

Ayurvedic Education in the New Millenium

As we move further into the new millennium, there is a growing fascination with the traditional wisdom of ancient India. Perhaps, this is because it is based on laws of nature that are timeless. Hence, it is as relevant to our well being today as it was thousands of years ago. This is especially true for Ayurveda^[1], the ancient and holistic healing system, which has been practiced in India for over 5,000 years.

Ayurveda is a complete medical science. There are even many Ayurvedic specialties including geriatrics and pediatrics along with internal medicine. In India today, Ayurvedic medicine flourishes along side Western allopathic medicine. Many Indian physicians are trained in both disciplines. While the structure of the professions may seem similar in some aspects, their understanding of disease and approach to improving health are entirely different.

Western health care systems are based on statistical models of healing. Rather than healing the individual who has a disease, Western medicine focuses on healing only the disease. Statistics tell physicians what methods will alleviate the symptoms of disease in most people. This method is useful for improving public health but does little for the individual who does not fit into the statistical norm. Ayurveda understands that each person is a unique individual and each person's path toward health and healing is equally unique.

Ayurveda is based on the idea that each person has a fundamental balance of energies in their body which make up their particular constitution^[2], with each person's constitution being uniquely their own. Determined at the moment of conception, an individual's constitution determines what is in harmony and what is out of harmony for each person. If a person exposes themselves to environmental influences (sound, color, aroma, and food) that are not harmonious with their fundamental nature, disease will result! As a person reestablishes a harmonious lifestyle, people heal and diseases no longer express themselves. Ayurveda understands that symptoms are only the body's way of communicating disharmony. When an area of disharmony is corrected, the symptoms disappear.

By contrast, the Western method of drug treatment defines cure as the alleviation of symptoms. This is most often accomplished by providing patients drugs that cover up symptoms. This method essentially silences the body's voice. With the voice (symptom) silenced, a person is able to continue a disharmonious lifestyle. However, the body's voice cannot be silenced forever. Eventually, either the symptoms return or new symptoms emerge-often more severe than the original.

There are many holistic health traditions and each has its own idea about the cause and correction of disease. Ayurveda is unique in that it begins with an understanding of a person physically, emotionally and spiritually. In this way, Ayurveda is truly holistic, accounting for the whole individual. Most alternative health care systems only address either the physical body or the mind - body connection. Ayurveda's body - mind - spirit approach is capturing the hearts of people throughout America who realize that we are indeed individuals at each and every level. One of Ayurveda's basic tenants is that nothing is right for everyone and everything is right for someone. This principle teaches that all disciplines and therapies have value. Ayurveda is a science of understanding what will work best for a specific person. It is not a dogmatic science stating that everybody must live one way or take one path toward healing. Ayurveda is defined as the "science of life". Hence it encompasses everything that affects one's life. Ayurveda is a path of finding out what has value for an individual. Some people thrive on spicy foods while others get indigestion. Some people need more sleep than others do. Through Ayurveda, people learn what foods, herbs, colors, aromas and sounds are best for them.

In today's modern world, stress is the number one cause of disease and unhappiness. Ayurveda's basic principle is that where there is harmony, there is health. Where there is disharmony there is

disease. Ayurveda is the path of returning to harmony. This concept of harmony means living in harmony with one's environment through each of the five senses. This way of life is stress free. And, by reducing stress on the system, Ayurveda heals. Ayurveda focuses on natural, holistic therapies that create an optimum environment in the body for healing to take place. By maximizing the body's healing potential, the body has the best possible chance of healing itself. Ayurveda utilizes dietary, herbal, aroma, color, sound and massage therapies as well as yoga and meditation to bring about healing.

Today's Ayurvedic practitioners are well trained in each of these areas allowing them to work with nature to correct imbalances within the body. In America today, Ayurveda is growing into a complete health care profession that is based on timeless natural laws of health and healing. The Ayurvedic profession, though relatively new in America, is growing rapidly. Demand for Ayurvedic practitioners is also growing rapidly.

A career in Ayurveda is rewarding on every level. The California College of Ayurveda (CCA) was the first state-approved College^{i[3]} for the clinical study of Ayurveda in the U.S. The CCA has a clear focus and intention to thoroughly train Ayurvedic practitioners. Our program leads to certification as a Clinical Ayurvedic Specialist (C.A.S.). A C.A.S. is one part coach, one part counselor, one part teacher, and one part guide along the journey. Providing healthcare through Ayurveda unleashes the potential of the human body, mind and spirit.

Since opening its doors in 1995, more than 100 C.A.S. practitioners have graduated and established practices. And, nearly 50 more will graduate each year. In 1998, with the help of the College's students and graduates we formed the California Association of Ayurvedic Medicine (CAAM). And, in 1999, we helped form the National Ayurvedic Medical Association (NAMA). As the Ayurvedic profession has grown, the College has evolved to meet the changing needs of the profession. Today, the College's Clinical Ayurvedic Specialist program is more extensive than ever before.

The main center of the California College of Ayurveda lies in Grass Valley. In addition, the College has expanded to offer satellite classes in the San Francisco Bay Area as well as Southern California. The California College of Ayurveda is the largest and most successful college of its kind in the country! New C.A.S. programs begin every few months and are offered in two formats: Full Time and Extended Weekend courses.

In addition to its educational facility, the College runs the world class Ayurveda Healthcare Clinic. People from across the country receive the highest quality of Ayurvedic health care in an environment that is nurturing as well as academic. The College's clinic offers personal consultations and health care coaching to help people understand their true constitutional nature and make positive lifestyle and dietary changes. The College's clinic also offers pancha karma^{i[4]} services.

Pancha Karma is the process of purifying and rejuvenating the body. Utilizing specialized massage techniques, oil therapies and other exotic techniques, pancha karma is a process a patient goes through to create the deepest physical and emotional healing possible. Patients often receive 5-10 days of continuous therapies lasting 2-3 hours each day. This special program removes toxins from the system and restores the internal vital energy to the body. The process is both rejuvenating and deeply spiritual.

Healing is a journey. The path to optimal health is neither short nor easy. Ayurveda, however, offers clear guidelines on how to succeed along that path. Most patients who enter into Ayurvedic care continue with a practitioner for 6-12 months. During this time the practitioner develops and implements a program of care based upon the uniqueness of the individual. And, most importantly, the practitioner educates the patient to understand their constitution and how they relate to the world around them. With this knowledge, a person can create an environment supportive to the healing process.

People are like plants. If plants receive the proper quality and quantity of sunlight, food and water, they will thrive and produce lots of flowers and have a rich color. However, if the environment is less than optimal, the plant may live but it will not thrive. It's color will not be as rich nor its flowers as numerous. People are very much the same. If the environment is not optimal, people live but do not

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thrive. Creating an optimal environment takes time and should not be rushed. It involves subtle, though significant lifestyle changes. Making these changes parallel a change or growth in consciousness. As consciousness evolves, the experience of life changes from one of unhappiness and disease to one of joy and optimal health.

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[2] <http://www.ayurvedacollege.com/glossary/term/15>

[3] <http://www.ayurvedacollege.com/glossary/term/38>

[4] <http://www.ayurvedacollege.com/glossary/term/11>