

Is the Popular Hindu Dangerous to Your Health?

by Dr. John Ankerberg, Dr. John Weldon

If book sales of texts on Hindu medicine are any indication, millions of Americans are turning to yet another ancient pagan form of medical treatment. "Ayurvedic medicine" is a method of diagnosis and treatment based upon a Hindu approach not only to the body but to life in general.¹ Its basis in Hinduism, an occult religion, is what makes ayurveda attractive to many New Age therapists, but many mainstream Americans also seem fascinated.

Like most ancient medical systems, traditional ayurveda is a mixture of legitimate empirical observations to health and disease and pagan philosophy and practice. For example, in Hinduism the origin of the ayurvedic system is ascribed to Hindu deities, especially Indra, and many remedies rely upon sympathetic magic.²

In the American medical climate of today, which is increasingly open to alternative and New Age medical approaches,³ articles in reputable medical periodicals such as the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* can now be found that advocate ayurveda. One article in *JAMA* noted that a growing number of Western physicians... are finding it to add valuable knowledge that is complementary to modern allopathic medicine,"⁴ while an October 2, 1991 *JAMA* editorial by George D. Lundberg observed, "*JAMA* has long had an interest in publishing responsible articles on traditional health care practices from other parts of the world." In fact, in the U.S., hundreds of M.D.s have now been trained at ayurvedic institutes.⁵

Further, a popular, novel form ("Maharishi Ayurveda") was promoted extensively by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of Transcendental Meditation with its millions of devotees.

"Maharishi Ayurveda" constitutes a Westernized version of traditional ayurveda which also incorporates the practice of Transcendental Meditation (TM) and certain adaptations of traditional practice. Deepak Chopra, M.D., founding president of the American Society of Ayurvedic Medicine is perhaps the most ardent medical promoter of this uniquely Hindu approach to medical care. Perhaps not surprisingly, Chopra is also a committed devotee of TM; his book *Perfect Health* is dedicated to TM founder, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. He even claims some 6,000 fellow M.D.s are themselves TM meditators.⁶

Dr. Chopra was appointed in 1992 to the National Institutes of Health ad hoc panel on alternative medicine, and is the author of several books on ayurveda and

related subjects including *Creating Health, Return of the Rishi, Unconditional Life,* and *Quantum Healing*. His books have now been translated into more than 25 languages. Chopra himself has treated well over 10,000 patients and has also trained hundreds of physicians in Maharishi Ayurveda.⁷ *His Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*, which was published in 1993, sold close to a million copies hardcover within a year. *People* magazine commented, "Few writers in the field of alternative medicine have so dominated the best-seller lists."⁸ Further, a number of medical centers around the country are using his program.

Physically, the approach of ayurveda can be divided into three basic categories: (1) well-established health principles (adequate rest, sleep, exercise, nutrition, etc.); (2) use of "natural" remedies such as herbs and plants which are codified in numerous ayurvedic texts; and (3) ideas, concepts and treatments that can only be considered unscientific and/or irrational, or occult.⁹ In their *Ayurveda: The Yoga of Health*, Baba Haridas and Dharma Sara Satsang observe, "according to ayurveda and Hatha Yoga, no healing therapy is complete unless it takes into consideration the health of the subtle [occult] body."¹⁰

While the principles of category one are sound in themselves, the other categories can present problems. For example, it may be unwise to accept ayurvedic herbal remedies unless efficacy has been scientifically proven:¹¹

This is illustrated by the case of *Rauwolfia serpentina*, one of the few Indian medicinal herbs to find its way into Western medicine. Beginning in the 1950s, the main active component of the herb, reserpine, was used to treat psychosis and high blood pressure. Careful studies since then have shown that the drug can cause depression, headaches, nightmares, irregular heartbeat, diminished libido, aggravation of ulcers, and a variety of other adverse effects. At the same time, safer and more effective drugs were developed for treating psychosis and hypertension. The turnaround took place over a decade or two. Ayurvedic physicians, on the other hand, have used the herb for hundreds of years without a thorough understanding of its dangers and limitations. Because they don't evaluate the effects of their prescriptions in a systematic, scientific manner, the same is probably true for most of the herbs they use.¹²

Further, the paganism and occult practices inherent in ayurveda can also be dangerous to one's health, both physical and spiritual (cf., our *The Coming Darkness: Confronting Occult Deception* (Harvest House, 1993)).

Since Ayurveda attributes many diseases to demons and astrological influences, it is not surprising that incantations, amulets, spells, and mantras are commonly used remedies. Goat feces washed with urine is prescribed for alcoholism and indigestion, milk mixed with urine for constipation. Enemas of animal blood are recommended for hemorrhage. Enemas of urine and peacock testicles are used to treat impotence. Hundreds of such remedies are codified in ayurvedic texts such as *Caraka Samhita*, translated and edited by P. V. Sharma.¹³

The essence of ayurvedic blending of physical/spiritual concerns can be illustrated in its diagnosis based upon the occult anatomy termed *tridosha* or the "three elements."¹⁴

One task of the ayurvedic practitioner is to maintain a “balance” between these three *doshas* or occult forces within the body. Thus, ayurveda is not merely, or even primarily, a physical medicine; it is fundamentally a spiritual method incorporating physical concerns, e.g., “An understanding of the need to strive for spiritual self-development is taken for granted and in this respect the physician combines the role of spiritual guide.”¹⁵ According to Dr. Deepak Chopra, “Ayurveda’s approach to physical disorders is not basically physical at all.... Ayurveda works because it corrects a distortion in consciousness.”¹⁶

Dr. Chopra, who is also a practicing endocrinologist, and former chief of staff of New England Memorial Hospital in Stoneham, MA, discusses the major premise of ayurvedic medicine, which primarily involves treating a person’s **consciousness**, instead of his/her body.

The ancient doctors of India were also great sages, and their cardinal belief was that the body is created out of consciousness.... Theirs was a medicine of consciousness, and their way of treating disease pierced the body’s matter and went deeper, into the core of mind. When you look at ayurveda’s anatomical charts, you don’t see the familiar organs pictured in *Gray’s Anatomy*, but a **hidden diagram of where the mind is flowing as it creates the body. This flow is what ayurveda treats.**¹⁷

Ayurveda is thus not based on the scientific disciplines or on traditional anatomy but upon the theory that the physical body is part of the “flow” of the mind. Further, in its true nature, the mind is one essence with divine consciousness (in Hindu terms, *satchitananda*):

In ayurveda, each and every symptom of disease, from a minor neck pain to a full-blown cancer, is under the control of attention [divine consciousness]. However, between us and the symptom lie barriers—the veils called Maya [Hindu for illusion]—that prevent us from exercising our attention [divine consciousness] in a therapeutic way. All mind-body medicine attempts to remove these obstacles so that healing can take place....[It is important] to have a science of awareness. Ayurveda supplies just that.... When I teach people Maharishi’s ayurvedic healing techniques.... I am trying to let them realize that their own awareness [divine consciousness] creates, controls, and turns into their bodies.... Together, meditation, the bliss technique, and primordial sound are the practical application of all that I have been building up to, the tools of quantum healing.¹⁸

Further,

...cancer, or any other disease, is nothing more than the sequence of these fleeting moments [of consciousness], each with its own emotions, its own mind-body chemistry.... the whole rationale for treating cancer (or AIDS) with primordial sound and bliss techniques is that these alone are the levels of consciousness common to everyone, the weak as much as the strong.¹⁹

Maharishi Ayurveda also offers patients astrology and yagyas or occult ceremonies intended to inspire the help of Hindu gods.²⁰ On a “Sonya Live” program, Chopra even argued that anticancer/antibiotic drugs don’t work and that standard medical approaches to cancer treatment (radiation, chemotherapy) had caused a national epidemic of immuno-compromised disease.

But it is sheer lunacy to replace established cancer treatments with astrology, supplications to pagan deities and occult “primordial sound and bliss techniques.” This places the patient’s health and prognosis at risk.²¹ Let us see why this is so. (As if to add insult to injury, ayurvedic “treatments” can cost hundreds or thousands of dollars.²²)

The New Paradigm: Antirealist Assumptions

Dr. Chopra begins his *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind* by telling readers who desire “true health” that they must discard ten false and harmful assumptions concerning who they are and the world in which they live. These “dangerous” assumptions include such ideas as:

There is an objective world independent of the observer, and our bodies are an aspect of this objective world.... Materialism is primary, consciousness is secondary.... Our perception of the world is automatic and gives us an accurate picture of how things really are.... [We are inevitable victims of sickness, aging, and death.]²³

Chopra proceeds to argue that such false ideas are part of the passing “old paradigm” and are inaccurate reflections of true reality. In fact, he offers the incredible explanation that such ideas “are *inventions* of the human mind....”²⁴ Supposedly, the only reason that we accept anything as objectively or phenomenologically real is because of the “tyranny of the senses.”²⁵ Even time and space are themselves mere “products of our five senses.”²⁶

Chopra, of course, could hardly practice his lucrative profession of book writing if he did not concede the basic error of some of his own assumptions, e.g., that our perceptions automatically deceive us.

Nevertheless, what does Chopra offer as the solution to our supposedly self-generated sickness? Merely that we recreate our reality. According to Chopra, our consciousness is divine and literally creates our bodies and our reality; further, the mind and body “are inseparably one.” Therefore, changing our consciousness automatically changes our bodily reality because “Our bodies are part of the universal [divine] body, our minds an aspect of a universal [divine] mind.” Chopra’s philosophical harmony with the New Age movement and the spirits of modern channeling is obvious here. Thus, “We can learn to start metabolizing non-change, eternity, the absolute. By doing that, we will be ready to create the physiology of immortality.”²⁷

Chopra is correct when he calls his antirealist ideas “vast assumptions,” yet he is on far less secure ground when he calls them “the makings of a new reality” and is arguing pure pseudoscience when he claims such assumptions “are grounded in the discovery of quantum physics made almost a hundred years ago.”²⁸ Quantum physics is routinely misused by New Agers, whether or not they have M.D. degrees, and physicists, (even physicists who are themselves New Agers) are often the first to point it out. In *Perfect Health* and elsewhere Chopra claims that the practices of Maharishi Ayurveda and TM are clearly supported by quantum physics and he refers readers to the book *The Cosmic Code: Quantum Physics as the Language of Nature* by eminent physicist Heinz R. Pagels.²⁹

But Pagels himself denounces Chopra's claims as "nonsense." He says, "Individuals who make such claims have substituted a wish-filling fantasy for understanding."³⁰ In fact, while executive director of the New York Academy of Sciences in 1986, Pagels submitted an affidavit on behalf of a former TM member suing the movement for fraud. He emphasized,

There is no known connection between meditation states and states of matter in physics.... No qualified physicist that I know of would claim to find such a connection without knowingly committing fraud.... The presentation of the ideas of modern physics side by side, and apparently supportive of, the ideas of the Maharishi about pure consciousness can only be intended to deceive those who might not know better....³¹

Nevertheless, Maharishi Ayurveda claims that as long as our consciousness is functioning properly (e.g. that we are practicing Transcendental Meditation and living in accordance with pagan ayurvedic principles), any disease can be prevented and, theoretically, any disease can be reversed, including the aging process itself!³² Thus, in answer to the question, "Must we become sick and grow old at all?" Dr. Chopra gives the amazing and unqualified answer "No!"³³

How does he derive such an astounding revelation? At one point, Chopra delineates the commonly held view of aging, that it is natural, painful, and finally fatal. He then proceeds to explain that, ultimately, in his view, aging is no more than mere **belief**. Thus, "if you take any or all of these to be statements of fact, you are under the influence of **beliefs** that do not match reality."³⁴ What Chopra affirms here is a very radical shift in world view "which makes disease and infirm old age **unacceptable**."³⁵ For example: "Although everyone falls prey to the aging process, no one has ever proved that it is necessary.... Aging is not natural at all. Maharishi Ayurveda operates on this assumption.... The ancient [Hindu] sages, renowned for their own immense longevity, ascribed aging to a 'mistake of the intellect.'"³⁶

But again, this is nonsense. It is ludicrous for a trained medical doctor and chief of staff at a major hospital to even assume there is such a thing as a "quantum mechanical body," let alone to base an entire system of healthcare upon it; further, to tell people that aging and disease can be prevented by adopting occult beliefs and practices is quackery.

Consider Dr. Chopra's allegedly enlightened advice to a patient with chronic myelogenous leukemia, a fatal cancer. In terms reflective of the philosophy of Transcendental Meditation, he explains to the patient, "What we want is to pull your awareness back to a healthier level, to a place where this disease is not so threatening. Ultimately, we would like you to find the place where it does not **even exist**."³⁷

This, of course, fits well with the *advaita* Hindu view that this world and the things that occur in it, such as disease and death, are not ultimately real but merely illusory manifestations of "imperfections" in consciousness. As Chopra confesses, "Without any treatment for his inner self... I did not consider that any outside medical treatment based on drugs or radiation went far enough."³⁸

Chopra further advises his patient, "If you can pierce the *mask* of disease and contact your inner self, even for a few minutes a day, [this is the practice of Tran-

scendental Meditation] you will make tremendous strides toward a cure, I promise.”³⁹

Or, consider Dr. Chopra’s discussion of a heart attack, another common killer in America. He explains that at the “quantum mechanical level” a heart attack can be produced solely by mental dissatisfactions—“therefore it comes as no surprise that a deep, smoldering dissatisfaction lodged in the mind should express itself in a physical equivalent—a heart attack.”⁴⁰

As to the true cause of heart attacks, “loss of [divine] awareness among the heart cells is primary.”⁴¹ Presumably this is because “molecules can make decisions.... [ultimately] we are choosing our own diseases” simply because we all supposedly live with so many false ideas about reality.⁴²

Dr. Chopra seems convinced that all individuals who suffer heart attacks (or cancer, diabetes, etc.) are really suffering deficiencies in consciousness above anything else. Such persons have “lost communication with the deep levels of [divine] intelligence that govern and control all [their] cells....”⁴³ Presumably, in order to prevent heart attacks (or cancer, etc.) one need only understand that consciousness can control all reality:

If one knew himself as he really was [i.e., a manifestation of God⁴⁴], he would realize that he is the source, course, and goal of all this flowing intelligence.... We are made victims of sickness, aging and death by gaps in our self-knowledge. To lose awareness is to lose intelligence; to lose intelligence is to lose control over the end product of intelligence, the human body. Therefore, the most valuable lesson the new paradigm can teach us is this: if you want to change your body, change your awareness first.⁴⁵

Even though not a shred of scientific evidence exists to substantiate Chopra’s ideas, he proceeds to claim that treatment based upon the ayurvedic premise of the supremacy of consciousness can actually prevent illness, disease and aging which, again, are merely **false beliefs** “that do not match reality.”⁴⁶

In conclusion, patients who desire “true health” will discover their best odds can be found through a healthy lifestyle and a responsible application of orthodox medicine, not in ancient paganism. God Himself warned His people not to adopt “the abominable practices” of the pagan nations because of their idolatrous and demonic nature and the inevitable consequences of such practice so amply demonstrated in human history (cf., *The Facts On Hinduism in America*). In the end, it is to such paganism that ayurveda would have us devote our souls. But ayurveda is only the tip of the iceberg of paganism that will soon ruin our land. America is still offered a better way, “The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commandments and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him” (Deut. 13:3b-4) and “then, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14).

Notes

- 1 Berkeley Holistic Health Center, *The Holistic Health Handbook: A Tool for Attaining Wholeness of Body, Mind, and Spirit* (Berkeley, CA: And/Or Press, 1978), p. 53.
- 2 Margaret and James Stutley, *Harper's Dictionary of Hinduism* (NY: Harper & Row 1977) pp. 34–35; Chandrashekhar G. Thakkur, *Ayurveda: The Indian Art and Science of Medicine* (New York, NY: ASI Publishers, 1974), pp. 4–5, 11; *Harper's Dictionary of Hinduism*, p. 292.
- 3 Ann Hill, ed., *A Visual Encyclopedia of Unconventional Medicine* (New York, NY: Crown Publishers, 1979), p. 17; John Ankerberg, John Weldon, *Can You Trust Your Doctor? The Complete Guide to New Age Medicine and Its Threat to Your Family* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt), 1991.
- 4 Hari M. Sharma, Brihaspati Dev Triguna, Deepak Chopra, "Maharishi Ayur-Veda: Modern Insights into Ancient Medicine," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, May 22/29, 1991, p. 2633. JAMA later regretted its publication of an article on Maharishi Ayurveda due to its association with Transcendental Meditation, while maintaining openness to traditional ayurveda.
- 5 Alma Guinness, ed., Readers Digest Association, *Family Guide to Natural Medicine: How to Stay Healthy the Natural Way* (Pleasantville, NY: Readers Digest, 1993), p. 57.
- 6 Deepak Chopra, *Perfect Health: The Complete Mind/Body Guide* (NY: Harmony, 1991), p. 124.
- 7 cf., *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.
- 8 Craig Bromberg, "Doc of Ages," *People*, 15 November 1993, p. 170.
- 9 Kurt Butler, *A Consumer's Guide to "Alternative Medicine"* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1992), p. 111.
- 10 Berkeley Holistic Health Center, p. 53.
- 11 Ankerberg, Weldon, chapter on herbalism.
- 12 Butler, p. 111.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 112.
- 14 Hill, ed., p. 18.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 16 Butler, p. 113.
- 17 Deepak Chopra, *Quantum Healing: Exploring the Frontiers of Mind/Body Medicine* (New York, NY: Bantam, 1989), pp. 5-6, emphasis added.
- 18 *Ibid.*, pp. 237-239.
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 267-268.
- 20 Andrew A. Skolnick, "Maharishi Ayur-Veda: Guru's Marketing Scheme Promises the World Eternal 'Perfect Health,'" *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 2 October 1991, p. 1749.
- 21 Butler, p. 116.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 118.
- 23 Deepak Chopra, *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind: The Quantum Alternative to Growing Old* (NY: Harmony, 1993), p. 4.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 5, emphasis added.
- 25 *Ibid.* p. 7.
- 26 Chopra, *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*, p. 8.
- 27 *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 29 . *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 9, 29-30; Chopra, *Perfect Health*, pp. 7-10, 131-132, 323.
- 30 Skolnick, p. 1750.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 Chopra, *Perfect Health*, p. 17.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 17, cf. p. 304.
- 34 Chopra, *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*, p. 59.
- 35 Chopra, *Perfect Health*, p. 5 emphasis added.
- 36 *Ibid.*, pp. 171-172.
- 37 . *Ibid.*, p. 111 emphasis added.
- 38 *Ibid.*; cf. p. 112.

39 Ibid., emphasis added.

40 Ibid., p. 109.

41 Chopra, *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*, p. 37.

42 Chopra, *Perfect Health*, p. 11.

43 Chopra, *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*, p. 37.

44 Ibid., p. 47.

45 Ibid., p. 37.

46 Ibid., p. 59 cf., pp. 24-31; Chopra, *Perfect Health*, pp. 171-172.