

सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः

May all be

Free From Illness



Dr. RAJESHWARI



Sri Anurodh Society

AUROPUBLICATIONS

POWERFUL THOUGHTS, INSPIRING VISION

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DR. RAJESHWARI

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Sri Anubhavo Society

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FOREWORD

Writing this foreword for the e-book *सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः – May All Be Free From Illness*, is an honour for me, not just because the author Dr. Rajeshwari is my elder sister, but also because it is being published by Sri Aurobindo Society's Auropublications, which adds a spiritual touch to the book.

In a world dominated by conventional medicine with its swanky hospitals and hi-tech equipment, what Dr. Rajeshwari advocates is preventive healthcare through holistic means, especially through natural means, following traditional practices and by taking the help of the *Pancha Mahabhootas* or the Five Elements. She makes it easy by explaining the working of our sense organs, and how the Elements help them function optimally, as well as providing scientific explanations to many of the seemingly superstitious customs and traditions, to make them acceptable to modern minds. During her years running Arogya Ashrayam, an NGO in Tamil Nadu for children with special needs, providing education and rehabilitation, she had travelled extensively to mine the treasure trove of traditional wisdom to help her wards. I have written about her work in this field, on my blog, cybernag.in.

My sister started her medical career in her 40s. Being over-age, she was not eligible for the regular MBBS course. So, she opted for a four-year degree in Naturopathy, to get the basic medical knowledge of anatomy, physiology, minor surgeries, etc., required for studying Alternative Medicine, her main field of interest. With that launching pad, she set about acquiring Degrees, Diplomas and Doctorates in the

various branches of Alternative Medicine, especially Acupuncture and Magnetotherapy. Her extensive research into how the Five Elements affect the functioning of the body earned her the WHO certified Ph.D. in Alternative Medicine (*Ph.D. Medicina Alternativa, WHO, Alma-Ata*).

Most of us in my family and extended family turn to her when faced with a medical problem and have never been disappointed. She prescribes homeopathic medicines or herbal remedies, Acupressure points to press and massage, diets and breathing techniques to follow – all depending upon the problem, and all done over the phone, based on the symptoms. As we each can attest, her treatment is impeccable and the cure, often miraculous. Every so often a conventional medical practitioner confirms her diagnosis based on expensive lab tests! However, she always lays stress on preventive health through healthy habits, especially eating habits.

She often says that disorders and diseases are mostly caused by faulty habits, and habits are often hereditary. Her favourite statement is, ‘Habits are hereditary, not the diseases.’ During phone conversations, she would somehow bring in health and share some nugget about preventive health or talk about a remedy for some disorder or health issue. I have learnt so much about the wisdom of our ancestors during even routine conversations with her.

Her remedies are so simple and doable that we had exhorted her to put them all down in the form of a book. That was how *Nature Cure at Home* was written, followed by the book on obesity, *Shed your Weight Without Tears* (Pustak Mahal). Both are goldmines of information about the causes of various disorders and diseases, going into detail about the working of the organs involved, with easy-to-follow home

remedies including diet, simple yoga exercises and therapies that can be practised at home. They are still bestsellers. I am happy to have been a part of her books and articles, having been her unofficial editor over the years.

I was delighted to read the concluding chapter of the present volume which has passages by Sri Aurobindo about the role of the Divine Force in healing. While talking to a doctor, Sri Aurobindo says, “For you believe and are conscious of the Force, your whole will is to cure, the patient’s will is to get well—the more he assents to the treatment, the more quickly the Force acts.”

This passage reminded me of something my sister often tells anyone who approaches her with a medical problem. ‘Do you have faith in the treatment? If not, do you have faith in me? If you do not have faith in either, you will not get any positive result.’

I feel that the ‘faith’ my sister talks about, is the Divine Force that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo mention as the vital element driving a cure, if it is welcomed by the patient.

And then there is also this passage from Sri Aurobindo: “I have often used the Force alone without any human instrument or outer means, but here all depends on the recipient and his receptivity—unless as in the case of many healers there are unseen beings or powers that assist.”

It reminds me of what my sister always says, ‘It is He who cures. I am just the instrument.’ She would often ask us to chant a shloka dedicated to a particular Deity along with following her medical advice – her spiritual prescription! Those of us who have experienced

her miraculous cures, know for a fact that it could not have been achieved without Divine assistance.

सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः – *May All Be Free From Illness* should be read for its rich offerings. In addition to the well-researched articles on the scientific basis for our traditions and customs, readers will find here the boundless spiritual treasure in the form of Sri Aurobindo's selected passages in the concluding chapter. And of course, learn how to be healthy by following a natural and spiritual lifestyle.

~ Thangamani

Author, Translator and Blogger
Mumbai, November 2024



Good health is the exterior
expression of an inner harmony.

~ The Mother, CWM 15: 136

INTRODUCTION

In a speech written for the Maharaja of Baroda in 1901, Sri Aurobindo had referred to the history of indigenous system of medicine in India prior to the British colonial rule. He wrote of the greatness of the ancient and indigenous system of medicine, and said that this system shared the fate of the other Hindu arts and sciences “both in the comparatively high degree of scientific knowledge and intelligent practice it had reached in astonishingly early times and in the premature blight which had subsequently come over it.”

This system of medicine was built on a sound and masterly knowledge in fields of surgery, pharmacy and sanitation. Successful surgical operations which would have been far beyond contemporary science in Europe were being conducted by Indian surgeons. The system had also “amassed a pharmacopoeia from indigenous drugs, which, however imperfect, was possessed of considerable merit and efficacy.” The rules of hygiene and sanitation which were being followed and advocated were exhaustive, sound and in consonance with the scientific opinion of today. The theory of the human body on which this system of indigenous medicine was based was in agreement with ancient view of physiology and human constitution instead of what are known today as modern ideas, “but its practical science was superior to its theory,” wrote Sri Aurobindo.

What happened to this great science of indigenous medicine? Sri Aurobindo remarked that it met the same fate as almost everything else in India because it came under a “curse of stationariness and decay.” Its practice gradually became mechanical and its science fell into disuse. He further added, “...the old authorities couched in the

learned tongue came to be repeated by rote; its pharmacopoeia was administered without intelligence or original research and analysis and therefore with only a fitful efficacy...". The surgical knowledge also ceased to exist except in a rudimentary form. Furthermore, the large number of sanitary rules which were once invested with a religious sanction came to be flagrantly violated in the daily practice of the people.

Over the course of time, entered Mahomedan medicine, which was a mediaeval science based on the Greek. But it did not tend to correct this state of things. It only added another imperfect system to the existing one, said Sri Aurobindo. "To a country thus circumstanced Western civilisation came with a medical science which, recovered from its old stagnation, was making immense strides, with a vastly superior pharmacy, an ever bolder & more subtle surgery and organised & living grasp of sanitation." (Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 1: 687-688).

This gradually led to fast erosion and erasure of the indigenous system of Indian medicine.

Fast forward to several centuries later. In India, as well as in many parts of the world today, we are witnessing a revival of the indigenous ways of healing and maintaining good health. There is now a greater interest in traditional medicine and natural approaches to healing. The increasing popularity of medical systems that are often spoken of as "Alternative" or "Holistic" or "Complementary" Medicine is a sign that more and more people are opting for healing and wellness practices which are more aligned with a 'whole'-view of what a human individual is instead of looking at only the specific part or organ which needs to undergo a special 'treatment' to be fixed.

This e-book brings together a series of articles written by Dr. Rajeshwari for [Renaissance](http://renaissance.aurosociety.org) journal <renaissance.aurosociety.org> which were first published in 2021-2022. Dr. Rajeshwari is a qualified specialist in Alternative Medicine who has conducted extensive research among India's rural and tribal communities learning about diverse customs and rituals related to health and well-being. Learning from the wisdom of the elders in these communities, and based on her research into drugless therapies of India and the Far East, she has been practicing natural medicine for a long time.

The author advocates living in harmony with Nature for a life of wellness and also strives to evoke and enhance the inherent divinity within each of us. She shares practical examples, interesting tales and anecdotes to help us along on this learning odyssey.

Dr. Rajeshwari reminds us that behind many of the customary practices and modes of conduct about which we hear from our elders, there were considerable knowledge and understanding of subtle truths of natural laws. But in its zeal for rationality, the modern mind often brands these as ignorant superstitions or mere irrational convention which have no relevance today.

We may recall here a letter of Sri Aurobindo in which he says that the word 'superstition' is often applied to beliefs not accepted by the form of religion one happens to follow or favour. It will be instructive to read the relevant passage from the long letter:

"It is quite true that the word "superstition" has been habitually used as a convenient club to beat down any belief that does not agree with the ideas of the materialistic reason, that is to say, of the physical mind dealing with the apparent law of physical process and seeing no farther. It has also been used to dismiss ideas and beliefs not in

agreement with one's own idea of what is the rational norm of supraphysical truths as well. For many ages man cherished beliefs that implied a force behind which acted on principles unknown to the physical mind and beyond the witness of the outward reason and the senses.

“Science came in with a method of knowledge which extended the evidence of this outer field of consciousness and thought that by this method all existence would become explicable. It swept away at once without examination all the ancient beliefs as so many “superstitions”—true, half true or false, all went into the dust bin in one impartial sweep, because they did not rely on the method of physical Science and lay outside its data or were or seemed incompatible with its standpoint.

“Even in the field of supraphysical experience only so much was admitted as could give a mentally rational explanation of itself according to a certain range of ideas—all the rest, everything that seemed to demand an occult, mystic or below-the-surface origin to explain it, was put aside as so much superstition.

“Popular beliefs that were the fruit sometimes of imagination but sometimes also of a traditional empirical knowledge or of a right instinct shared naturally the same fate. That all this was a hasty and illegitimate operation, itself based on the “superstition” of the all-sufficiency of the new method which really applies only to a limited field, is now becoming more and more evident. . . The growing reversal of opinion with regard to many things that were

then condemned but are now coming into favour once more, is very striking.”

Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 28: 388-389

Sri Aurobindo’s last words from the above passage are worth reiteration. What was true at the time he wrote the letter, sometime between 1931 and 1937, is even truer today. Indeed, it is very striking, as he remarks, that today we are witnessing a “growing reversal of opinion with regard to many things that were then condemned but are now coming into favour once more.” This is definitely the case with healing traditions and wellness approaches from the past.

This collection of writings by Dr. Rajeshwari helps us get a closer look and a deeper appreciation of the indigenous ways, customs and practices which were advocated to help maintain good health. Often these were integrated within the religious mould of life and living, so that people would be naturally encouraged to practice them as part of their lifestyle.

I conclude this Introduction with these words of Sri Aurobindo, where he speaks of his own discovery of the effectiveness of that mighty Will and Faith which act behind the maintenance of good health.

“For nearly forty years I believed them when they said I was weakly in constitution, suffered constantly from the smaller & the greater ailments & mistook this curse for a burden that Nature had laid upon me. When I renounced the aid of medicines, then they began to depart from me like disappointed parasites. Then only I understood what a mighty force was the natural health within me & how much mightier yet the Will & Faith exceeding mind which God meant to be the divine support of our life in this body.”

The concluding chapter of this volume features a few selections from Sri Aurobindo where we get a good illustration of the effectivity of “the Will & Faith exceeding mind” that is spoken of as a healing force in the above quote. These selections help us understand the conditions under which the spiritual force works to cure illnesses. We also get a glimpse of how the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were using the Divine Force to help *sādhakas* in their healing process.

As always, we offer this work to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

In gratitude,

Beloo Mehra

Editor, *Renaissance*

Pondicherry, 2024



All Nature dumbly calls to her alone
To heal with her feet the aching throb of life
And break the seals on the dim soul of man
And kindle her fire in the closed heart of things.

~ Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p. 314

PANĆAMAHĀBHŪTA AND THEIR ROLE IN WELLNESS

Our ancestors had great knowledge about the factors that affect our lives and well-being. Using their common sense, they keenly observed every minute detail in their surroundings and natural forces, and learned, assimilated and used the knowledge thus gained to give us an invaluable legacy of health imbued with spirituality. By ‘ancestors’ I mean those of all indigenous cultures and civilisations but with specific focus on Indian and Eastern cultures.

They had an astonishing knowledge not only about health and diseases but also knew the importance of the right food in preventing and managing disorders of the body. To correct imbalances and restore good health, they were able to harness the powers of the Five Elements or what we know in India as *pañcamahābhūta*. These are: *Ākāśa* (sky/space/ether), *Vāyu* (air), *Agni* (fire), *Aapa/Jala* (water), and *Prithvī* (Earth), present both in Nature as well as the human body. To help restore good health and to promote wellness, our ancestors set in place customs, rituals and traditions that would bestow on us the best of physical and spiritual health. If one were to closely study the customs and rituals followed by people of different cultures over centuries, one would be amazed to see the wisdom of our ancestors.

Though both men and women of the ancient world possessed a good knowledge of health and diseases, it was the women who took care of the family’s welfare, including health and meals. They knew precisely

how to keep all the members fit and healthy. A grandmother could be equated to a senior family doctor, and the younger women to interns. All knowledge was transmitted down the generations through observation and practice, and of course, by listening to elders, without the benefit of any notes.

When we look at Indian and other Eastern cultures, we are amazed at our ancestors' knowledge of astronomy, astrology and other cosmic sciences, though they did not call them by these names! They knew about climate variations and could predict natural calamities just by observing the changes in the behaviour of animals and birds – more accurately than our meteorologists with all their sophisticated equipment can do today. They could deduce the effects of the movement of the planets and other celestial bodies on the behaviour and health of the inhabitants of the Earth. Finally, they connected with the Divine within themselves by being connected and compassionate to all living beings, including plants.

To this day, remote communities and tribes that are untouched by modern trappings rely on their elders' knowledge of Nature's ways. Unfortunately, generations of nuclear families and the increasing popularity of conventional medicine in both urban and rural areas have reduced the influence of elders in our society and consequently the importance of folk medicine and wisdom. It is a pity that a treasure trove of such wisdom is being lost due to scepticism, which are getting rejected as superstition and old wives' tales.

The *pañca mahābhūta* have always been the guiding and governing forces of our well-being, despite sea changes in medical practices over the millennia. Thankfully, we have a clearer vision with proof, backed by scientific experiments and investigations under lab conditions, that the Five Elements are indeed the vital forces in our lives.

Our Ancestors' Knowledge of the Panćamahābhūta

As mentioned earlier, *Panća Mahābhūta* or the Five Elements are not only found in Nature but also within the human body. In that respect, our body can be compared to a small universe. It was therefore natural for our ancestors of Indian and Eastern cultures to make the five elements an integral and inseparable part of all customs and traditions. These customs might have evolved and changed over the centuries and millennia, but the basic concepts ingrained in them have remained unchanged even today.

Nature was the nurturer for our ancestors, as she provided them with food, energy, herbs to cure ailments, relief from stress and tension-related mental illnesses, and much more. They lived in harmony with Nature and the Five Elements contained therein. With the passing of time, people began settling down, forming clusters of civilisation and these very *bhūta*-s not only became their means of livelihood and means of transport, but also proved to be an inexhaustible source of knowledge.

They further enhanced their knowledge through a spirit of inquiry that led to exploration, thereby creating a treasure trove of wisdom for posterity. So vast in scope and depth is this storehouse of knowledge that it wouldn't be wrong to say that we are still only skimming the surface.

Realising that human existence depended on the *bhūta*-s, our ancestors began caring for them. It was almost as if the latter actually spoke to our ancestors: "Use us, but also nurture us and we will be your well-wishers and care-givers in return!" What a beautiful way of interdependent living!

Living closely with the Elements, they understood their moods and behaviour – when the weather would be pleasant, when it would turn foul, the change of the seasons, when the rains would be good and when they would fail and so on. Thus, they devised a comfortable and compatible co-existence among humans, other living beings and Nature. There are verses in our Vedas and Upanishads that offer prayers to the *Panća Mahābhūta* of *Ākāśa*, *Vāyu*, *Agni*, *Jala*, and *Prithvī*.

Our ancestors nurtured and preserved the Five Elements by living in tune with Nature, instituting certain rituals and customs that were beneficial for both living beings and Nature. The underlying concept was mutual reverence and nurturing, because each of them involved the use of one or more *bhūta*-s, which in turn benefited the humans.

Even a cursory study would reveal the great wisdom and deep thought behind these customs. By cleverly weaving the rituals and customs around divine propitiation in the early years and later around dharmic duties and social obligations, our ancestors ensured that the living beings and Nature were cared for equally.

Interestingly, many of these rituals and customs exist even today. While many people follow it by force of habit or compulsion without understanding the significance behind them, others reject them completely as being superstition or regressive. Let us consider some of the customs related to temple *pujā* and the *bhūta*-s involved in them.

The foremost one is water. No temple visit is complete without *jala*. Many of our temples were/are either situated on riverbanks or have temple tanks attached to them – the latter being a part of any medium or large temple – especially in southern India. The devotees first take a holy dip in rivers and temple tanks before entering the temple.

In all temples the Deity has *abhiṣekam* (ritual bathing) performed by the *purōhita*. In northern India, the devotees themselves offer *jala* to Shiva in temples. They drink the *abhiṣeka tīrtham*, or the *purōhita* sprinkles the *tīrtham* on the devotees (*tīrtha prokṣanam*). No wonder water bodies were preserved and kept pure with so much emphasis on the use of *jala* in temple rituals.

Interestingly, a pilgrimage is known as *tīrtha yātra* in India. The word *tīrtha* literally means crossing over, which is usually representative of the crossing over of this ocean of earthly existence to the realms beyond. So, the idea of water is also present there.

Large-scale *homā-s* or *havans* and *yajñá-s* performed in temples bring in the element of *agni* to clear away any pollution of the *vāyu* in the atmosphere. *Prithvī* is conserved by growing plants and trees for producing flowers and leaves, fruits and twigs offered in the *havans*. The flowers and leaves have beneficial medicinal properties that help cure many diseases. When these four *bhūta-s* are protected and preserved, the fifth one – *Ākāśa* (sky) becomes pristine, pure and directly connects the spirit of man to the Divine Force.

It is popularly believed, especially in southern India that Lord Śiva manifests Himself in the form of the *pañcabhūtas* in each of the following *sthalas*, of which four are in Tamil Nadu and one in Andhra Pradesh.

- As *Prithvī Lingam* at Kancheepuram
- As *Vāyu Lingam* at Kalahasthi
- As *Appu/Neer/Jala Lingam* at Thiruvanaikaval
- As *Agni Lingam* at Tiruvannamalai
- As *Ākāśa Lingam* at Chidambaram

To understand *pañcabhūta tattva* and the importance of the *bhūta*-s in our lives, we should know how these five elements affect our body. In the succeeding chapters, I will discuss more about the concept of the *pañcabhūta tattva*, explaining how the different elements are intertwined with each other and how only their perfect balance can make for our physical and mental well-being.



In the ancient conception of the universe our material existence is formed from the five elemental states of Matter, the ethereal, aerial, fiery, liquid and solid; everything that has to do with our material existence is called the elemental, *adhibhūta*.

~ Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 18: 18

PANĆAMAHAĀBHŪTA AND OUR CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

The *pañcamahābhūtas* are the very source of our existence, yet humans are mindlessly abusing them and consequently suffering from health disorders and ailments. Before proceeding further, it is important to understand how and why these *bhūtas* exist in the universe and in the human body, which is a small universe in itself.

In spiritual terms, the human body is the *jīvātmā* in which the Supreme Being or the *Paramātmā* dwells. This mortal body is like a rented home for humans to perform their duty according to their *karma*, till they live out their time on earth. It is significant to add here that our ancestors who lived in compatibility with *pañcamahābhūtas* never ‘died’ or ‘passed away’, but just left this rented house.

Even today when someone dies, it is customary to say that the person has discarded his *bhoot sharīr* (mortal body) or that he had given up his *prāṇa*, and attained *sadgati* to be one with the Existence or *Paramātmā*. In Tamilian families, it is customary to send out the news of someone’s demise as that person having attained *Śivaloka prāpti* or *Vishnuloka prāpti*.

There is a great truth behind this. *Prithvī*, the first *bhūta* was created by *Paramātmā* to nourish all living beings as long as they stay in this house (physical body). But where would the nourishment to feed us come from? *Prithvī* needs resources to feed her mortal children.

Hence *Paramātmā* created the other elements or *bhūtas*, namely *vāyu*, *jala*, *agni* and *ākāśa*, all of which are His *swarūpa*.

It therefore became necessary to preserve and protect the *bhūtas*, so that living beings may exist in this world. Our forefathers took the help of the plant kingdom in this task. They studied Nature and planted an abundance of vegetation and trees. A bit of brushing up of our middle-school environmental science would tell us the role of the plant kingdom in the cycle of life.

- First of all, it is the plant kingdom that purifies *vāyu* (air) and *ākāśa* (sky) – by breathing in carbon-dioxide that animals and humans exhale, and breathing out life-giving oxygen, which is needed by the latter. Plants also inhale other noxious gases in the atmosphere, which are harmful to living beings.
- Coming to *jala* or water, a good forest cover is essential for plentiful rainfall, as the moisture released through the process of transpiration during photosynthesis by the leaves augments the atmospheric moisture, thereby inducing rains. This in turn fills up the water bodies and rivers. It is interesting to know that both the human body and our earth are covered by 70% water.
- How do trees protect *prithvī*? The roots of large trees go deep into the earth and hold it together, preventing soil erosion. It is logical therefore to have lots of trees to preserve the earth.
- Those of us living in concrete jungles can appreciate the role of trees in reducing the temperature in the atmosphere and preventing global warming. This is how the plant kingdom regulates *agni* (fire/heat).

The active element of the plant kingdom is water. Isn't it amazing how this group of living beings, with just one active *bhūta*, works for the

benefit of those with more active elements, including human beings who have all the five *bhūtas*?

Though the plant kingdom preserves all the five elements, it is *vāyu* that holds the first place in the scheme of things, for the simple reason that it is life itself. We can go without food for days, even months. We can do without water for days, as some people do in the ritualistic fasting without any water intake. But can we live without air even for a few minutes, unless we are trained to hold our breath for any length of time?

Our native deep-sea divers do just that as they dive in the oceans to collect pearls. Even in this day and age, they do it without any scuba suits or sophisticated deep-diving equipment – all due to their learning from their elders and practical experience, going back centuries and more.

And of course, those who do *sādhanā* can do this by controlling the *prāṇa* and restricting it only to the *nāḍis*, from root to crown. They train their body to achieve this by practising perfect *prāṇāyama* – not the kind we see now in some modern yoga training which focuses just on the postures or breath exercises learnt and practised incorrectly or half-heartedly, watching videos and TV programmes.

Our ancestors from millennia back knew the scientific truth about the need to preserve trees. Their scientific temper was honed, not in laboratories over test tubes and experiments, but through observation and experience. Scientists are only now discovering how certain plants in the close vicinity of humans can help reduce pollution and increase well-being by providing oxygen. NASA today advocates planting of these plants around and inside residences and offices because these are useful in not just cleaning the air, but also reducing people's stress levels.

In their wisdom, our ancestors instituted a host of religious rituals around the protection of plants and trees: One of them is offering *jalam* or water to trees that are of immense benefit to humans: the *vatavrkṣa* (banyan), *pīpal*, *aśwattha* (fig), *āmalaki* (Indian gooseberry) and such, which have spiritual merits. *Vat Savitri vrat* is another such ritual, where women worship the banyan tree for the long life of their husbands.

Not just the trees, even plants that grew wild and were considered useless or poisonous were associated with particular deities and offered to them – *dhatūrā* (thorn apple) and *arka* (crown flower/giant milkweed), to name a few. Why, even the humble grass *dūrva* (Bermuda grass) is a special offering for Lord Ganesha! All of these have special medical benefits.

The neem tree was planted closest to the home. Even today we can see at least one big neem tree in the compounds of village houses. A rope cot is usually found under it, where the members of the family relax, work or sleep. If neem was chosen to be planted near the home, they avoided planting tamarind trees in the close vicinity, planting them in a separate grove. What was so special about the neem tree and why was the tamarind shunted to a separate grove?

Go to the next chapter where I narrate a village lore – a true incident that has become a lore over time.



It should take long for self-cure to replace medicine, because of the fear, self-distrust and unnatural physical reliance on drugs which Medical Science has taught to our minds & bodies & made our second nature.

~ Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 12: 477

LEARNING FROM THATHA

In that remote village of South India a long time ago, lived a venerable Elder. Nobody knew for sure, but he was believed to be more than 100 years of age. Simply known as Thatha (grandpa), he was a repository of ancient folk wisdom he had learnt from his forefathers. He had a panacea for every physical and mental illness about which the villagers consulted him. He gave them simple remedies and solutions.

Among the many things he had learnt was that one should not walk or sleep under a tamarind tree at night. In order to keep the villagers from going into the tamarind grove at night, he told them that there were *ketta kaatru* (noxious gases – another name for ghosts in Tamil) there. His word was accepted by everyone, except a group of sceptical youth, who thought that he was superstitious.

So, one night, the friends decided to go to the grove and sleep there, to challenge the advice given by Thatha. They lay under a big tamarind tree, telling jokes, laughing and chatting about ghosts and spirits. Hardly had they slept, exhausted, when they awoke one by one, in cold sweat and unable to breathe. The terrified boys were convinced that they had been ‘caught’ by the ghost! Leaving their mats and pillows, they somehow managed to run back to their homes in the village, screaming their heads off.

Next morning, the boys woke up with severe body ache and palpitations and lost no time to seek out the Elder. In anxious tones, they told him that something had indeed ‘caught’ them at night, but were surprised to see him simply standing there, smiling. “So you met

the ghost!” Thatha chuckled. The boys looked suitably chastised. He then gave them a simple prescription of walking on a road lined with tamarind trees during the day and sleeping under a big neem tree at night, for the next 40 days.

The boys were now afraid of going anywhere near a tamarind tree, even during the day, leave alone sleeping under any tree after their previous night’s scare. Finally, Thatha accompanied them. Surprisingly, their aches and pains vanished and palpitations were gone, when they woke the next morning. Naturally they were curious to know how they had been cured and wanted to know why they should continue the treatment for 40 days.

Thatha then told the boys that for some time after having inhaled toxic air through their mouth, the experience and its memory might scare them again while talking and sleeping – just the way it had the first time, especially if they were alone. The prescribed treatment for the 40-day period would ward off this situation.

He also explained that certain trees including the tamarind tree, and a tree with similar fruits/pods like tamarind which grows extensively around the country, variously called *Kodukkapuli/Vilayati imli/Madras thorn* (Botanical name: *Pithecellobium dulce*) give out *prāṇa vāyu* like the other trees during the day, but breathe out all the *ketta kaatru* (noxious gases) at night. The boys had felt choked that night because they had been chatting non-stop before going to sleep, and then inhaled so much of carbon-dioxide during their sleep. On the other hand, because the *neem* tree releases *prāṇa vāyu* all through the day and night, they had felt refreshed in the morning after even a single day of treatment.

Thatha hastened to add that even when the tamarind tree and others of its kind breathed out all the noxious gases at night, they were in fact

readying themselves to give out *prāṇa vāyu* the next morning to continue helping humans and animals. This explains how these trees help when they can but are helpless when they cannot. In this way, the plant kingdom teaches us a lesson about helping fellow beings whenever we can without shirking away the responsibility of doing so.

Why only 40 days, and why not more or lesser number of days? There was a spiritual reason in addition to a physical one for this, Thatha told the boys who by now had become curious and open to understanding more.

Panābhūta and Panēndriyā

Let you and I also follow Thatha and understand the reason behind 40 days of treatment. For this, we first need to about the term *vratam*.

In India, starting from the month of *Jyēsthā*, *sanyāsis* and *mathādiśas* of ascetic orders observe *Chaturmāsya vratam*. During this period, they go to secluded places for four months, where there is no disturbance or sensory distraction in the form of visitors. They live on a frugal diet of fruits and uncooked food, eating just once a day. This is a *sātvik* way of observing *vratam* giving the necessary rest to the *panābhūtas* in the body and *panēndriyas* of the mind. Our elders have stipulated this period of *vratam* during the monsoons, when our body and mind need the deserved rest.

For the bodily organs are governed by the *panābhūtas*, any course of treatment is a kind of *vratam*. For example, one organ in the body – say, the respiratory organ – may accept the new habit of walking through the grove of tamarind trees in the morning and through the grove of neem trees in the evening. But other organs – for example, digestive organs – may not accept this ritual right away. It normally

takes 40 days for all organs to function in sync, to achieve complete cure as per the organ clock theory.

This is same as the idea that practice makes one perfect. For instance, many months of practice are necessary for an athlete before he or she can enter a competition. Similarly, the period of time for all organs to get accustomed to a particular pattern of behaviour is 40 days. When combined with a regular pattern of dietary intake this is the right way to ensure proper healing and good health.

The *pañcabhūtas* have a very close relationship with *pañcēndriyas* or five sensory organs. These, namely *śabdā*, *ruchi*, *gandham*, *dr̥ṣṭi*, and *sparsām* (sound, taste, smell, sight and touch) create powerful hurdles in our effort to practice *sāadhanā vratam* and *dhyāna*. Though our body may sit still at one place, our mind wanders all over the globe; our ears may be sensitive to the slightest distraction; our hand instantly rises to scratch the skin if a mosquito bites us; our eyes will open to see what caused the specific smell, and so on.

No wonder Adi Shankaracharya referred to the *pañcēndriyas* as wild animals. In the 43rd shloka of Śivānandalahari, he says:

मा गच्छ त्वमितस्ततो गिरिश भो मय्येव वासं कुरु
स्वामिन्नादिकिरात मामकमनः कान्तारसीमान्तरे
वर्तन्ते बहुशो मदजुषो मास्तर्य मोहादय
स्तान् हत्वा मृगयाविनोदरुचितालाभं च संप्राप्यसि II

Don't go here and there, O God of the mountains,
And please my Lord, always live in me.
For O primeval hunter, within the limits
Of the dreary forest of my mind,

Live many wild animals like envy, delusion and others,
And you can kill and do thine sport of hunting,
And enjoy there yourself.

That is the literal meaning of the verse. Here is another one that is closer to my heart.

O! Śiva! You came to give Paśupathāstra to Arjuna. You are the first and foremost hunter. If you are fond of hunting, you need not go anywhere else. Come and stay in my hrdayam (heart) and hunt the most dangerous wild animals that dwell there, as you please, and give me your anugraha (grace).

If Śiva were to dwell in our hearts, His *anugraha* will be perfect and permanent, as he will hunt the itinerant *īndriyas* and kill them or keep them under his control and prevent their wandering.

It is interesting to learn how the inter-connection of the *pañcēndriyas* and, in turn, their connection with the *pañcabhūtas*, bind the *jīvātmā* with the *Paramātmā* – held by the *prāṇa* till we leave our mortal body – and then directly binding with Him when *prāṇa* link is severed.



Medicine is necessary for our bodies in disease only because our bodies have learned the art of not getting well without medicines. Even so, one sees often that the moment Nature chooses for recovery is that in which the life is abandoned as hopeless by the doctors.

~ Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 12: 477

THE ADVAITA WAY OF SELF-HEALING

Advaita or the non-dualistic school of *Vedānta* is not only a spiritual philosophy, it also provides an excellent healing approach that has been practised for ages to cure all types of illnesses – including chronic diseases.

As per the Advaita Vedantic thought, man can attain union with the Divine even while living in the body on earth by abiding in perfect inner knowledge and discrimination. Our sages and seers used this spiritual truth to develop an excellent method of self-healing. Their approach did not involve any external aid such as medicines or mental training, but it focused on achieving oneness with the Supreme Power at a spiritual level.

This unique self-healing practice slowly faded away due to negligence and remained forgotten till modern-day psychologists discovered its efficacy and based their new therapeutic tool on it and called it hypnotism or hypnotherapy. Sadly, it falls woefully short of the original wisdom of Advaitic principle.

For one, hypnotism needs a therapist who puts the patients in a trance to make them talk of their past experiences. The therapist then probes for reasons of the patient's ailments, based on what the patient talks in his trance. Since during hypnotism the patients end up revealing their most private thoughts, they are generally apprehensive about the therapist divulging the secrets while sharing, experimenting and publishing the findings. So even if they get cured temporarily, they

sometimes become sick again and lose any inner balance they might have gained.

Vedānta teaches us that the *ātman* is imperishable and is the real Self. Unlike the body, it is free from hunger, thirst, delusions, sorrow, old age and death; it is unaffected by evil or good; it is Self-Existent. It is essentially one with the *Paramātmā* or the Ultimate Consciousness. Realising the *ātman* or Self is thus same as uniting with the *Paramātmā*, the Super Self and master of all that is, all that ever was or will be. There is no more illness, old age or sorrow for the one who has obtained a healthy body through self-discipline, since there is nothing left to realise through any experience of physicality.

Advaita healing has two individual methods and a combined method of healing. They may be called the negative, positive and neutral methods – in that order – the last being a combination of the first two.

The focus here is on the immortal Self, and not the perishable mortal body (the gross and subtle bodies). Though the perishable body may be sick, the *ātman* is untouched by the sickness. By using simple assertions, miraculous cures can be achieved in the *Advaita* method of healing.

The Negative Method

In the negative method, an assertion like ‘I am not sick’ does not mean that the mortal body is not sick, because the visible human body *does* exhibit and suffer illness. The assertion ‘I am not sick’ is directed to the immortal *ātman*. Here, the ‘I’ is not the body but the *ātman*. The remedy lies in the thought that sickness is the illusion, which has no real existence.

A question naturally arises as to how the sickness can be an illusion, when the body is actually suffering? The physical body is suffering,

but the *ātman* is not. By directing the thought of sickness as an illusion to the *ātman*, the mind automatically exerts its healing power by denying the matter called ‘sickness’. Where is the disease or sickness, when the *ātman* is unaffected by it? So in effect, there is no sickness or disease. The *jīvātmā* and *Paramātmā* are one and inseparable and therefore disease-free.

The Positive Method

The working of this philosophy can be seen even more clearly in the positive method. The realisation that the *ātman* or the real Self is untouched by sickness makes the mind assert: ‘I am well’ and ‘I am in perfect health’. It is worth noting that here the sickness is not denied as in the negative method, but instead, there is an assertion of perfect health. These affirmative suggestions produce excellent results when curing many chronic diseases.

The Neutral Method

The denial method and the affirmative method meet finally at the same point to produce similar results, and this is the neutral method. The assertions first deny and then affirm what might seem different things, but are actually the same thing – wellness. The denial of sickness and affirmation of perfect health are simultaneous occurrences.

The mind cultivates the thoughts thus:

I am not ill (Negative)

I am well (Positive)

There is no such thing as sickness (Neutral)

The *māyā* or illusion makes one believe that the body is the *self*. But with the dawn of knowledge when the illusion disappears, *dwaita* (duality) becomes *advaita* (oneness) and the wholeness of the immortal *ātman* remains untouched by sickness and evil, becoming one with *Paramātmā*.

Have you noticed how children who are sick enough to stay in bed, refuse to do so and run off to play? They forget their discomfort and play the whole day but once they are back home, their discomfort returns. This is the denial method which helps them temporarily.

Compare this with those children, who are encouraged by the elders in the family to not make a fuss about small discomforts and illnesses, thus making them get into the habit of ignoring them or taking them in their stride. When these children say, “I can go outside and play. I am not sick,” or “The pain in my injured knee will go away if I go and play,” the diversion of play has a positive effect on their mind. Such children are already practicing the *advaita* method of healing, suitable to their age. As they grow older, they naturally build a greater resistance to sickness because their deeper self-healing practices have been effectively fine-tuned.

The following analogy will help one understand how the mind exerts its power over the body to heal itself.

The human mind is the storehouse of electricity. It receives impulses through the sensory nerves and transmits impulses through the motor nerves to all parts of the body, as long as we live. In the case of electricity, long positive and negative wires are connected at particular locations to create neutral current which acts as the node to transmit the current to multiple points.

In the human body, energy flows through the two main nerves and gets distributed through a network of nerves branching out to other

parts of the body, keeping the light of life burning. The central cord (*suṣumnā nāḍi*) has such nerve centres (*śakras*) that act as the nodes and control various organs in the body pertaining to the respective *śakra*. The Ida and Pingala *nāḍi-s* run along on either side converging at specific *śakras* in the *suṣumnā nāḍi* to create the neutral. *Prāñāyama* which controls these currents helps one's mind power to take control of the physical body and heal it.

It would not be out of place here to emphasise that this self-healing power can achieve its peak in every one of us when we train ourselves in eating a *sātvik* diet and leading a selfless life doing *parōpkāra* – caring for others, loving fellow living beings and by leading a contented life.



If you want to get cured there are two conditions. First you must be without fear, absolutely fearless, you understand, and secondly you must have a complete faith in the Divine protection. These two things are essential. ~ The Mother, CWM 15: 141

WHEN ŚABDAM HELPS TO DISPERSE NOXIOUS VĀYU

Most of us have witnessed our elders asking those who are sneezing to leave the place during gatherings such as weddings or other auspicious functions. Did they do it because it was inauspicious to sneeze?

Certainly not! This is a health-related custom, which our ancestors had instituted in their wisdom as a part of the rituals. While sneezing, the condensed and impure air in the body gushes out – often accompanied by saliva, phlegm and microscopic bacteria that pollute the air. An explosive sneeze no doubt serves to get all the accumulated toxic air and impurities out of the air passages including the nose, but it also scatters germs and bacteria in the process.

It may be recalled that the corona-virus-related advisories asked us not only to stay away from those who sneeze and cough, but also to maintain suitable distance from anyone while outside the house to avoid droplets from their saliva, phlegm or mucus fall on you, just in case someone is a carrier of the virus. Seen in this context, don't our ancestors come across as being much more scientifically aware than anyone gives them credit for? Their so-called taboos were, in fact, rooted in sound common sense connected with health.

But there is something more beyond the mere hygienic aspects of sneezing away from people. Let us examine how *śabdām*

and *vāyu* (sound and air) work together to maintain a healthy balance of the elements in our body.

Let me begin by painting a scene which is not too uncommon.

The evening *pūja* is going on in a crowded temple. Arun stands in front of the *garbhagriha* with folded hands. He looks as if he is lost in the contemplation of the Deity, but is in fact thinking about his assessment report that he received that afternoon – the report was not too good.

A few feet away from him sits old Guptaji, leaning on a pillar. His eyes are closed as if in meditation, but perhaps he is taking a nap. In the crowd of devotees is also Usha, who has come to the temple with her mother. She is bored and wants the *ārati* to start, so that they could leave. She tries concentrating on the *pūja*, and unknowingly yawns. Guiltily she looks around and sees many around her yawning away. She wonders curiously as to who started the chain of yawns!

Suddenly the temple bells begin clanging as the *ārati* starts. Instantly, Arun, Guptaji, Usha and all the yawning devotees are alert and begin clapping to the beat of the *ārati*.

Do you know that we just witnessed – the amazing power of sound or *śabdham* – one of the *pañcēndriyās*, coming to the rescue of the polluted mind and awakening the mind and body. I have mentioned the yawning devotees because sound also helps with controlling the yawning habit. Our elders had a very simple solution using *śabdham*, to deal with the yawn. But we will come to that later.

Let us first look at some basic facts about respiration. It is important to breathe through our nostrils as they have inbuilt fine filters in the form of very fine hairs which filter the air we breathe in of noxious

gases and particulate matter, allowing more oxygen into the windpipe. The amount of oxygen we inhale determines our good health.

Have you noticed that we often breathe through our mouth instead of the nostrils? For example, whenever we are talking incessantly on our cell phones, or are engrossed in some apps on our smartphones, or are immersed in some serious work such as reading, writing, thinking or listening intently as during a lecture. We even unknowingly hold our breath while watching something thrilling on the screen or in real life, exhaling only when it ends.

All these factors interfere with the inhalation-exhalation process. When we talk, we don't breathe through the nostrils, but only through the mouth, thereby allowing unfiltered air to enter the system along with carbon-dioxide and other gases. Likewise, when we are engrossed in some serious activity, we never inhale normally through the nostrils, or just do shallow breathing. And when we hold our breath, we don't inhale at all, thereby increasing the quantity of impure *vāyu* in the respiratory track and lungs.

Now visualise this: our lungs are filled with impure blood, waiting for oxygen, but we are not inhaling normally, thereby not sending in enough fresh oxygen to purify the blood. Since only oxygenated blood can pass through the arteries to the heart, the blood becomes dense and the breathing becomes heavy.

But Nature has a wonderful tool in the form of yawning to remove the noxious gases that have accumulated in our body due to our incorrect breathing.

Have you ever wondered why it seems to be contagious, especially in a room with lots of people, just as we saw it happen in the crowded temple?

When one yawns without trying to close the mouth or suppress it in anyway, the heavily laden foul breath escapes in a large quantity, sometimes accompanied by a loud sound let out by the person yawning. If a person near the one who is yawning inhales this impure air unknowingly, it enters that person's lungs and soon he or she is yawning too. Before long there is a chain of yawns.

In Tamil, there is a saying – *A kumari (young girl) might go alone on a lonely road, but a kottaavi (yawn) will never go alone.* In this saying, the original word was *kottaan* (ghost), which later got corrupted to *kottaavi*. It means that even a young girl would go alone but the ghost never would, it always takes others along. By the ghost, our elders had meant the impure air exhaled through the yawn. What does this 'ghost' take along? Yes, it takes the toxic air exhaled by others too!

Modern day etiquette dictates that it is impolite to yawn with an open mouth, but that is the best way to get all the foul air out of the lungs – better still, to let out a sound along with a yawn helps even more! When the yawn is suppressed, the foul air remains in the system making one even more tired.

This brings me to the use of *śabdham* which our elders used to recommend to deal with open-mouthed yawns.

The customary practice was to open one's mouth wide when yawning and also to let out a sound. Simultaneously, one would snap one's fingers or clap with one's hands in front of the open mouth. It is significant to mention here that the thumb and middle finger represent *agni* and *ākāśa* respectively. The sound from the throat, the fingers or hand – all helped to disperse half the polluted air that escapes in a gust.

Let us recall the story of the boys who had run away from the tamarind tree. There too, it was their screams which helped them move, by eliminating the noxious air they had inhaled and removing their tiredness.

We have seen how accumulated toxic air in the lungs is cleared by yawning accompanied by sound. There are other methods used by Nature to rid the body of accumulated foul air – sneeze and hiccough. Let us look at the sneeze and the role of *śabdā* in sneezing.

It is customary for elders to say, ‘Hari Om!’ or ‘Shiva!’ when either they themselves or others sneeze, repeating it after every sneeze. Their sneeze would also be explosive with a loud *hachchoo!* Would you believe me if I said that this is the best way to sneeze as it clears the air passages and lungs effectively? (*Śabdā* to the rescue again!) Often people close their mouths while sneezing, or pinch their nose to stop an impending sneeze. Such actions can cause many health disorders, including allergies, breathing difficulties such as asthma, ear-related problems, chronic and even incurable diseases.

It is important to recall that our elders never admonished one to stop a sneeze, or told us to sneeze soundlessly. Instead, one was encouraged to sneeze aloud. But this is possible only when one is alone. Then one could sneeze aloud and not worry about dislodging germs and bacteria in the air that might harm others in the vicinity. But when surrounded by people, one was always supposed to be mindful and leave the gathering if one wanted to sneeze.

Thus, both the yawn and sneeze are accompanied by sound, since sound disperses air. The added sound made with the hands and fingers helps to disperse the foul air of a yawn. Thus we understand that the *bhūtas* and *īndriyas* work together to keep us healthy. In this case the *īndriya* of *śabdā* comes to the aid of two *bhūtas* – *vayu* (yawn),

and *vāyu + āpas* (sneeze). We will examine more of this relationship in the following chapters.



If you are ill, your illness is looked after with so much anxiety and fear, you are given so much care that you forget to take help from the One who can help you and you fall into a vicious circle and take a morbid interest in your illness.

~ The Mother, CWM 15: 144

HOW VĀYU BOTH HELPS AND HINDERS ŚABDAM

The moment an ancient custom or tradition is mentioned, often the first question that is raised is if there is any scientific basis to this practice or is it just a superstition. Scepticism demands concrete proof. Hence, the physical and spiritual wellness as practised by the ancient Indians specifically addresses this issue.

My attempt so far has been to unravel the astonishing scientific wisdom of our ancestors, which has been handed down the generations in an unbroken chain. They achieved perfect health by harnessing the power of the Five Elements or *panchamahābhūtas* for their benefit, even while nurturing them in return, thus living in harmony with the Universe. Even in the 21st century, we have wise elders who continue with these ancient practices, helping those around them.

We have seen how *śabdā* aids *vāyu* in the body by helping to eliminate the toxic gases that get accumulated in the lungs and tissues, through yawning and sneezing. The help is however, not one-sided, because sound also needs a *bhūta* to travel – either *vāyu* (air) or *āpah* (water).

This is the reason why space is silent, as it is a vast vacuum. Any sound is heard only when the object (meteorite, spacecraft or any space debris) strikes the atmospheric layer, where there is air to carry the sound.

Just as in the external universe, in the micro-universe of our body the *bhūta* that is *vāyu* and the *īndriya* that is ear help us receive and produce sounds, including speech and music. The vocal cords play the major role in this in-built programme created by Nature.

And yet, the same *vāyu* which helps *śabdām* in so many ways can at times be its foe and a hindrance too. We have all come across the following commonplace sights that seem rather quirky but are some of the best illustrations of folk wisdom which uses the above scientific fact to deal with everyday problems connected with sound.

- Street vendors shouting at the top of their voice with a hand covering one of their ears – usually the right.
- Cupping the hands around the mouth when calling someone who is at a distance. (Note that the ear is not covered here).
- A singer covering one of his/her ears with the hand while singing in the upper octaves.
- Since infants cannot cover the ears, they are not allowed to cry for a long duration by elders in the family. There are exceptions to this rule too, but we will come to that later.

Before analysing the reasons for the above examples, we should understand the structure and functions of the voice box (larynx) which is situated at the top of the trachea or windpipe, leading to the lungs.

The Voice Box

If we peek down a wide-open mouth, we can see the voice box at the base of the throat. Its structure is like that of an inverted harp, the musical string instrument. Here the ‘strings’ are the vocal cords.

While we need to strum the strings of the harp with our fingers to produce music, the unique harp in our throat produces sounds in all octaves just with the aid of *vāyu*. In other words, we can say that it functions more like a windchime that produces notes in various octaves when the wind passes through it. The *prāṇa* bellowed out from the lungs through the mouth vibrates and modulates these harp-like chords, to produce a variety of sounds in all pitches, including speech and music. It is pertinent to mention here that the infant's cry is shrill because their vocal cords are very fine and delicate and still undeveloped.

The deep inhalation and exhalation during *prāṇāyama* bring out the *prāṇa* through the nostrils. But when we open our mouth to speak, shout or sing, the sound pushes the air through the vocal cords to make the voice heard.

These vocal cords have a distinct role in producing music. The great 18th century poet and saint Thyagaraja has brought this out beautifully in one of his *kritis* called *sōbhillu saptaswara*. The lyrics illustrate the *saptaswara*'s divine beauty rising step-by-step from the *nābhi* (navel), *hṛdya* (heart), *kantha* (throat), *rasana* (tongue) and finally *nāsā* (nostrils). Only a well-trained singer who can connect himself with the *paramātmā* through each of the *chakras* can produce such an effect in the *saptasvaras*.

Vocalists do *riyaz* long before sunrise, during *Brahmamuhūrtam*, when there is abundant oxygen in the air. The air that enters the mouth is unpolluted, making the task of the voice (sound) easier.

What About the Ear?

If it is the *prāṇa* from our lungs passing through the various *chakras* that produces sound, what does the ear have to do with it? Why does one cover the ear while singing or shouting, or while raising one's voice to be heard above the din, and why at other times it is not necessary? The answers to these questions lie in the fact that *vāyu* not only helps produce *śabdā* but also hinders it at times.

Our ancestors learnt about this connection between sound and air through common sense and their powers of observation. In their great wisdom, they devised simple methods to deal with common problems associated with the production of sound by the vocal cords. It is amazing to see how all these seemingly rustic techniques have a sound scientific basis.

Let's start with the street vendor who covers one of his ears to raise the pitch of his voice while calling out his wares. The wind, entering through the ear can distort the voice and harm the vocal cords. By covering one ear, the air is prevented from entering through that ear.

The absence of the disruptive wind not only makes the sound distinct, but also helps carry it far. If we observe keenly, we will notice that vendors who shout at the top of their voices without covering their ears end up with a hoarse and cracked voice, in addition to suffering from chronic throat trouble.

Another example: when in crowded and noisy places like weddings, public functions or even a railway platform, it is natural to speak at a high pitch to be heard above the din. This can damage the vocal cords and sometimes we 'lose our voice', that is, the larynx completely loses its power to produce any sound. Most of us do not know that if one of

the ears is covered at such times, our voices can be heard distinctly without our having to raise our voice.

Likewise, a classical vocalist or *qawwali* singer covers one ear when reaching the upper octaves, to make the voice distinct. Folk and street singers also use this technique. It is mostly the left ear that is covered, while the other hand moves in rhythm with the song or keeps beat.

Now we come to the person trying to call out to someone at a distance. Why is he not covering his ears, but is cupping his hands around his mouth? Here there is no need to cover the ears, even though the wind may enter the ear, as it is not confined to a small space but spread over a wider area. The sound is carried by the air, directed by the cupped hands to the person being called. Do try using these tricks and see how effective they are, to appreciate the wisdom of our ancestors!

In olden days men wielding megaphones made public announcements, especially during elections and such. Here, the sound made by the throat, focused through the funnel (usually made of tin) gets magnified and defies the disturbance of the wind to be clearly heard at a distance.

The Infant's Cry

I have left the infant's cry for the next chapter when I will share my personal interaction with a village elder and his 12-year-old grandson. The boy was baffled by his grandmother's seemingly contradictory instructions with regard to his baby sister's crying. If at one time she asked the mother to pick up the crying child, at other times she told her to leave the child alone, even if it cried her heart out.

What was the grandmother's reason behind this? Read about that in the next chapter.



Do not love your ill health and
the ill health will leave you.

~ The Mother, CWM 15: 146

INTERNAL BALANCE OF FIVE ELEMENTS

Though the incident I am about to narrate occurred over two decades back, it is still fresh in my memory.

It is about a family in one of the remote villages I used to visit. It was a large family, which consisted of several elders. The grandparents aged 80 and 71 were revered for their folk wisdom, which they had imbibed in turn from their elders. They dealt with common health issues of the family by suggesting indigenous remedies and common sense solutions. Even in medical emergencies, they managed to provide first aid before doctors were called in. Most of the time the medical personnel looked on with disbelief at the effective aid that had already been given, but nevertheless argued against it as being crude and made money out of the situation.

“Moderns have not the solid nervous system and the natural (as opposed to the artificial and morbid) zest of life that their ancestors had.”

Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 31: 587

The 12-year-old grandson in this family was quite intelligent and always respectful towards elders, particularly his grandparents whom he admired for their native wisdom. He was curious as to how they knew so much, without ever having gone to school or attended any adult education classes. He asked intelligent questions and his grandparents were also eager to explain things in detail to him.

The first time I went to their house, he was asking his grandfather why his grandmother was giving contradictory orders about picking up a crying baby. “She asked me to cover the baby’s ears yesterday when she was crying. This morning she made my mother pick her up when she was crying. And now, she is saying, ‘Let her cry for a while and that it is good for the baby to cry.’”

Clearly the boy was puzzled. And I am sure, so are you. There is no inconsistency here, but a deep understanding of the nature of the *bhūtas*, which must be rightly appreciated. That there is a scientific basis for the seemingly contradictory advice given by the grandmother can be seen from the explanation the proud grandfather gave the boy. But that will have to wait a bit.

Our body is a micro-universe with all the five elements *or pañca bhūtas* residing in it. Just as their balance in the outer Universe is vital for the well-being of our planet, the internal balance is also necessary for health and well-being of individuals.

We saw earlier how our elders took the help of sound to counter the effect of *Vāyu* entering the body through the ear. They also knew that they had another ally in the form of water with which to reduce the ill-effects of wind in the body. This can be best illustrated by an infant’s crying and how our elders dealt with it to safeguard the *pañca bhūtas* inside the baby’s body and prevent harm to its tender internal organs.

When we open our mouth to speak, cry, shout or sing, the exhaled air caresses the vocal cords to produce the sound. While we are doing any of these acts, we cannot inhale through the nostrils. (Go on, try it out!) When the *Vāyu* with all good and noxious gases finds an open mouth, it gleefully enters freely through it into the body, without getting even

partially purified by the filters of the nose. Once inside, it wanders at will, while simultaneously blocking the entry to the nose and ears.

Adults might become aware of the situation and try to remedy it, by starting to breathe through the nose. But a wailing infant is incapable of fully stopping the entry of the wind through the mouth, though sound helps to some extent. That is why elderly women will not allow the infant to cry for long, but will immediately lift and cradle it in their arms thus covering and protecting the ears of the child from the double attack of the wind.

However, when the infant cries for a prolonged time, its eyes begin watering. This is the additional effort of the water element to prevent the harm caused by the wind. When they notice the tears, elders would advise: “Let it cry for some time, it is good for the baby.” The saying ‘*Baalaanaam rodanam balam,*’ which means ‘wailing is the strength of the babies,’ bears out this scientific fact.

Can Tears Help a Baby?

Let me now come to the grandfather’s explanation given to his grandson about the science behind the grandmother’s contrary advice in dealing with a crying baby.

Like the other two sensory organs – nose and ears – our eyes too suffer the effect of abundant unfiltered *Vāyu* striking it. In order to counter the wind, the tear glands release a large amount of water in the form of tears.

When the eyes begin watering, the water element helps in two ways: firstly, it gets rid of the polluted water caused by the powerful wind, escaping through the tears (the tears taste salty indicating the pollution in the water); secondly, the power of the wind is reduced by the tears.

If a crying infant continues to wail without shedding any tears, and there is no one around to lift it, some elder in the house would ask an older child to cover the ears of the child gently. This is to protect the very tender eardrums and prevent deafness in the child. You would have noticed that the infant waves its arms and kicks its legs while crying. These actions help relieve the *Vāyu* that has also entered the muscles and joints, when it gained free entry through the mouth.

When older children throw a tantrum, they mostly open their mouth and cry. The loud sound pushes the wind further inside. Usually children and infants cry in this manner. In order to fight the wind that rushes in through the open mouth, water comes to the aid in the form of tears from the eyes and saliva from the mouth. Sometimes the nose begins running too, adding to the quantity of water discharged.

But when elders, especially women cry or sob, they suppress the sound by burying their face in their *pallu* or in a pillow. Since a large quantity of water needs to be let out, water rushes out of not just the eyes, but also the nose.

The three elements wind, fire, and water, which regulate the *tridośas* (*vāta*, *pitta*, *kapha*) in the body have their own balancing mechanism. If one of them becomes aggressive, the other two try to do their bit by taming the element that has gone wild, thus ultimately helping humans.

Likewise, our ancestors understood the concept of the dominant and passive *bhūtas* within and outside the body, and used the knowledge to handle situations of any nature to restore and maintain good health.

Can Wind Help Hard of Hearing Elders?

The boy listened intently and was quiet for a while before coming up with another question. This time it had to do with the hearing

problems of some of the elders in the family. Some were partially deaf and others, totally deaf. He wanted to know why they asked him and others to come close and speak loudly and still complained that they couldn't hear anything?

The grandfather loved such questions from the boy. He was convinced that one day his grandson would be the elder of the next generation, and be able to guide people on preventive health with his wisdom! He then explained the sound and wind theory to the eager boy.

When we speak, the air we exhale comes first, followed by the voice. So, if one goes very close to the ear of the deaf person and speaks, the exhaled wind enters and blocks the entry of the voice that follows it, with the result that they can't hear anything.

If you feel that cupping your hands near the deaf person's ear before speaking might help, it does not. It actually makes it worse, for the cupped hands push the dense air we breathe out right into their ear. At least outside air has oxygen, but the exhaled being full of carbon-dioxide is very dense. This makes it impossible for sound to enter the ear, thus effectively blocking the voice from being heard.

The boy now understood the problem the elders faced. But he still had another question: "Why was it that some voices were heard clearly by these elders even if spoken from a distance, while others were not audible?"

"That is because the pitch of their voice is either shrill or they are speaking at the top of their voices," replied the grandfather. "The wind carries the sound to their ears and does not block it, as it does when one is very close to the ear," he added.

"This is the reason why sounds in the high octaves – a doorbell, buzzer or someone shrieking even at a great distance – can always be heard

clearly by the deaf,” the grandfather further explained, patting his grandson indulgently.

This is how our elders intelligently and ingeniously dealt with the problems caused by the imbalance of the five elements within our body. So the next time you are faced with communicating with someone who is hard of hearing, don't forget to employ the above bit of folk wisdom! Use the power of wind.

One of the first warnings given in the times of COVID-19 was to stay away from those who sneeze and cough. While sneezing does spread viruses, it is a blessing to the person sneezing.

Often when we are suffering from a congestion of the nose or head, a good sneeze brings instant relief and helps us to breathe easily. Sneezing helps to get rid of the accumulated toxins from the upper respiratory track (ear, nose, throat). It accomplishes this act with the help of the *bhūta Āpah* (water) and the *indriya śabdām* (sound).

Sneeze: The Cleanser of Respiratory Organs

Because it is a blessing, our elders called out ‘Shiva!’ or ‘Hari!’, when either they themselves or someone else sneezed. Even in the West, there is the custom of saying, ‘Bless you!’ when someone sneezes.

Knowing the dangers that sneezing posed, they ordered the person suffering from bouts of sneezing to go out and sneeze in a secluded place, away from others. So too, a sneezing child's nose and mouth were covered with a towel to prevent droplets from the nose and mouth contaminating anyone.

After Covid-19, the Western world has started to reinvent what our ancestors did ages ago without much ado, as part of their daily lives. Social distancing, not touching any food without first washing the

hands and so on. Funnily, all the rituals and customs that had been dismissed as being regressive and repressive, have now got the ‘scientific’ stamp!

Connecting Healthy Practices to Religious Rituals

Our ancestors wisely connected all such customs and traditions to the worship of deities and the related rituals. That is why only the ritually pure were allowed to do the *pujā* and *ārti*. They maintained physical distance from everyone and some even observed silence before their *pujā* routine.

In the south, no one is allowed inside the *garbhagriha* of the temple, except the *pujāri* who does the *pujā* and *sevā* to the presiding deity. The custom of covering the head and part of their face, is prevalent in many temples in the north even today, especially during *pujā /ārti*.

In big temples, the *pujāris* performing the *ārti* do not chant but maintain silence to prevent any droplets of saliva falling on the *murti* and contaminating both the deity and the sanctum sanctorum.

When Even Deities are Quarantined

The Jagannath temple at Puri has a centuries-old annual ritual called *Anasara*.

A few weeks before the annual Rath Yātrā , the deities are bathed in 108 pots of cold water. They are believed to get fever after this ritual and are therefore quarantined for 14 days. The significant fact in this ritual is that the priests cover their mouths with a piece of cloth to avoid contaminating the sacred water, when they do the *abhiśekam*.

In many temples of south India, there is a special pond or well, whose water is used for the *abhiśekam* of the deities. The priests cover their

mouths and sprinkle turmeric powder before drawing the water for the *abhiśekam*. The west is waking up only now to the bactericidal properties of turmeric, while our ancestors knew about them millennia ago!

Today, thanks to all the awareness material flooding social media, everyone knows that the droplets of saliva thrown out while speaking, sneezing and coughing can infect those in the vicinity. But isn't it amazing that all these temple traditions were instituted millennia ago? What more proof do we need for the scientific temper of our ancestors?

Our ancient customs prevailed in all religious communities. The Jain *sādhus* and *sādhvis* were strict practitioners of *ahimsā* towards the smallest of insects. Traditionally their attire included a small broom tied at their waist, which swept the path ahead of them and prevented insects coming under their feet as they walked. Most of them went barefoot for this reason too. They also tied a cloth on their face covering the nose and mouth, to prevent insects entering and perishing inside – much like the Covid-19 masks.

Their motive was to save lives, but in the process, they also safeguarded themselves from falling prey to any virus present in the air or from others they came in contact with. They never ate anything after sunset for the same reason. Their firm belief in non-violence towards all living beings protected them in turn from scores of physical ailments caused by eating late meals.

Sneeze to Disgorge Impurities and Viruses

Let us see how sneezing helps to disgorge impurities and viruses that have entered the body through unfiltered *vāyu*, with the help of

different *bhūtas* in our body. As they do in the process of crying, *āpah* and *śabdām* come to the aid while one is sneezing.

Excess *vāyu*, dense with toxins, enters the body through the ears when they are not covered while going out in the rain, heavy fog or in windy conditions, finding its way into the lungs. This is how we catch a cold.

The phlegm present in the lungs becomes dense due to the fire element *agni*. *Vāyu* also pushes the phlegm deeper into the lungs to occupy all the bronchioles in the lobes of the lungs. So dense is the water laden with *agni* that it cannot get out or push its way out with the help of *vāyu* alone and needs the combined efforts of other *bhūtas*, as well as the nose, mouth and eyes and *indriya śabdām* (sound) in the form of *cough*, to throw out the polluted fluid.

Of course, cough is also caused by indulging in very cold drinks and eatables or due to chain smoking or getting into the habit of smoking from the teens.

To relieve the pressure caused by this onslaught, the rattled lungs desperately try to push out the phlegm through bouts of coughs accompanied by *śabdām*. The sound produced by the vocal cords while coughing is different from music nor speech. It is both irritating and frightening. Often, even cough is unable to dislodge the dense phlegm, even when aided by *śabdām*.

When Cough Alone Is Not Enough

It is at such times that sneeze comes to its aid. When the coughing is severe and non-stop, a few microscopic drops of phlegm-laden water are thrown out by a good sneeze through the nose. This helps prevent the phlegm from entering the gullet (food pipe) and thus it protects the digestive track.

When the powerful *bhūtas* in the body (*vāyu* , *āpah* and *agni*) suffer, the *indriya śabdā* mercifully helps humans like a caring mother when her child is in trouble. After a bout of rattled coughing, the vocal cords push the fluid through the sneeze.

Thus *śabdā* comes to the aid of *vāyu*, *āpah* and *agni*. Since the sound has to be really loud to help dislodge the phlegm, *śabdā* needs another outlet besides the throat. So, the nose comes in to help through the sneeze.

You might have noticed that when sneezing starts, coughing subsides. It is a great relief to the sufferer because the sneeze is less traumatic than the cough. A single sneeze at the end of each bout of coughing releases the fluid bit by bit. But a chain sneeze can release more water, throwing the droplets with great force, through the nose to quite a distance. Successive sneezes are also capable of releasing thick sinus fluid, thus simultaneously easing the congestion in the head and chest.



The healthiest ages of mankind
were those in which there were
the fewest material remedies.

~ Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 12: 475

ĀTURMĀSYA SANKALPAM

A large majority of people are generally unaware that most of the rituals and customs we may be following to this day are entwined inseparably with our everlasting ancient wisdom. Our ancestors saw it fit to connect every tradition and custom to religious and dharmic duties of people, so that they would benefit both physically and spiritually. One of them is *Āturmāsyā Sankalpam*.

This annual ritual is observed for four months during the months of *Āśāhadh-Kartik*. It starts with *āśāhadhi/Devshayani Ēkādaśi* and ends with *Prabodhini/Uṭhāna Ēkādaśi*. Our *devatā-s* are said to be taking rest during this period. So as not to disturb them, no auspicious ceremonies are held.

But this is also a period most suitable for intense spiritual *sādhana*. So any *dāna*, *pujā* or *japa* done during this period begets one multifold *punya*. In addition to religious rituals and *japa-tapa*, *seva* is of utmost importance during *āturmāsyā*.

Similarity with Agyatavāsa

First, let me briefly mention about the *agyatavāsa* which is similar in some respects. *Agyatavāsa* means retreating to a secluded place, where one is a stranger, to live for a stipulated period of time. This ritual gives the needed rest physically, mentally and intellectually but also requires one to be conscious spiritually.

In the Mahabharata, the Pandavas during the *agyatavāsa* served King Virata of Matsya in various capacities, helping the kingdom prosper. Yudhishtira, as the advisor to the king, Bheema as a cook, Arjuna disguised as a transgender teacher of fine arts to the princess, Nakula and Sahadeva as groom of horses and a cowherd respectively, did yeoman service to the king.

When Duryodhana was unsuccessful in tracing the Pandavas with just days left for the *agyatavāsa* to end, Bhishma advised them to look for nearby kingdoms that had prospered in the recent past. For he knew that the Pandavas would only bring happiness and prosperity wherever they went.

In both *agyatvāsa* and *ċaturmāsyā*, it is important to live incognito in a secluded place, to turn inwards and towards *paramātmā*. One should also be of service to those around, including the dwellers of animal and insect world. Since *ċaturmāsyā* falls during monsoon, there are millions of small insects and other living beings on the ground. This is the reason our rishi-s and muni-s who followed the path of *ahimsa* stopped their *padayātra*-s during this time, to prevent harm to these tiny creatures.

Ċaturmāsyā – A Holistic Approach to Wellness

During *ċaturmāsyā* one steps back, withdraws from the world, either physically or mentally to regain one's spiritual and divine energies.

In the olden days, before the start of *ċaturmāsyā*, *sanyāsi*-s and *mathādiśa*-s of all *mathā*-s from Kashmir to Kanyakumari withdrew themselves to places where there would be no disturbance or sensory distraction. They proceeded to far off hills, riverbanks and caves. There they observed fasting and silence as they turned inwards to practice deep contemplation and *dhyāna*. They subsisted on

a *sātvik* diet of fruits and water, giving due rest to both the *pañcābhūta*-s in the body and *pañcēndriya*-s of the mind.

One can call this internal cleansing. Observing silence increases oxygen intake for internal cleansing. One's spiritual vibration increases manifold because of living in solitude and quietude. With one's mind constantly turned towards the Supreme Consciousness, one's inner radiance begins to shine through. The spiritually advanced *sadhaks* may also realise an identity with the *Paramātmā*.

This is why when at the end of *čaturmāsya*, *sanyāsi*-s and *mathādiśa*-s returned from their isolation, people would go to get their *darshan* and blessings, to be in the presence of the divinity shining through them.

But in present times, things have changed drastically. The *mathādiśas* who observe *čaturmāsya* these days visit other *mathās* or *ashramas*. Crowds of people flock to seek their blessings. The various activities connected to the darshan, the cameras recording everything that is going on – all such things distract and pull them down in consciousness. The significance of the sacred *čaturmāsya* gets diluted. Surrounded by the mundane vibrations of so many people the inner spiritual vibration is lost or considerably lessened.

Our ancestors instituted the *čaturmāsya sankalpam* as a means to help overhaul the *pañcābhūtas* representing the internal organs of the human body – especially of those above the age of 50. Therefore, even householders observed the *čaturmāsya sankalpam*, while staying at home.

Austerities at Home

While *sanyāsis* went to remote places, our elders at home utilised the benefits of *vrata*-s (fasts and other austerities) to the maximum extent

to achieve similar results. Through their disciplined lifestyle they set an example for the younger generations for maintaining good physical and mental health and also growing spiritually.

Āturmāsya is also the time for several big and small festivals and all of them have elaborate *naivedyams*, thus encouraging overeating. *Vrata-s* being the opposite, help to offset the ill-effects of overeating the rich *naivedyams*. The elders in the family observed their *vrata-s* with just fruits or a liquid diet, spending all their time in doing *japa* and devotional activities. Some also observed *maun vrat*, talking only when absolutely necessary. The other members, including the children respected the elders' silence and withdrawal.

All these austerities have their benefits.

- Liquid diet cleanses the urinary tract (kidneys and bladder).
- The digestive tract (stomach, liver, gallbladder, pancreas) gets the much-needed rest from the ordeal of digesting food.
- Intake of fruits, when necessary, helps eliminate toxic waste from the bowels.
- Juices, mostly vitamin C-enriched *nimbu pāni*, accomplishes three jobs: quenches thirst, cleanses the blood, rejuvenates the circulatory system.
- *Maun vrat* increases oxygen intake, which helps to cleanse respiratory organs and freshen the brain.

This is why many foods are proscribed during these sacred months, which also fall during the monsoons when the digestive system is at its most sluggish.

As an effect of observing such *vrata-s* along with spiritual pursuits, the elders' radiated goodness and energy.

However, the younger generations were not allowed to fast.

The reason was simple: the younger folks are still walking on the path of karma and have to fulfil the duties of householders before going on the path of jñāna. For them, earning money, running the family, bringing up children, taking care of the elders and doing other allied duties are important. They need the physical energy to do all the work and can't fall prey to weakness due to hunger. Therefore, the elders, in all their wisdom, told the younger generation, '*kutti virudam kudiyai kedukkum*', which loosely translated means that the young should not fast, lest it affects the family's fortunes.

Our elders combined scientific and spiritual wisdom which helped them develop tremendous inner strength. It stood them and their family in good stead even during adversities and calamities. They guided the younger generation by example.

Today, much of this wisdom has been lost or corrupted. Most people who observe *vrata-s* these days end up eating 'special foods' – often unhealthy – and munching through most of the day. Basically, they only avoid certain items of food, otherwise are eating and drinking as usual. This can be counterproductive, to say the least!



It is not the medicine that cures so much as the patient's faith in the doctor and the medicine. Both are a clumsy substitute for the natural faith in one's own self-power which they have themselves destroyed.

~ Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 12: 475

INNER SIGNIFICANCE OF VARIOUS RITUALS AND CEREMONIES

To begin with, let us reflect on the deeper reason behind all the outer rituals and ceremonies which we see in our temples. Sri Aurobindo, the Rishi of our times explains this beautifully and precisely in these words:

“The image to the Hindu is a physical symbol and support of the supraphysical; it is a basis for the meeting between the embodied mind and sense of man and the supraphysical power, force or presence which he worships and with which he wishes to communicate...

“The rites, ceremonies, system of cult and worship of Hinduism can only be understood if we remember its fundamental character. . . it has always known in its heart that religion, if it is to be a reality for the mass of men and not only for a few saints and thinkers, must address its appeal to the whole of our being, not only to the suprarational and the rational parts, but to all the others.

“The imagination, the emotions, the aesthetic sense, even the very instincts of the half subconscious parts must be taken into the influence. Religion must lead man towards the suprarational, the spiritual truth and it must take the aid of the illumined reason on the way, but it cannot afford to

neglect to call Godwards the rest of our complex nature. And it must take too each man where he stands and spiritualise him through what he can feel and not at once force on him something which he cannot yet grasp as a true and living power.

“That is the sense and aim of all those parts of Hinduism which are specially stigmatised as irrational or antirational by the positivist intelligence.”

Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 20: 147-148

Gods Also Need Their Rest

Let us first understand that it is not only humans who need to rest to get rejuvenated from unhealthy environment and vibrations. The presiding deities installed in the form of *murtis* in our temples also need rest to restore their divine power. People go to temples to get the spiritual vibrations of the sanctum. But unfortunately their own vibrations, which may be far from positive, pollute the premises. That is why the deities need to be given periodic rest.

We saw how the deities in the Puri Jagannath temple are taken to an isolated place to be purified, treated and rested before the commencement of the Rath Yatra. This may sound odd to those who don't understand that the *murtis* of the deities are invested with *jīva* when their *prana pratishtha* is done at the time of their installation. They are not just lifeless 'idols' as insinuated by the ignorant.

Divine Seva to Cleanse Body and Mind

Ancient, big temples in southern India have a unique way of purifying the temple premises as well as give rest to the deities periodically, which is usually every 12 years. Known as *kumbhabhishekam*, this consecration ritual follows any structural repairs or restoration work to any area of the temple premises.

Unlike in Puri, where the *murtis* are removed from the sanctum to be rested, the temples in the south have *murtis* that are fixed and can't be moved from the garbhagriha. So they are given rest through another ritual preceding the *kumbhabhishekam*.

Balayalam and Kumbhabhishekam

Before the temple renovation begins, through a specialised ritual the divine power of the temple's principal deity as well as other deities are transferred to a *kalasha*. The kalasha is placed atop the *Balayalam*, which means a mini *aalayam* (small temple). This ritual is performed for days, weeks and even months together as per the traditions and customs of that particular temple.

Since the divine presence of the deities are transferred to the holy waters contained in the *kalasha*, puja is offered to the *kalashas* and *ustava murtis* only. During this period, no puja is offered to the main *vigrahas*. The divine presence of the temple deity continues to be in the *kalashas* only until it is transferred back to the *moola vigrahas*, on the day of *Kumbabishekam*.

The temples are closed for darshan during the period of restoration, with the main tower gate being shut. Only the pujaris and some selected helpers are allowed to do the daily puja and offer other rituals to the deities in the various *sannidhis*.

In this massive effort of cleaning and renovating, people from all walks of life and from all communities participate with reverence and enthusiasm, spiritually cleansing themselves by doing the required manual labour. They offer their service or *seva* to the deities and the temple.

Once the renovation and repairs are done, the consecration rituals commence with *sahasra kalaśa homam*, which is followed by the *kumbhabhiśekam* that is done with the sacred water from the 1000 *kalaśas*. This *kumbhabhiśekam* is offered to the *kumbhas* at the top of the *vimana* above the *sannidhi* and also to the deities in the sanctum.

The *Abhiśeka tirtha* sprinkled on devotees is a much sought-after grace from the deity. The temple opens to the devotees after this purification ritual, with enhances spiritual vibrations.

Year-long Seva in Temples in Southern India

One can witness another temple-seva all-year round, across the Tamil Nadu in different *kshetras* and also before and during annual temple festivals. This *seva* is known as *uzhavara thiruppani*, which means ‘sacred labour done with the *uzhavaram*’. It involves physical labour and is included as one of the *sadangus* or rituals prescribed for human beings in ancient Tamil scriptures.

It was started in the latter part of the 5th century CE, by the great Saivite saint Thirunavukkarasar – one of the four great Nāyanmārs, who had spearheaded the Bhakti movement.

Those taking part in this sacred duty, do every kind of cleaning work in and around the temple including sweeping, washing the inner complex at every *sannidhi*, cleaning and desilting the temple tank and lending a helping hand in the community cooking for *annadanam* –

the last being a regular activity in big temples. The devotees get the sacred *prasadam* as reward for their seva.

Kar Seva in Temples and Gurudwaras in Northern India

Kar seva is a comparable activity in the temples and Gurudwaras in northern India. One can say that the various *sevas* at Gurudwaras are the equivalents of *uzhavara thiruppani*. Like the latter, these are carried out all year round and imbue the volunteer *sevadars* with the spirit of humility, devotion and reverence towards the Supreme.

Visiting temples and undertaking *uzhavaara pani* and *kar seva* not only increase our inner strength but also give us spiritual energy and physical strength to face any crisis. They imbue the devotees with humility while providing mental and spiritual cleansing. All this is thanks to the wisdom of our ancestors, who had inseparably woven physical and mental health aspects into these activities.



The spirit within us is the only all-efficient doctor and submission of the body to it the one true panacea.

~ Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 12: 476

PADAYĀTRA, A PANACEA FOR ALL-ROUND HEALTH

We all know that walking is one of the best and safest exercises with innumerable health benefits. But has it occurred to you that your walk mirrors your state of mind? When one is angry or agitated, one tends to walk heavily and very fast; when one is in a light mood, the step is light and one skips along; in extreme joy, one tends to almost run. This itself brings out the fact that how one walks determines the overall benefits walking provides.

Our ancestors knew many time-tested psycho-spiritual therapies which have been handed down the ages. Walking, jogging and running, have all been used traditionally and purposefully by them, often combining them with a deeper psychological or spiritual intent, which actually increased the health benefits manifold.

In olden days, *yatras* were undertaken on foot and often took months. This boosted the health, brought discipline and had the added advantage of spiritual well-being.

Today, with sedentary lifestyles, one needs to go for a walk in a very deliberate manner! More and more people are taking to exercises, following videos offered by 'fitness experts' or attending online classes. When exercises like jogging, zig-zag walking and such are done indiscriminately without paying heed to individual needs and

constitutions, they can cause discomforts and disorders, sometimes even triggering new health problems.

Also, what people often forget in the fitness craze is that walking has more than just physical benefits for the body. Our ancestors clearly understood this when they came up with ritualistic practices which involved walking and conscious movement.

Some Examples

Let us take a look at some of the traditional *padayatras* that are still being undertaken by countless devotees in our country. We begin with the *parivrājakas* (wandering sanyasis). Theirs is a kind of *vratham*, like *ċaturmāsya sankalpam* and *ajnatavasa*, which entail solitude and tapas combined with *seva*, but with the same aim of rejuvenating and cleansing afforded by the latter two.

A *parivrājaka* becomes a *parivrājakācārya* or a wanderer-teacher in due course, disseminating knowledge as he or she goes along. *Parivrājakas* don't stay in one place and usually stay away from dwellings. They sustain themselves on *bhiksha* (alms) taken from the villages they pass through and camping in the open or in temples. This is walking combined with a spiritual purpose, which in turn exalts the *parivrājaka*'s spiritual power. Even in this day and age, we follow the noble path and teachings given to us by divine *parivrājakas* such as Buddha and Swami Vivekananda.

Buddha, the Parivrājaka

Born a prince, Siddhartha who later came to be known as the Buddha, he was deeply disturbed seeing the suffering and misery around him and left his home in search of the Truth. It was not easy. For months and years, he was engrossed in *tapasya*, unmindful of hunger and

thirst and his surroundings. And then one day, sitting under a bodhi tree, he saw the Light within – a realisation of the Truth. In that instant, the cause of all human misery became clear to him.

The *bhikshus* practiced *ahimsa* towards all living beings, helped people in distress and performed *seva* filled with mercy for all living beings without distinction. They also lived close to nature, as they wandered all over the country, utilising the healing properties of the *pañcabhūtas* effortlessly, maintaining a sound physical, mental and spiritual health.

Buddhism continues to have walking as an important spiritual practice, with even walking meditation undertaken by the practitioners.

Swami Vivekananda, the Mendicant

Swami Vivekananda was another notable *parivrājaka*, closer to our times, who worked ceaselessly for the spiritual and mental wellness of the nation. He had become a *parivrājaka* after being initiated into *sanyāsā* by his Guru Ramakrishna Paramhansa, who gave him the work of spreading the essence of Sanatana Dharma in all directions.

In December 1892, he went alone to Kanyakumari, at the southernmost tip of India, to find answers to the questions troubling him. Once there, the sight of the vast ocean touching the horizon, the divine *sangam* of the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal and the mighty Indian Ocean instantly calmed his mind. He was spellbound by the serene beauty of the *sangam*, with the waves of all the three bodies of water rushing to touch, meet, and salute the sacred feet of Bharat Mata.

He jumped into the water and swam till he reached a rock. His meditation on the "last bit of Indian rock" (later known as the Vivekananda Rock Memorial) continued for three days from 25 to 27 December. Swami Vivekananda contemplated on India's past, present and future. It is believed that Devi Parvati blessed him, her ardent devotee, on this rock, as She is also believed to have done tapas on this rock which to this day bears imprints of Her feet.

It was on that rock that he had a "vision of one India" and came up with a solution in the form of resolution, which is popularly known as the "Kanyakumari resolve of 1892". The purpose of the 'resolve' was also to organise *sannyasins* for social and cultural upliftment of the country. The work of this mission was to be a fine blend of spiritual upliftment, service and devotion.

In 1893, Swami Vivekananda went abroad—to the US, England and Europe, spreading his message of Sanatana Dharma. His address at the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago is well known. He asserted that the world is a large family and Hindu dharma espouses universal love and compassion for all living beings. His message was aimed at the whole world and held universal appeal. Inspired by his speech and call for selfless, dedicated persons to join him in this mission to spread peace in the world, many came forward to become his disciples and followed him later to our country.

Warkaris of Maharashtra

The Buddha and Swami Vivekananda were *parivrajakas* in different eras and served humanity in different ways. Both understood the need for the spiritual solitude that wandering afforded them to enhance their spiritual energies.

But there are several other kinds of wanderers too, who undertake *padayatra* with an aim to gain spiritual merit. They are the *yatris*, not the kind who hop into planes and cars and take the cable car to the top of the mountain to ‘visit’ a temple, but those who walk miles and miles, observing austerities, doing *vratams* and chanting names of their beloved deities as they walk. Such walking is beneficial for the physical health as well as the spiritual well-being of the devotees.

The Warkaris of Maharashtra belong to this group of *yātris*. Every year they undertake this *wari* (*yātra*) from all across Maharashtra. They start on Krishna paksha Ashtami of the month of *Jyēṣṭha* and end on *Āśāhadh śukla pakṣa Ēkādaśi* at Pandharpur, carrying the *padukas* of various saints, notably Sant Tukaram Maharaj’s *padukas* from Dehu and Sant Dnyaneshwar’s from Alandi.

They walk in groups or *dindis*, chanting and singing bhajans and kirtans, with a bundle or a small trunk on their head holding their essential items. Since the *wari* is undertaken during the monsoon months, the food carried by them is simple and easily digestible, with fruits and uncooked eatables to last for the duration of the *wari*. Once at Pandharpur, they bathe in the sacred Chandrabhaga and after darshan of their beloved Vithoba and Rakhumai, partake of the *prasadam*.

During their *wari*, they follow the custom of the *parivrājakas* and do not enter anyone’s house, spending their nights at temples or *dharamshālas* or even in the open in a tent. Some carry their deities along with them, performing puja every day before proceeding. Some devout *warkaris* follow Sant Tukaram’s *dhava* or running of the last few kilometres from Velapur, to the Vithoba temple at Pandharpur. The saint had been so overcome with emotion sighting the spire of the

temple from the small hillock in Velapur, that he had run all the way to be close to his beloved Vithoba.

This annual ritual renders emotional well-being to the warkaris, in addition to the physical discipline of keeping with the *dindis* (groups) and following the timings, etc. It enhances their faith in their Vithoba which helps them address calmly their problems such as sickness, financial difficulties, etc. As they stand in front of their Lord, they surrender themselves to Him and return with renewed faith, fully energised physically and mentally.

This *yātra* is believed to be over 800 years old and many modifications and changes have taken place over the centuries. What remains unchanged is the devotion and faith of the warkaris in their beloved Vitthal and Rakhumai.



Physical ailments are always the sign of a resistance in the physical being; but with surrender to the Divine's Will and a complete trust in the working of the Grace, they are bound to disappear soon.

~ The Mother, CWM 15: 137

SOME MORE PADYĀTRA TRADITIONS IN INDIA

We saw earlier how our traditional practices derived from ancient wisdom guide us to lead a diseases-free life. *Yatra* to sacred abodes of deities is one such form of spiritual activity. Our ancestors did not institute this tradition only so that people would visit sacred places and temples.

By adding other regimens such as *vratams* accompanied by physical and mental discipline before and during the *yatra*, they ensured that the *yātris* were physically fit, mentally energised and spiritually uplifted – a complete overhaul of our systems!

Most people are aware of the famous *yātras* that have gone on over millennia like the Char Dham, Kailash-Mansarovar, Vaishno Devi and Amarnath *yatras*, there are also many smaller *yatra* circuits. Some of them are region-specific and are not much known outside the region. It is notable that these *yatras* were all done on foot in olden days, though many people use various means of transport in modern times.

Earlier I wrote about the Pandharpur *wari* and how the warkaris run the last lap to the Vithoba temple. But have you heard of a *yatra*, where the devotees literally run to 12 *Shivasthalams*, covering 100 odd kilometers within 24 hours?

Shivalaya Ottam

This unique ‘running’ yatra is known as *Shivalaya ottam*, which literally means running *to* Shiva temples. It starts in the morning of *chaturdashi* and the devotees run through day and night of Shivaratri to reach the final abode of Shiva before dawn. The *yatra* starts at the Shiva temple at Munchirai-Thirumalai and ends at Shakaranarayana temple at Thirunattalam. Observing complete *upavās* and *jāgran* through Shivaratri, walking and running by turns on barefoot, they end their *vratham* with the darshan of Hari and Hara at the Shakaranarayana temple, where both the deities are placed side by side.

It is believed that Parashurama installed these *Shivalingams* at these places. He was the avatar of Vishnu, and the *shishya* of Sadashiva. The divine vibration from the *Shivalingams* in the various temples en route guides and gives the pilgrim-*yātris* the energy to keep going. A unique feature of the *yatra* is that the devotees clap their hands chanting ‘Govinda! Gopala!’ as they run to Shiva temples! This is to bring home the Truth that Hari and Hara are the twin manifestations of the one Supreme Being.

The devout *yātris* fast for a week before Shivaratri, taking only tender coconut water and *nungu* (palmyra fruit) during the day and *tulsi* water at night. The run itself has a lot of health benefits: *Vāyu* blocks our ears while running and so the *indriyam śabdham* comes to the rescue – that is why the pilgrims loudly chant ‘Govinda! Gopala!’ as they clap their hands. The sound throws out accumulated foul air from the lungs and also any noxious air given out by trees at night. The chant is however intermittent to allow for normal breathing. Running also ensures that the mind

doesn't wander from the thoughts of the deity, as happens while walking.

Nerthikkadan

The custom of *Nerthikkadan* (Tamil word for a religious vow), followed in the southern states, involves going to the abode of one's *ishta devata* or *kula devata*. Devotees undertake *padayatra* covering long distances to *kshetras* such as Tirupati, Tiruthani, Pazhani, and other *sthalams* to fulfil their vows.

Since most temples in southern India are situated on riverbanks or the seashore, or on hills or mountains, they abound with dense greenery containing many medicinal herbs and also have health-giving water bodies such as waterfalls and springs. Walking or climbing in such environs and bathing in the sacred water are in themselves therapeutic. Papanasam, Tirukkutram, Ahobilam, Srisailam, Sabarimalai and many more *kshetras* are examples of these.

People often take a vow to trek to the abode of their *ishta devata* or *kula devata* (family deity) when any calamity or a chain of misfortunes occur in the family. They undertake the *yatra*, observing strict *vratham* and chanting the name of their beloved deity.

Many devotees of Murugan/Subrahmanya carry heavy loads of offerings like milk, fruits, etc. on their heads (*karagam*) and *kavadi* (a pole on the shoulder balancing two baskets at each end with the offerings) and subject themselves to physical hardships like pricking their tongue, cheeks and back. All of these customs have multiple health benefits, including acupuncture!

The Sabarimalai *yatra*, involves the observing of a strict regimen of *vratham* and abstinence for 41 days after conducting the *mandala puja*. The *yatra* ends on Makara Sankranti in Sabarimalai, where

devotees bask in the sublime sight of Makara Jyoti. The mental and physical discipline as a result of strict *vratham*, give the spiritual energy and strength during the arduous *yatra*, thus rejuvenating them in mind and body.

Giri-Pradakshinam

Among the *padayatras* there is the unique *giri pradakshinam* or *parikrama*, the circumambulation around sacred hills and mountains in many regions of the country. Some of the well-known ones are Mount Kailash in the Himalayas, Brahmagiri in Triambakeshwar, Maharashtra, Govardhan *parvat* in Vrindavan and Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu.

Among them, the *parikrama* of Kailash is the most arduous at 52 kms and high altitudes. Then there is the Narmada *parikrama*, a months-long *yatra*, that begins at the source of the river and goes along its route till the sea and comes back in a *pradakshinam*. The number of people doing it by foot today is minimal, but some devout people still do it.

While other *parikramas* of sacred mountains are undertaken only on special festivals or seasons, the *Giri pradakshinam* in Tiruvannamalai is a daily affair, at least for many devotees living in that area. Every *purnima* and *pradosham* day, devotees from all parts of the state throng the city to do *pradakshinam* of the sacred hill of Arunachala. Traffic is stopped completely.

However, the festival of Karthigai in the Tamil month of Karthik, when the *Mahadeepam* is lit on mount Arunachala (Tiruvannamalai), is considered the most sacred day of all for *giri-pradakshinam*. *Annadanam* is performed at a large scale for those

who do the 14-km *pradakshinam*. This is a classic combination of physical, mental and spiritual well-being, combined with seva.

Kanwar/Kāvāḍ Yatra

This *yātra*, undertaken by devotees in northern states of India, is akin to the *kavadi* carried by Murugan devotees in the south. It was originally associated with Baidyanath *dhām*, one of the 12 Jyotirlinga *sthalams* in Deogarh, Jharkhand. From time immemorial, devotees have carried Gangajal for the *abhishekam* of Shiva, who is worshipped here as Vaidyanatha, the Lord of Physicians, praying for good health and relief from sicknesses.

According to the *purānas*, when *halāhal* poison was thrown up during the *sāgar manthan*, Shiva had consumed it to save the universe and all living beings from the poison. His neck turned blue and His whole being was engulfed with burning heat. Devi Parvati bathed Him with Gangajal to cool the effect of the poison. This is how the belief came about that anyone who bathed Baidyanath with Gangajal would be cured of all sicknesses.

Devotees carry Gangajal from the nearest place where Ganga flows – 110 kms at Sultanganj, in two pots at the end of a *kānvar* (bamboo pole). The devout do it as a religious vow, observing strict *vratham* by abstaining from salt and other tasty foods. They walk with the water for the *abhishekam*, to the accompaniment of ‘*Bol Bum!*’ ‘*Bhole Bum!*’ Even their speech is interspersed with ‘*Bol Bum*’ and they address each other as *Bum*.

Just as devotees run during *Shivalaya Ottam*, the *Dak Bums* run all the way from Sultanganj to Deogarh in one day, starting on Sunday to end it on Monday—Shravan Somvar. While climbing the hill they chant

‘Bol Bum’ joyfully, for the Lord not only cures them from sicknesses but also fulfils all their wishes.

If you are wondering how the devotees get Gangajal when the river flows so far away, there is the belief that all rivers are forms of the Ganga flowing from the locks of Shiva as she flows down the country. Not only rivers, but water from any waterbody is considered Gangajal, which is why during rituals the *jal* offered to the deity is called Ganga, regardless of where it is taken from.

Kavaris are aware of this fact, the knowledge having passed down over generations from our ancestors. So, they collect water from any river, tank or pond on their way to visit their beloved Baidyanath ji with the faith that it is Gangajal!

Over time, the *kāvaḍ yātra* has changed, with *kānvaris* making the yātra to Ganga in the Haridwar, carrying back the water in their *kānvars* to the Shiva temples in their own towns and villages to do *abhishekam* to the deity. However, the original *kāvaḍ yātra* was to Baidyanath Dham and it was directly connected to health and wellness.

There are many more unique regional yatras in our vast country. I have only mentioned a few here. One thing common to most of these is that they begin and end on a specific *tithi* or auspicious day. The Warkaris reach Pandharpur on Ashadhi Ekadashi, the Murugan devotees reach the abode of the deity on Thaippusam or Vaikasi Vishakham, the Sabarimalai *yatris* reach on Makara Sankranti and the Shivalaya Ottam ends before sunrise on Shivaratri.

Yatras are meant to signify that any physical exercise like walking, jogging and fasting will enhance the wholesome benefits only when combined with a spiritual intent.



We ought to use the divine health in us to cure and prevent diseases; but Galen and Hippocrates & their tribe have given us instead an armoury of drugs and a barbarous Latin hocus-pocus as our physical gospel.

~ Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 12: 476

THE FORCE THAT HEALS: LIGHT FROM SRI AUROBINDO

The Mother once explained that one of the key reasons why humanity today suffers from a greater number of illnesses and more severe illnesses is because human mind has become a slave of the doctors and the medicines they prescribe. She added that the only true salvation for humanity is to “escape from mental domination by opening to the Divine Influence which they will obtain through a total surrender.” (CWM, 10: 324)

How does the Divine Force and Influence work as a healer? This is our focus in this concluding chapter after an overview of some of the indigenous and natural healing and wellness approaches from Indian cultural tradition. The best way to speak of the Force that Heals is to highlight a few relevant passages from Sri Aurobindo which speak of the conditions under which the spiritual force works to cure illnesses.

We have selected some excerpts which also give us a glimpse of how the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were using the Divine Force to help *sādhakas* in their healing process. Going through these passages, we also see that the faith and inner receptivity of both the patient and the instrument that is used to apply such force, namely the doctor, are important factors in determining the efficacy of the spiritual or yogic force. For the ease of understanding we have categorised the selected passages under suitable headings.

Body as Instrument of Dharmasādhana

“I put a value on the body first as an instrument, *dharmasādhana*, or, more fully, as a centre of manifested personality in action, a basis of spiritual life and activity as of all life and activity upon the earth, but also because for me the body as well as the mind and life is a part of the divine whole, a form of the Spirit and therefore not to be disregarded or despised as something incurably gross and incapable of spiritual realisation or of spiritual use.

“Matter itself is secretly a form of the Spirit and has to reveal itself as that, can be made to wake to consciousness and evolve and realise the Spirit, the Divine within it.” (Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 35: 497-498)

Body and Mind and Life – Part of the Divine Whole

“Perhaps I might say a word about Ramakrishna’s attitude with regard to the body. He seems always to have regarded it as a misuse of spiritual force to utilise it for preserving the body or curing its ailments or taking care for it.

“Other Yogis—I do not speak of those who think it justifiable to develop Yogic siddhis, but of those who think that that should be avoided—have not had this complete disregard of the body: they have taken care to maintain it in good health and condition as an instrument or a physical basis for their development in Yoga.

“I have always been in agreement with this view: moreover, I have never had any hesitation in the use of a spiritual force for all legitimate purposes including the maintenance of health and physical life in

myself and in others—that is indeed why the Mother has given flowers, not only as a blessing but as a help in illness.” (ibid.)

Divinising of the Body, Life and Mind

“In my view the body as well as the mind and life has to be spiritualised or, one may say, divinised so as to be a fit instrument and receptacle for the realisation and manifestation of the Divine. It has its part in the divine Lila, even, according to the Vaishnava sadhana, in the joy and beauty of Divine Love.

“That does not mean that the body has to be valued for its own separate sake or that the creation of a divine body in a future evolution of the whole being has to be contemplated as an end and not a means—that would be a serious error which would not be admissible. In any case, my speculations about an extreme form of divinisation are something in a far distance and are no part of the preoccupations of the spiritual life in the near future.” (ibid.)

Illness, Part of the Struggle in the Domain of Matter

“The prevalence of illness just now is a fact; it is part of the struggle that is going on in the domain of Matter. But even so there are plenty of people in the Asram who get rid of their ills by reliance on the Mother. If all cannot do it, what does that prove or disprove? It only proves that the Power does not work absolutely, miraculously, impossibly, but it works by certain given means and under conditions. I have always said that, so what is there in that that is new or that annihilates the truth of the Yoga?” (Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 35: 500-501)

Only Supramental Force Works Absolutely

“As for the Force,. . . I have told you that it is not always efficacious, but works under conditions like all forces; it is only the supramental Force that works absolutely, because it creates its own conditions.

“But the Force I am using is a Force that has to work under the present world conditions. It is not the less a Force for that.

“I have cured myself of all illnesses except three by it and those too when they come I have kept in check; the fact that I have not succeeded yet in eliminating the fact or probability of those three does not cancel the fact of my success with the others.

“As for the Mother, she used formerly to cure everything at once by the same Power—now she has no time to think about her body or to concentrate on it. Even so when she makes a certain inner concentration she can see, read etc. perfectly well without glasses, but she has no time to work out the possibility which that shows.” (ibid.)

Three Ways of Working of the Force

Disciple: In several recent cases you have insisted on knowing this or that about the patient's condition. But what is the need of your knowing these things? Is not Yogic vision more powerful and accurate than our external optical capacities?

Sri Aurobindo: “As for me, I have no medico in me, not even a latent medico. If I had, I would not need an external one but diagnose, prescribe and cure all by my solitary self. My role in a medical case is to use the force either with or without medicines.

“There are three ways of doing that—one by putting the Force without knowing or caring what the illness is or following the symptoms—that however needs either the mental collaboration or quiescence of the victim.

“The second is symptomatic, to follow the symptoms and act on them even if one is not sure of the disease. There an accurate report is very useful.

“The third needs a diagnosis—that is usually where the anti-forces are very strong and conscious or where the patient himself answers strongly to the suggestions of the illness and unwittingly resists the action of the Force.

“This last is usually indicated by the fact that the thing gets cured and comes back again or improves and swings back again to worse. It is especially the great difficulty in cases of insanity and the like. Also in things where the nerves have a say—but in ordinary illnesses too. (CWSA, 35: 505)

The Intervening Spiritual Force and a Complex Nexus of Forces

“. . . the Force does not act in a void and in an absolute way, like a writing on a blank paper or in the air, the “Let there be light and there was light” formula. It comes as a Force intervening and acting on a very complex nexus of forces that were in action and displacing their disposition and interrelated movement and natural result by a new disposition, movement and result. It meets in so doing a certain opposition, very often a strong opposition from many of the forces already in possession and operation.

“To overcome it three factors are needed, the power of the Force itself, i.e. its own sheer pressure and direct action on the field of action (here the man, his condition, his body), the instrument (yourself) and the instrumentation (treatment, medicine).

“I have often used the Force alone without any human instrument or outer means, but here all depends on the recipient and his receptivity—unless as in the case of many healers there are unseen beings or powers that assist.

“If there is an instrument in direct touch with the patient, whether the doctor or one who can canalise the force, then the action is immensely assisted,—how much depends on the instrument, his faith, his energy, his conveying power. Where there is a violent opposition, this is frequently not enough or at least not enough for a rapid or total effect, the instrumentation (treatment or medicine) is needed.

“It is especially where the resistance of the body or the forces acting on the body-consciousness is strong that the medicine comes in as an aid. But if the doctor is non-psychic or the medicine the wrong one or the treatment unplastic, then they become an added resistance which the Force has to overcome. This is a very summary and inadequate statement, but it gives the main points, I believe.

“P.S. I forgot to say that the surroundings, especially the people around the patient, the atmosphere, the suggestions it carries or they give to him, are often of a considerable importance.” (CWSA, 35: 503-504)

Resistance in the Vital to the Force

“There has been no negligence on our part in putting the force for X’s change—the Mother has been doing that daily; nor is the trouble she has contracted one for which we are in any way responsible—it is not imposed as an ordeal or anything else.

“If there is so obstinate a persistence of her attachment and the demands it makes, it is because there is in her own vital a resistance to the Force that would remove it. If there were the complete consent in the being for giving it up (not only mental wish or prayer, however strong), it could not possibly last—at any rate in this form,—only at most for a time in fragments of the old habit.

“There is in her vital a certain violence of temperament—I do not mean merely a tendency to violence of speech or act, but an exaggerated intensity in the feelings and vital reactions, and this is the source of the trouble. For it is this that when asked to give up the claim and attachment, has reacted vehemently calling in an outside Force to support its resistance.

“When this rises, her mind also begins to justify the claim and demand, her vital feels very hurt and angry with the Mother because she does not support it. All that is proof of a very familiar kind of resistance which refuses to yield to the mind’s will or the soul’s aspiration. . . .

“The Divine Force does not act now in an omnipotent ease regardless of conditions—it might do that if it were the pure supramental Force in its native action; but that is not yet. Here conditions have been created and it acts under those conditions. You speak of the Force acting in the case of the illnesses you have treated. No doubt, but here too it is under conditions—only, favourable conditions.

“For you believe and are conscious of the Force, your whole will is to cure, the patient’s will is to get well—the more he assents to the treatment, the more quickly the Force acts—the one obstacle is the force of the illness itself and the patient’s habitual subjection to it.

But with everything else against it, that does not succeed in remaining. It is quite otherwise in these things where the consent of the being is far from being complete, where the mind often consents to and justifies the illness when it comes, even takes strongly sides with it, where the vital is there with its revolt and clamour and tempest.

“It is only if the *sadhak*’s resolution is firm and one-minded, not to assent to the attack when it comes, to refuse all mental justification of it, to detach himself from the vital movement in the very time of its action that the liberation can be done with the clarity and ease which you desire.

“Otherwise, the only thing to be done is to keep up the pressure of the force quiet and strong and persistent until it gets into the vital itself and makes it reject its own movement.

“For that you [*the doctor*] must help by getting rid of the violence and impatience in your own nature and being yourself patient, firm and persistent. You are here to change your nature and the difficulty is no reason for throwing up the spiritual endeavour.” (CWSA, 35: 502-503)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Rajeshwari has been awarded a Ph.D. *Medicina Alternativa* (WHO, Alma-Ata) for her *Thesis on the Five Elements Theory*. She holds several other degrees and diplomas in various branches of non-allopathic medicine and healing approaches. These include:

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In 1998, Dr. Rajeshwari was awarded the Young Scientist Award at *The All India Naturopathy and Alternative Medicines Conference* held at Bangalore, for her paper on *Integrated Treatment with Laser Therapy and Homeo-Puncture*. Her work has been documented in two books: (i) *Nature Cure at Home* (ii) *Shed Your Weight Without Tears* (Pustak Mahal). She has also written extensively on health-related holistic topics in several national newspapers and magazines, including specialised articles in medical journals. Interested readers can check out her exclusive articles on holistic health written under the pseudonym of [Amritavarshini](#), on [Cybernag](#).

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BHĀRATSHAKTI

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