

Ayurvedic Perspectives on Selected Pathologies

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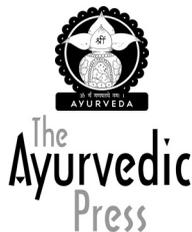
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Ayurvedic Perspectives on Selected Pathologies

*An Anthology of Essential Reading
from Ayurveda Today
Second Edition*

by
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Anthology Compiled by Vasant D. Lad
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Albuquerque, New Mexico

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Chapter I

Causative Factors of Āma

Fall 1999, Volume 12, Number 2

उष्मणोऽल्प बलत्वेन धातुमाद्यमपाचितम् ।
दुष्टमामशयगतं रसमामं प्रचक्षते
वाग सु १३६२५

Ushmano 'lpa balatvena dhātum ādyama pāchitam
Dushṭam āmashaya gatam rasam āmam prachakshate

The first dhātu (rasa) which by the weakness of the (digestive) fire remaining uncooked and becoming vitiated accumulates in the stomach and small intestine is known as āma.

Vāg. Su. 13.25

THESE SUTRAS DESCRIBE the formation of *āma* in the body and mind. You should learn this first *sūtra* by heart. The first line of the *sūtra* means: because of the low, inner fire, *āhāra rasa*—the food precursors of all subsequent *dhātus*—remains *apachita*, remains undigested, unprocessed and raw.

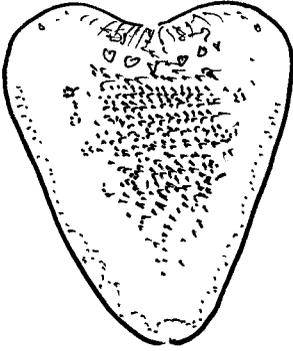
In the second line of the *sūtra*, the raw, unprocessed *āhāra rasa*, which is disturbed by *āma*, goes into the *āmāshaya*, the stomach. The drawing on the next page illustrates the lesser curvature of the stomach and its blood vessels as well as the greater curvature and its many blood vessels. Also shown are *jāthara agni* and the thoracic duct or chyle duct which

contains *ādyām apachitam rasam*, the undigested food precursors. *Ādyām apachita rasa* refluxes back into the stomach through the blood vessels because of low *agni*. This means that *āma* formation takes place when the end product of previously eaten food contains materials that have not been fully digested. This end product, whether fully digested or not, is the food precursor for the *dhātus*. This food precursor is the *ādyāhāra rasa* which is not digested completely or processed properly because of low *jāthara agni*. Because it is

ushmano: ushma means heat referring to inner heat, fire, agni
'lpa: 'lpa means low, little, scanty
balatvena: by the strength
dhātum: the tissue
ādyāma: the first; first dhātu, the rasa
pachitam: undigested, unprocessed, unassimilated
gata: to go
rasam: it goes to the rasa dhātu
āmāshaya: stomach
chaksa: to look
prachaksa: means not only looking but knowing

undigested, it is called āma which is *dushtam*—disturbed—by quality. Translating the entire sūtra: *Because of the low inner fire, the first food precursors of the dhātus remain unprocessed. Those disturbed, unprocessed, raw food precursors then enter the stomach instead of going to feed the dhātus, at which point they are called āma.*

This first sūtra is one of the beautiful definitions of āma. It puts emphasis on jāthara agni, the gastric fire. Because of the low strength of inner fire, agni, the first āhāra rasa remains undigested and disturbed. That undigested and disturbed āhāra



A white coating on the tongue indicates āma in the gastrointestinal tract.

rasa enters back into the stomach for further digestion because the tissue does not accept and cannot process anything raw. This is the intelligence of the body. This is the reason a person's tongue looks coated. Before eating look at your tongue in the mirror. If the tongue is coated because of āma, that means undigested, unprocessed *rasa* is regurgitating back into the stomach. You should not eat if your tongue is coated. That is going against the intelligence of the body. Modern medicine does not give any importance to a white coating; they say do not worry, it is there. However, Ayurveda says this is the root cause of all disease; that disease is born out of āma. That is why disease is called *āmaya*. It means that which is born out of āma.

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आमं अन्नरसं केचित् केदित्तु मल संचयं ।
प्रथम दोष दुष्टिं च केचित् आमं प्रचक्षते ॥

Āmam annarasam kechit kedittu mala sanchayam
Prathama doṣa duṣṭim cha kechit āmam pracakshate

According to some, accumulated wastes are āma but, according to others, undigested ahara rasa is āma and according to others the previously disturbed dosha is called āma.

अनाम

Anon.

The second definition is more complete. This sūtra is not in the classical texts; it is from an enlightened master, *kechit*. Kechit can even be translated as “someone” or “some authority.” *Amam* is āma and *anna rasam* means undigested food juice. Therefore, according to an authority, āma is undigested food juice. That is the whole meaning of this first phrase, *amam annarasam kechit*. The second phrase, *kedittu mala sanchayam*, means that when a person does not sweat properly, then this unexpressed sweat will make the body impure. If a person does not urinate for three days then non-eliminated urine will make the body impure. It is the same if a person does not defecate for four or five days, those constipated feces make the body impure. When the *malas* stay in the body for too long they

Chapter 6

The Concept of Cancer in Ayurveda

Fall 2005, Volume 18, Number 2

Tumors and Tissue Irregularities

IN AYURVEDIC LITERATURE, a detailed description is given of various types of tumors. Terms such as *gulma*, *granthi*, *utseda* and *arbuda* are used for specific tumor conditions.

A growth, enlargement or cluster is called *gulma*, which is specifically used to indicate a tumor. *Gulma* is a benign tumor that has defined borders. There are many types of *gulma*. For instance, *rakta gulma* means a fibroid tumor, or even a fatty tumor. *Māmsa gulma* is a tumor arising from the muscle tissue. *Vāta gulma* refers to diverticulosis or accumulated gases in the colon. It creates localized bunching, which moves from one part of the abdomen to another.

Granthi is the name given to a glandular tumor. *Rasa granthi* is a lymphoid tissue tumor arising from the lymphatic system (*rasa dhātu*). *Meda granthi* means lipoma, which takes place in *meda dhātu*, in the fatty tissue. *Jatru granthi* means a thyroid tumor, while *yakrut granthi* is a tumor arising from the liver or gall bladder and *kloma granthi* is a tumor of the pancreas.

The Sanskrit word *utseda* means bulging, referring to any kind of localized bulging underneath the tissue.

Finally, *arbuda* is a malignant tumor or cancerous growth. That means an uncontrolled growth of abnormal tissues, due to low *dhātu agni*, which is related to damaged nucleic acid within the healthy tissues—either locally or spread throughout the body. *Arbuda* can occur in the breast, prostate, lungs, colon or elsewhere in the body. The description of *arbuda* in Ayurvedic literature gives us a detailed picture of malignant tumors or cancer.

Cellular Dynamics

According to Ayurveda, the cancer disease process happens at the subtle cellular level, called *ati anu srotas*. *Agni* is metabolic activity and there are thirteen main types of *agni*. *Jāthara agni* is the gastric fire, which governs gross digestion, absorption, assimilation and transformation of food into micro chyle. *Bhūta agni* is present in the liver and

governs subtle molecular digestion of food into the five elements: Ether, Air, Fire, Water and Earth. It is this molecular digestion that is affected by arbuda. Every tissue also has its own agni component, called dhātu agni, which refers to the enzymes and amino acids that govern tissue nutrition and cellular metabolic activity. The seven dhātus (tissues) are rasa (plasma), rakta (blood), māmsa (muscle), meda (fat or lipids), asthi (bones and cartilage), majjā (bone marrow and nerve tissue), and shukra (male reproductive) or ārtava (female reproductive tissue).

At the cellular level, each cell is a center of awareness, a conscious microscopic life. Every cell has cellular integrity and governs its own metabolic activity. There is a flow of communication from one cell to another, which is called prāna. *Tejas* is responsible for cellular metabolic activity and *ojas* governs immunity. These three (prāna, tejas, ojas) are the factors that control reproduction of arbuda at the cellular level.

Arbuda has its own tejas and it can produce new blood vessels (*sirā*) as part of the process of angiogenesis. Arbuda also has its own perverted prāna, which absorbs nutrients. It can produce agni (enzymes) and, with the help of prāna, it can invade the circulatory system and find a place to grow. Arbuda can also stimulate its own proteins to grow and multiply. It demands increased metabolic output; as a result, there is often severe weight loss in the patient.

The Role of Ahamkāra

Why does a normal, healthy, life-maintaining cell become so crazy? That is a key point. According to Sankhya's philosophy of creation, *Purusha* is the conscious principle and *Prakruti* is primordial matter and creative potential. The first expression of Prakruti is *Mahat*, which is intelligence. Next comes *ahamkāra*, the 'I' former. Ahamkāra is a central energy field that is present in every substance, and it maintains that thing's form, shape, color, and consistency. For the past millions of years, mango seeds have never forgotten to produce mango trees, mango flowers, and mango fruits. The ahamkāra (or 'I' former) of the mango governs the specific forms of the tree, flower and fruit that are produced from the seed.

Ahamkāra is the energy that is responsible for the creation of all forms and the specific arrangement of their molecules. If we look at the human body, at the time of fertilization, a single sperm fertilizes a single ovum and mitotic division happens. Each cell is divided into two and continues multiplying to eventually create the beautiful form of a human mammal. What is true with the human being is also true in the rest of the animal and plant kingdoms. This philosophy of creation is applied at the cellular level. Every cell has definite form and functions, and the structure of the cell is maintained by cellular ahamkāra. Therefore white blood cells have a certain form, red blood cells have a typical form, the platelets and multiple nucleated muscle cells have specific forms, and so forth. These are all maintained by ahamkāra.

Ahamkāra can be called self-esteem. We all have this self, ego, 'I' or me. We all have consciousness, but it is the consciousness of millions and trillions of selves. Ahamkāra is the collective consciousness of trillions of cell bodies. There is some deep connection between ahamkāra at the gross physical level and at the cellular level. Disturbed ahamkāra can create a severe distortion of the physical body and individual identity. If someone

doesn't have self-esteem and self-respect, that person may become depressed or have an inferiority complex, and he or she will become sad and miserable. That will slowly affect the immune system and the person's metabolism, distorting the whole psychosomatic identity.

Arbuda Pūrva Rūpa: Warning Signs of Cancer

Cancer is a silent enemy in the beginning, with few signs and symptoms. The following is a list of the prodromal signs and symptoms of arbuda or cancer.

Malāvashṭambha means repeated chronic constipation or absolute constipation. Changes in bowel habits are quite common after age 65, but if such a person does not have a bowel movement even after taking triphalā, one should think about cancer of the rectum as a possibility. It is helpful to do a colonoscopy just to rule out cancer.

Mūtra krichra means a change in bladder habits, repeated urethritis, or cystitis.

Rakta gama means bleeding. Say children are playing and a child who receives a pinch to the skin suddenly develops a balloon-like hematoma; that is an early sign of cancer. Rakta gama are bleeding disorders. One can rule out cancer when there are repeated attacks of bleeding from the nose, the ear, the vagina or the rectum.

Srava is a foul smelling discharge from a wound.

Kāthinya granthi means thickening of a tumor.

Avipāka is chronic indigestion, which is another preliminary symptom (pūrva rūpa) of cancer.

Sakashta anna pravasha means difficulty in swallowing. If a person feels like they have swallowed some food but it is stuck near the heart area, and especially if such a person is elderly, one can think about the possibility of cancer and encourage the person to have it checked out.

Tivra kāsa is a nagging cough that doesn't respond to cough syrups. A nagging cough can be due to cancer of the lungs.

Svāra bheda means hoarseness of voice. A hoarse voice is due to dryness of the vocal cords and it is an important sign of cancer that is due to depletion of ojas. This may indicate a malignant tumor in the vocal cords, or a tumor elsewhere in the body. It is more common in the case of someone with a history of smoking. However it can also be a sign of pandu, which means anemia. In that case, the person looks fair and has low energy levels.

Arbuda granthi is a hard nodular mass. This is another pūrva rūpa that can occur in a person who has developed cancer.

Deha laghutā means extreme, severe weight loss. It is another warning sign of cancer.

The same thing is true at the cellular level. Each cell has its own self-esteem and self-importance and, if the cell membrane is clogged with āma, there is poor communication. Such a cell is an isolated cell that becomes lonely. A lonely cell starts to act independently, producing its own enzymes and its own agni. That cell goes on growing independently and, as a result, it becomes malignant. These arbuda cells have a distorted self and hyperactive metabolism, demanding more metabolic output and attacking their neighboring cells. They convert neighboring cells into cancerous cells.

Not every disease noticeably undergoes the standard process of samprāpti (pathogenesis) in its ordinary sequence. The cellular factors and pathological changes that occur in cancer may not appear to follow this process, yet they do. At the cellular level, there is

Chapter 8

Celiac Disease with Reference to Grahani Roga

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CELIAC DISEASE (ALSO CALLED CELIAC SPRUE) is a chronic intestinal malabsorption disorder. It is caused by intolerance to foods that are rich in gluten, or more specifically to gliadin and gliadin-like protein fractions in wheat, rye, barley and possibly oats. Most people call these gliadin and gliadin-like proteins gluten.

The word sprue comes from the Dutch word ‘spruw,’ which means mouth blisters. These were highlighted by the Dutch physician Vincent Ketelaer as a noticeable symptom of celiac disorders in 1669, almost three centuries before a reaction to gluten was found to be the cause of celiac disease. Note that tropical sprue is an infectious disease, due to bacterial infection. It is different from celiac disease and gluten sensitivity.

Ayurveda categorizes this disorder as being due to an imbalance of agni. Celiac disease falls under *grahani roga*, because *grahani* is the name for the small intestine. Grahani is the container, while agni is the content. If one is affected, the other is also bound to be disturbed.

The functional unit of the small intestine is the villus. The intestinal villi hold food molecules during the digestive process. If agni is strong, the villi are strong and healthy. They maintain their tone, coordination, and rhythmic movement, and correctly perform their actions in the process of digestion, absorption, and assimilation.

When there is agni imbalance, the functioning of the villi are affected and the person can get either gluten enteropathy or non-tropical celiac sprue. Any food substances that are heavy, fatty, and gross can suppress agni. Gluten is gross, heavy, sticky, dull, and oily in nature, so it can cause low agni and result in the production of āma.



According to Ayurveda, cellular agni maintains cellular intelligence and selectivity. In cases of a chronic agni disorder, the bodily cells lose their intelligence, which affects their selectivity. These cells react to gliadin molecules as if they are a bacteria or virus.

Gliadin acts as an antigen. To fight with this antigen, the cells of the intestinal mucous membrane produce antibodies, creating an immune reaction. The aggregation of killer T lymphocytes attacks the neighboring mucous membrane, causing mucosal damage and loss of some of the villi. This leads to poor assimilation and malabsorption of foodstuff. The affected person typically has low iron levels, malabsorption of fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E and K, and possibly dehydration. If gluten is removed from the diet, the patient's health can show noticeable improvement.

After someone with celiac disease eats wheat or another gluten-containing grain, the food enters the small intestine and, once it reaches the jejunum, antibodies in the intestinal wall are stimulated. These antibodies destroy the villi. This is one theory behind celiac disease.

The other theory is that due to a chronic agni imbalance, the undigested gluten acts like a toxin (āma). This āma clogs the channels of the villi and creates a thick coating of toxic matter over the intestinal mucosa, resulting in malabsorption.

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is another form of grahani roga, producing abdominal pain when passing stools as well as bloating, gas, abdominal distension, mucous in stools, and episodes of alternating diarrhea and constipation. More women are affected by this condition than men and there is no weight loss. In IBS, the symptoms disappear when the patient is asleep. This is partly because IBS is sometimes related to a history of sexual or physical abuse. In sprue syndrome or celiac disease, there is usually weight loss and the symptoms are always present.

Diagnosis

Various tests can be performed to determine if someone has celiac disease. A biopsy has historically been the main diagnostic tool. Blood tests taken after eating wheat or other gluten foods can reveal if there is a reaction to gluten as well as whether there are low levels of minerals, vitamins and other nutrients. However, not everyone with gluten intolerance has celiac disease.

The only way to tell if you have celiac sprue is through biopsy and laboratory tests. It is important to rule out other causes of nutritional deficiencies, so consult with a gastroenterologist if you want an accurate analysis.

Ayurveda uses examination of the intestinal pulse to discern whether someone has celiac disease or gluten sensitivity. If the intestinal pulse is extremely feeble, it may mean celiac disease; whereas if it is strong, it can indicate food sensitivity.

Celiac disease has hereditary factors. In certain families, the family members carry a low agni disorder from one generation to another. The affected children may be born with a khavaigunya (defective space) in the small intestine. In such cases, these individuals can often develop gluten sensitivity and may have a genetic predisposition to celiac disease.