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Research Paper and Reflection
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The Spiritual Nature of plants

A manifestation of consciousness and a glimpse at
the wisdom of ancient herbalism to be applied
today

December 6th, 2009

One of the most important things of being an Ayurvedic practitioner or doctor is to be conscious of the great power we are manipulating every time we suggest or use an herb in any of its medicinal presentations: powders, tablets, medicated wines, ghees, oils, etc. Beyond our theoretical knowledge of the herbs, they carry within them millions of years of nourishment and wisdom. Herbs carry tradition, health and magic. Yes, you can call it magic. They are a gift to humanity, a gift that helps us be more in-tuned with our nature and, in this way, healthier and ultimately one with the cosmos.

But what does it mean to be conscious about the power of an herb and how can they help us be one with the cosmos? According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, the word consciousness is a noun that means primarily “the quality or state of being aware especially of something within oneself.” — Oneself, what a big word — According to Ayurveda the existence of the self and everything there is in the universe has two fundamental principles that work in unison: *Purusha*, the Primal Spirit, the seed of consciousness, the soul or *Atman*; and *Prakruti*, the Great Nature, what gives shape, the matter. The essence of the spirit lies in the human body as in any form of nature; the same way the capacity of creating lies within all. This means that consciousness can go beyond reasoning and thought. It also means that we are all connected by an intrinsic intelligence that resides at the core of our existence and manifests from there. With this affirmation, one can say that being aware of oneself or even just a part of it can allow us to be aware of the self that lives within everything else, including the plants. Also in this line of thought, we can say that humans contain within themselves all the information of the elemental, mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms, the same way a plant carries the potential information of a human being (Frawley and Lad, 4).



Image 1 - “*Prakruti and Purusha.*” Ayurveda. *The mantra of niramaya*

“The earth, like a gigantic receptor or radio-station, inhales and exhales stellar and cosmic forces, the absorbed essence of which grows and unfolds as life. These forces are not all material, but include subtle energies of an occult or spiritual nature. Plants transmit the vital-emotional impulses, the life-force that is hidden in light. That is the gift, the grace, the power of plants.” — Frawley and Lad, 4

This also implies that the actions of the plants in our body can directly affect our connection to the *Purusha* and *Prakruti* by a transformation of energy. As the first law of thermodynamics states, energy cannot be created nor destroyed but only transformed. Thus, life is meant for transmission and nourishment between all the forms, and all of us play a key role in the maintenance of this cycle, constantly giving and receiving the same energy in different ways. How incredible it will be to actually be conscious of this energy and how it flows to unfold as life within ourselves and everything around us!

In the book *The Yoga of Herbs*, Drs. Frawley and Lad explain how within the human being lies the underlying structure of the plant. The nervous system in our body is like a human plant. In this way, the external plants can communicate with our internal plant when we intake them, connecting directly to our essence. Plants exist to transform light into life through photosynthesis, the same way humans exist to transform life into consciousness, love, and we do it by perception and awareness of this eternal source. Plants are constantly bringing to us the light and the energy of the universe, of the sun, of all the stars. These cosmic energies received by the plants are then transmitted to us to nourish our astral body. They not only give us the medicinal and nutritional value for our tissues. They also give the love and wholeness of the cosmos to our nervous system, the commander in chief of all our mental, psychological and physical functions, as well as the gateway to achieving higher levels of spirituality, consciousness and enlightenment, according to the great yogis, buddhists, saints and sages of all times (Frawley and Lad, 4).

“In the outer world, a central sun is the source of light and life. In the inner world, a central sun is also the source of life. The inner sun is our true Self, what the ancients called Purusha or Atman. Plants bring us into communion with the energy of the outer sun, while our inner plant, our nervous system, brings us into communion with the inner sun. Establishing the proper link between the outer plant and the inner plant thus completes the circuit of light and life, and establishes the free flow of awareness in which the mind is liberated — unites the sun with the sun, merges the outer and the inner, creates a festival of delight in living.” — Frawley and Lad, 5

Using a plant becomes a communion with the cosmos. Whenever Ayurvedic practitioners or doctors use or suggest herbal remedies, they are awakening the magic, the wisdom of the cosmos, of the outer sun to communicate with our inner sun, trying to align the body with the nature of all natures, to bring it to a state of homeostasis, of true balance, which also entitles an effortless manifestation of health, beauty, peace, service, strength, wisdom and all the beautiful qualities of life. The plants will nourish our nervous system as well as stimulate our perception, our awareness of the cosmic energy and love, helping us achieve our purpose in life, our union with the Self that is within all.

Plants are indeed — magical.

It is common to see in ancient as well as in some modern cultures throughout the world how plants are worshipped for spiritual and medicinal purposes. In India, today, plants are still used in different ceremonies for the gods as well as Ayurvedic medicines, the same way as they are used in some Latin American cultures, especially in shamanistic practices of the Amazon, just to name one. Regardless of the purpose of these rituals and how “spiritual” the practitioners are, the practice shows a deep and powerful connotation that may extend beyond superstition. It is a perception and a belief in the power of the plants that has been passed on by generations, or a recognition that the power within them is not only brought out by just using them. The power is awakened by the experience, the awareness, the communion with them and the energies of the universe.

In the book, *Ayurvedic Secrets of Healing*, Maya Tiwari, also refers to the mythological and religious — the magico-spiritual nature of the plants in Hindu India. According to this belief system, the cosmic memory of the plants is carried by *Gaja*, the sanskrit word for elephants. Hindus believe that elephants bless us by preserving the function of our memory that holds the knowledge of the plants. This preservation occurs on an energetic level, where the subtle vibrations of the elephant’s innate wisdom of the plant life and medicines are transmitted into the memory functions of all other species.



“This transmission happens in the same way the moon may reflect on the surface of a lake, the moon symbolizing the elephant’s memory and the lake representing the human memory receptor. If the moon was removed, there could be no reflection of it in the lake. Likewise, if the elephants were eradicated from the earth, humans could not sustain the knowledge of the plant medicine in their memory bank.” —

Tiwari, 433

Image 2: Base image - Real Astrologers Web site

According to Hindu mythology, each plant holds a psychic feature, just as any other member of any species on the earth. India is filled with sacred and magical origins of animals and plants, and Tiwari lists a few examples in her book as follows: (Tiwari, 433-434)

- 🌸 **The lotus plant:** *considered the cradle of the universe, unfolds from formlessness into resplendent glory. This plant is said to be endowed with the cosmic memory of the universe beginnings in the primordial waters. Its flower is said to have sprung from the navel of Lord Vishnu himself. To imbibe lotus medicine is to have every cell and tissue of the body revel in the luminous nature of the lotus itself.*

- 🌸 **Ashwaganda:** *named after the power and smell of the horses, it is said to impart its intrinsic nature of vitality and expertise to the human body. Known for its virility, Ashwaganda is thought to arouse the memory of potency in every cell of the body.*

- 🌸 **Pomegrante:** *its fruit carries the cosmic memory of prosperity and fertility. Traditionally this fruit is used to purge envy, jealousy and other negative vibrations from the body.*

- 🌸 **Sesame seed:** *it is said to have appeared first when a sweat droplet from Lord Vishnu's body fell to the earth and sprouted into the sesame plant. Soon, the plant put forth beautiful white trumpet shape blossoms. When eaten, sesame seeds are said to invoke the memory of rejuvenation, giving "sneha," lavish love, to the cells and tissues.*

- 🌸 **Ginger:** *it is said to carry the force of the earth's fire deeply into the tissues of the body. Ginger is also called the universal medicine because it is thought to awaken the body's memory of the universe's original fire, when all manifestation transformed into life.*

A Manifestation of Consciousness into the Practice of Today

It all seems to be about retrieving memory, awakening an intrinsic universal intelligence in the essence, in the *Purusha* of the plants. In Ancient India the seers and sages uncovered the wisdom of the plants. “Theirs was not a science of experimentation, but a form of direct participation.” They did not separate themselves and the plants as subjects and objects. They meditated with the plants; they became one with them, understanding the inner and outer suns, practicing therefore, the science of yoga, of union. The plants revealed their secrets to them so they could be passed on to humanity; some of these secrets so subtle that our modern chemical analysis cannot, yet, uncover them. (Frawley and Lad, 5-6)

"My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble mind." — Albert Einstein

The seers of ancient India left detailed information on the nature and application of hundreds of herbs. They left a system of classification of the herbs based on their energetics: *Rasa* (taste), *Virya* (energy), *Vipaka* (post-digestive effect) and *Prabhava* (special effect). They went further on to explain the different means of administration of the herbs and timings according to the needs of the person suffering the imbalance, in powder, decoctions, medicated wines, ghees, oils, tablets, etc. They detailed hundreds of imbalances and illnesses with the appropriate line of treatment. They even have descriptions of diseases that belong to our times, such as autoimmune diseases and AIDS. The sages foresaw how radically humans will be separating themselves from nature, how deeply they will be falling to uncontrollable illnesses as a consequence of a degradation in lifestyle and food habits. Could they have left us this legacy because they also foresaw not all practitioners would be able to get THAT close to their nature?

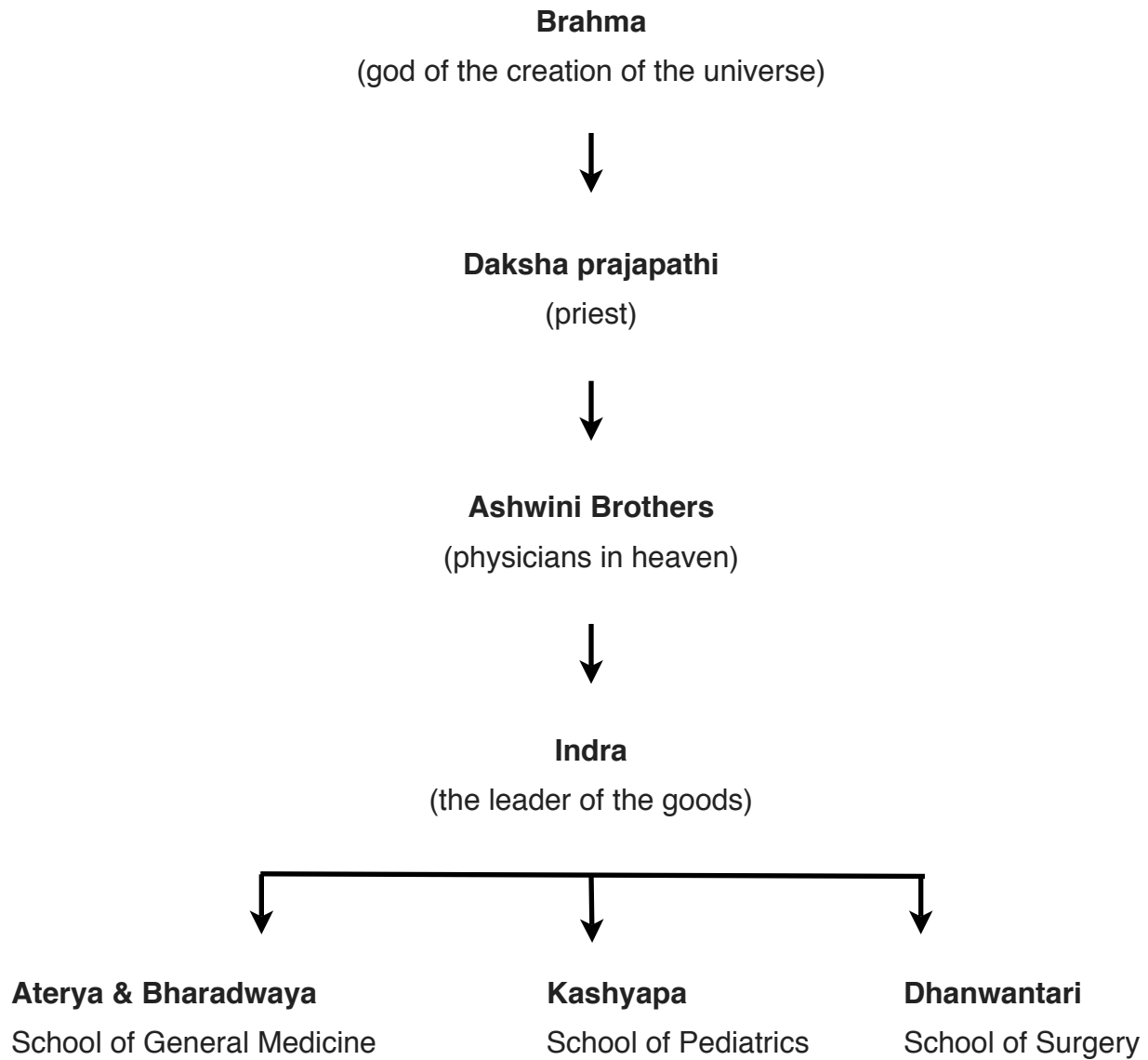
The generations that followed these great men of wisdom found in their hands a vast legacy of knowledge that, passed on by prose and oral tradition, and later through manuscripts and books, unfolded as one of the richest cultures there could be on earth — *Incredible India*. A country so rich in all aspects of human philosophy and spirituality,

medicine and science, religion, humanities and language. You name it, and there will be something ancient related to it in India. It is a land that holds the roots of so many aspects of our race, a country that has been somehow entitled to preserve all these legacies, some now shaped as colorful traditions and religious rituals, some of which their own vast population may not even understand, but simply see as just part of their culture.

Whether the lotus flower truly sprang from the navel of Lord Vishnu himself or the sesame plant appeared first when a sweat droplet from Lord Vishnu's body fell to the earth and sprouted from it, remains a matter of belief. So long as people use them and believe in their medicine, who cares? These beliefs belong to a beautiful millenary tradition that deserves the respect of all humanity. Yet, it is not unreasonable to also follow the line of thought that may trace the root of these religious manifestations back to a time when great sages achieved the blissful stage of full contact to the source of all life, making them aware of a mission that entitled them to reveal to humanity some of the most resourceful herbal legacy for the greater good of generations to come. Did they put the names of the Hindu gods in the story so that the people — not conscious people like us — will understand that there is a cosmic power in these herbs and believe? Or was it adapted by the generations that follow?

That might have been around the time when, according to the mythological origin of Ayurveda, the people of ancient India sent Daksha Prajapathi, a saint and priest, to speak with Lord Brahma, god responsible for the creation of the universe, so that he could learn Ayurveda and give relief to the miseries of humans. Brahma had memorized the eight branches of Ayurveda in a hundred thousand verses in a thousand chapters by a ray of enlightenment from the creator, the universal spirit. Daksha passed this information to the Ashwini brothers, the twin physicians of heaven. The brothers passed it on to Indra, the leader of the gods. Up to this point the information remained in the heavens. Great seers on earth meditated upon remedies for the numerous human maladies but in vain, until Indra finally instructed his disciples Atriya and Bharadwaja, Kashyapa and Dhanwantari. They founded the Ayurvedic schools of internal medicine, pediatrics and surgery. Ayurveda then descended from the skies. The story says that they wrote extensively on many subjects, but most of these writings are now lost. Yet

their students, mortals/sages, wrote many books, like the Caraka and Sushruta samhita of the post-vedic period, which are the ones now available to us — humans, the not so conscious kind.





Lord Brahma imparting the knowledge of Ayurveda to his disciple, Daksha Prajapati

Image 3 - Ayurveda. The mantra of niramaya



Daksha Prajapati conveys the Ayurvedic knowledge to Aswins, the twin gods

Image 4 - Ayurveda. The mantra of niramaya

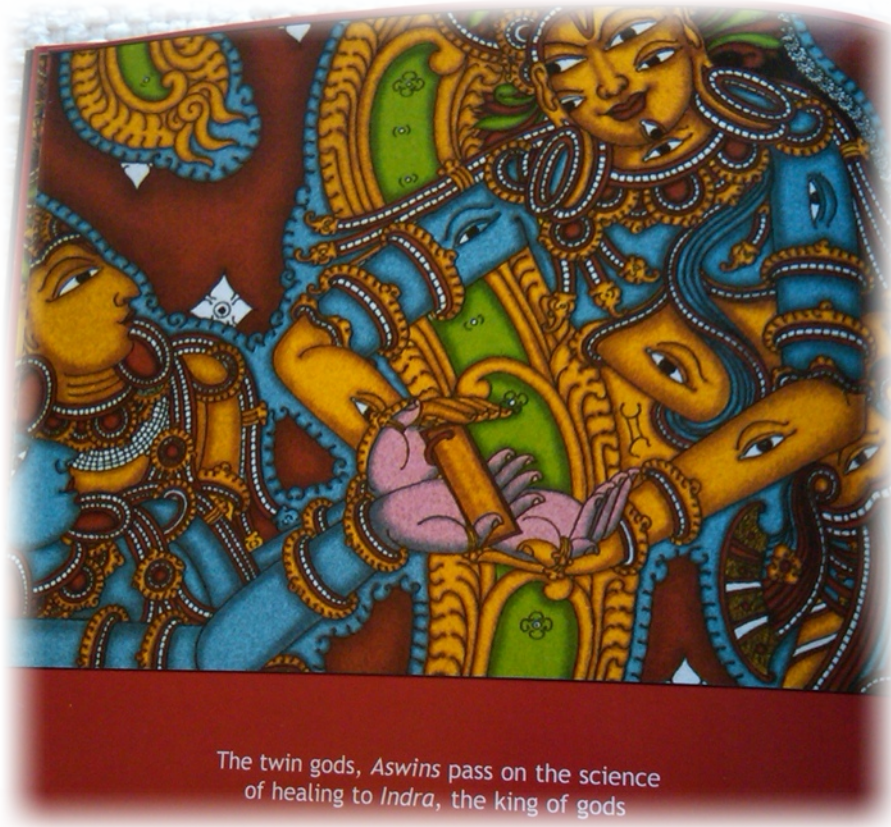


Image 5 - Ayurveda. The mantra of niramaya

And Ayurveda was born with all the richness in herbology and medicine as its Sanskrit name conveys — *āyus*: life, and *veda*: related to knowledge or science.

The Science of Life. Was it a manifestation of consciousness, or was it a magico-spiritual / mythological creation? Was it both?

I leave the question open....

“The supreme task of the physicist is to arrive at those universal elementary laws from which the cosmos can be built up by pure deduction. There is no logical path to these laws; only intuition, resting on sympathetic understanding of experience, can reach them.” — Albert Einstein, 1918.

The most important thing is to understand the great power that lies within our hands as practitioners of Ayurveda. Whether it is in the form of yoga, where the practitioner can experience and receive the information of the herb, or by understanding a belief system, a traditional system that for generations has experienced and recognized the power of the plants, or just both... I believe that the success of the practitioner who has studied and understands the herbs will rely on how deeply rooted within his/her self is the true surrender to these greater forces of nature. How humble you remain in front of any case to the greater intelligence of the universe, and how open you have allowed your intuition to be to the endless resource of knowledge that you carry in yourself. Because I do believe that in the process of connecting the inner sun with the outer sun, there will be rays of light passing through, lightening your way to see the great sun even if you are nowhere near to see it all. And you can experience those glimpses if you have the right intention and you take care of by applying Ayurveda in you. And yes, I think many will benefit from small, but firm steps. I believe it is this constant working to achieve awareness, consciousness, and this tribute to the cosmos and the thousands of years of tradition, what will set you, Ayurvedic practitioner, apart from the interests of modern pharmaceutical and medicinal approaches. Approaches, which while so rich in knowledge and advances, continue to separate us from our nature.

“Apart from the gifts of good memory, intelligence, learning and rational thought, a true physician will treat all living beings with as much goodwill and friendship as he would regard his parents, siblings and kind.”

“Salutation to the genuine physicians, rich in knowledge and skill, clean, masterly in action, and self controlled.”

— Quotes of Caraka cited in the book *The Legacy of Caraka* by MS Valiathan (Valiathan, 144-145)

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