

Robert Svoboda

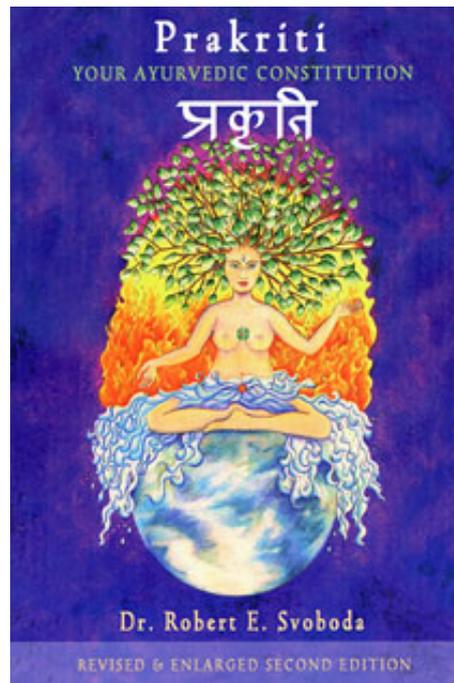
Prakriti: Your Ayurvedic Constitution

Reading excerpt

[Prakriti: Your Ayurvedic Constitution](#)

of [Robert Svoboda](#)

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Chapter Six

Balance

Structure in life helps reduce the effects of stress. Stress, or rather improper reaction to stress, creates new diseases and worsens pre-existent ones. Stress permits alien beings like viruses and cancerous cells to colonize new territory by impairing the immune system's ability to respond to invasion.

Stress occurs every time you have to adapt to a new situation. Every time your surroundings—your physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual circumstances—change you must change along with them, and develop a new equilibrium. Your immunity is your resilience, your capacity to roll with the punches and snap back to normal after even the lowest of blows. As stress increases, strain on the immune system grows, and when the strain becomes too great your immune protection fails and you develop an illness.

Stress seems to be proliferating; even unborn children today sometimes develop peptic ulcers. No one is immune from exposure to all stress, but we can improve our immunity to the stresses we do encounter. Whatever the variety and the timing of your stress, your natural reaction to it will be determined by your constitution. You will react as your genes instruct you to react unless you have conditioned your body to react differently. Specific patterns of Vata-Pitta-Kapha derangement must develop in order for specific diseases to manifest, but all patterns of derangement are fundamentally due to the weakness of your immunity, which is your individuality.

Prana, Tejas and Ojas

Prana is the life force, equivalent to the chi or ki in Oriental medicine. It strings body, mind and spirit together on a single strand of breath, like pearls on a thread, and causes them to live, to act together as a single organism. Tejas is the force of transmutation, which permits body, mind and spirit to influence one another in spite of their different planes of existence. Ojas, the subtlest manifestation of the force of immunity, is the glue that cements these pieces together and integrates your being. Prana, Tejas and Ojas unite body, mind and spirit.

Vata, Pitta and Kapha, the Three Doshas, are the gross manifestations of Prana, Tejas and Ojas, which are not doshas at all. Vata is the more unstable form of Prana, Pitta the more reactive form of Tejas, and Kapha the more inert form of Ojas. When physical, mental and spiritual digestion are at their peak Vata, Pitta and Kapha are produced from Prana, Tejas and Ojas in quantities just sufficient to perform necessary bodily functions. Poor digestion allows greater produc-

tion of these reactive by-products, reducing thereby the amount of the essential forces that the organism has available to it. Increased Vata, Pitta and Kapha production also requires increased excretion, and further energy loss.

We obtain Prana from our atmosphere and from our food. Breathing recharges Prana immediately. Prana is not oxygen, any more than Kapha is mucus or Pitta is bile. Prana is the life force; oxygen is one of its carrier substances. Food and water also carry Prana. While most of our nutrients are absorbed into the circulation from the small intestine, Prana is absorbed from the colon. Modern research shows that substances called volatile fatty acids are absorbed from the colon into the circulation and can act as a significant energy source for the system. These volatile fatty acids, like oxygen, are carriers of Prana. The health of our lungs and colons determines how much Prana we can absorb, and thus how alive we feel.

When the lungs or the large intestine function inefficiently our bodies absorb Prana inefficiently and Vata is generated in increased amounts. Vata and Prana are alike, both being airy, intense, expansive and subtle, but Vata is not inherently balancing and nutritive, as Prana is. Unless Vata is regularly excreted from the system it causes disease. Although disturbed Vata can affect any dhatu it shows special affinity for Bone. The health of Bone is thus intimately tied to the health of the lungs and the colon. Hence Vimalananda's advice to keep the body (the bones) moving, the bowels (the colon) moving, and the breath (the lungs) moving.

Pathologies in the lungs, bones and large intestine are often related. For example, women who smoke lose more calcium from their bones because of the effect of carbon monoxide in the smoke on blood chemistry. Likewise, balancing one of these organs can benefit the others. Dry ginger mixed with jaggery (solidified sugar cane juice) improves the flow of urine and feces and, when it is given to patients of upper respiratory congestion, may relieve this congestion by relieving congestion in the colon. Sometimes medicated enemas are administered to control an attack of asthma.

Tejas is Fire. Prana inflames Tejas in the same way that a bellows inflames a hearth fire. When the mind is stable and discrimination is strong Tejas burns cleanly and purely and is transferred efficiently to the body. When motion or inertia affects the mind, or discrimination is agitated by memory or swamped by emotion, Tejas is perverted. Then its transfer into the body produces greater amounts of Pitta. Since consciousness is strongly influenced by chemical toxins transported by blood, the ability of Tejas to properly nourish the physical digestion depends on blood, on the liver and spleen, which control blood, and on the brain.

Ojas is the medium through which the force of Tejas is transmitted. Both physical and mental digestion can be strong only when Ojas is strong. Ojas and Kapha are closely related. When there is good digestion of food and other sensory impressions Ojas is efficiently produced. Weakened digestion causes increased Kapha production, and promotes production of ama.

Ojas is a substance, unlike Tejas and Prana, which means that it can be pro-

duced, collected and stored. Anything which increases Vata decreases Ojas, including dry or stale food, excessive exposure to wind and sun, worry, fear, sorrow, old age, fasting from sleep, and excessive loss of any body tissue. Loss of Shukra, which nourishes Ojas directly, is more detrimental than loss of other tissues. This is one reason why sexual restraint is recommended in Ayurveda.

Ama is the sinister counterpart of Ojas. Ojas is a living force that protects the integrity of the individual. Ama is a living force in the sense that it is a rich broth of nutrients for any alien invaders like bacteria, viruses and cancer cells who might choose to try to subjugate the system.

When Ojas is strong Tejas can properly digest and assimilate food and nourish all the dhatus, which strengthens ahamkara and your identity. A strong central identity will not allow either ama or intruders to remain in the system. Weak Ojas interferes with the transmission of Tejas, which weakens the digestion and encourages production of ama. Ama is useful nutrition only for intruders, and weakens both the dhatus and ahamkara. A weak ahamkara in turn encourages alien identities to flourish in the muck of ama, just as a weak government encourages the proliferation of lawlessness.

Ojas is the foundation of your physical immunity, and produces your aura. Your aura is your first line of defense against intrusions from the outside, a buffer against all the negativity that is consciously and unconsciously projected against you each day. Weak Ojas allows more negativity to seep through the aura barrier, increasing internal disharmony. The weaker your aura, the less stress you can simply shrug off and ignore.

Indigestion

Indigestion is the base of all physical diseases, the condition from which all other disease conditions arise. In a sense indigestion, the inability of an individual to digest any physical, mental or emotional input, is the sole disease of living beings. It usually begins in the mind as a "offense against wisdom," and is projected from the mind into the physical body.

All disease results from a combination of physical, mental and spiritual causes. Some diseases like ulcerative colitis are mainly due to mental influences; others like the common cold are mainly physical. Patients who suffer from both a mental and a physical disease, such as schizophrenia and asthma, or psychosis and arthritis, usually find that the physical problem gets worse whenever the mental disorder goes into remission and vice versa. Ultimately all diseases are mental; all are caused by willfulness, that perversion of intellect and common sense which makes us do what we are not supposed to do. This willful perversity is *prajnapamdha*, "offense against wisdom."

For example, suppose you are a VK person living in northern Minnesota. It is the middle of the night in the middle of winter and a blizzard is blowing outside. You are suddenly struck by a craving for ice cream. You know that ice cream is cold, wet, sticky, heavy and Kapha-producing, and that both night and winter are Kapha times, and that your constitution has Kapha in it. You know

that if you eat the ice cream you are begging to increase Kapha, but you do it anyway, and the next morning your system is thoroughly clogged with Kapha. This is your "punishment" for a "offense against wisdom." It is not punishment in the classic sense; no one sits on high throwing thunderbolts at us for eating the wrong food. This sort of penalty occurs automatically when one of the rules of healthy living is violated. As an astute Indian woman once said, we are punished not *for* our actions but *by* our actions; each of our "offenses against wisdom" seeds the reaction that follows.

Transcontinental airplane flight is a stress to anyone regardless of constitution. You can travel across the United States in about six hours, crossing three time zones in the process. Your consciousness arrives at your destination in six hours and accompanies you off the plane. Your body, however, does not really arrive until three days later, since it takes about a day for it to recover from each time zone you cross. If you take the time to rest and recuperate from your journey you can adapt easily to your new location.

Your mind, however, hates to remain still, and does not like to permit the body to remain still. It often convinces itself that its balance is contingent on getting pending work out of the way as quickly as possible. Intercontinental air travel is a stress, and so is trying to go to work as soon as you land. Your mind's impatience with your body over its jetlag strain further impedes the adaptation process. If your mind gets its way and you try to go about business as usual there is a good chance that your body will sulk, and will express its displeasure by becoming ill. You cannot blame your body for taking revenge on your mind; your illness is a natural product of your "offense against wisdom."

The mind's physiology parallels that of the body. Like the physical Five Great Elements the mind has its own Five Elements:

Stability, the mental equivalent of Earth;

Emotion, the mental equivalent of Water;

Discrimination, the mental equivalent of Fire;

Memory, the mental equivalent of Air; and

Emptiness, the mental equivalent of Space.

Emptiness of mind is that which permits the other states of mind to manifest. Discrimination is the mind's digestion, which determines whether or not a course of action is appropriate for the well being of the organism. As long as your power of discrimination functions normally you will turn away from committing "offenses against wisdom." Mental instability weakens your ability to discriminate, just as disturbance of Vata, Pitta and Kapha affect the physical body's digestive capacity. Weak discrimination encourages the formation of mental ama (abnormal perceptions), just as weak digestion allows physical ama (toxic wastes) to be produced.

Vata, Pitta and Kapha are in charge of uniting the Five Great Physical Elements together in the body. Sattva, Rajas and Tamas perform the same function for the

mind. Healthful, simple, well-digested food and healthful, simple habits promote Sattva. Intense, stimulating foods and intense activities like sex promote Rajas. Stale, putrid food and dulling activities like sleep promote Tamas. Rajas and Tamas are the doshas of the mind. They are needed in small quantities, but cause disease when they accumulate to excess.

Good physical digestion is associated with these signs:

1. You feel no discomfort after ingesting your desired quantity of food.
2. After eating you do not burp gas which has the same odor and taste as the food you ate.
3. Your stomach does not feel full for an unusual length of time after your meal.
4. No symptoms are produced as the food passes through your small intestine and colon; you should not even be aware of this stage of digestion.
5. You excrete your feces at your habitual time. It must be of the proper consistency and should have no blood, mucus or undigested food in it, nor should it be offensive in odor.
6. After digestion your physical desire for food returns at the usual hour. (A mental desire for gratification of the tongue does not count.)

If any of the above is lacking, physical indigestion is present.

Good mental digestion is associated with these signs:

1. You feel no mental discomfort after ingesting your desired quantity of sense objects.
2. Your mind does not feel full and jaded afterwards, nor does it "burp up" any reactions to what you experienced.
3. No untoward emotions are produced while you are processing this new information.
4. You are able to effortlessly and accurately retrieve your experience from memory and communicate it on demand.
5. Your sleep after indulgence is sound and enjoyable, and free of disturbing dreams (which are indicative of mental ama).
6. Desire for further sensory gratification arises after an appropriate period of time.

If any of the above is lacking, mental indigestion is present.

Physical indigestion can cause mental indigestion, and vice versa, but most

often the two exist together. Since the body is much easier to control than the mind Ayurveda teaches that it is best to purify and balance the body first, to whatever extent possible, before turning to address the mind. A harmonized body exerts a harmonizing effect on the mind.

Physical indigestion is basically of three types: that caused by Vata, that caused by Pitta, and that caused by Kapha. Any one of these doshas can cause the body to lose its ability to process food, each in a different way. We can know by the symptoms produced which dosha is predominantly disarranged.

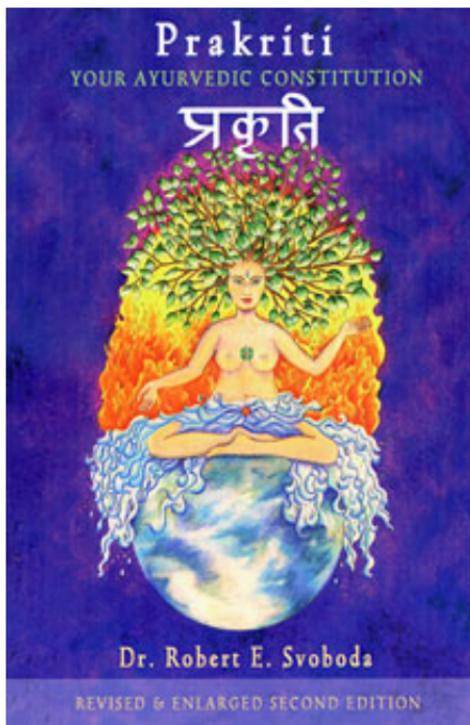
Vata-caused indigestion mainly affects the large intestine. Constipation alternates with loose stools, and there is usually copious intestinal gas, but all symptoms are variable. For a few days digestion improves, and then for no apparent reason the old symptoms return. The situation is so ever-changing that the individual does not know what to eat or when to eat to produce the unpredictable intermittent spells of good digestion.

Pitta-caused indigestion affects mainly the small intestine, and usually causes loose stools. Sensations of heat heartburn or anal burning after defecation are common. The patient may crave hot spicy food, which if consumed only worsens the condition.

Kapha-caused indigestion affects mainly the stomach. The sufferer usually feels no desire for food at all, and may complain of heaviness in the upper abdomen, watering of the mouth, and heaviness in the limbs. Constipation is common.

Kapha is most at home in the stomach, Pitta in the small intestine, and Vata in the colon. If indigestion is allowed to continue untreated one or more of these doshas will increase greatly, leave its home organ, and begin to circulate in the system searching for a weak area in which it can locate and cause a disease. Untreated indigestion thus results in acute diseases like colds, fevers, coughs, influenza, diarrhea, peptic ulcer, and so on. All these diseases are methods Nature uses to purify your organism when your being has failed to "digest" its life experiences well and has instead allowed physical and mental filth to collect inside you.

No matter how efficiently you treat an acute disease your effort will be wasted unless you also address the underlying indigestion. Until you eliminate this root other diseases will sprout from it. When possible treatment should begin with the uprooting of the root cause of the disease, after which any specific manifestations can be rectified. Life-threatening situations require emergency attention, true, but once the crisis passes the indigestion remains to be tackled



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