

An Ayurvedic Perspective on The Lunar Effect

By : Arlini Singh

*ya esa sodasa-kalah puroso bhagavan manomayo 'nnamayo
"mrtamayo deva-pitr-manusya-bhuta-pasu-paksi-sarisha-
virudham pranapy ayana-silavat sarvamaya iti varnayanti*

Translation

Because the moon is full of all potentialities, it represents the influence of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The moon is the predominating deity of everyone's mind, and therefore the moon-god is called Manomaya. He is also called Annamaya because he gives potency to all herbs and plants, and he is called Amrtamaya because he is the source of life for all living entities. The moon pleases the demigods, inhabitants of Pitrloka, animals, birds, reptiles, trees, plants and all other living entities. Everyone is satisfied by the presence of the moon. Therefore the moon is also called Sarvamaya (all pervading)

(Srimad - Bhagavatam 5.22.10)¹.

Introduction

For centuries, Man has looked up and gazed at the wonder and splendour of the Moon. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Moon has played such a vital role in the traditions of every culture, as Man has appreciated and respected the Moon, not only for it's beauty, but also for his survival.

Johanna Paungger and Thomas Poppe in their book, Guided by the Moon, states that Man discovered:

- that numerous natural phenomena - the tides, birth, meteorological events, women's menstrual cycle, and much more - are related to the movements of the moon
- that the behaviour of many animals depends on the position of the moon; that birds, for example, always gather their nest material at particular times, so that the nests dry out rapidly after a rainfall
- that the effect and success of both countless everyday activities and others that are less everyday - cutting wood, cooking, eating, cutting hair, gardening, putting down fertilizer, doing

laundry, using medicines, performing surgical operations, and many other things - are subject to rhythms in nature

- that sometimes operations and doses of medicine administered on certain days can be helpful, while on other days they can be useless or even harmful - often regardless of the amount and quality of the medication or the skill of the doctor
- that plants and their component parts are exposed to different energies from day to day - a knowledge of which is crucial for successful cultivation, tending and harvesting of crops - and that herbs gathered at certain times contain incomparably more active agents than at other.

In other words, the success of an intention depends not only on the availability of the necessary skills and resources, but also decisively on the timing of the action.”²

The moon is the Earth’s only natural satellite and the average distance between ourselves and moon is about 384,400 km. Currently, it takes the moon 27.3 days to orbit the Earth. However, the moon is moving away from Earth at approximately 3.78 cm every year, causing the rotation of Earth to slow down. “Just like keeping a plate spinning on a stick, the key is to have the plate spinning fast, as if it slows down it crashes to the floor. In a similar way, as the Earth's rotation slows down, our whole planet may start to slowly wobble and this will have a devastating effect on our seasons.”

BBC News, 1 February 2011.³

Living in harmony with Lunar Cycles

In ayurveda, we are acutely aware of the need for balance. When there is a doshic imbalance in the body, it leads to disease. Therefore, it is crucial that we maintain a doshic balance within ourselves and align ourselves with nature so that we live in harmony with the cycles of Earth, whether it is the day or night, or season or cycle of the sun and moon.

Celeste Teal, an esteemed astrologer and author of several books on astrology notes, “the Moon has an effect on every single molecule and every living thing on our planet, including our body and our mood! The Moon goes through her regular rhythmic cycles constantly over the course of our entire lives, even though we are mostly so caught up in what is going on in our modern world to take much notice, let alone take advantage of her cycles to improve our lives or some particular situation. If only we were more familiar with the natural impulses of the Moon,

as people were in earlier times, and how to work in harmony with her cycles, our lives might be much less stressed.”⁴

Some of the effects of the moon on an imbalanced person

The relationship between the moon, emotions and brain rhythms are now being examined by scientists.

In a study, Dr. Arnold L. Lieber M.D , a psychologist and Dr. Carolyn R. Sherin, both of the University of Miami, had analyzed nearly 1 900 murders that had occurred in Dade County, Florida between the period of 1935 to 1970 and concluded “that murders became more frequent with the increase in the moon’s gravitational force.” Their data revealed that the murder rate began to rise about 24 hours before the full moon, reached a peak at full moon, then dropped back before climbing back up to a secondary peak at the new moon.⁵

Two medical researchers, Professor C.P. Thakur and his postgraduate student, Dilip Sharma of Patna Medical College in Patna, India had researched the reporting of crime to three police stations, for the period from 1978 to 1982, in three different locations. One being a rural location, the other being an urban one and the third being an industrial location. They found that the incidence of crimes committed on full moon days was much higher when compared to the incidence of crime on new moon days and seventh day after the full and new moon. They attributed this finding to “human tidal waves” caused by the gravitational pull of the moon.⁶

In Brighton, UK, extra police forces were sent out on full moon nights, following research by the Sussex force which concluded that there was a rise in violent incidents on full moon nights. Inspector Andy Parr told BBC, “ From my experience, over 19 years of being a police officer, undoubtedly on full moons, we do seem to get people with sort of, stranger behaviour - more fractious, argumentative. And I think that’s something that’s been borne out by police officers up and down the country for years.” ⁷

A study done by Varinder S. Parmar of Department of Psychiatry , Queen’s University, Canada, analyzed the relationship between the lunar cycle and the frequency of emergency psychiatric visits in one population using three different methods of defining the full moon timeframe. In the first model, the full moon period was defined as the 12 hours surrounding the full moon. In the

second model, the full moon was defined as a 24 hour period including the twelve hours before and after the time of the full moon. In the third model, the full moon was defined as a three - day period made up of 24 hours before, the day of the full moon and a 24 - hour period after the full moon.

They concluded that the lunar cycle in a 3 - day model did not influence the frequency emergency psychiatric visits. However in the 12 - hour and 24 - hour model, they found that the frequency of the emergency psychiatric visits was reduced. But there were more patients with a diagnosis of personality disorder during the 24 - hour full moon period and that triage codes during the time tended to be more severe. ⁸.

A study in 2013, by chronobiologist and sleep researcher, Christian Cajochen at the Psychiatric Hospital of the University of Basel in Switzerland found, unexpectedly, that lunar cycles does influences human sleep, even when one does not see the moon or is unaware of the moon phase. Over a period of 4 years, the researchers had monitored the sleep pattern, brain and eye activity and hormone secretions of 33 participants in the lab, whilst the participants slept. All the participants were healthy, had no sleep disorders and were not on any drugs or medication.

After reviewing the data, the researchers found that during the time of the full moon, the brain activity that was related to deep sleep dropped by 30 percent, resulting in the participants taking about 5 minutes longer to fall asleep and sleeping for an average of about 20 minutes less overall. The participants showed diminished levels of melatonin, a hormone that regulates sleep and wake cycles.⁹.

Dr. Winifred B. Cutler conducted her research on the lunar influences on the reproductive cycle in women. Her study was from 1976 to 1983 with 312 women in the age group of nineteen to thirty five years of age. Her study concluded that there was a definite link between the changing phases of the moon and “the propensity for menstrual onset in women”.¹⁰.

Dr. Arnold L. Lieber M.D in his book, *The Lunar Effect, Biological Tides and Human Emotions* also agrees that the moon affects almost every aspect of human life, including the menstrual cycle. He explains that a female child is affected by biological tides from the moment of conception. During gestation, the fetus is in equilibrium with the biological rhythms of the

mother. However, at the time of birth, the newborn's rhythms are her own. Therefore in some cultures, it is stated that a female child is born on the bright side or waxing stage of the moon and a male child on the dark side or waning side of the moon.

Dr. Lieber further states, " Because of complex interplay between hormonal balance and fluid and electrolyte balance, women at certain times during the menstrual cycle may be more susceptible to the triggering effects of biological tides. During premenstruum, many women experience bloating, tension, and irritability. Transient fluid buildups and electrolyte imbalance occur. The added physiological stress of a biological high tide occurring during premenstruum could result in drastic physical and /or behavioural consequences. It is well documented that women are more susceptible to physical illness and erratic behaviour in the few days prior to menses, and that hospital admissions, psychiatric illness and violent crime are far more frequent then. Male hormones are less involved with fluid and electrolyte balance and there seems to be no male counterpart of the premenstrual -tension syndrome." ¹¹.

Interestingly, the word "menstruation" is related to the word " moon." The word "menstruation" and "menses" are derived from the Latin word *mensis*, which means month, which is also linked to the Greek word, *mene*, meaning moon.

The Nervous System from the Ayurvedic Perspective

From the above mentioned research, it is evident that the moon affects the human body in profound ways. Perhaps, the greatest havoc is wreaked on a weak nervous system.

According to Ayurveda, the nervous system consists of the sushumna nadi, the ida nadi and the pingala nadi. There are many subtle energy channels that flow throughout the astral body of man called *nadis*. There are 72 000 nadis in the body of which the sushumna nadi is the most important of all. The sushumna nadi runs up the centre of the spinal cord, with the ida nadi (also know as the moon or chandra nadi) on the left side and the pingala nadi (or the sun or surya nadi) on the right side. Strung along the sushumna nadi are the six chakras, which are the Muladhara, Svadhishtana, Manipura, Anahata, Vishuddha and Ajna chakra. The seventh chakra, the Sahasra Padma chakra is not on the sushumna. The ida and pingala nadi, spiral

around the sushumna nadi, crossing each other at every chakra. Finally, they all meet at the Ajna chakra, which lies between the eyebrows.

Dr. Halpern, further states that the nadis and chakras are associated with the nerve plexuses in the physical body. He links the sushumna to the brain and spinal cord, the ida nadi to the left sympathetic nerve chain and the pingala nadi to the right sympathetic nerve chain.¹².

As the pingala nadi is linked to the sun, it is warm whilst the ida nadi being associated to the energy of the moon is cold. The ida nadi represents the feminine aspects of our personality. It controls the function of the parasympathetic nervous system and has the quality of being cold.

The qualities of the ida nadi are as follows:

Quality	Ida
Guna	Tamasic
Breath	Left nostril
Temperature	Cold
Sex	Female
Quality	Mental
Metal	Silver
Colour	Blue
Energy	Negative
Nerves	Parasympathetic
River	Yamuna
Planet	Moon

Ida is negative whilst the pingala is positive. The force currents in ida, pingala and sushumna operate alternatively and from the flow of breath in the nostrils we can determine whether the current is moving through ida or pingala. The ida nadi is dominant when the left nostril has a greater flow of air and the pingala nadi is dominant when the right nostril has a greater flow of air. If the flow through both nostrils are equal, then sushumna is dominant.

Pay attention to your breath, and you would notice that it usually flows more in one nostril than the other. When breath is moving through the right nostril (the flow is through the pingala nadi) then we are more energized and able to get physical work done, digest food better, etc. The body generates more heat and the mind is extroverted. Here the physical strength is heightened and the mental strength weakens. At night, the person will have difficulty falling asleep and would be restless.

When the breath is moving through the left nostril, (the flow is through the ida nadi) then the person is more alert mentally, the mind is introverted and concentration improves. However, the digestive process may be sluggish and there maybe indigestion. The person is also able to sleep better. We see the reverse here in that the mental strength is heightened and the physical strength weakens.

The flow through the ida and pingala nadi alternate approximately 60 minutes, although other sources states 90 minutes, influencing our activities. But it is possible to alter the flow by willpower and practising certain techniques such as padadirasana and pranayama. The prime aim of hatha yoga, is to establish a balance in the flow between the prana in the ida and pingala so that we are not disorientated either mentally or physically. The literal translation of the word '*hatha*' means "forceful" in Sanskrit. It is made up of two words *ha* and *tha*, which are two bija or seed mantras. *Ha* represents pingala nadi and the solar qualities, and *tha* represents the mind and lunar qualities. Balancing pingala and ida or balancing the sun and the moon, leads to awakening of higher consciousness.

The flow through the sushumna nadi only begins when the ida and pingala nadi is balanced and purified. The flow of breath through the right or left nostril alternates rhythmically throughout the day and night, "representing the domination of ida/pingala nadis or negative/positive influxes of energy and attitude. At the end of each cycle, the breath flows evenly for 1 - 3 minutes. This signals the period when the energy is neither negative nor positive but neutral, and sushumna nadi is flowing."

Swami Muktibodhananda Saraswati : Swara Yoga - Part 4: Rhythmic Flow of the Swara.¹³

The sushumna must be flowing for the person to be able to meditate properly. If the flow through the pingala is dominant, the person will be physically restless and if the flow through the ida is dominant, the person is mentally restless. Both types of restlessness will hinder meditation. It is only when there is flow through the sushumna, that kundalini rises through the chakras.

Ida nadi operates in conjunction with the right hemisphere of the brain which is responsible for the functioning of the left side of the body. Similarly, pingala nadi operates in conjunction with the left side of the brain and is responsible for the functioning of the right side of the body. Breathing through the left nostril activates the right hemisphere of the brain and conversely, breathing through the right nostril activates the left hemisphere of the brain.

“ Modern scientists have investigated the science of the breath and its influence on the mind, but they have not yet recognized that the nadis and the breath are linked to the movements of the sun and moon, which was well known to the ancient seers. It has been recorded in the Pawana Vijaya Swarodaya that during the dark fortnight of the lunar cycle, when the moon is waning, surya nadi (pingala) becomes active at sunrise on days 1-3, 7-9 and 13-15. The nadis function alternately in 60 - 90 minutes intervals throughout the day and at sunset, chandra nadi (ida) begins to function. Then, on days 4 -6 and 10 - 12 chandra nadi flows at sunrise, and surya nadi at sunset. During the bright fortnight, when the moon is waxing, the reverse process takes effect; at sunrise on the first 3 days, chandra nadi opens, and so on. The breath should be checked at these times to make sure that the appropriate nadi is functioning.”

Swami Muktibodhananda Saraswati : Swara Yoga - Part 4 : Rhythmic Flow of the Swara.¹⁴

At the base of the spine, subtler than the physical body, lies the kundalini energy or spiritual energy. According to Dr. Marc Halpern, “one view of the kundalini shakti is that when aroused, it rises through the sushumna and carries the soul out of the seventh chakra to liberation from the cycles of birth and death. Another view is that it rises and activates the soma in the head and liquefies it, causing it to flow back to the heart to activate prana. The heightened prana then becomes the power of immortality”¹⁵.

Dr. David Frawley, states that soma is related to the Moon and has its seat in the head. “The mind like the Moon has a reflective nature that is developed through receptivity, observation and

contemplation. The mind functions best when it is cool and calm like the light of the Moon. The mind has its own natural contentment when it rests in its own nature, held silent within us. Honouring the Moon in our lives and understanding the place of the Moon in our Vedic astrology chart helps us work with the Soma within us.”¹⁶

The Greek philosopher Aristotle as well as the Roman historian, Pliny the Elder both believed that the brain was greatly influenced by the moon because it is “the moistest” organ. The moon controls the water on Earth, so it is believed that the moon controls the water in our body as well. Kumar Dileep et al, states “psychosis is the group of psychiatric illness with serious distortion of thought, behaviour, perception and gross impairment in reality testing. Schizophrenia is the most common disorder in psychiatric outpatient departments. Unmada is a similar clinical condition described in almost all Ayurvedic texts.”¹⁷.

Unmada (psychosis) is a state of disturbed mental function. According to Acharya Caraka, Unmada (psychosis) is an unsettled condition of Manas (mind), Buddhi (decision), Smriti (memory), Sanjainanam (orientation and responsiveness), Bhakti (desire), Sheela (habit), Chesta (activity) and Achara (conduct).¹⁸ The Caraka Samhita describes the cause of psychosis as the doshas get aggravated in patients with weak mental strength, mounting upwards through manovaha srotas and vitiates the heart, which is the seat of Buddhi (decision) and disturbs manas (mind) and occlude manovaha srotas. This causes loss of intelligence and the individual loses the power of discrimination and engages in improper activities. ¹⁹.

Ayurveda recommends routines (charya) for all natural time cycles like daily routines (dina-charya), monthly (masa-charya), seasonal (ritu-charya) and life stages (ayu-charya). The masa-charya is based on the moon’s phases and is specifically related to the fourth day (chaturthi) and eleventh day (ekadashi) of both the waxing and waning phases of the moon.

“This cleansing and wellness masa-charya includes specific do’s and don’ts about diet, herbs and lifestyle on the fourth and eleventh day of the moon’s waxing and waning. These routines have been culturally incorporated into the Vedic lifestyle and are misunderstood as ‘religious rituals or fast.’” ²⁰.

Chaturthi is the fourth day of any lunar month in the Vedic calendar. It is recommended to fast during the day and to break the fast at night after prayers to the moon. Ekadashi is the eleventh day of the bright and dark fortnight of every lunar month in the Vedic calendar. This fast begins from sunset the day before and ends on the morning after the eleventh day. On ekadashi days, a fast is kept devoid of all beans and grains. One can have fruits, vegetables, dairy and dairy products. “ The Ekadashi day is recognized as the best of all days to fast because it is on this day of the moon phase in which the rays of the moon actually nourish the subtle nerves and feelings of the heart.”²¹.

“According to modern science, it is known that the air pressure on our planet varies to extreme limits on both the new moon (amavasya) and the full moon (Purnima) day. This is because of the orbital path combination of the sun, moon and earth. This can be observed by the change in the nature of the tidal waves on the new moon and full moon days. The waves are very high and rough, but from the next day onwards, the waves become calm, an indication that the pressure has also receded. Now, based on this fact, the significance of Ekadashi fasting can be explained in 2 ways:

- 1) According to science, it takes about 3 - 4 days for the food that we eat today to reach our brain. Now, if we eat light/ fast on Ekadashi days, that intake will reach the brain correspondingly on the New moon / full moon day.

On both of these days, the earth pressure is at its maximum, thus leading to imbalance in everything, including ones thought process.

So, if the input to the brain is at a minimum, the chances of the brain indulging in any wayward activity due to the high pressure imbalance also becomes minimum.

- 2) Another explanation for the Ekadashi fasting is that compared to any other day of the moon cycle, the atmospheric pressure is the lowest on the Ekadashi days. Thus, this is the best time to fast and cleanse the bowel system. If we fast on any other day, the high pressure / strain may damage our system.²².

The Moon and agriculture.

Dr. Frawley states, “ ...rejuvenate properties may require picking the plant at a proper time of the day or season of the year. Soma relates to the Moon, so the right alliance of the plant with the movement and phases of the Moon has its importance.”²³

Jullian Ellis, a young farmer in Cornwall, UK, became very interested in the affect of the moon on gardening after attending a talk on “ Gardening by the Moon” by Mr. John Harris. Since he was concerned about the effect of conventional methods of farming on the environment, he decided to research the subject further. The objectives of his study, called the Nufield Study Tour was :²⁴.

1. to visit farms that use the moon calendar for farming;
2. to investigate the impact of the moon on crops and animals; and
3. to research if there was a role for farming by the cycles of the moon in UK agriculture

To understand his research better, we need to understand the following basic knowledge of the moon. There are four main cycles of the moon, which are:

1. waxing and waning (the synodic cycle) : 29.5 days

The waxing stage is the moon growing from new moon to full moon. This is the first and second quarter. The waning stage is the third and last quarter, when the moon shrinks. The gravity pull of the moon is greater at new and full moon. The lunar light is understandably the strongest at full moon.

The biodynamic method of farming advises to plant fruit producing plants that grow above the ground in the first quarter. Root crops should be planted in the second quarter. Compost or farm yard manure is best applied in the third quarter and the fourth quarter is the best time for cultivation. The waning moon is the best time for any operation in which bleeding could be a problem. Even hay is of better quality if cut on a waning moon as during this period the gravitational pull is less and therefore the sap content is less.

2. Ascending and descending : 27.3 days

This is the height of the moon above the observer’s horizon

3. Sidereal cycle: 27.3 days

This is the Moon’s journey through the twelve constellations of the Zodiac. It spends an average of two - three days in his zodiacal constellation. This cycle has a link with the four elements (Earth, Air, Fire and Water).

Here we need to identify the element that links to each type of group e.g.

- | | | |
|---------------|---|---|
| Earth element | - | root plants e.g. potatoes, beetroot, carrot, potatoes, turnips, etc |
| Water element | - | leaf plants e.g. spinach, kale, watercress, lettuce, cabbage, etc |

- Air element - flowering plants e.g. cauliflower, broccoli, etc
- Fire element - fruit - seed plants e.g. blackberries, bean, peas, etc

4. Apogee - perigee cycle : 27.2 days

This is the cycle that affects the tides on Earth. When the moon is at apogee, it is the furthest distance away from Earth and the moon is at its closest distance to Earth during the perigee stage. The moon moves around the earth in an elliptical orbit, so its distance from the earth is varied during the cycle period.

Julian Ellis visited biodynamic farms in Switzerland, Germany, Luxembourg, Italy and Canada to research further the effect of the moon on farming. In all the farms, he found not only more nutritious fruits and vegetables but also a larger yield of crop.

Biodynamics was an expression coined by Robert Steiner in the 1920s. He was approached by the farmers to find a solution to their poor quality of crops and the ongoing problem of diseased crops. Biodynamics is an organic method of farming and refers to working in harmony with nature, the cosmos and with spiritualism. The relevance of biodynamics to humans is not only more respect and less damage to our environment, and less depletion of the quality of the soil, but the harvesting of highly nutritious fruits and vegetables and potent herbs. From our understanding of ayurvedic nutrition, we can understand that eating foods of poor quality is going to result in poor quality of health. It makes sense also that when treating with potent herbs, we should see better results. Therefore it is imperative, that not only are our foods and herbs organic but grown in a sustainable manner and in an intelligent way, maximizing the light of the moon to achieve full nutritious and healing value.

As Caraka mentions, “ Only that which can bring about health is a proper medicine. And it is only he who is the best of physicians who can free (his patients) from diseases. The success in all endeavours (in curing illness) comes from correct application (of medicine) and from (the presence) of (such) a highly trained physician endowed with the all (necessary) qualities.”²⁵

Conclusion

“The Sun is the universal soul,
the Moon mind, Mars strength,
Mercury speech, Jupiter wisdom, Venus virility and
Saturn sorrow and suffering”

Brihat Parasara Hora 1-13-14²⁶

Ayurveda is the treatment of a patient from a physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual standpoint. With the moon having a strong influence on the mind, and the mind having a strong influence on our physical body, emotions and spiritualism, it is imperative, that we recognize the need to stay in balance with Nature. As Kahlil Gibran states, “ We are all like the bright moon, we still have our darker side.” The moon keeps the same side facing earth as it passes through its orbit. From earth, we always see the same side of the moon all the time. Therefore the side that is never seen, is sometimes referred to as the dark side. Just as the moon has a bright side and a dark, unseen side, so too the moon has positive and negative effects on life on earth. However, ayurveda does provide remedies for counteracting the negative influences and it rests upon us to utilize the positive benefits. In the words of Archarya Caraka, “ Soma (The god of water or the moon), which is said to be represented by Kapha in the body, brings about good or bad effects according to its normal or abnormal state, e.g. sturdiness and looseness, plumpness and emaciation, enthusiasm and laziness, potency and impotency, wisdom and ignorance and other such qualities.” ²⁷.

There is not much information and research on this topic. It is the hope of the writer that this paper, would create awareness of the value of the Moon to ourselves and to our beautiful planet at the same time, emphasizing the need for sustainable living.

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