

Ayurveda, Service, and Enlightenment

Each person is put on this planet for a purpose. Ultimately, according to Sankhya philosophy, our highest purpose is simply to have experience. That will happen no matter what we do. The question is, what will we do and what will the impact be upon our life and our soul?

If we are living in harmony with the rhythms of life, the nature of our service varies with our stage of life. During our formative years (kapha time), our primary role is to learn and grow. At this age, we generally take more than we give. This is natural. Service that does occur is more of an experiment designed to further our learning about life. When a Boy Scout performs community service, the lessons they are learning generally exceed the service they are providing.

It is during the second phase of life that nature has intended for us to become serviceful. This phase could be called the service phase. Ayurveda^[1] calls it the pitta phase. At this time, we take our preparation and put it to use. The quality of our preparation significantly impacts the quality of the service we provide. This phase begins biologically between the ages of 13 and 16 though we generally don't enter this phase in modern society till between the ages of 18 and 22. Some enter even later. When we do, we take on a job or a career. This time of life is designed such that each person becomes a part of the community, providing a service that allows the community to function. In the ideal capitalistic society, each person is rewarded according to the quality, quantity and importance of the services provided.

During the third phase of life, nature has intended for us to reflect upon the work we have provided and the life we have lived. This is the vata time of life and could be called the phase of reflection and teaching. This period generally begins the ages of 55 and 70. During this time of our lives, each person benefits most by spending more time in meditation and reflection and cultivating their spiritual connection. While service is winding down, it is not altogether over. The person in their vata time of life, reflecting upon what they have learned now has a responsibility to share and pass on the wisdom and experience they have gained. This can occur in several ways. One is through spending time with those beginning their service phase. Those in the vata time of life make the best coaches. Technology may change but not the fundamentals that drive individuals. There is great value in the wisdom that resides in the heart of the elderly. Another way for those in the vata time life to serve is to be of some assistance in childrearing. While it is not practical for those in the vata phase to take on a primary role, a supplemental role that supports the family unit is of value and often reduces the stress upon the parents in their pitta phase.

Sadly, reflecting the dysfunction of the family unit and society as a whole, those in their vata time of life do not often receive the opportunity to share what they have learned. Often rejected by their own children or kept at a distance, the elderly die with their secret wisdom. The person who enters the vata time of life and is unable to serve the next generation is also going to be less healthy as a result. Thus, it is a lose-lose situation between the elderly and their children. To keep healthy, the elder can choose to share their knowledge with those who are receptive. Through volunteer organizations in most communities, the elderly can find fulfillment in passing on their knowledge and wisdom. The elder must often seek out this resource, however, as no one else will do it for them. Thus, each person has ultimate control over to what extent they serve.

At any stage of life, service is important. Service helps the youth learn, the adult contribute to the functioning of society, and the elder pass on their knowledge and wisdom. When service is provided in the spirit of selflessness, service transcends the realm of the physical and enters the spiritual. Provided in this manner, service becomes a means of exhausting karma and liberating the soul as the individual moves closer to enlightenment. However, when service is provided merely for what a person will receive in return, karma is accumulated and the chains that bind the soul to the physical realm become stronger. This individual continues on in the drama of the physical illusion and all the pleasures and suffering that come with it.

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Recognition of the phases of life provides each individual with a road map of understanding how to best be of service. Surrender to the divine currents that move us through these phases is a pre-requisite to self-less service and the spiritual benefits that come with it. Health is achieved by humbly providing service to the best of one's ability.

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[1] <http://www.ayurvedacollege.com/glossary/term/10>