

**Kaya Kalpa**  
**and the Alchemical Tradition in**  
**Ayurveda and Siddha Medicine**

**California College of Ayurveda**

**Student Research Paper**

**By Ione Linker**

**March 2009**

## **'History' of Kaya Kalpa**

"Ten thousand years ago, a King of India had a problematic, headstrong daughter, who refused to marry any of the eligible princes who were presented to her. In anger and frustration the king decreed that she was to be blindfolded and placed in the castle courtyard in the midst of all her suitors. The man she first touched was to be her husband and their children would continue the Royal line.

On that day an elderly holy man wandered into the courtyard to deliver herbs to the King's physician and, by chance, was touched first by the princess. Even though he pled exemption due to his advanced age and holy vows, the King's word was law and they were to marry in three months time. The holy man consulted his teacher about his problem and the teacher instituted an intensive program to rejuvenate and energize.

For 90 days the holy man ate a special diet, performed breathing techniques, took ritual herbal baths and was anointed with sacred oils. At the end of that time his hair had turned from gray to black, a new set of teeth had grown into his mouth, and his skin and body were youthful and strong. He married the Princess. They had many children and of course lived happily ever after.

This was the beginning of Kaya Kalpa treatment. Vigorously suppressed by the British, it almost was lost. There are now fewer than 30 practitioners in the world." 1

This "history" of the mysterious ancient rejuvenation process of 'Kaya Kalpa' is found on the websites and in the brochures of many of those few present-day practitioners of updated forms of this treatment. 'Kaya Kalpa' is most often referred to in passing in Ayurvedic literature as a mystical or legendary process used to revitalize and even immortalize the most spiritually-evolved saints and sages in ancient India, and not described as a realistic or repeatable therapy.

## **The Search for Kaya Kalpa**

Beginning to research deeper into the subject of Kaya Kalpa, it became more and more of a mystery, bringing up references to and inter-connections with the ancient Tamil Siddhas, Siddha medicine, alchemy, Rasa Shastra and Tantric traditions – all somewhat mysterious subjects. My conclusion, which I will attempt to trace out for you in the following pages, is that it is a distinct tradition of its own, probably originating with the Siddhas, and adopted, adapted and described by spiritual aspirants in all these traditions and more following them, who were guided to find the means to continue, in the body, on their enlightenment path. Kaya Kalpa is a truly alchemical

process of physical rejuvenation (fairly well documented) and psycho-spiritual transformation (much more subjective) which uses the same basic treatments of the traditional detoxification (Panchakarma) and rejuvenation (Rasayana) therapies of classical Ayurveda, but with a different, more specific goal: extending the lifespan, even immortalizing the body, of the advanced spiritual aspirant, to enable attainment of the goal of *moksha* – spiritual liberation - in this lifetime.

There are a few more anecdotal ‘histories’ of Kaya kalpa that pop up in, even light research, of experiences closer to our modern time:

One is: “The Incredible Life of Tapaswiji Majaraj, 1770-1955. Born a prince in a Sikh kingdom in northern India, Tapaswiji Majaraj was trained to be a military leader, and assumed the role upon his father’s passing. At the age of 55, he tragically lost all his immediate family, and in his devastation, renounced all worldly possessions. He found a guru, learned many yoga practices, and began to live a severe, austere life. He lived in a cave without food for six years, subjecting his body to extremes of heat and cold, and holding uncomfortable postures for extended periods of time. During one twenty-four year period, he remained standing or walking with his left hand over his head. He spent periods of three, seven, and eight years standing in a single spot. For twelve years he spent six hours a night meditating by a freezing lake wearing only a loin cloth while his disciples poured buckets of frigid water over his head. Those twelve summers he spent six hours each day in the scorching sun, surrounded by a ring of fire.

By the time he reached 100, his body was ruined, partially deaf and blind, bent over at the waist, using a cane to walk, he prepared to die. On his final journey, he met a Yogi who, sensing his spiritual greatness, convinced him to undergo 90 days of kaya kalpa. He emerged looking like a man of thirty, with black hair, new teeth, and a supple, strong body. After returning the favor to the Yogi (90 days of kaya kalpa service), he set out on even more austere practices. Twice more during his long life, he underwent kaya kalpa to rejuvenate his battered body, allowing him to travel, teach, and demonstrate spiritual attainment and detachment to thousands.

At age 185, he demonstrated his final control over his weak, diseased, and wasted body; he momentarily transformed himself into an erect, strong and radiant being, chanted the sacred AUM, and died instantly.”<sup>2</sup>

Here is another brief account, from Dr. Sunil Joshi, in his book on [Ayurveda and Panchakarma](#): “My father told me the story of my great, great grandfather, Shankarji Joshi. Shankarji was a famous vaidya, or Ayurvedic physician, renowned throughout India for his skill in this ancient

healing science. His entire life was dedicated to bringing health to the people of his area, and he did so until he passed on at the age of ninety-six. It was said that by the time he was sixty-eight, he had lost many of his teeth and his vision had weakened. He went away for a period and underwent *kaya kalpa*, an ancient rejuvenation procedure documented by the Ayurvedic texts, which not only restored his vitality and eyesight, but also gave him back his teeth.” 3

These anecdotes compellingly describe a very powerful process of rejuvenation, albeit those who undergo the process are also clearly not your average person, but beings of social stature and, presumably, spiritual attainment. But is this potential opportunity for substantial physical regeneration real? What is *Kaya Kalpa*, and is it indeed “documented by the Ayurvedic texts,” as Dr. Joshi asserts?

### **What is Kaya Kalpa?**

Most every source on *Kaya Kalpa* will define the term for you as “transformation (*kalpa*) of the body (*kaya*).” So I first began searching for the words “*kaya kalpa*” in the main classical Ayurveda texts, the *Charaka Samhita* and *Ashtanga Hridaya*. They were not to be found. I did find detailed descriptions of *Rasayanas* /rejuvenation treatments, which sounded exactly like what I had heard of the *Kaya Kalpa* process. One day at a seminar with renowned Ayurvedic educator and author Dr. Vasant Lad, I asked him: “What is *Kaya Kalpa*?” He responded by quoting a sutra from *Charaka* and translated , “ Rejuvenation therapy is of two kinds, as known to the sages: (i) *kutipravesika* - the important one (greatly beneficial) and (ii) *Vata tapika* – the other (less beneficial).” 4 “*Kaya Kalpa*,” Dr. Lad told me simply, “is *kutipravesika*, with *amalaki rasayana*, for one year!” That is to say, seclusion in a specially-built hut, taking an herbal rejuvenation recipe containing *amalaki* or *amla* (*Emblica officinalis*, one of the ‘three fruits’ in the classic Ayurvedic compound, *triphala*), for a year. Though *Kaya Kalpa*, it turns out, is many things to many people, this simple description gave me a starting point, and seems to give the essence of the process, at least parts of which repeat in most other versions I was to find.

### **Kaya Kalpa and Rasayana (Rejuvenation Therapy)**

*Rasayana*, or Rejuvenative medicine, is one of the main eight branches of Ayurvedic Medicine. Here are the further details of the first type of *Rasayana*, the *kutipravesika* process, from the

Ashtanga Hridaya version. I would come to see similar descriptions repeated in many sources on kaya kalpa (Notice that most of the steps of Purva and Pancha Karma, the detoxification regimens which should be followed before beginning the Rasayana therapy, are included):

“Volume 3. Chapter 39. v.6-7. In a city, at an auspicious place, where articles required are available and which is devoid of too much breeze or other causes of fear, a white house (made white by painting with slaked lime) having three apartments one inside the others; with small openings (door and windows) should be constructed, facing north (or in the north side of the city), free from smoke, sunlight, dust, wild animals, women, idiots, etc. It should be equipped with all the necessary medical equipments (including the medicines) and made clean (by washing, painting, etc.).

v. 8-10. Further, on an auspicious day, after worshipping those who are to be worshipped, he should enter that house (specially built), clean (in body and mind). There he should get purified by purificatory therapies (emesis and purgation), become comfortable (free from diseases) and get his earlier strength. He should lead a life of celibacy, courage, faithfulness, controlling the senses, granting gifts, compassion, truthfulness, and righteous activities; always thinking of divine beings, sleeping and keeping awake in proper manner; be fond/desirous of medicine and speaking pleasant words; such a person should then start consuming medicines.

v. 11-12a. Then the person who has undergone oleation and sudation therapies earlier, should drink hot water with the paste of haritaki, amalaki, saindhava, nagara, vacha, haridra. Pippali, vella and guda; by this he purges without any difficulty.

v. 12b-13. Further, the person who has thus been purified and who has followed by regimen of liquid diet after purification should be given food made with yava only added with ghee for 3,5, or 7 days till the old faeces (lurking inside) gets purified.

v. 14. Having conditioned the alimentary tract in this way, the person should begin to consume that rejuvenatory medicine whichever is found suitable, after considering his habits, etc.” 5

The text then goes on to describe the preparation of various rasayana formulas, including Brahma rasayana (an herbal confection recipe like chyawanprash), and various amalaki and pippali recipes – amalaki is indeed prominent in the recommended rasayanas.

The other type of rasayana described in the texts, Vata Tapika, does not involve seclusion in the hut, but can be done with the patient living out in the world. The Ashtanga Hridaya says:

"v. 143. Kuti pravesha method is suitable only to those who are free of all encumbrances and who afford all the paraphernalia required. For others who do not have these, the best is suryamarutika, or vatatapika.

v. 144. Now will be described medicinal formulae which can be consumed especially by those persons who are prone to be exposed to sun and wind, and which do not cause harm to the body even though deficiencies occur in providing comfort (during the treatment). " 6 (and various other rasayanas are then described.)

This Vata Tapika is the type of treatment the modern practitioners of Kaya Kalpa are providing for the most part, though the extended seclusion seems to have been a key component of the ancient kaya kalpa process. These healers want to bring the rejuvenatory and spiritualizing benefits to the stressed out modern world, but as one practitioner says: "The air and light Kaya Kalpa (vata tapika) is not directed so much at physical rejuvenation, rather at transformation of the emotions, thoughts, and spirit." 2 The intensive seclusion, spiritual rites, and 'drugs' used in the kutipravesika process seem to be what brought about the storied regrowth of skin, hair and teeth. More will be discussed on those 'drugs' later.

### **Siddha Medicine**

Now, we found descriptions of the process, but what about those words, **kaya kalpa**? They seem to come from the Siddha tradition. "Siddha system is one of the oldest systems of medicine in India. The term 'Siddha' means achievement and the 'Siddhars' were saintly figures. Eighteen 'Siddhars' seem to have contributed towards the development of this medical system. Siddha system's literature is in Tamil and it is practiced in Tamil-speaking parts of India. ... This system of medicine developed within the Dravidian culture, which is of the pre-vedic period. The Siddha system is largely therapeutic in nature. ... The principles and doctrines of this system ... have a close similarity to Ayurveda, with specialization in Iatro Chemistry (Rasa Shastra [the preparation of metallic medicines]). 7

Imminent Ayurvedic author, Dr. Bhagwan Dash writes: " 'Siddha' is a Sanskrit term which means 'perfection.' Persons who have accomplished spiritual perfection are also called Siddhas. The southern part of India gave birth to great saints in the distant past and they had great achievements in different fields of art and science. Being part of Indian culture, often the scholarship between the saints of the north and the south was exchanged and therefore it is very

difficult to put a demarcation line between Ayurveda and the system of medicine that was conceived, patronized and propagated by the saints [Siddhas] of South India.

Some of the basic principles of Ayurveda and Siddha systems of medicine are common. However, Siddha ... medicine has made unique and significant contribution to therapeutics and pharmacy. ... The prevention and cure of illness are the basic aims of all systems of medicine. The Siddha system has, in addition, a concern for the immortality of the body. The Siddhas have developed a discipline called Kaya Kalpa designed for longevity with a complete freedom from illness." 8

Another article on Siddha medicine says:

" Siddha medicine was developed by the ancient Tamils, Dravidian people who lived in South India. The early Tamil epics mention poets who were also medical men. In the seventh and 12th centuries A.D. bhakti literature blossomed, so did medicine. This was the period when most famous siddhars lived. Surgery was well developed. Siddha philosophy believes that the aging process can be slowed down, and that a long and healthy life can be achieved. This requires strict daily regimen in terms of diet and medical supplements.

There are two ways of achieving a long and healthy life:

- The use of kayakalpa medicines
- The practice of kalpa yoga

Kayakalpa Medicines:

The word 'kaya' means body and 'kalpa' means stone. The word 'kayakalpa' means sturdy as a rock and ageless. [Here we have a slightly different definition.] Some good kalpa herbs are Ginger (*Zinziber Officinalis*), Kattukai (*Terminalia Chebula*), Amukkura (*Withania somnifera*), Keelanelli (*Phyllathus Niruri*), Date Palm (*Phoenix Dactilyfera*), Seran Kottai (*Semicarpus Anacardium*), Vembu (*Azadiracta Indica*), Tulsi (*Ocimum Sanctum*), Lemon (*Citrus Media Varacida*) and Vilvam (*Aegle Marmelos*).

Kalpa drugs are manufactured from inorganic compounds also. For instance Ayasambeerakarpam is made from certain metals soaked in lime. Ayabringaraja Karpam is made from iron processed in lime juice. Poorna Chandrodayam contains gold, mercury, and sulphur. Kalpa drugs have rejuvenating powers and are believed to retard the aging process.

Kalpa Yoga:

The eight steps of Kalpa Yoga are identical to the eight stages of yoga prescribed by Patanjali.

These are:

1. Iyama (observances) 2. Niyama (restraints) 3. Asana (physical postures) 4. Pranayama (breathing exercises/control of the vital breath) 5. Pratiyakara (withdrawal/detachment of the senses) 6. Dharana (concentration of the mind) 7. Dhayana (sustained meditation) 8. Samadhi (merging of the conscious mind with the Superconsciousness).

The practice of yoga holds the promise of slow aging and a long and healthy life ." 9

### The Siddhars

Many sources refer to the sage Agasthya and his disciples, the "18 Siddhas" or the 'Siddhars' as the progenitors of Siddha medicine and Kaya Kalpa. Tirumoolar and Bhoganathar in particular authored mystical/medical texts and had amazing life stories which have been handed down to us. Bhoganthar, or Bhogar, lived for thousands of years, many of which he spent with his guru getting advanced knowledge and then teaching in China, some say originating many of the Taoist arts as the master "Bo-Yang;" he transmigrated to several bodies, wrote the *Tao Ching* and the *Te Ching* as the poet Lao Tzu, and finally returned to south India for his final attainment of *swarupa samadhi*, the 'golden body.' 10

"In China, he was instructed by Kalangi Nathar (his guru) in all aspects of the Siddha sciences. These included the preparation and use of the kaya kalpa herbal formulae to promote longevity. ... In his poem *Bhogar Jnana*, sutra 8, verse 4, he describes vividly what happened after carefully preparing a tablet using thirty-five different herbs:

With great care and patience I made the (kaya kalpa) tablet and swallowed it:

Not waiting for fools and skeptics who would not appreciate its hidden meaning and importance.

Steadily I lived in the land of the parangis (foreigners) for twelve thousand years, my fellow!

I lived for a long time and fed on the vital ojas (sublimated spiritual energy)

With the ojas vindhu I received the name, Bhogar:

The body developed the golden color of the pill:

Now I am living in a world of gold.

(based upon translation by Yogi S.A.A. Ramaiah, 1979, p.40-42).

"He chose three of his best disciples and his faithful dog, and took them to the top of a mountain. After first offering a tablet to the dog, the dog immediately fell over dead. He next offered it to his leading disciple, Yu, who also immediately fell over dead. After offering it to the two remaining

disciples, who by this time were extremely nervous, and who promptly hid their tablets rather than swallow them, Bhoganathar swallowed the remaining tablets and also fell over unconscious. Crying with grief, the two remaining disciples went down the mountain to get material to bury the bodies. When the disciples returned to the spot where the bodies had been left lying, all that was found was a note, in Bhoganathar's handwriting, which said:

The kaya kalpa tablets are working. After awakening from their trance, I restored faithful Yu and the dog. You have missed your chance for immortality. (Ibid.)" 11

Bhogar was cited as convening a meeting of the Siddhas *before* he went to China, when he was already an advanced yogic adept in Kriya Kundalini Pranayam, in 3102 BC, and was still advising temple builders in Tamil Nadu in 900 AD. He met and became the teacher of Kriya Babaji Nagaraj, the guru of the Kriya yoga lineages, in around 211 AD. 12

### **Indian Alchemy/ Rasayana /' Rasa Shastra'**

The Siddha adepts and hereditary lineages coming after spent generations developing those 'secret' methods of preparing medicines fit for human consumption - and indeed for healing and life extension - from inorganic metals and minerals. This brings us to the alchemical connection of Kaya Kalpa. We heard above that one of the unique aspects of Siddha medicine is its specialization in Iatro Chemistry, or Rasa Shastra – the art and science of converting metals and minerals into non-toxic, consumable 'drugs.' These metallic medicines, usually in the form of bhasmas or calcinated ashes, are another of the areas of ayurveda considered "mystical" by some, and associated with kaya kalpa and the Siddhas.

One of the most well-known modern day practitioners of Kaya Kalpa, Dr. Raam Pandeya, has as his website and business name: "Kaya Kalpa – The Alchemy of Enlightenment, " and I heard anecdotally from yogi friends that his treatments were very powerful, and especially "the minerals" he gave were described to me as "consciousness altering." In Dr. Pandeya's documentary film on Kaya Kalpa 13 we hear from some of the Siddha vaidyas and ancient yogic adepts , as well as from Dr. Pandeya's clients, about kaya kalpa , the herbal/metallic medicines, and their transformational effects. This gave me the idea of searching on "Alchemy," which interestingly, led me to many of my sources for this paper.

"Alchemical ideas dominate Siddha medicine. Although alchemy was not the primary aim ... , they wanted to evolve drugs that could arrest the decay of the body. But this could not be achieved by drugs which themselves are subject to decay such as drugs of vegetable origin. Thus, the

preparation of drugs of metal and mineral origin that do not lose their potency with the lapse of time. ... Some of the methods used by the Siddhas still survive under a veil of secrecy. Certain mercury and arsenic compounds are manufactured only in certain families and the methods are a closely guarded secret." 14

Does this Indian Alchemy have the techniques for turning base metals into gold, like the medieval European alchemy we hear most about in the West? It would seem that it does, and indeed may have been the origin of that later alchemy. But again, this was not the aim of the Siddha's alchemical achievements, rather a step on the way, a test even, for making the metals into immortality medicines.

In Indian alchemy: or Rasayana by Dr. Mahdihassan, in the Foreword by Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, we find that : " the alchemical perspective has been directly concerned on the one hand with minerals, metals, and aurification, and with all that gold symbolizes in the natural domain. On the other hand it has also been closely associated with the question "immortality" and "longevity" and ultimately with the acquiring of the "body of gold" or "diamond", which is also the goal of initiatic techniques. .... Indian alchemy has a much more ancient history than imagined until now and ... it is in fact closely related to certain forms of Yoga, especially Tantrism, with which it became closely associated later, to the extent that the power to perform alchemical transmutation came to be considered as one of the siddhis of the Yogis." 15

And Dr. Mahdihassan later states: "Rasayana or Indian Alchemy essentially [is] geriatrics and closely bound to the life of ascetics in the wilderness... . There has been without doubt a relationship from the beginning between initiatic and spiritual practices on the one hand and the external "substances" used to attain health, longevity and immortality on the other... . The science of alchemy .. is concerned at once with the cosmos and the soul, with minerals and plants, and finally with the healing art ... and deals ultimately with man himself as a substance that is to be transmuted and made worthy of the immortality for which he is destined through his own theomorphic nature." 16

And again we have that prolific author, Dr. Bhagwan Dash, writing in Alchemy and Metallic Medicines in Āyurveda on the processing of mercury into gold as a test:

" Alchemy, according to Indian tradition, is not an end in itself. It is only a means. The actual intention of processing mercury is to administer it for the preservation and promotion of positive health of the individual so that he can practice different religious rites unhindered for a sufficiently

long period to achieve *jivan mukti* i.e. salvation from the bondage of the world while remaining alive. To ascertain the suitability of mercury for administration to an individual, it is tested over raw (unprocessed) mercury and other base metals. If it is capable of transmutation of ordinary mercury into gold, then it is considered to be suitable for administration to the individual. This method is still in practice secretly by saints who are adept in this science. In 1949, a saint by name Pt. Krisna Lala Sharma demonstrated this method before a gathering of national leaders.”

17

And further Dash describes the actual processing of mercury that is done in great detail. Here is just some of the initial overview: ... “for the treatment of ordinary diseases, only eight *samskaras* (stages of processing) are considered to be enough. But to make it more potent for curing obstinate and otherwise incurable diseases and to make it more effective for the purposes of rejuvenation (*rasayana*) which results in longevity leading to salvation while alive (*jivan-mukti*), mercury should be subjected to eighteen stages which taken together are called *astadasa samskara*.

*Deha sidhi* (perfection of the body and mind of the individual) is the primary aim of using processed mercury. [The first testing phase of] examining the processed mercury by the transmutation of base metals into noble metals is called *lauha sidhi* (perfection in achieving transmutation of metals).” 18

Other sources such as Zvelebil's [The Siddha Quest for Immortality](#) give a concise list of the phases of the Kaya Kalpa process in the Siddha tradition, of which the alchemical metallic medicines are only one and indeed the least common therapy :

“The *kayakarpam* ( or kaya kalpa) treatment consists in the following steps:

1. Preservation of vital energy by influencing internal secretions and blood circulation through controlled breathing and Yoga practice.
2. Conservation of male semen and female secretion, to use it in regenerating processes.
3. Use of a ‘universal’ salt known as muppu / muppuu, prepared by special processes to induce rejuvenation.
4. Use of (calcinated) powders prepared from metals and minerals, such as mercury, sulphur, gold, mica, copper, iron, etc.

5. Use of drugs prepared from herbs.

This last step (5) is the one most often employed, as it is the safest, and these drugs are relatively easily obtained, whereas step (4) is most risky, and hence it's 'secrets' are relatively well and jealously guarded. " 19

And more on the herbal medicines: "Each Siddha author and each Siddha physician and healer has his own kayakalpa plant. Tanvantiri (cf. Tanvantiri Vailtiyam) mentions Indian gooseberry (emblic myrobalan), aloes, root of vilvam (bael, Crataeva) etc.; Pokar talks of asparagus, aloes, root of bael, etc.; Tirumular mentions fresh and dry ginger; Teraiyar prefers lime fruit, holy basil, margosa, etc.; and a text known as Nanacastirattirattu speaks of five plants which purify the body and induce rejuvenation (among them cloves, pepper, and cumin). As mentioned above, these remedies, while considered powerful, are relatively harmless and without side-effects, and may be tried by anyone." 20

### **Merging of Kaya Kalpa and Rasayana Therapies**

So we have seen that the Kaya Kalpa process of seeking longevity and immortality of the physical body, in order to attain spiritual perfection, originated with the Siddhas. They also developed alchemical processes to make 'magic' salts and metallic medicines to further the effect of the herbal ones and the yogic techniques first developed for the kaya kalpa process. Those herbal medicines and yogic techniques were also some of the main Rasayanas or rejuvenative methods of Ayurveda, as the two systems overlapped and merged over time. Eventually we see writers referring to Kaya Kalpa, Rasayana, the herbal medicines and the metallic medicines interchangeably in the same texts, all referring to rejuvenative practices. A wonderful example is found in the writings of another very prolific Indian author, Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, who was a medical doctor before taking holy vows. He refers to Kaya Kalpa in his books Raja Yoga, Hatha Yoga, Practice of Nature Cure, Bazaar Drugs, Practice of Ayurveda and in one actually entitled Kaya Kalpa (one of the three books I found references to with that title, none of which I could lay my hands on – ah, the elusive Kaya Kalpa!).

In Practice of Ayurveda, Swami Sivananda holds that " Rasayana treatment which confers Kaya Kalpa comes under Ayurveda. " 21 He then devotes a chapter to the subject in his usual zippy style – a great summary with interesting details as well. Here are some highlights:

"Ayurveda shows you the way to attain a high standard of health, vim, vigour, vitality and longevity. It solves the riddle of old age. It helps you to preserve the youth. It gives a scientific description of the process of rejuvenation, Kaya Kalpa.

Chyavana and other sages of yore who had a broken and debilitated constitution on account of old age, renewed their vigour of life and lived for countless years by undergoing Kaya Kalpa treatment.

Chyavana prepared a confection out of various herbs and took it. That herbal preparation is known by the name Chyavanaprash which is still used by the people of India. Mandavya Rishi who lived in the Vindhya mountains took an Elixir. He got perpetual youth through the use of drugs.

... Kaya Kalpa is that form of treatment which restores the aged and debilitated body to its pristine youth and vigour, re-establishes the full potentialities of the senses and gives good health. Kaya Kalpa adds new life to years and new years to life.

Kaya Kalpa restores the natural balance to Vatha, Pitta and Kapha, brings the functions of Saptadhatus to a normal condition and cures many incurable diseases. Kaya Kalpa should be conducted under the expert guidance of a very competent Ayurvedic physician.

The life-long accumulation of various poisons in the system causes decay, old age, and death. Therefore one should take recourse to Pancha Karma for purifying the body before he begins Kaya Kalpa treatment.

#### Forms of Kalpa Treatment

Kuti Pravesika Kalpa: One remains in a dark cell. He lives on black cow's milk alone. He should not take shave. He should not touch cold water. He lives in seclusion. He is cut off from friends and society. This gives complete rejuvenation." 22

Swamiji goes on, much like the classic texts, to detail many rasayana recipes, except that he calls them all 'Kalpas.' An interesting one: "Somalata Kalpa: This process is a difficult, delicate and drastic one. The patient becomes unconscious for some days. The skin peels off. He comes back to consciousness and becomes a blooming youth." 23 (We will look further at the mysterious 'Soma' drug later on.)

Now we can see how the Siddha concepts around Kaya Kalpa have been integrated in the popular mind with Ayurveda and Rasayana, as Sivananda then devotes a separate chapter to Rasayana, and here is where he includes the mercury and metallic medicines, and talks about immortality :

" The Rasayana Treatment.

...According to this treatment, old age is a disease. This needs to be treated. Accidental deaths can be avoided. Life can be continued indefinitely through Rasayana treatment. ....

Rasayana treatment is done through sulphur, mercury, nux vomica seeds, Neem, Haritaki, and Amalaka.

The Rasayanas can immortalize the physical body. The Rasayanas keep the physical body healthy and strong for a long time in order to achieve the goal of Self-realisation in this very life. If the body is kept healthy and strong for a long time, the Yogic students have much time to attain the goal. Much time will not be lost in dying and being born again. This is the theory of Rasayanas.

Three distinct processes are described in the Ayurveda to attain longevity and rejuvenation. They are 'Rasaraj Rasayana,' - termed mercury - which has first and foremost place among the ancient therapeutics; 'Rasayana' herbs; and 'Aachara Rasayana.'

*'Eko Aso Rasaraj Shariram-ajara Amara Kurute'* - the only thing that can make the body ever young and immortal is the blessed Rasaraj.

Longevity is also attained through rasayana herbs such as Soma, Nila, Nari, Padma, Hareetaki and Amala. Amala and hareetaki tone the body, give immense strength and virility and make it immune from many diseases. The patient is kept indoor (Kuti-pravesh) or out-door (Vatepik).

"Aachara Rasyana" or rejuvenation and longevity through the practice of Yama and Niyama or right conduct ... is another kind of treatment by the Yogins and sages." 24

Sivananda also mentions the age requirements stipulated in the texts for rasayanas:

"According to the Sushruta the rasayana treatment should be performed on the subject either in youth or in the middle age. It will not bestow the desired results, if it is performed when old age or decrepitude has already set in." 25

This seems to be the one clear distinction I can find between Rasayanas and Kaya Kalpa, in that, in the old stories, at least, the Kaya Kalpa process was specifically used for the elderly and physically worn-out spiritual aspirant who wanted a new lease on life, in order to continue his quest for enlightenment.

## **'Soma'**

'Soma' is a mysterious plant elixir, or perhaps group of plants, that is referred to a number of times in the classical texts, and whose actual identity is now unknown and pondered over by many commentators. In The Alchemical Body, Siddha Traditions in Medieval India, researcher David Gordon White quotes the classic texts on the kutipravesika process, describing the structure of the womb-like, three-chambered hut. Then the text goes on to describe the *soma* therapy:

"The soma plant brought into the kuti ... (is) cut with a gold implement, and (its) milk collected in a golden cup. With one dose of soma milk in the kuti, a person passes through several severe states of cleansing in about ten days, and then begins to grow as quickly again. On successive days in the first week, he vomits, purges, and emits fluids ... . His hair, nails, teeth, and skin fall off and are soon regenerated. But before the regeneration begins, he is a ghastly sight .... Very soon the skin of the man begins to grow normal ... . For some time, the person thus has to be nursed through all the growing stages of a new-born babe: oil smearing, bathing, feeding, and putting to sleep in a soft bed. Before the close of the first month, the person begins to develop a new set of teeth ... . After some more time his old hair is removed and then he develops a luxuriant growth of jet black hair.

Later still ... exposure is practiced as in the case of a child – he is carefully and gradually taken from the innermost room of the kuti into the second enclosure, then into the third, and finally into the open sun and air, all in the course of about thirty days. After nearly three months or more ... he may be in a fit condition to go about in the world. " 26

As to the identity of this mysterious and powerful plant, a typical passage from History of Indian Medicine states:

"In the Rg Veda Soma is the juice of a milky climbing plant (*Asclepias acida*) extracted and fermented to form a beverage, liked by the gods and priests. ... the soma or moon plant is said to be produced on the Mujavat mountain. The juice is described as sweet, pungent flavored and exhilarating. ... It is said to confer immortality. The plant has been identified as *Acido Asclepias*. Some consider it to be *Semitia Genia*, while others think it to be *Sarcostema Viminalis*. But the Vedic plant is still unknown." 27

## Modern Kaya Kalpa Therapies

So now we are back full circle, to the description of an intensive herbal therapy in the seclusion of the kuti. But the evolution of Kaya Kalpa since those ancient times has brought us ' Kaya Kalpa' rejuvenative processes that may be in seclusion or not, may be herbal or metallic/mineral, may involve yogic and spiritual practices, or all the above. As mentioned earlier, the modern practitioners of Kaya Kalpa for the most part are providing Vata Tapika treatments, for people out in the world. There are reportedly still some practitioners of the ancient forms of kaya kalpa practicing in relative secrecy in India, and they are not listed on the web! One surmises that the serious seeker would probably find them. We will instead look briefly at the treatments offered today by two well known Ayurveda and Kaya Kalpa teams here in the United States: Dr. Raam Pandeya and his associates, and Drs. Light and Bryan Miller.

Light and Bryan Miller studied Kaya Kalpa therapy under Dr. Pancha Bai Chotay of Mumbai, India, who was Dr. Anne Wigmore's teacher for wheatgrass therapy and was also an attending physician to Mahatma Ghandi during some of his famous fasts, and who at the writing of an article on Kaya Kalpa by Bryan Miller some years back was still practicing at the age of 117. On the Miller's website their three to four hour Kaya Kalpa treatment is described:

"While maintaining a tantric, connective breath, an herbal paste made from Indian herbs is massaged onto your entire body. The paste draws out impurities while re-vitalizing the skin and brings emotions to the surface. After the paste is dried, it is removed by further body work that reaches deep holding patterns. Skin brushing completes the stimulation and cleansing. Special herbal oil is formulated and applied by a third massage to nourish and seal the skin.

A steady stream of warm oil is directed onto the area of the third eye for 30 minutes creating ecstatic sensations and expanded awareness. This is shirodhara (or shirodara)

A hot bath is prepared with herbal extracts and essential oils. The recipient enters and performs multiple rounds of Breath of Fire ( Kundalini ) and primal sounds. This creates a fiery state to release unexpressed emotions and fears. Guided Forgiveness Rituals release you from past projections about relationships and creates an opening for new ways of perceiving them. A cooling shower returns the person to the body and initiates divine connectedness, while affirmations refill the mental body.

The patient is dried and placed in a cocoon of sheets and blankets. The chakras (energy centers) are anointed with the most powerful and spiritual of essential oils while a deep meditative breath is maintained.

A restful state of bliss is obtained that can carry over for the next few days, weeks even months in everything planned and performed. After the treatment, one is at rest from 2 to 5 hours." 28

The elements of breath techniques, herbal medicines (topical), and the cocooning in the sheets at the end, echo the ancient form of treatment. The treatment is recommended to be combined with Panchakarma detoxification, and also suggested as appropriate only to those with a spiritual practice and some breathwork experience.

Dr. Raam Pandeya is from a family lineage of Ayurveda and Kaya Kalpa practitioners. His treatments are very similar to the Millers (in fact Light Miller briefly studied with him), except that he places an emphasis on the use of alchemical herbo-mineral (metallic) medicines that he obtains from those secret family lineages in India and uses, both in the *alepa* or body paste used during the hands-on treatment, and in the rasayana supplements given to patients to take afterwards. Some words from his website:

"An applied alchemy, Kayakalpa frees the vital energy by purifying and nurturing the body, mind and psyche with specific medicinals and therapies. In this process, the regenerative powers within are awakened, creating a magnetic and vibrant being whose consciousness is transformed for the fulfillment of their life purpose." 29

Dr. Pandeya offers a Kayakalpa practitioner training, one module of which is

"Applied Alchemy - Here we will discuss the therapeutic principles, composition, preparation and application of ethno- botanic herbo- mineral pharmacopoeia and alchemical compounds in Kayakalpa." 30

### **Conclusion**

Kaya Kalpa therapy, always used for rejuvenation and increased longevity, has however, transformed over the years: from a highly secretive, selective, and intensive treatment first developed by saintly adepts who used it to immortalize their physical bodies; next to the still intensive treatment reserved for those high-status or highly-evolved individuals deemed worthy of life-extension; to the modern-day where "Kaya Kalpa" seems to have become a buzz word for any

kind of rejuvenative therapy or product. These include everything from the body treatments and medicines offered by hands-on practitioners, to breathing exercises and postures of various schools of "Kalpa Yoga," to 'Kaya Kalpa' websites offering aromatherapy, body oils, herbs and allied products. Several organizations offer training as Kaya Kalpa practitioners, including Dr. Pandeya's. When I first looked up the subject in around 2002, there were around 500 "Kaya Kalpa' Google references; now, there are over 2,000. This explosion of interest is a reflection of the fact that more and more of the members of our modern society are feeling stressed-out, disease-prone and spiritually-disconnected, and are looking to these ancient Ayurveda and Siddha systems of natural healing and spiritual wisdom to increase both longevity and quality of life. And for those rare seekers who have set themselves the goal of enlightenment in this lifetime, there just may be some still-viable ancient techniques out there, if they look hard enough and prepare well enough, to help them on their way.

OM KRIYA BABAJI NAMA OM!

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