

## AYURVEDIC MEDICINE: EFFECTIVE FOR FIVE THOUSAND YEARS

Puja D. Patel

*Considerable modern research has proven the efficacy of Ayurvedic herbal preparations, and research has now moved to elucidating their mechanisms and sites of action.* —Virender Sodhi, M.D.

Ayurvedic medicine, originating from the Holy Book of Veda in the Hindu religion, has been in the Indian tradition and literature for centuries. However, even though Ayurveda, the Science of Life, is still alive in the Indian culture and is used in the western world, religion and medicine have long been kept separate from each other in the west. Karen Armstrong, in her introduction to *The Battle For God*, observes that “the people of Europe and America had achieved such astonishing success in science and technology that they began to think that *logos* [the rational, pragmatic, and scientific thought] was the only means to truth and began to discount *mythos* [religion] as false and superstitious” (11). Ayurveda stands to challenge this western understanding, showing that religion can be associated with science, and is also a means to discerning the truth. Swami Sada Shiva Tirtha writes in his book *The Ayurveda Encyclopedia: Natural Secrets to Healing, Prevention and Longevity*, “Ayurveda, said to be a world medicine, is the most holistic or comprehensive medical system available” (3), and the encyclopedia, which has been reviewed by licensed western physicians, catalogs Ayurvedic approaches to hundreds of illnesses. Similarly, in the article “The Scientific Value of Ayurveda,” Alex Hankey, Ph.D. illustrates the increasing importance of Ayurveda in the west, asserting that “many trained practitioners of Western biomedicine are now putting its simple and profound system of understanding health and disease, known as *tridosha*, into practice” (221). Ayurveda has a long history of aiding people suffering from various psychological and physical diseases, among them depression and diabetes, demonstrating that religion and science can perform the same functions when it comes to mental and physical health.

Ayurvedic medicine roots its accomplishments and history as far back as five-thousand years ago (Tritha 3), and was first announced in the “four main books of Vedic [the holy book in Hinduism] spirituality” (3). In the Hindu tradition, Ayurveda was the first to use aromas, foods, yoga, and daily routines to heal people and to increase their longevity. Ayurveda is acknowledged as a lifestyle in itself since “it is a three-dimensional healing system and explains how the interaction between

body, mind and spirit can be predicted, balanced and improved to enable us to stay or become healthy and vigorous" ("Ayurveda"). This traditional medical practice consists of leading a life in which the body, mind and spirit are in harmony with one another, and asserts that if this harmony is disrupted, the imbalance will make it difficult to sustain a healthy life.

In addition to promising a healthy way of living, Ayurveda has succeeded in healing people for centuries by using anatomy, physiology, and surgery (Tritha 3). Ayurveda is a form of healing process that people believe in not only because it is a part of tradition but also because they have observed and experienced firsthand its achievements. Additionally, it has many of the features of western medical practices. In *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India: Medicine in the Buddhist Monastery*, Kenneth Zysk states that

Ayurvedic medicine encompassed a sophisticated scholastic medical system recorded in specialized medical textbooks that present a distinctive medical epistemology relying essentially on empiricism followed by explanations of observable phenomena. (3)

If, in Armstrong's analysis, "*logos* was the rational, pragmatic, and scientific thought that enabled men and women to function well in the world...*logos* must relate exactly to facts" (11), the definition of *logos* applies to Ayurveda as well as to western medicine. Ayurveda, as Zysk asserts, is a medical system with a literature and epistemology, one that has proven to be effective through experiments and empirical data, confirming that rational and realistic methods are used to demonstrate the effects of religious medicine that "enable men and women to function well in the world" (Armstrong 11). Like modern medicine, Ayurveda uses codified methods in order to heal, and the healing process involves several steps to improve longevity and human health. Though Ayurveda is the oldest form of medicine, it is one of the most sophisticated, since "without the aid of technological x-ray machines or CT- scans, [its practitioners] knew of the inner workings of the human body" (Tritha 8). Tirtha lists the specific categories of Ayurvedic practice including the nervous system, the digestive system, the circulatory system, and the structural system. Scientific medicine addresses the same categories of the human body as Ayurveda, the difference being the ways by which they heal an individual. To aid its patients, Ayurveda uses meditation and herbal compounds, which may have altered throughout history without changing the essential components. Additionally, even in

modern society, Ayurveda not only focuses on the physical aspects of the patient, but incorporates the use of hymns, known as Mantras, to cure people mentally as well as physically.

The ancient Indian healing method demonstrates its connection to psychology through its theories, observations, and treatments. According to the Elmer Social Science Dictionary, psychology is a “scientific study of human behavior, mental processes, and how they are affected and / or affect an individual’s or group’s physical state, mental state, and external environment” (Elissetche). Psychology, consisting of therapies as well as drug treatments, falls under the broad branch of science or *logos*. Ayurveda is similar to psychology in the sense that it helps people connect to the inner self, and purify the body through “mental processes.” Swami Sivananda Radha, who has practiced yoga through the use of Mantras, explores the supremacy of Mantras, “collection of sacred syllables” (3), and the effects of Mantras on the mind and the body in his book, *Mantra: Words of Power*. With a stable mind, he claims, people have the ability to function better. “This may seem a strange thought but a person becomes what he thinks....If you continually chant you will eventually realize your divine nature and there will be little room for sickness at any level—physical, emotional or mental” (Radha 42). Thus, in the practice of Mantra and yoga, a person can reach a psychological and a physiological state in which he realizes his true nature and can “become what he thinks.” Mantras can, in this case, be seen to connect to the pragmatism of *logos*.

Ayurvedic theories and use of Mantras relate to psychological theories; “[their] repetition gradually awakens the higher faculties in a person and raises the consciousness towards the level of the Mantric resonance” (Radha 8). Mantras can “raise the consciousness,” and that consciousness is the core of psychology. Roger W. Sperry, a physician who received the Nobel Prize in the Physiology of Medicine in 1981, identifies consciousness as “the highest level organizing principle of the mind” (Levin 126). This essential element, consciousness, is affected by the repetition of Mantras. As Radha explains,

as the Mantra is put into the subconscious, the mind is purified to an extent of which we would be incapable without this aid. So the power of the Mantra is great protection from fear. Slowly the ego is overpowered by the Higher Self. (28)

It is surprising to read an Ayurvedic book that uses the word “ego,” a psychological and Freudian term for the balance between desire and moral values, and the assertion that the Higher Self can overcome ego. Sigmund Freud, a neurologist and the founder of the psychoanalytical school of psychology consisting of theories based on the unconscious mind, discusses the power of consciousness and ego in his book, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. Throughout the book, Freud states that ego is the balance between an individual’s unconscious desires and his morals. Hence, ego is what an individual is aware of, and the rest of an individual’s thoughts are buried in the unconscious.

Mantras help the individual to make unconscious conscious; they are “put into the subconscious” and lead to awareness of the Higher Self, in terms of religion, or the unconscious, in scientific terms. Mantras demonstrate the association between Ayurveda and science; they lead to the same solution, even though the solution is expressed in different words. Moreover, Radha asserts that Mantras give security against fears, which is parallel to psychology, since psychology also helps overcome phobias. In the west today, the ancient Vedic meditation and repetition of Mantras is used in Transcendental Meditation (also derived from the Vedic tradition) by Maharishi University in Iowa to reach the state of pure consciousness and self. Chanting of Mantras can lead to the part of the brain that involves a high level of cognitive functions, and *mythos*, in the form of Ayurvedic Mantras, have no limits when dealing with the unconscious. As Armstrong observed, “*logos* had its limitation... It [can] not assuage human pain and sorrow. Rational arguments [can] make no sense of tragedy” (11). What *logos* cannot guarantee, *mythos* can, and Ayurveda can promise that, through daily practice of Ayurvedic lifestyle, an individual can be mentally healthy. Sometimes, what modern science cannot promise, old religious medicine can.

Ayurveda not only relates to the field of psychology by helping the individual attain the Self or connect to the unconscious, both practices emphasize the relationship of patient and therapist. One of several therapies in the field of psychology is psychotherapy, in which the relationship of therapist and patient is a vital aspect of therapy. Gerald Corey, an expert in Counseling Psychology, writes in depth about the process of psychotherapy in his book, *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*. “Therapists are able to facilitate healing through a process of genuine dialogue with their client. The kind of person a therapist is

remains the most critical factor affecting the client and promoting change" (5). In this way, psychotherapy is similar to the therapy that Ayurveda has followed since it was introduced. Psychotherapy recommends the deep and warm understanding of their clients, which is essential in Ayurvedic therapies as well. "Each of the original Ayurvedic texts clearly states that counseling involves tact, diplomacy, and positivity on the part of the practitioner. Practitioners are advised not to become too intimate with clients" (Tritha 339), as they are in psychotherapy.

Ayurveda's links with psychology can also be observed in Ayurvedic treatment for mood disorders. The website for National Institute for Mental Health states that in depression an individual feels "sad, empty, hopelessness, loss of interest, lethargic" ("Depression"). In *Scientific Basis for Ayurvedic Therapies*, Lakshmi Chandra Mishra, Ph.D., a professor in Research Division of Southern Carolina University of Health Sciences, compares depression to a state of the human mind that Ayurveda terms *tamsik* (20). In this state of illness, the individual is lazy, inert, indifferent, and consequently suffer from health imbalances (Tirtha 340). Both depression and *tamsik* are described as having the same symptoms; only the ways in which the treatment is processed varies. For depression, an individual may be prescribed medication, whereas in Ayurveda, the patient is prescribed the repetition of Mantras (yoga), herbs and frequent contact with a caring person. "Scientific evidence has already accumulated to suggest that several yogic practices have great psycho-rehabilitative and anti-stress effect" (Mishra 447). Science has proven that Mantras and yoga have a positive effect on the mental health of an individual. Five thousand years ago humans had some of the same physical and mental problems; the difference is that, before modern science, they relied on religious medicine and meditation. Ayurveda, in the west regarded as *mythos*, was recognized as both *mythos* and *logos* by the ancient Indian health system.

Together with tremendous healing power for psychological illness, Ayurveda is also effective for physical illnesses. Diabetes is a condition in which an individual's body is unable to use or breakdown glucose and produce insulin efficiently ("All about Diabetes"). Mishra observes that diabetes can lead to "premature disability, mortality, blindness, and end- stage renal disease," and in Ayurvedic medicine the term used for diabetes mellitus (DM) is *madhumeha kshaudrameha* (102).

The Ayurvedic approach to DM management includes life-style dietary interventions, exercise, and a variety of hypoglycemic herbs and herbal formulas depending upon the predominant *dosa*...the ayurvedic clinical description of DM, etiology, diagnosis, prognosis, and recommended lifestyle changes are basically similar to those described in Western medicine. (Mishra 102)

Clearly, modern Western medicine and Ayurvedic medicine are not entirely on two separate ends of *mythos / logos* spectrum when dealing with diabetes; on the contrary, the religious approaches to healing are compatible with those of science. For example, in ancient India, Mishra explains, Ayurvedic practitioners determined the diagnosis for diabetes through the detection of the level of sweetness in the urine by observing the swarm of flies and ants over the urine (105). Mishra's account of clinical examination demonstrates that Ayurveda, like scientific medicine, uses specific strategies to diagnose an illness. *Logos* and science, in this case, run parallel to the strategies and cures of ancient Ayurvedic medicine in India.

Professor Mishra has shown how an Ayurvedic practitioner diagnoses a patient with DM. A further step would be the path Ayurveda takes to cure that patient. In an evidence report, "Ayurvedic Interventions for Diabetes Mellitus: A Systematic Review," prepared by Paul Shekelle, M.D., Ph.D. and his colleagues in the Southern California Evidence-Based Practice Center, the success of Ayurvedic treatment for diabetes mellitus using several different studies is evaluated. The results from the study confirmed that the herbs used in the Ayurvedic process were effective in controlling the glucose level: "studies using fenugreek [herb] generally reported beneficial results for control of cholesterol and, to a lesser degree, for improved blood glucose control....Two Ayurvedic formulas, D-400 and Ayush-82, were used in a number of studies that showed promising results" (National Center for Biotechnology Information). The report closely examined various studies and the ways by which the experiments were performed to determine the efficiency of Ayurvedic medicine in treating diabetes mellitus, concluding that several Ayurvedic medicines could aid patients with diabetes successfully. Many studies confirm positive results of Ayurveda on patients with diabetes. Southern California Evidence-Based Practice Center is not the only center that studies the effectiveness of Ayurvedic medicine. The Internet Health Library includes a study by the Department of Endocrinology and Metabolism, IPGME & R and SSKM Hospital in Calcutta, in

regard to the Ayurvedic treatment for diabetes as well. "The report concluded that the results indicate that the Ayurvedic herbal compound is effective as an adjuvant to conventional treatment for non-insulin dependent diabetics" ("Ayurvedic Treatment and Diabetes"). Ayurvedic herbal compounds, discovered several thousand years ago, have proved to be a promising treatment for diabetic patients, and are being used in the modern world as a "conventional treatment." That Western practice centers are testing the effectiveness of an Indian religious medicine confirms the power of Ayurveda, and challenges the notion that people seem to be turning to science and *logos* and pushing away from religion and *mythos*. If religion were truly irrelevant to science, research would not be performed to assess the efficacy of a form of religious medicine.

Ayurveda, however, is more than a "religious" medicine, but has ties to the western disciplines of psychology, anatomy, biology, physiology, and others. The positive effects of Ayurvedic medicine on the field of psychology and diabetes suggest that Ayurveda is effective with a broad range of problems. Ayurveda has already shown to be effective in several studies, in which clinical tests were performed, such as the study performed in Calcutta, and the following case example will further the evidence of the effectiveness of Ayurveda. An online source, Oracle Think Quest Education Foundation, using recognized institutes such as National Institute of Ayurvedic Medicine, evaluates a case of an Asian male. The patient experienced rigorous chest pains, and was barely able to walk. Instead of performing surgery on the patient, the doctor was certain that using Ayurvedic treatment and processes would heal the patient.

Dr. Sodhi determined the patient to have a pitta-kapha body type and started him on a cleansing program that included a change of diet, and appropriate herbs. After three months, the man's cholesterol levels dropped more than 30 percent and HDL's rose to 48. Moreover, the man's exercise tolerance dramatically improved and he became able to walk longer distances and to jog on the treadmill with no symptoms. EKG (electrocardiogram) reading has shown improvement in the man's cardiovascular system. ("Alternative Medicine Therapies")

This example illustrates that the use of Ayurvedic herbs and practice is effective in severe cases of chest pain and high cholesterol, with the improvement of the individual confirmed using EKG, a recent technology. Ayurvedic medicine is not

only useful for acute conditions, however, but for long-term health. Emphasizing that the state of the mind determines the state of the body, Ayurvedic medicine suggests that if an individual is capable of changing his way of life to a lifestyle based on Ayurveda, he is capable of controlling longevity (Tritha 3). Ayurvedic medicine does not simply give herbal compounds, it offers specific ways to perform daily activities. The main goal of Ayurveda is to prevent illness through the use of Mantras, meditation, and regulated living.

Even though Ayurvedic medicine has succeeded in countless ways, it is inevitable for any field of study to be criticized. Biases against Ayurvedic medicine are in part due to the small number of studies performed. A study performed by a critic of Ayurveda, Robert B. Saper, M.D., "Heavy Metal Content of Ayurvedic Herbal Medicine Products," showed that the heavy metal contents in only one of the five Ayurveda HMPs proved to be toxic. However, this study was based on the Ayurvedic herbs sold in the Boston area stores only. Another critic of Ayurveda, Dr. M. S. Valiathan, commented that "clinical studies that would satisfy the liberal criteria of WHO [World Health Organization] have been alarmingly few from India, in spite of patients crowding in Ayurvedic hospitals" ("Tranquillizer"). There are other studies that show the negative effects or side effects of some Ayurvedic medications; however, the solution is to have modern science strengthen the weaknesses of Ayurveda, as Ayurveda can aide in improving western medications. *Logos* and *mythos* must go hand in hand when dealing with the idea that everything consists of negative and positive aspects.

Compared to just a few years ago, the United States population is now using Ayurvedic medicine, as well as other Complementary and Alternative Medicines (CAM), more frequently. Lawrence Tyler, Ph.D., professor of Sociology at Western Michigan University, in *Understanding Alternative Medicine: New Health Paths in America*, explains the wide use of Ayurvedic and herbal medicine in the U.S. Many of the dietary supplements that the Americans consume consist of the same herbal compounds as the compounds listed in Ayurvedic and other CAM texts (Tyler 43). Furthermore, fifty-five percent of all U.S. sales are herbal and dietary supplement sales (43).

Many people in the United States turn to alternative health practices and remedies because they feel that mainstream medicine is not serving their health needs...the dislike and rejection of conventional

medical practices may be as great a contributor to the success of alternative medicines as is the user's satisfactions with such products... people are frustrated by their experience of the established medical profession and looking to alternative medicines as a solution. (58)

Although dietary supplements are accepted the American population, the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) rejects Ayurvedic medicines by claiming that the medicine has high levels of toxicity if taken in large dosages. However, any drugs taken in large doses, even those approved by the FDA, can be toxic. For example, consumption of aspirin in large dosages can be toxic to the liver: "One study, published this month, noted that about half of all cases of liver failure are caused by an overdose of acetaminophen" ("Pick the Right Pain Pill"). Even though aspirin causes toxicity if taken in high dosages, FDA approves it. Nevertheless, FDA still rejects Ayurvedic medicines for being toxic in high dosages. The divergence between Ayurvedic medicine and the FDA and AMA (American Medical Association) is not because of the negative effects of Ayurvedic medicine, but rather mainly due to the pride of the AMA protecting its own principles and methods of practice (Tyler 58). The west (including the AMA) has become so accustomed to its own scientific and technological approaches to medical dilemmas that it does not even want to consider spiritual and natural approaches. As Armstrong has observed, "[w]e...have lost the sense of *mythos* in the West today, but we are very familiar with *logos*, which is the basis of our society" (11).

Like modern medicines, Ayurveda survives criticism and successfully continues to help people in need. In an article, "Study shows the public is turning to alternative medicine and away from dangerous prescription drugs," Mike Adams writes that seventy percent of the adults are now turning to alternative medicines, including Ayurvedic medicine. Even modern science has a negative aspect, for several studies have shown that modern drugs alter the biochemistry of the body, forcing the body to arrive at normal levels of blood sugar, cholesterol, and blood pressure. Because of this, more people are turning to natural remedies of alternative and Ayurvedic medicine (Adams). If science / *logos* and religion / *mythos* were so far apart, people would not turn to Ayurvedic medicine for aid. Westerners are now seeking a new form of medicine, one that combines modern medicine with ancient remedies.

Although many individuals are turning to Ayurveda for support, Ayurveda should be considered a strong addition to the medical field, not a replacement for the western medicine. Ayurveda may not provide a solution to every illness. For example, if an individual needs surgery due to a specific tumor, modern science and technology will be necessary. However, "Ayurveda offers excellent follow up care to facilitate the body's natural healing ability after surgery or medical problem" ("What is Ayurveda?"). Together, modern science and Ayurveda can ensure a healthy lifestyle that may prevent disease states of the body. One way that Ayurveda will be more acceptable to the western world is if doctors in the west recommend it to their patients; but when doctors prescribe medication to the patients they should also give advice of how to lead to a lifestyle that is provided by Ayurveda. Patients do not have to choose between Ayurveda and western medication. Rather, the wisdom of Ayurveda should be incorporated into western medicine.

People in the west have been so comfortable with *logos* that they have overlooked *mythos* as a way of life, and many people in the United State are unaware of the options provided by Ayurvedic medicine. Ayurveda is more common in India because it is marketed and studied more frequently there. In "Ayurvedic Medicine Industry in India," Subhuti Dharmananda, Ph.D., Director for the Institute for Traditional Medicine, states that the main supplies of Ayurveda consume "about 85% of India's domestic market." Additionally, India has more undergraduate schools, physicians and hospitals dedicated to Ayurveda compared to the U.S. The west places many more restrictions on its medical practices, and these regulations and restrictions hold the west back from achieving healthy lifestyles that prevent disease states. Hence, in order to make the use of Ayurveda more widespread, it needs to be evaluated, approved, marketed and recommended regularly by western experts and industry. Ayurveda does not need to be turned into modern science, but there needs to be a branch of science that relies on religious medicine.

Fortunately, Ayurvedic medicine is not only a highly recommended form of medicine in India, and it is beginning to be tested and used in the western world. More hospitals and research centers are performing studies of Ayurvedic treatments every year. Ayurveda has impacted a wide range of people dealing with minor health problems, from headaches to cardiovascular problems. Ayurveda may not address every illness, but like any field of science, it provides many remedies. Every field of science has its own focus, as psychology treats problems of mental health. Similarly,

Ayurveda is its own field, which does not preclude its participation in the science field. On the contrary, Ayurvedic medicine has proven that religion, science and technology can combine to aide one another. Thomas Edison stated, "the doctor of the future will give no medicine, but will interest his patients in the care of the human frame, in diet, and in the cause and prevention of disease." Ayurveda can help modern science to achieve this. Therefore, Ayurveda should be embraced not just as a part of *mythos*, but as a crucial part of *logos* as well.

#### WORK CITED

- Adams, Mike. "Study shows the public is turning to alternative medicine and away from dangerous prescription drugs." *News Target*. 17 April 2006.  
<<http://www.newstarget.com/z019352.html>>.
- "All About Diabetes." American Diabetes Association. 2006.  
<<http://www.diabetes.org>>.
- "Alternative and Complementary Medicine: Ayurvedic Treatment and Diabetes Research Index." Internet Health Library. 30 Nov. 2006.  
<<http://www.internethealthlibrary.com>>.
- Armstrong, Karen. *The Battle for God*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000.
- "Alternative Medicine Therapies: Ayurveda Medicine" Oracle ThinkQuest Education Foundation. 1998.  
<<http://library.thinkquest.org/24206/ayurveda-medicine.html>>.
- "Ayurveda." Science of Life. 2005.  
<<http://scienceoflife.co.uk/Ayurveda/ayurveda.html>>
- "Contemporary Ayurveda: Tranquillizer: Health, Fitness and Relaxation." 2007  
<<http://www.tranquillizer.co.uk/ayurveda/contemporary#mozTocId860714>>
- Corey, Gerald. *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*. United States: Brooks/ Cole-Thompson Learning, 2005.
- "Depression." National Institutes of Health. 06 December 2006  
<<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>>.
- Dharmananda, Subhuti. "The Ayurvedic Medicine Industry in India." September 2003. <<http://www.itmonline.org/arts/ayurind.htm>>
- Elissetche, Martin. "Elmer" Social Science Resource Center. 21 May 2001. Elmer's Social Science Dictionary. <<http://www.elissetche.org/dico/P.htm>>

- Freud, Sigmund. *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego.* New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1967.
- Hankey, Alex, Ph.D. "The Scientific Value of Ayurveda." *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine.* 11 (2005): 221-224.
- Levin, Fred. *Psyche and Brain: The Biology of Talking Cures.* United States: International Universities Press, 2003.
- Maharishi Ayurveda. Information for Practitioners. 2006. Research on Ayurveda. 06 Dec. 2006. <<http://www.maharishiAyurvedapractitioners.co.uk/Index.htm>>.
- Mishra, Lakshmi Chandra. *Scientific Basis for Ayurvedic Therapies.* New York: CRC Press, 2004.
- National Center for Biotechnology Information. 30 October 2006. National Library of Medicine. <[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)>
- "Pick the Right Pain Pill." *Best Health, U.S. News & World Report.* 26 December 2005.
- Radha, Swami Sivananda. *Mantras: Word of Power.* Canada: Timeless Books, 1982.
- Saper, Robert. "Heavy Metal Content of Ayurvedic Herbal Medicine Products." *The Journal of the American Medical Association.* Vol.292 no3 (2004); 292: 2868-2873.
- Scientific Research on TM Maharishi University of Management. 2006. 06 Dec. 2006.<[http://www.mum.edu/tm\\_research/welcome.html](http://www.mum.edu/tm_research/welcome.html)>.
- Tirtha, Swami Sada Shiva. *The Ayurveda Encyclopedia: Natural Secrets to Healing, Prevention and Longevity.* Delhi, India: Sri Satguru Publication, 1998.
- Tyler, Lawrence Ph.D. *Understanding Alternative Medicine: New Health Paths in America.* New York: The Harwoth Herbal Press, 2000.  
<<http://www.usnews.com/usnews/health/articles/051226/26body.pills.htm>>
- "What is Ayurveda?" Natural Salt Lamps. 2004-2007<<http://www.natural-salt-lamps.com/whatisayurveda.html>>
- Zysk, Kenneth G. *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India: Medicine in the Buddhist Monastery.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

COMMENTARY: Joseph Stosko

In contemporary American society, debates continue over the role of medicine's relationship to both the individual's physical and psychological health. Depression and anxiety are two of the most common illnesses that are diagnosed in

the United States today. While relative success is achieved through medication and therapy, it is also possible that other methods could be incorporated to treat common and more serious illness. In her essay, "Ayurvedic Medicine: Effective for Five Thousand Years," Puja Patel attempts to fuse the Indian tradition of Ayurveda and modern medical methods of healing for the purpose of a more holistic approach toward healing and preventable suffering. Perhaps not well known to the average western reader, as Patel reminds us, Ayurveda has been in existence for more than five thousand years, while modern medicine emerged and has continuously been legitimated since the enlightenment. It is precisely within the context of the western enlightenment tradition and its assault on religion or what Karen Armstrong terms as *mythos*, that Patel makes her case for the reinsertion of the legitimacy of a healing tradition that is not western in origin but has incredible relevance and compatibility with modern medicine. She adds that since Ayurveda is a comprehensive system that incorporates both the mind and the body, it can also be proven empirically, tying in Armstrong's other category of *logos*.

Patel's essay can also be seen as an example within a larger framework to reconcile the secularism of the enlightenment tradition with religiosity. Like the many contradictions of modernity, the importance of the dichotomy of secularism and religion are continually becoming increasingly important in the global public sphere. With respect to the western context, secularism has been a tradition for over three hundred years and is still an ongoing process in political and social life. In regards to India, secularism is a more recent phenomenon that does not hold as much power in the public sphere. The point is that the tension and hopeful fusion has to be analyzed and critiqued within that specific national context. Patel's argument is a particular attempt at ideological reconciliation, but is only the first step. How would Ayurveda practically supplement modern medicine? Is a creation of a new medical institution with cosmopolitan principles and various methods, not just including Ayurveda but other traditions as well, be more beneficial than current institutions that attempt to prevent psychological and physical suffering? Are we to imagine a hospital that has an Ayurvedic wing? Why stop there, when that would open the door for the incorporation of healing traditions from all over the world?