

## New Age Āyurveda

or

### What Happens to Indian Medicine When it Comes to America

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#### Preface

Originally I wrote this paper some years ago as a presentation for a North American audience. However, since coming to Europe, I have noticed that there are fundamental similarities between Āyurveda in North America and Āyurveda in Europe. In fact, what I have called 'New Age Āyurveda' describes well the form of Āyurveda found in many parts of the European continent. Thus readers in Europe may find the following discussion informative.

I cannot call this paper a scholarly article. It views Āyurveda in a contemporary Western setting and tries to answer the question of why it has taken a particular form in a particular place. In an effort to find a plausible explanation for this phenomenon, I have taken as my point of departure the traditional Āyurveda of the classical Sanskrit treatises.

#### Introduction

Over the past few years Āyurveda has made its entry into the alternative health care market-place in North America. Previously, hardly anyone knew about Āyurveda, outside of a small group of specialists who took it upon themselves to learn about it and to expound its history and principles.

In this paper, I wish to begin to explore reasons for this recent rise of Āyurveda in the market of alternative medicine and to point to major differences between classical Āyurveda and New Age Āyurveda.

Āyurveda, 'the science of the life-span', is a traditional system of medicine that derives from India. Its theoretical basis can be traced to a fundamental connection between humans and the world around them, formulated in terms of three *doṣas* or basic physio-mental characteristics: *vāta* – the wind and air

characteristic, *pitta* – the fire and heat characteristic, and *kapha* – the liquid and viscose characteristic. Each human body contains these three in varying proportions. When they are balanced in an individual, there is health, when not, disease results. After properly diagnosing an imbalance, the traditional Āyurvedic physician or *vaidya* restores and maintains the proper dosic balance by therapies that rely on diet, daily and seasonal regimens, systematic bodily purification, herbal-based remedies and medicines that combine herbs and minerals, and occasionally, surgical interventions.

Indian medicine may be divided into three main phases. The first or Vedic phase dates from about 1200-800 B.C.E., and is dominated by magical medicine. The second or "classical" phase is marked by the advent of the first Sanskrit medical treatises, the *Caraka* and *Suśruta Saṃhitās*, which codified a great amount of medical information around the principle of the three *doṣas*. This period dates from a few centuries before to several centuries after the common era, and includes all subsequent medical treatises dating from before the Muslim invasions of India at the beginning of the eleventh century – for such works tend to follow closely the earlier classical compilations. The third or "syncretic" phase is indicated by clear influences on the classical paradigm from Islamic or Unani and other non-classical medical traditions, as witnessed in Śrīṅgadhara's fourteenth century *Śrīṅgadhara Saṃhitā*, and Bhāvamiśra's sixteenth century *Bhāvaprakāśa*. The time span for this phase extends from the Muslim incursions to the modern era, and more recently includes interactions with the Western medical system.

We have now entered another phase of Indian medical history, which I would like to call 'New Age Āyurveda'. It denotes, for the most part, classical Indian medicine imported to the Western world by non-Indians.

#### Why 'New Age'?

New Age movements in general, as the name implies, tended to adhere closely to ideas of millenarianism, believing that a new epoch of human history was about to dawn on earth, and that prudent humans should prepare themselves for that great moment by attuning themselves to the incoming spiritual forces. Followers of these movements embraced the mystical and occult teach-

ings of great masters and often favoured the religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. In North America, groups developed around a spiritual leader who usually came over or was brought over from India, such as Swami Vivekananda, Swami Paramahansa Yogananda, Swami Prabhupada, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, and Yogi Bhagavan Rajneesh.

The groups of followers were composed mostly of white, middle-class, young men and women who were dissatisfied with the established forms of Judaeo-Christian religiosity. Forsaking all but essential relationships with their families and the "established" order, these devotees formed communities of like-minded spiritual seekers who disseminated their messages through independent publications that found their way onto the shelves of specialised New Age bookstores.

In the arena of health and medicine, J. Gordon Melton explains that 'some physicians with occult interests and others frustrated at the stubborn limitations of modern medicine developed what became known as the holistic health movement.'<sup>1</sup> Many religiously inspired New Agers embraced the same skeptical views as those of the holistic practitioners, and a marriage between New Age spirituality and holistic health took place. Holistic medicine assumed a decidedly spiritual dimension and supported the ideals of the New Agers' who, in turn, became the clientele for the new approach to health and healing. Melton sums up the movement quite succinctly:

Peace, healing, and environmental restoration mingled readily with spiritual transformation; images of one group became metaphors for another. The New Age movement came to maturity as it offered not just occult training and cultural dissent, but a complete alternative lifestyle.<sup>2</sup>

With the exposure of some of the less scrupulous elements of the wider movement, such as L. Ron Hubbard's Church of Scientology and Rajneesh's

<sup>1</sup> J. Gordon Melton, 'Whither the New Age?', in Timothy Miller (ed.), *America's Alternative Religions*, Albany, New York (State University of New York, Press) 1995, pp. 347-352; see p. 350.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.

religious community in the state of Oregon in the northwestern part of the USA, the ideologies and practices of the New Age met with severe criticism, leading to a decided downturn in its popularity over the past decades. Recently, however, New Age ideas have again begun to surface, and a major vehicle for the introduction of these ideologies is the growing field of alternative or complementary medicine; and, among those, Āyurveda, the ancient and traditional medicine from India, is fast becoming the alternative medicine of choice for many of the current generation of New Agers.

### I: The Medicine of New Age Āyurveda

The Āyurveda that is generally practised in North America deserves some attention, since for most people there, it is their first, if not their only exposure to traditional Indian medicine. I would like to focus on a few key individuals and organisations whose ideologies and practices define Āyurveda in North America. They include Vasant Lad, Robert Svoboda, Transcendental Meditation (TM) and the Maharshi Āyurveda movement, and Deepka Chopra. What ties them together is their common acceptance and promotion of the principles and ideologies of the New Age, and from them, we can isolate the following four characteristics of New Age Āyurveda in North America:

1. attributing a remote age to Āyurveda and making it the source of other medical systems,
2. linking Āyurveda closely to Indian spirituality, especially Yoga,
3. making Āyurveda the basis of mind-body medicine, and
4. claiming the "scientific" basis of Āyurveda and its intrinsic safety as a healing modality.

#### *Vasant Lad*

Vasant Lad is the Director of The Ayurvedic Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He trained in Āyurveda in India and received a bachelor's degree in Āyurveda from Pune University College of Āyurvedic Medicine, where he was also an instructor for fifteen years. Lad also received some training in Western allopathic medicine, but never obtained a medical degree. In 1979 he

came to North America and gave lectures on Āyurveda throughout the United States. In 1981 he became the Director of the aforementioned institute which he established in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and later moved to Albuquerque. He admitted to me that he prefers this part of North America because it is environmentally most like his native city of Pune in the Indian state of Maharashtra.

Lad's knowledge and practice of Āyurveda is well grounded in the Indian tradition of classical Āyurveda, but his presentation of the subject reflects the New Age approach that unites Āyurveda with Indian spirituality and exploits Āyurveda as an ancient representation of mind-body medicine. The definition of Āyurveda he provides in the Institute's brochure, *Ayurveda. A Brief Introduction and Guide*, captures well the New Age spirit:

Ayurveda ... means 'The Science of Life and Longevity' and is perhaps the oldest existing healing science. Ayurvedic knowledge originated in India more than 5000 years ago and is often called the 'mother of all healing'. The principles of many natural healing systems now familiar in the West, such as homeopathy and polarity therapy, have their roots in this ancient science. Ayurveda enables one to understand how to create balance of body, mind, and consciousness according to his/her own individual constitution and how to make lifestyle changes to bring about and maintain this balance.<sup>1</sup>

It is a commonly held belief that the older the system is, the greater is its credibility. New Age aficionados seek justification in antiquity. In the case of Āyurveda, not only does it have a divine origin, but it also has a long record of trial and error that establishes its efficacy. For many then, a more valid test of efficacy is longevity rather than the short-lived double-blind-placebo type of clinical trial. The supposed great antiquity of Āyurveda also lends support to any statement that it is the 'mother of all healing systems', such as homeopathy.

Any form of healing that advocated an integrated approach was called

<sup>1</sup> The Ayurveda Institute, *Ayurveda. A Brief Introduction and Guide*, Albuquerque, New Mexico (The Ayurveda Institute) n.d., p. 2.

'holistic', a term that was closely associated with the hippie movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1980s and 1990s, it has been replaced by mind-body medicine and more recently by 'quantum healing'. The comprehensive approach of holistic medicine is juxtaposed to Western, allopathic, medicine which is understood to focus on a single diseased part of the body to the neglect of the whole person. New Agers claim that modern medicine 'treats the symptom rather than the person'.

The shift to mind-body medicine derives largely from the efforts of scientific researchers sympathetic to holistic and New Age medicine (which are often regarded as synonyms). These scientists have been gathering evidence to prove that the mind has a profound effect on how a person feels. Specialists in the field of psycho-neuroimmunology are mapping links among the brain, hormones, and immune system, which they believe make up a single integrated, and complex network. Easily learned techniques, such as relaxation therapy and guided imagery, assist patients to reach deeper levels of their consciousness in order to exploit the innate psychic forces to battle illness and maintain health.

New Age Ayurveda capitalises on the philosophy of mind-body medicine and integrates ancient Indian spirituality in the form of Yoga into the regimens of healing. The healthy effects of Yoga and meditation have been advocated by New Agers for decades. It is not surprising, therefore, to see that Yoga and Ayurveda are united into one system in New Age Āyurveda. Yoga and meditation are the techniques that work with the herbs and therapeutics of Āyurveda to bring all the body's forces to bear in removing disease and restoring and sustaining health. New Age Āyurveda represents a blending of the science of mind-body medicine and Āyurveda through Yoga and specialised Āyurvedic therapies.

In his richly illustrated book, *The Science of Self-Healing*,<sup>4</sup> Lad outlines the fundamental principles and practices of Ayurvedic medicine. He devotes an entire chapter to Yoga and meditation, explaining which postures or *āsanas* are good for ailments due to each of the three *doṣas*, and how individuals of each of the three types corresponding to the *doṣas* should practice *prāṇāyāma*

<sup>4</sup> Vasant Lad, *The Science of Self-Healing*, Wilmot, Wisconsin (Lotus Press) 1984.

or breathing exercises. He also includes sections on diagnosis by means of the examination of the pulse, the tongue, the face, lips, fingernails, and eyes.

Vasant Lad's book is one of the earliest on Āyurveda written specifically with the Westerner in mind and published in the West. Located especially on the shelves of New Age bookstores, it caters principally to readers who have consciously or unconsciously embraced the ideology of New Age rather than to scientifically trained physicians or health care professionals. It greatly simplifies the complexities of Āyurvedic medicine as it has come down through the ages, but has not misrepresented the system as a whole.

Lad's Ayurvedic Institute has an Āyurvedic clinic attached to it, where mainly Americans undergo a simple regimen of purification therapies, diet and nutrition counselling, rest, and meditation and Yoga on the southern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Although sympathetic to the needs of his patients, Lad adheres scrupulously to the laws regulating health care in the state of New Mexico.

In addition to the clinic, the Institute sells a line of Āyurvedic products including the ever popular Chyavanprash, and extracts with such New Age names as Ayurbiotic, Deep Love, Rebirthing Breath, and Sweet Memory. It offers lessons and lectures in Āyurveda, given in conjunction with Robert Svoboda, and publishes a journal, called *Āyurveda Today*, with articles on all topics pertaining to Āyurveda and Hindu spirituality.

A close associate of Vasant Lad is Robert Svoboda, a disillusioned American medical student who studied Āyurveda with Lad and in India. He is one of the few Westerners to have received a degree in Āyurveda from an accredited Indian institution, the Tilak Ayurveda Medical College in Pune. Initiated into the Tantric Aghora tradition in India, Svoboda epitomises the penchant of New Agers to reconnect medicine and religion, a union that in the West was severed around the time of Paracelsus but in India has never been separated.

Like Lad's book, Svoboda's *Prakṛti. Your Ayurvedic Constitution*<sup>5</sup> is designed as a self-help book for the Aquarian age. Definitely more engaging a writer than Lad, Svoboda takes the reader through his own brand of Āyur-

<sup>5</sup> Robert Svoboda, *Prakṛti. Your Ayurvedic Constitution*, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin (Lotus Press) 1989.

veda. The signposts are familiar, but the path is entirely new. He begins with a simple introduction to the well-known *doṣas*, tastes (*rasas*), and constitutional types. Rather than moving into disease and treatment, he makes a detour into a lengthy discussion of food, nutrition and routine. He introduces his chapter on food with an underlining religious sentiment which seems to run throughout the work, weaving in and out at various places. One is never sure if one is reading a book about Indian medicine or one individual's personal religious quest through the ancient Indian tradition of Āyurveda. This is clearly expressed in his views about vegetables and eating:

Few of us live our lives in a way that would make proud the turnip that was tormented for the table, or the radish who relinquished its own identity to become an internal part of you or me. Eating is a sacred act, an offering made into the internal digestive fire for propitiation of the indwelling spirit of a human form in much the same way as offerings are made into external sacrificial fires to propitiate cosmic forces which have been personified into the forms of deities. Since it is a form of worship, eating should be ritualized to emphasize its sacramental aspect.<sup>6</sup>

Following the section on diet and eating, Svoboda addresses briefly Āyurvedic therapeutics as the means to restore balance in the organism. Next comes a very short discussion of disease, mainly in the form of various common ailments with their Āyurvedic explanations and remedies. The book concludes with a chapter on rejuvenation through the use of alchemically-based *rasāyanas* and spirituality in the form of Tantric *kuṇḍalīni-yoga*. It may not be the most reliable source of traditional Āyurveda, but it is a text that speaks to the heart and soul of those seeking the familiar blend of medicine and mysticism through Indian spirituality that is common to New Age ideology.

Svoboda works closely with Lad at the Ayurvedic Institute. In the wake of Lad and Svoboda, a second generation of Americans trained at the Ayurvedic Institute is avidly promoting and practising Āyurveda all over the country.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

An important approach of New Age Āyurveda in North America is emphasis on gentle and natural healing that is entirely safe with little if any side-effects. The philosophy of gentle healing made its initial appearance through the literature of Maharishi Ayur-Ved(a)/Āyurved(a), a part of the larger Transcendental Meditation or 'TM' organisation.

#### *Maharishi Ayur-Ved and Deepak Chopra*

Some time in the early 1980s Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, spiritual guru to millions in the TM movement, began expanding the scope of his meditation programme by including medicine. He called together about 200 doctors who were practitioners of TM in order to help launch the Maharishi's new medical initiative by combining TM with Āyurveda. Deepak Chopra was hand-picked by the Maharishi to spearhead the programme, along with three *vaidyas* from India: V.M. Dwivedi, expert in Rasāyana therapy, B.D. Triguna, specialist in pulse diagnosis<sup>7</sup>, and Balaraj Maharshi, expert in Dravyaguṇa (Āyurvedic pharmacopoeia).

Chopra, the son of a New Delhi cardiologist, holds a medical degree from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences with a specialisation in endocrinology. Before joining the Maharishi movement as its chief spokesperson for Āyurveda, Chopra was on the staff of the New England Memorial Hospital in Stoneham, Massachusetts, and maintained a successful private practice.

In 1985, Chopra began Maharishi Ayur-Ved Products International, Inc. (MAPI). It marketed and distributed Ayurvedic medicines which had been 'rediscovered' by Maharishi and his doctors. These include its own 'Amrit Kalash', along with Maharishi Ayur-Ved teas and oils, which are integral to its health programme. He was also appointed to direct the movement's principal Āyurvedic health and training centre in Lancaster, Massachusetts.

Chopra, along with the three Indian *vaidyas* and other doctors, formulated a comprehensive health programme of mind-body medicine with Āyur-

<sup>7</sup> Pulse diagnosis itself belongs not to the "classical", but to what I have called the "syncretic" period of Āyurveda above, cf. p. 6 of Gerrit Jan Meulenbeld, 'The Many Faces of Āyurveda', *Journal of the European Ayurvedic Society* 4 (1995), pp. 1-10.

veda at its core. They gave it the trade mark of 'Maharishi Ayur-Ved'. But in truth, it follows the basic paradigm of New Age Āyurveda with a twist, the addition of the TM meditation programme.<sup>8</sup>

The *Fundamentals of Maharishi Ayur-Ved. A Personalized Guide for Diet, Seasonal and Daily Routines* is a well-produced, glossy publication by Maharishi Ayur-Ved Inc. in Lancaster, Mass.<sup>9</sup> It gives the inside information about Maharishi Ayur-Ved with the added bonus of permitting the reader or inquirer to partake of Ayur-Ved at no charge.

Like all other forms of New Age Āyurveda, Maharishi Ayur-Ved claims to be the basis of other systems of medicine in the world, but in this case it is also the origin of modern biological medicine via the Greeks:

Historically, Ayur-Ved is the world's original system of health care. It is the basis of ancient Greek medicine, which is the root of much of western medicine.<sup>10</sup>

Maharishi Ayur-Ved is not Āyurveda *per se*, but the Maharishi's 'rediscovery' and revival of the traditional system 'in its purity and completeness', resulting in 'a remarkably modern, scientific approach, ... based on timeless wisdom.' Its goal is to 'prevent disease, preserve health and promote longevity', ... through the 'development of consciousness, specific diets, exercise prog-

<sup>8</sup> See Elise Pettus, 'The Mind-body Problems', *New York* August 14, 1995, pp. 30-31 and 95.

<sup>9</sup> Maharishi Ayur-Ved, *Fundamentals of Maharishi Ayur-Ved. A Personalized Guide for Diet, Seasonal and Daily Routines*, Lancaster, Mass. (Maharishi Ayur-Ved) 1993. Francis Zimmermann has criticised this form of Āyurveda for being too commercialised. He says: 'When stressing the soft and gentle quality of Ayurvedic treatments the ideological discourse of modern advertising visualizes gentleness in the properties of oils and in conspicuous gestures of massage. The unctuous quality of oils and the fluid gestures of massage provide images of nonviolence. Instead of being the harmonious result of careful adjustments, this nonviolence is the property of a commodity. You buy this nonviolence in commercially produced oils and massages.' (pp. 217f. of Francis Zimmermann, 'Gentle Purge: The Flower Power of Ayurveda', in: Charles Leslie and Allan Young (eds.), *Paths to Asian Medical Knowledge*, Berkeley, California (University of California Press) 1992, pp. 209-223.

<sup>10</sup> Maharishi Ayur-Ved, *Fundamentals of Maharishi Ayur-Ved*, p. 1.

rammes, herbal supplements, and personalized daily and season routines.<sup>11</sup> There are two components to the system:

1. Development of consciousness by TM. This provides the basis of the mind-body component of Maharishi Ayur-Ved. 'At the heart of Maharishi Ayur-Ved is the concept of creating perfect balance for the mind and body.'<sup>12</sup> This is, as seen previously, also a major component of New Age Āyurveda.

2. Personalised programme of diet, exercise and regimen. All aspects are provided by Maharishi Ayur-Ved. The therapeutic regimen involves a faithful if somewhat modified form of the traditional *pañcakarma* or the five purifying actions (head purgation, enemas, laxatives, vomiting, and – sometimes – bloodletting). Tailoring these to the sensitivities of a Western patient, Maharishi Ayur-Ved focuses on gentle healing by using only mild forms of head purgation (warm oil drops in the nose), of herbal laxatives, and of enemas. The last ones, being at times rather uncomfortable, constitute the most drastic forms of the therapeutics. Always, the South Indian techniques of oil massages and streaming oil on the forehead (*śirodhara*) are administered as methods of relaxation. These therapeutic measures, along with natural medicines, fill the 'gaps in modern health care .... without harmful side effects'.<sup>13</sup> Like the others, this type of New Age Āyurveda claims to offer a better and safer system of medical treatment than does the existing "scientific" medicine of the West.

The reader is next treated to a description of the basic 'mind-body' types according to the three *dosas* and shown how to determine his or her own mind-body constitution (*prakṛti*). This is followed by an explanation of the characteristics of disturbed *dosas* and diets to restore the balance, effects of seasons on diets and *dosas*, and ways to adjust the diets accordingly and to (re-)establish balance through proper daily regimens. All these are effected through a particular Maharishi Ayur-Ved daily routine which necessitates the intake of Maharishi's specific products and the adherence to his specific exercise prog-

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

ramme.<sup>14</sup>

In 1989 Maharishi bestowed on Chopra the title 'Lord of Immortality' for his work in promoting the TM movement and its medical system.<sup>15</sup> In order to bring this system of Maharishi Ayur-Ved to the attention of the established medical community, Chopra, Triguna, and Hari M. Sharma, a medical doctor at Ohio State University, College of Medicine, working with Maharishi, authored an article, 'Maharishi Ayur-Ved: Modern Insights into Ancient Medicine', which appeared in the prestigious *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1991.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, the essay is marred by factual errors that result in misinformation and breaches of professional ethics. In the article, the authors claim that centuries of foreign rule in India caused the suppression of Āyurvedic institutions and the loss of Āyurvedic medical knowledge. In order to rectify this situation and regain the lost wisdom, Maharshi Mahesh Yogi with several Āyurvedic physicians began Maharishi Ayur-Ved, Inc. as a 'modern renewal' of the old tradition. The article therefore advocates the health benefits of TM and the practices of Maharishi Ayur-Ved.<sup>17</sup>

Although not supported to the degree that allopathic medicine was during the British period, Āyurveda has nevertheless maintained an unbroken history in India. Moreover, the large number of Sanskrit medical treatises stored in libraries and private collections throughout India (not to mention texts composed in the different vernaculars) indicates that very little, if any, Āyurvedic knowledge has been irrevocably lost. On the contrary, Āyurveda definitely enjoyed ongoing preservation and even development over the centuries. It would thus appear that rather than a revival, Maharshi Ayur-Ved simply appropriated the established system of traditional Āyurveda, and gave it the name of TM's spiritual leader.

More serious was the authors' failure to disclose the fact that Maharishi

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-12.

<sup>15</sup> Pettus, op.cit. in note 8, p. 31.

<sup>16</sup> Deepak Chopra et al., 'Maharishi Ayur-Ved: Modern Insights into Ancient Medicine', *Journal of the American Medical Association* 265.20 (May 22 and 29, 1991), pp. 2633-2637.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 2633. See also Pettus, op.cit., p. 31.

Ayur-Ved refers to its own system and product line rather than to the traditional, and particularly the classical, system from ancient India. This alleged disregard for professional ethics generated a flood of severe criticism directed at the Journal and its editor, Andrew Skolnick, who was forced to respond in writing. His harsh comments accused the TM movement of perpetrating a 'widespread pattern of misinformation, deception, and manipulation of lay and scientific news media', and charged Chopra and his co-authors with using the journal to further the goals of the movement. The movement countered by filing a defamation suit against the journal, which was dismissed without prejudice in March 1993.<sup>18</sup> The events surrounding the affair caused a wave of bad publicity that has affected the entire TM movement and New Age Āyurveda in general by bringing it under the close scrutiny of a skeptical medical community and an increasingly mistrusting public.<sup>19</sup>

Chopra eventually split from the TM group to begin his own enterprise. In June 1993 he was appointed executive director of the Sharp Institute (For Integrative Health Care) and set up his own Center for Mind/Body Medicine in the posh San Diego suburb of La Jolla, California. The ripples from the *JAMA* article were felt on two fronts. The medical establishment's NIH Office of Alternative Medicine refuses to have anything to do with Chopra despite its awarding a grant to the Sharp Institute to study Āyurveda. Likewise, the TM movement forbade its followers to have any contact with Chopra. All TM centres were issued a directive 'to ignore him and not try to contact him or promote him in any way' in order to preserve the purity of the Maharishi's teaching.<sup>20</sup> Despite these reactions from the medical community and his one-time followers and supporters, Chopra has maintained his position as the *guru* or Vaidya Ācārya of New Age Āyurveda in North America and enjoys popularity the world over through his numerous publications, his tapes and videos, and his personal appearances. More than any other advocate of Āyurveda, Deepak

<sup>18</sup> Pettus, op.cit., p. 31.

<sup>19</sup> See in this regard also Dieter von Schmädell, 'Ayurveda – Quo vadis? Maharishi Ayur-Veda – Fortschritt oder Sackgasse?', *Journal of the European Ayurvedic Society* 3 (1993), pp. 229-249.

<sup>20</sup> Pettus, op.cit., p. 31.

Chopra has brought Āyurveda into the homes of millions of Americans and has helped to make it among the top six choices of alternative or complementary medicine, along with osteopathy, chiropractic, acupuncture, homocopathy, and naturopathy.<sup>21</sup>

## II: New Age and Classical Āyurveda

The practitioners, teachers, and organisations discussed above represent the major popularisers of Ayurveda in North America. Each has "trained" others, and a third, if not a fourth, generation of Āyurvedic specialists is now beginning to emerge on the scene. The Indian tradition of *guru* and *śiṣya*, teacher and student, remains very much alive in New Age Āyurveda.

We have observed that there are four basic characteristics that distinguish New Age Ayurveda in North America. I would now like to examine how each one compares to "classical" Āyurveda.

First: Antiquity equals authenticity. New Age Āyurveda claims that Ayurveda has its origin in the remote past, some 5000 years ago, and is the basis of all subsequent healing systems including Graeco-Roman, homocopathy, and eventually modern Western biomedicine.

Best estimates suggest that the beginnings of a codified medical system, eventually known as Āyurveda, probably began around the sixth century B.C.E., as the earliest evidence of such activities is to be found in the Buddhist Pali texts that reflect the events of that time. Although some conceptual similarities exist between the Āyurvedic idea of *doṣas* and the Graeco-Roman notion of humours, there is as yet no substantial evidence to link the two medical traditions, let alone to determine the possible direction of any flow of ideas.

<sup>21</sup> For further discussion of Deepak Chopra and his influence in the West, see Matt Labash, 'The End of History and the Last Guru', *The Weekly Standard* July 1, 1996, pp. 18-24, and John Leland and Carla Power, 'Deepak's Instant Karma', and Carla Power, 'Don't Mess with Deepak', and 'Chopra Goes Global', *Newsweek* 130.16 (October 20, 1997), pp. 44-47, 48-50, and 51, respectively. The former contains inaccurate information that has led to lawsuits against the *Weekly Standard*, so that much of what Labash reports cannot be considered as wholly reliable.

Second: Everything is spiritual. Āyurvedic medicine and Indian spirituality are inextricably connected in New Age Āyurveda. All systems of New Age Āyurveda include some significant component that involves the Yoga *āsanas* (postures) and meditation. Classical Āyurveda in India has consciously separated the medical training of Āyurveda from the spiritual and religious discipline of Yogic asceticism. Yoga has incorporated certain aspects of Āyurveda to promote and maintain general health, but Āyurveda has not included Yoga in its principles and practices.<sup>22</sup> In India, Yoga and other forms of spirituality have always been readily accessible through the proper religious channels of priests and *gurus*, and Āyurvedic *vaidyas*, like other members of society, availed themselves of the spiritual and religious training as was appropriate to their inclination and position in society. Religion was an ever present part of their lives and did not need to be incorporated into the medical system, though there were conscious efforts to do so briefly during the colonial period.<sup>23</sup> In North America one of the principal motivations for the New Age movement was a search for spirituality that was somehow absent in the existing religious traditions. Indian spirituality filled the void for many New Agers, so that New Age Āyurveda, like other imports from India, had to be spiritually based, despite the fact that mysticism and meditation were never part of the original teachings of Āyurveda.

Third: Harmonise the mind and the body. In addition to its emphasis on spirituality, New Age Āyurveda holds mind-body medicine to be fundamental. Just as in Yoga and other spiritual disciplines proper training of the mind results in taming both the mind and the body, so also in Āyurveda it must be the case that the mind plays the major role in controlling the health and well-being of the overall body. Modern science has discovered that thoughts do in fact affect the functioning of the body. The biomedical technology of biofeedback

<sup>22</sup> Kenneth G. Zysk, 'The Science of Respiration and the Doctrine of the Vital Breaths in Ancient India', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113 (1993), pp. 198-213.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Meulenbeld, op.cit. in note 7, p. 3: 'In more recent times, we can observe that during the revival of Āyurveda in the nineteenth century, much thought was given to the integration of Āyurveda, philosophy, and religion. ... The most recent literature does not show this tendency any longer, being characterised by a secularisation of Āyurveda.'

has been used effectively for a couple of decades in treating migraine headaches and in stress management. Similarly the study of energy fields in and around the body started years ago with the experiments on 'orgon' by Wilhelm Reich and others, who have become cult figures of the New Age Movement. Nowadays, scientists are carrying on the work with more knowledge and sophisticated technology. Their theories and discoveries have led to the sub-discipline of mind-body medicine that has become popular with the New Age movement. Linking Yoga to Āyurveda, therefore, permits New Age Āyurveda to benefit from the work of mind-body medicine.

Rather than a mind-body connection, Āyurveda maintains an inherently micro-macrocosmic relationship between the human body and its environment and emphasises rather physical than mental causes for maladies. What influences the world around the person also affects him or her. In its general aetiology (*nidāna*), traditional Āyurveda mentions that, among other causes, mistakes in understanding (*prajñāparādha*) and unwholesome contacts of senses with their objects (*asāmyendriyārthasamyoga*) also cause malady. Mistakes in understanding include acts against the natural laws because of ignorance, loss of patience because of emotional imbalance, and loss of memory. These usually result from the impressions left from past lives, or what is popularly called *karman*. The second involves the misuse of the senses that result in the damage to the eyes, skin, ears, tongue, and nose, and to their individual functions. These causes of disease do not result exclusively from the individual's mind or thoughts as modern mind-body medicine would explain them. Therefore, the mind-body medicine of New Age Āyurveda is something rather different from that in classical Āyurveda.

Fourth: The rediscovery of truth. What is natural is good, what is artificial is bad. New Age Āyurveda strongly argues that the ancient system of Āyurveda is based firmly on modern scientific truths that were already known in antiquity by the insightful *ṛsis* and teachers of Āyurveda. The principles and practices may be formulated and expressed differently, but the underlying scientific bases are the same. Likewise, New Age Āyurveda claims that all the medicines and treatments that are employed are natural and therefore completely safe without toxic or harmful side-effects.

As far as can be ascertained, modern scientific medicine and Āyurveda



are still wide apart in their respective understandings of the workings of the human body, and a common vocabulary of words and ideas has yet to emerge. Significant differences in conceptual understanding exist between the two medical systems, so until a common language of discourse is established, dialogue between practitioners of Āyurveda and the doctors of allopathic medicine will remain at the superficial level.

New Age Āyurveda's insistence on gentle, safe, and natural healing is worrisome and a cause for concern. Its ignorance of classical Āyurveda in this regard can indeed be harmful to people. Despite their ideological premise that connects humans to nature, the texts, teachers, and practitioners of classical Āyurveda always caution about the possible dangers and mishaps that can occur from the wrong administration of a therapeutic procedure or the toxic effects from the wrong formulation, preparation, or prescription of a specific medicine. Classical Āyurveda would never claim that it was always safe. It would, however, maintain that the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of a particular remedy or medical procedure depends on the knowledge and skill of the physician. If a therapy failed or caused an undesired result, or if medications were toxic to the patient, it was not the fault of the technique or the drugs employed, but resulted from an incompetent physician who did not diagnose properly, did not prepare the medicines correctly, or did not know the full range of effects of a treatment or remedy. Followers of New Age Āyurveda should heed the warnings clearly spelled out in the classical system.

### III: Conclusions

The most recent manifestation of Āyurveda is found in the Western world. It combines the spiritual and ideological elements of the New Age movement with an ancient Indian medical tradition to produce New Age Āyurveda. Āyurveda has reached the Western world, but in a different form from which it began in India. The transformations that have occurred in Āyurveda reflect Western attitudes and concerns rather than internal development of the system itself. What the final form of New Age Āyurveda will eventually look like depends largely on those in the West who teach and practise it and those in India who support and encourage it.

## The Authorship of the Tibetan Medical Treatise *Cha lag bco brgyad* (Twelfth Century AD) and a Description of its Historical Background\*

BARBARA GERKE

### INTRODUCTION

The *Gyushi* (*rGgyud bzhi*; lit. 'The Four Tantras') are the most famous and fundamental works of all Tibetan medical literature. So pervasive is their influence that they have been in continuous use since the twelfth century. This paper deals with a medical text concerning the *Gyushi* known as the *Cha lag bco brgyad* (lit. 'The Eighteen Implementations'). This text was of major importance for traditional Tibetan medical studies between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries AD. Subsequent to this period, it largely disappeared from the medical curricula. Its authorship is generally attributed to the outstanding physician of the early twelfth century, Yuthog Yontan Gonpo the Younger (gYu thog yon tan mgon po gsar ma; AD 1112-1203; hereafter referred to as Yuthog). This treatise should not be viewed and analysed apart from the vast corpus of Tibetan medical literature and its history. Rather it should be viewed in terms of its historical context. Studying the eighteen texts in this way raises a number of interesting questions. Why did they enjoy such popularity for five hundred years and then suddenly disappear? Who were their authors and how is the development of traditional medicine in Tibet at that time reflected in their compilation?

Part one of this paper concentrates on the medical history related to the work. Part two examines the eighteen texts and their diverse authorship.

The Lhasa edition of the seventeenth century version of the *Cha lag bco brgyad* was reprinted in LOKESH CHANDRA 1968. Other private manuscript versions may be available from individual physicians scattered throughout the Himalayan region. An incomplete edition of the original blockprint manuscript forms the major part of the Tibetan medical manuscript collection

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