



PANCHAKARMA

by

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PANCHAKARMA



A "WHOLISTIC" SYSTEM



PANCHAKARMA is a unique contribution of the INDIAN THOUGHT PROCESS, which goes far beyond being merely a physical cleansing process. When Ayurveda, the knowledge of life and longevity, gives minimum importance to physical fitness and well being, how can such a deep and important treatment process like the Panchakarma be limited to physical cleansing alone? Today Panchakarma is extremely popular, the world over, especially under its more popular acronym, PK.



LIVING BEING IN THE COSMOS



Let us begin by giving a very simplistic explanation for the CONCEPT OF TREATMENT according to Ayurveda. Let us look at the living being as a big box primarily filled with space: the space being enclosed in various channels that flow through all parts of the body; having a continuous movement of nutrition; carrying fluid to all parts of the box as also toxic fluid being brought back to the main channels; wherein dynamic metabolic activity is continually occurring within the body - within the smallest of smallest spaces leading to the creation of essence and waste; and finally the box itself having a few openings on its periphery to enable its interaction with the world outside - receiving essential (as and when the essence within the box falls below an optimal level) nutrition from the world outside, and releasing essential (as and when they build up to a level which is higher than can be accommodated within the box) toxins into the world outside. Further, due to the presence of these peripheral openings, this living box is affected by the pulsations in the external universe, and hence based on the levels of ESSENCE & TOXINS within the box, it is protected/unprotected from the vagaries of the cosmos.



BALANCE AND IMBALANCE



If the level of the essence is more than that of the toxins, it is able to withstand and protect itself from any external vibrations; while if the level of the waste is more than that of the essence, then it remains unprotected and may succumb to the pulsations in the external universe. The BALANCE OR HARMONY in the box is maintained by the dynamic equilibrium that exists between the essence and the waste. Please do not consider the waste or the toxin as being totally unimportant or of no consequence to health. The production and existence and consequent expulsion of proper waste is a very important indication of harmony or HEALTH and hence it is said in a particular context that the "waste is actually the strength of the living being".

Thus once the above picture is clear, the importance of the peripheral openings also becomes clear. The peripheral openings in the living being are the eyes, the ears, the nose, the mouth, the genital tract, the urinary tract and the rectum. In women, the breasts form two additional openings. Thus in men, there are nine openings while in women there are twelve openings. Additionally, there are the pores on the skin which enable the release of the toxins through the medium of sweat. It is these openings that enable the interaction with the external environment. And it is through these openings that the gross and the subtle toxins are eliminated from the system as well as absorbed into the system as the case may be. Under normal circumstances, the waste is eliminated from the system in the form of the NATURAL URGES that each of us experience on a day to day basis. The most common among these urges are those of the urge to urinate and the urge to defecate. And generally, most of the waste is expelled from the system through these two processes along with the natural sweating that we experience most of the time.

Now let us take an abnormal condition where the wastes in the box are considerably built up and are not being routinely expelled in sufficient quantity due to various reasons. It may be due to improper metabolic activity, it may be due to clogging of the channels through which the waste moves to reach the peripheral openings; it may even be due to the blockage in the peripheral openings; or it may be due to excessive toxins entering the box from outside; and finally it may even be due to the natural ageing process. Whatever the case may be, due to inability to move out, the wastes increase abnormally within the box and thus creates an IMBALANCE and consequently a DIS-EASE or a discomfort within the box.



FROM DIS-EASE TO EASE



Now there are primarily three ways to remove this discomfort and restore the ease.

- The first is to increase the nourishment considerably by which the balance between the essence and the waste is gradually restored and the malfunctioning within the box is rectified leading to the expulsion of the increased wastes in course of time, and restoration of equilibrium. This is possible only if the distorted action of the increased wastes is within containable limits. Further this may be only a temporal solution.
- If not, then the second option is to be applied which is the removal of the excess wastes forcibly from the box using the existing peripheral openings. Here processes are used wherein the wastes are forcibly brought from all parts of the box into the primary channels connecting to the peripheral openings and then thrown out of the box using hard hitting methods.
- If this method is also not successful, it is only then that the third and most dangerous option is to be resorted to - which is cutting opening the box at the vulnerable point, and physically removing the waste and then suturing up the box once again. However as is well known, once any material is cut open and then re-sutured, the scar always remains and there is always a possibility that toxins or wastes again enter the box through this unnaturally created opening which does not otherwise have a role to play in maintaining the dynamic balance within the box.

The application of all these three options requires that the box be moved into a suitably CONDUCTIVE ENVIRONMENT, and all activity within the box is totally focused on the removal of the excess toxins and RESTORATION OF HARMONY. To enable this, it may also be that the other normal activities occurring within the box are brought down to the minimal level at which it can continue to function so that the entire energy is concentrated on the repair process, till such a time when the box is back to normal and fully capable of taking care of itself.



TELLING AYURVED-ICALLY...



This is the principle of understanding of the living body and consequent treatment in Ayurveda. Here the first corrective option described is the ZAMANA treatment or the pacification of the disease using medicines and corrected diet and lifestyle. The second corrective option described is the ZODHANA treatment under which is described the PANCHAKARMA, wherein the accumulated and disease-creating wastes are forcibly eliminated from the system. And the third corrective option described is the ZASTRAKARMA or surgical treatment which is also the least desirable option, for as mentioned earlier, it is not a naturally corrective measure. An important point which is integral to the success of all the above three treatment options is the creation of a conducive internal and external environment which will hasten the HEALING process. This environment can be created only by total physical and mental rest and the texts clearly mention that "for all diseases and for all treatments that are undertaken, the patient should be under TOTAL PHYSICAL & MENTAL REST".

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