

Ayurvedic Perspectives on Selected Pathologies

Other Books by Vasant D. Lad

Ayurveda: The Science of Self-Healing. 1985

The Complete Book of Ayurvedic Home Remedies. 1998

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Strands of Eternity: A Compilation of
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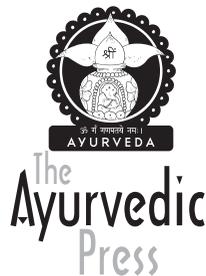
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Ayurvedic Perspectives on Selected Pathologies

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

by
Vasant D. Lad, BAM&S, MASc

Anthology Compiled by Vasant D. Lad
First Edition Compiled by Glen Crowther



Albuquerque, New Mexico

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Chapter 1

Causative Factors of Āma

Fall 1999, Volume 12, Number 2

०धष्मणोऽल्प बलत्वेन धातुमाद्यमपाचितम् ।
दुष्टमामशयगतं रसमामं प्रचक्षते
वाग सु १३.२५

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.

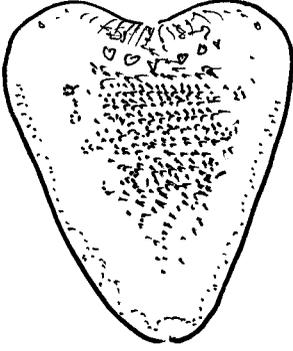
In the second line of the *sūtra*, the raw, unprocessed *āhāra rasa*, which is disturbed by *āma*, goes into the *āmāshaya*, the stomach. The drawing on the next page illustrates the lesser curvature of the stomach and its blood vessels as well as the greater curvature and its many blood vessels. Also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

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

rasa which is not digested completely or processed properly because of low jāthara agni. Because it is 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



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

āhāra 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.

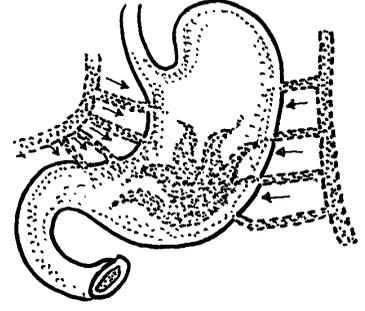
आमं अन्नरसं केचित् केदित्तु मल संचयं ।
प्रथम दोष दुष्टिं च केचित् आमं प्रचक्षते ॥

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 āhāra rasa is āma and according to others the previously disturbed dosha is called āma.

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 consti-



Āma formation due to low agni causes unprocessed micro-chyle to regurgitate back into the stomach.

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

Tumors and Tissue Irregularities

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.

Sakashtha 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.

Tīvra 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 21

Liver Disorders

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ACCORDING TO AYURVEDA, the three doshas, seven dhātus (tissues), and three mala (excreta) govern an individual's unique psycho-physiology. Each dhātu has its own srotas (channel), and generally, each srotas is made up of its related dhātu. For example, rasa vaha srotas governs the functioning of rasa dhātu.

The srotas governs the nutrition of its respective dhātu and the creation of its upadhātu (superior by-product/s) and mala (other by-product/s). For example, the upadhātus of rasa dhātu are stanya (lactation) and rajah (menstruation). The mala is poshaka kapha, and that poshaka kapha nourishes all bodily kapha. Likewise, each srotas has its own unique *sroto mūla* (root), *sroto mārṅa* (passage), and *srota mukha* (opening). In the root of a srotas, there is the *dhātu dhārā kalā*. This *kalā* is a membranous structure that separates two dhātus from one another. For instance, *rasa dhārā kalā* is a membranous structure that governs the functional aspects of the root of rasa vaha srotas. Each sroto mūla also contains the *asthāyi* (immature) *dhātu* and the dhātu's ojas, tejas, and prāna. To take another example, *rakta vaha srotas* has its *mūla*, *mārṅa* and *mukha*. According to Shushruta, the *mūla* of rakta vaha srotas is the liver and spleen. This *mūla* governs the functioning of *rakta dhārā kalā*, and *rakta mūla* contains *asthāyi rakta* and *rakta prāna*, tejas, and ojas.

The liver is called *yakruta* in Sanskrit, while the gallbladder is called *pittāshaya* (the vessel of pitta). *Ya* means to circulate and *kruta* means to create. Hence, *yakruta* can be defined as that which helps to create and distribute āhāra rasa (microchyle). The liver also governs protein, carbohydrate, and fat metabolism. In embryonic life, it is the liver that produces red blood cells. Any red blood cell born into the body of an adult will live for about 120 days. After that time, it will be destroyed in the liver—hence, in this regard, the liver has both creative and destructive functions. Additionally, the liver is both a secretory and excretory organ. It secretes liver enzymes and excretes bile and heavy metals.

Bile

Bile is a complex fluid created from the disintegration of the old red blood cells. It is excreted by the liver and stored in the gallbladder. Bile is essential for life. In the gallbladder, the bile is concentrated ten times more than in the liver, so it is oily and extremely alkaline in nature. The quantity of bile that is produced daily varies from person to person. In people with *vāta prakruti*, it is generally around 500 ml a day, while in pitta types it may be as much as 1000 ml, and in kapha people is around 700 ml per day. The color of the bile is due to rañjaka pitta. In the liver, it is pale green, whereas in the gallbladder it is dark green, because it is more concentrated. However, when that bile comes into the duodenum and mixes with the digestive juices and pancreatic enzymes, it becomes less concentrated and turns yellow.

The taste of bile is bitter. It is oily, liquid, viscous, and slimy. Bile plays an important role in the digestion of fats. Bile salts are present within the bile and these salts act as a buffer to reduce surface tension, so that fat is converted into an emulsion. The surface area of fat is increased, which improves digestion of the fatty substance.

Bile is also a good solvent for splitting enzymes. It improves the absorption of minerals, such as calcium and magnesium, and fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E, and K. Bile also has the important function of excretion. Bile excretes metals such as copper, zinc, mercury, and other toxic heavy metals as well as dead bacteria. Because bile is liquid and oily, it acts like a laxative. Bile in the colon gives the stools a yellowish-brown color and helps mass peristaltic movement and elimination of feces. Bile maintains an appropriate pH balance in the digestive system.

Functions of the Liver

The liver is one of the vital organs. One can live without a spleen; one can live without one kidney, or without testes or ovaries. However, no one can live without a liver. Mother Nature hides the liver under the rib cage. You can say we live due to the liver.

According to Ayurveda, a primary function of the liver is the formation of rañjaka pitta. Rañjaka pitta in the red bone marrow gives the reddish color to red blood cells. This is the same rañjaka pitta as in the liver and stomach, so the liver plays an important role in the formation of red blood cells and nourishing rakta dhātu. The erythrocytic formation of red blood cells is an important function of the liver in an embryo, whereas after birth this is done by the red bone marrow. Blood formation in the fetus is called mesoblastic hematopoiesis and hepatoblastic hematopoiesis. After birth, the rounded ends of the long bones, the femur and humerus, contain red bone marrow, which continues to form red blood cells. The ribs, vertebrae, and flat bones also produce red blood cells. When doing kapāla bhāti prānāyāma, there is a peculiar movement in the ribs and vertebrae, so if you do hundreds of this prānāyāma daily, it will improve blood.

In adults, the liver has a destructive function, as it destroys old red blood cells. From these destroyed red blood cells, the hemoglobin is split into heme and globin. The heme becomes the bile pigment, while the globin becomes globulin and promotes immune functions. Globulin contains a high level of ojas, so the liver produces ojas. This is why a doctor can give a gamma globulin shot to prevent hepatitis.