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Dr. David Frawley

The Ayurvedic Medicine System

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Dr. David Frawley, being in town for a Vedic conference, was gracious enough to speak at the Society's Friday evening meeting on the Ayurvedic system of medicine.

As David said, we need to open our minds to systems that may not be the most familiar to us. So, even though the Vedic systems of astrology use planets, signs, houses and aspects, there is considerable difference between the frameworks of the Vedic and tropical systems of astrology. Because of the similarity in names, it can be quite confusing to think of one and then the other. Some of the underlying principles of the overall Vedic system are as follows:

1. We live in a conscious universe. The underlying factor behind planets, stars and the universe, including ourselves and everything in our world, is consciousness. The Light of Consciousness comes into our beings through the lens of the stars and planets.

2. The Vedic system is based on the law of karma, which is simply Newton's physical law: Every action causes an equal and opposite reaction. But the law of karma applies on all levels. Karma is simply action. There is cause and effect at work. Whatever we set into motion, we experience. Karma is not destiny, fate or lack of free will. We create our own destiny in life. From these two underlying principles, we can derive a couple of corollaries:

Corollary 1: We are free to act, but within the field of natural time. Who we are today is conditioned by who we were yesterday. Tomorrow is conditioned

by yesterday and today. The momentum we have built up in the past will take an equal effort to change. So the faster we are going in our headlong rush in a certain direction, the longer it will take and the more effort will be required to reverse or change that momentum.

Corollary 2: Karma acts within the field of natural law. We are free to put our hand in the fire. But we are not free to put our hand in the fire and not be burned.

Problems exist because of this on the conditioned level of the mind. We cannot simply jump from the depths of depravity to the Highest Consciousness by willing it to be so. We must work and climb the mountain. We may be able to draw on a certain amount of grace to help accelerate our progress, but there is basic work to be done along the way, no matter what.

One of the primary tools for understanding what is required of us, and when, is astrology. This is fundamental to the culture of India, which was developed over a period of 5,000 years based on this knowledge. Only since the time of the British has there been any opposition to the underlying tenets of the Indian culture. But there has never been the kind of overthrow of astrology in India that there was in the West.

The Cosmic Being is in all elements of the universe, including things we regard as inanimate like chairs and rocks. These are simply not really expressing

their life due to their stasis. (Though how many of us have not owned a car or appliance or similar “object” that had a particularly strong personality and set of characteristics. . . .) The Cosmic being taught the Ayurvedic system – the wisdom and knowledge of life. The Vedas are an attempt to understand and express the energies and integrity contained within life. The Vedic system proposes three basic energies: water (kapha), fire (pitta), and air (vata). These basic elements are expressed in the planets: Moon, Jupiter and Venus are water; Sun, Mars and south node of the Moon are Fire; Saturn, Mercury and north node are the Air representatives.

Kapha (water) energy and planets make for a more rounded shape, containing and holding. They tend to be pale and have a soft quality. Pitta (fire) generates more heat in the body. These people may have reddish skin, a powerful digestion, and are more active. They will be of moderate weight. Vata (air) people are more electrical, quick like lightning, changing, nervous, with changeable bodies. They tend to be cold and dry, with the health and energy a little less robust. The skin may be a bit dull.

Even the trans-Saturnian planets fall conveniently into this scheme, even though they were not part of it to begin with. Uranus is obviously vata, air, with its electrical and nervous qualities; Neptune is kapha, water, associated with liquids and their tendency to flow and fill; Pluto is pitta, fire, with the energy and drive associated with this symbol.

Diseases are also classified in the same way. Fiery diseases exhibit infections, fever, redness, heat, blood in evidence, and so on. Air diseases encompass, among others, rheumatism and arthritis (Saturn), weakness of the immune system, retention of toxins. These tend to be the slow, chronic diseases. Watery diseases include all types of fluid retention and edema, weight issues, diabetes, asthma, mucus involvement, discharges that do not involve blood.

The first house covers the body with its congenital situations, deep seated problems, hereditary diseases and factors, etc.

The weak houses, the ones that tend to cause health problems, are the 6th, 8th, and 12th. The 6th tends to be associated with digestive problems, the detoxification of food and weaknesses of the immune system. This is where enemies of the body are found. The 8th is associated with catastrophic illness, accidents, injuries, etc. The 12th house spells out chronic illness. Many planets in the 12th house indicates a lowering of the vital energy. The 12th and 6th form a health axis that, if heavily populated with planets, can show significant health problems. To a reasonable extent, this will depend on the condition of the planets and the houses themselves, but in general, heavy 6th-12th house domiciles reflect weaker constitutions.

The Moon is the emotional nature. If emphasized, the emotions will play a significant part in the health of the individual. Afflictions to the Moon indicate health problems, especially if the Moon is in the 6th or 12th house.

Timing is one of the specialties of the Vedic system. The dashas, or planetary periods, define how long each planet rules the life events. The starting point is calculated from the position of the Moon in its birth nakshatra (mansion, of which there are 27 in the 360° zodiac). Each planet has a specific period of years associated with its dasha, from 6 years for the Sun to 20 years for Venus. If the lord of the 6th house is weak, then its running period is especially likely to be weak, indicating health problems during that time particularly. Note that Mars in the 6th house provides a certain amount of protection and health benefits, useful if the lord of the 6th is weak. From these dashas, we can plot to course of diseases. Transits are also used but only given about one third of the weight of the dashas.

Obviously, as we investigate the possibilities of minimizing the effects of ill health and weaknesses in the chart, we have to recognize that in the end we will all die. So some diseases are effectively incurable. In these cases, the objective of the Ayurvedic practitioner is to recognize this and ameliorate them to the greatest extent reasonably possible. Vedic

astrology is pragmatic in this sense: it helps show how to catalyze the hidden, untapped energies.

Among the processes available to the Vedic astrologer and client is the use of gemstones as a process of shaping energies. Similarly, prayers by those skilled in the appropriate methods, and meditations, mantras, and rituals can all help alleviate the problems. Included in this is the Vedic practice of praying to the deities of the planets. This is not idolatry such as the worship of a statue as though it were the god itself. The objective is to tap into the planet's positive energy and exclude the negative energy that may come from an afflicted planet in the chart.

Ayurveda is mind-body medicine. It recognizes them as interconnected. The food you eat affects your mind and body. Your emotions and thoughts affect your digestive system. The Ayurvedic system defines three kinds of food: physical food, such as we might have for lunch; impressions, such as we might pick up from the negative information coming from television; and associations, the people we associate with on a deep level. All these affect our assimilation in both mind and body.

Astrology reflects the astral or energy body behind the system. A good astrologer can not only see the balance of kapha, pitta and vata in the chart, but also the energy involved in the individual's ability to absorb or reject the negative impressions and associations he may come into contact with. One of the most difficult things in isolating the health factors from the psychological and physical factors.

In looking at the archetypal energy of the planets, we need to recognize it as the same on all planes. Thus the same Sun energy comes through three planes of meaning: Father, Vitality, and Soul. Modern science has developed an exclusive system of logic: a thing is this or that, black or white. But the collective unconscious is inherent in each of us. We innately, if subliminally, know that we are involved with all human beings, all life, all universes, etc. Expansive astrology gives us the ability to discover some things on all levels.

One of the uses of astrology is as support for the Ayurvedic medical system. Timing, focus, body parts, root causes of illness, psychophysical aspects, seriousness, prognosis can all be more clearly seen by use of astrology to supplement the Ayurvedic medical system. We can then develop very comprehensive systems for helping the patient. Ayurvedic medicine works a great deal with regimens. If a patient is heavy in pitta energy, he or she should not go around eating cayenne pepper, walking out at noon in Phoenix in July, etc. The excessive pitta energy needs to be balanced by inputs of a cooling nature. But we all tend to be drawn to the things that are already over-emphasized in our charts. One of the problems is that, in youth, we are relatively unaware of the damage that we are doing. And by the time we realize what we were doing, it is too late to undo it. If you can catch something at the beginning, you can cut it off. If you let it grow, it's hard to root out.

Spiritual practices are also important to the maintenance of balance. The Mars person might be directed to do energetic things relative to a spiritual discipline – learn a vigorous martial art, for instance; the Moon person would be better off meditating and becoming involved with a faith process.

The Vedic system includes Vastu, sacred geometry, geomancy, or Feng Shui. This process of examining the energy in the chart to understand how to design and build the house, office, or other living space provides for improving our surroundings to be supportive of ourselves.

One thing stands out. As a society, we cannot have health on the collective level without honoring the planetary energies. If we ride roughshod over them, as we tend to in our modern world, we leave ourselves unprotected from the negative that can be part of the planetary archetypes.

In the Vedic system, the Ascendant and Moon dominate the chart, being much more powerful than the Sun. The nodes in Vedic are judged to a great extent by the ruler of their sign. The north node is

approximately of Saturn energy, and the south node is of Mars energy. Eclipses occur at the nodes, allowing the transformation of energy. The north node is strong in the 10th, 3rd, 6th and 11th houses. These are expansive, successful houses. The south node is the particular significator of the astrological and occult fields. If the south node is emphasized, it represents a likelihood that the native will become involved in astrology or another occult field. The north node dasha is good for marriage, but those marriages tend not to last. The south node dasha is an introverted, rather withdrawn period. The nodes magnify the energy focused in them.

Conditions that might indicate incurable or untreatable diseases include, but are not limited to,

nor should they be ascribed exclusively to, the following: weakened ascendant and its ruler; weakened Moon and its ruler; Lord of the 1st in the 6th or Lord of the 6th in the 1st, or both. Many other conditions also apply. A bad dasha period (that of a weakened planet, especially Saturn, Mars, or the nodes) in a weak chart provides a pessimistic prognosis. In general, diseases ruled by the nodes tend to be hard to treat and improve. The Vedic astrological system can provide much insight into how to balance the energy of the chart so that the patient has the best chance of recovering or at least maintaining the best energy he can. But it is not a simple process!