delusion, are the pathogenic factors in the mind. The former type is quieted by medications, spiritual and physical and the latter by knowledge, practical application of knowledge, steadiness, strong memory and deep concentration"
CA.SU.Ch.1 sl.57,58.

When in Ayurveda they describe the three doshas they are really talking of innate qualities that have to be respected and that give the amazing biodiversity and individuality. So each human being has different strengths and sensitivities and knowing how to deal with these is essential for grounded preventative care.

We know that with same diet people can have different cholesterol levels.

We know that physical activity can be beneficial or harmful depending on the individual. At the same time by defining the qualities of these doshas it becomes easier to recognize them in our environment. In this way one can prescribe a nutrition plan, specific asanas or yogic postures,can suggest activities that can have a beneficial effect in preserving health or they can help to eradicate disease.

In the mental level cultivation of sattva and control of rajas and tamas will bring a better understanding of the Self. The effect of it would minimize the psychological stress that is one of the roots of so many diseases.

So this approach is a much more holistic approach that in reality deals with the Brain and Genome aspects in a more synthetic and practical way and can be used as a very effective tool in preventing psychosomatic conditions.

Of course by stretching this holistic approach it does not mean that the analytical method of modern science is wrong or less useful. It simply means that it is not complete without a more synthetic understanding of the human being and the universe.

"For the passions are the cause of suffering and are the producers of pain and its resort the body.The renunciation of all passions is the means of removing all pain."
CA. SA. ch.1 sl. 95

Here again the psychosomatic nature of human Being is emphasized by mentioning the underlying causative factors of disease rather than limiting the human being to a concept of machinery and the role of the physician to the role of an engineer.

Conclusively it is through cooperation of modern science with a Holistic approach of Ayurveda that human suffering can be reduced both in physical and mental level .

In approaching the human being as an entity with Spirit, Mind and Body Ayurveda manages to handle the psychosomatic conditions in a thorough and efficient way.

Dr Nikolaos Kostopoulos is a graduate from the Medical University of Athens; an allopath, specialised in pneumology medicine. He turned towards homeopathy and then ayurvedic medicine, which he is now practicing for more than 10 years. He is managing the «Holistic Health Centre» in Athens and carries out research work together with Vaidya Ashvin Barot on psychoso-matic illnesses and stress management according to ayurveda.