

The Five Elements Part IV: Water

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The element water, called “apas” in Sanskrit is the fourth of the five great elements (pancha mahabhutas). It comes fourth because it evolves from ether, air and fire containing the essence of these elements within it. Ether provides water the space to exist within. Air provides water with the ability to move and flow. The relationship between fire and water is more esoteric. Air creates the friction that generates the heat of fire. Fire moves in a fluidic or flowing manner. In each evolution from one element to the next, nature becomes denser. As fire becomes denser it cools and takes greater form. This is the form of water.

The water element represents fluidic matter and the cohesive principle of physics. . Water is the protector of the body. It provides the body with its most basic nourishment. Water protects against the dissolution of the ether element, the roughness and motion of the air element and the heat of the fire element. The water element soothes all pain and inflammation in the body.

The origin of the water element is the tanmatra of taste called rasa. Rasa in this context is the primordial causation of the experience of taste. Rasa is the causal energy that provides the potential for the experience of taste to occur. It is not the taste itself. However, since taste depends upon the water element for its manifestation, disorders of the ability to taste are due to an imbalance of the water element.

Water: Sense Organ and Organ of Action

The tongue is the vehicle through which the rasa tantatra manifests. The tongue is the sense organ of water. Through the tongue we taste the world around us. It is interesting to note that the taste buds of the tongue only work, when water or saliva is present. No water, no taste. The urethra is the organ of action. Through the male urethra, highly potentized reproductive fluid is expelled from the body. Through the male and female urethra, water is expelled in the form of urine. Imbalances of the water element in the body can be observed by monitoring changes in a person’s experience of taste as well as through alterations of urine or seminal fluid.

The Qualities of Water

To know any element is to know its qualities. Water is cool, stable, heavy, moist, smooth, gross, flowing, dull, cloudy and soft. The water element is the antidote to symptoms that have the opposite qualities in the body. It is important to take in the qualities of water when you are feeling too warm, ungrounded, emaciated, dehydrated, rough, lacking in self-esteem, obstructed and immobile, irritable with a sharp tongue, transparent and vulnerable or if your heart has become too hard.

The Five Waters of The Body

In the human body, water is expressed in five distinct ways known as the five types of kapha. . The water that protects the mouth against the actions of chewing and against the enzyme that begins the breakdown of carbohydrate (salivary amylase) is called bodhaka kapha. Bodhaka kapha is the salivary fluid and also the mucous membrane secretions of the lips, cheeks and pharynx. The water that protects the mucous membranes of our stomach against the acids that aid digestion is called kledaka kapha. The water that stabilizes the flow of neurological impulses and protects the nerves of the brain is called tarpaka kapha. The water that protects the joints from the friction of motion is called sleshaka kapha. Sleshaka kapha is found in the synovial fluid that moistens joint surfaces and in the bursae that allow tendons to glide smoothly over each other. The water that protects the respiratory system from the movement of breath (A drying process) is called avalambaka kapha. Avalambaka kapha keeps the mucous membranes of the bronchi and lungs healthy and also provides the fluids that support the pleura and pericardium. .

Water and the Kapha Dosha

The kapha dosha contains both water and earth. It is water that is responsible for most of the protective and healing aspects of the kapha dosha. As water is the foundation for earth in the body (water supports earth's heavy, stable qualities) an increase in the qualities of water will result in weight gain and sluggishness.

Consequences of Excess and Deficient Water on the Dhatus

Tending the waters of the body begins with caring for kledaka kapha in the stomach. The stomach is the home of the kapha dosha. If the qualities of water increase too much, they overflow from the stomach into circulation and flood the tissues of the body. When food is taken in that is too moist or oily, water builds up and reduces the strength of the digestive fire. Digestion becomes impaired and food moves slowly through the digestive system. The accompanying reduction in appetite and a sense of heaviness in the abdomen are among the earliest signs that kapha is increasing and out of balance. As water overflows from the digestive system, it often settles in the watery tissues of the body.

These tissues are the rasa (plasma), medas (fat) and shukra (fluidic reproductive tissue) dhatus. The quantities of these tissues increase resulting in edema, obesity and an increase in genital waste secretions (smegma). Secondary watery tissues increase as well resulting an increase in menstrual flow in women and in breast milk supply. Unfortunately, the quality of the increased breast milk and menstrual fluids are of poor quality and are often mixed with mucous.

Water deficiency results in many of the opposite qualities. The rasa, medas and shukra become too dry resulting in dehydration, dry mucous membranes, dry skin, weight loss and weakness in the reproductive tissues respectively. A dry rasa also results in a decrease in urination, sweating and in the formation of dry, hard stools. In addition, the lips and eyes become dry.

Water in the Diet

In our diet, the sweet taste is the main source of water. Cooked grains, non-fermented dairy, oils, nuts and fatty meats are foods with ample water element within them.

The proper intake of these foods supports healthy water element in the body. Excess intake results in the symptoms of excess noted above. Deficient intake results in the symptoms of deficiency.

Water and the Seasons

Spring is the season of water. It is the season in which the water stored within the snow begins to flow from the mountains into the rivers and streams. Water is the source of life and the container of prana. As the water begins to flow, life grows in its wake. Spring is sweet and its sweetness nourishes all of life. During this time, the water element in our bodies naturally increases and flows. It is important to keep the water from overflowing in our bodies at this time by making sure that we do not over indulge in sweets, meats and oils.

Water and the Cycle of Life

In the cycle of life and death, water represents the years of our learning in preparation for performing dharma. Our water years are the years of cohesion. These are the years of schooling and training as we attract and draw in the knowledge and information we will later use during our fiery pitta time of life.

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