

# THE ROOTS OF ĀYURVEDA

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*Selections from Sanskrit Medical Writings*

Selection, translations & introduction

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PENGUIN BOOKS

Thinking - G.W.

## CARAKA ON EIGHT SETS OF THREE (1.11)

## THE THREE AMBITIONS

'Now I shall set forth the chapter which starts with the three ambitions', said the Venerable Ātreya.

A man of the world who is of robust character, intelligence, manliness and courage, and who is interested in discovering what is good for him, both in this world and the next, should develop three ambitions: the will for life, the drive for riches and an aspiration to reach the world beyond.

*The will for life*

Of these three, he should first and foremost develop the will for life. Why? Because when life is lost, everything is lost. A healthy person can safeguard it by following a healthy regimen; a sick person by paying proper attention to relieving disorders. Both these measures have already been discussed, and will be discussed further. And so a person who behaves in the manner prescribed will live to a ripe old age because he has safeguarded his life. This concludes the explanation of the first ambition.

*The drive for prosperity*

Next, he should develop a drive for the second ambition, prosperity. Because, after life, prosperity is the best ambition. There is no misfortune worse than having a long life without resources. So he should endeavor to acquire resources.

I shall describe some proper ways of earning such resources. They include, for example, farming, husbandry, trade, service to the king, or any other jobs that are not frowned upon by good people, and that provide a livelihood and affluence. He should find one of these, and start to work at it. Working in this manner, a man will live a long life, filled with honour. This concludes the explanation of the second ambition.

*The aspiration for the world beyond*

Next, he should develop an aspiration to reach the world beyond.

There is some uncertainty about this. How is that? Where do doubts about whether or not we exist after departing this world come from?

## ON REBIRTH AND NON-BELIEF

There are some people who trust only what they can observe, and because rebirth is something beyond the senses they become non-believers. There are others who, solely on the strength of religious tradition, expect to be reborn. But the scriptures themselves are divided:

Some people think that the cause of birth is a mother and a father. Yet others think it is spontaneous creation, or divine intervention, or mere chance.

So it is that people wonder whether there is such a thing as rebirth or not.

The wise man should put aside doubt and the views of the non-believers. Why? Because very little is directly perceptible, while vast is that which cannot be directly perceived. For example, there is what one can comprehend from religious tradition, by inference, and through logic. Why, the very senses by means of which we comprehend visible things are themselves beyond perception!

It is not rigorous to say that only the visible exists, and nothing else exists. After all, an object may escape detection even if it is perceptible. This might happen when things that do actually exist are either too close, or too far away, or are covered up, or if one's senses are weak, or one's attention wavers, or if the objects are right next to something identical, or are eclipsed, or are too tiny to be seen.

And these scriptures are no reason either, because they contradict logic:

If the soul of a mother or father were to enter the child, that soul might enter two ways: either whole, or in part. If it were to enter whole, the mother or father would immediately die; and yet the subtle soul cannot be divided into parts.

Some hold the opinion that the intellect and psyche are transferred as though they were the soul; such folk cannot accept that creatures are generated in four different ways.

One should recognize that whatever particular characteristics the six elements have is inherent in them, and their conjunction and dissociation is caused solely by *karma*.

It is unacceptable to say that the basis of consciousness, which is beginningless, is created by another. But creation by another may be acceptable if the cause is 'that other', the soul.

A non-believer admits no proof, not anything to be proven; no agent, not any cause. For him there exist no gods, no prophets, no saints, no *karma* nor any legacy of *karma*. For him even the soul does not exist. His own soul is infected with arbitrariness. This sin is the greatest sin of all: to cling to non-belief. So an intelligent man should cast off this mentality, which leads nowhere, and use the light of intelligence, provided by good men, to see everything as it really is.

**On how to know**

In fact, everything has two aspects: the true and the false.<sup>19</sup> There are four ways of investigating this: through the precept of an authority, by perception, by inference, and by reasoning.

**Definition of authority**

'Authorities' are those whom austerity and knowledge have freed completely from agitation and lethargy. Authorities are cultured and discerning; their statements are incontrovertibly true. They have clear, unobstructed knowledge of past, present and future. They are neither agitated nor lethargic, so how could they not speak the truth?

**Definition of perception**

Perception is defined as that awareness which is manifested at the exact moment that the soul, the senses, the mind and an object are in contact.

**Definition of inference**

Something is inferred after there has been a perception, and there are three ways in which it can be done, from the past, the present or the future. In the present: a concealed fire from its smoke. In the past: intercourse from seeing pregnancy. In the future: inferring fruit from a seed. Intelligent people, having observed a fruit that originated from a seed, know that in the present case it will be exactly the same.

**On reasoning**

Corn comes about from the conjunction of water, ploughing, seed, and season. This is 'making connections'. So is the creation of fetuses from the

<sup>19</sup>Or 'what exists and what does not exist'.

conjunction of the six elements. Fire arises from the conjunction of fire stick, base, and friction. The banishment of sickness through the successful combination of the four methods of medicine is achieved through 'making connections'.<sup>20</sup>

There is a mentality which regards existing things as being generated from the combination of many causes. That is what is known as reason. It applies to the past, present and future, and it leads to the achievement of the three goals of life.

This is the judgement by means of which everything may be judged; there is no other. Using it to test the true and the false in this way shows that rebirth does exist.

**On rebirth established from authority**

In this context, authoritative tradition is, for example, the Veda. Anything declared by scholarship which does not contradict the sense of the Veda, which is propounded by those who can judge, which is agreed upon by cultured people, and which promotes the general welfare of the world, also counts as authoritative tradition. This authoritative tradition gives us to understand that the highest good is most effectively brought about by austerity, generosity, sacrifice, truthfulness, non-violence, and a chaste life.

Those who are without blemish have taught via the scriptures that people who have not transcended the flaws in their own character cannot be free from rebirth. Of old there were

<sup>20</sup>These verses involves a play on words that does not work easily in English. A Sanskrit word for 'reason, logic' is *yukti*; the root used in this word also gives the word *ananyoga*, 'conjunction, combination', which the author is here using in his metaphors for the process of reasoning. The image is of reason as a process of putting together elements to derive a result; it is the opposite of that implied in the English 'analysis'.

very ancient masters who had divine vision. These ancient ones had mastered the scriptures, and thrown off all fear, passion, anger, greed, delusion and pride. They were intent on the Absolute, they were authorities. They knew how to perform rituals properly, and their intellects displayed undiminished purity. They observed, and then taught rebirth, so it has to be believed.

#### *On rebirth established by perception*

It may be established on the basis of perception too.

- Children of the same mother and father may not be alike.
- People from the same background may have different colouring, voices, looks, temperaments, intellects or fortunes, be born in high or low families, as servants or lords.
- Life may be happy or miserable, and life may be of various lengths.
- Past deeds give present rewards.
- Actions which are similar yield different outcomes.
- Aptitude in one area of activity, but lack of aptitude in another.
- The memory of previous births, for example when people come back to life after dying.
- People may look similar, but one may be nice, another nasty.

#### *On rebirth established by inference*

Then again one can make an inference like this: this is the fruit of an action I myself performed in a previous life, which was inevitable, indelible, supernatural by definition, and trailed after me. And hereafter something else will come to be. The seed is inferred from the fruit, and the fruit from the seed.

#### *On rebirth established by reasoning*

And this is the reasoning:

- A fetus is born from the combination of the six elements.
- Activity comes from the combination of an agent and an instrument.
- An action performed has an outcome, not one that was not performed.
- A sprout cannot grow if there is no seed.
- The outcome corresponds to the action.

'Reason' means saying that one thing cannot grow from the seed of another.

#### *Summary*

Thus, since the four means of cognition establish the existence of rebirth, a man should follow the paths of righteousness, namely obedience to his guru, schooling, the performance of religious vows, taking a wife, begetting children, caring for his servants, showing reverence to guests, generosity, freedom from avarice, frugality, not being spiteful, steadfastness in the actions of body, speech and mind, circumspection regarding the body, the senses, thoughts, the intellect, the self, and mental equilibrium. A man should take up such pursuits, and any others he knows of which are like them, and which are approved of by good people, which lead to the next world, and which provide a living. A man who behaves like this achieves renown in this life and on departing from it he goes to the world beyond. This concludes the explanation of the third ambition, for the world beyond.

#### THE THREE PILLARS

Now, there are three pillars, three kinds of strength, three sources, three illnesses, three paths of disease, three kinds of physician, and three kinds of medicine.

The three pillars are food, sleep and a chaste life. As long as a person does not get addicted to the things which are bad for him, which will be described below, then these three apt pillars

support his body and it can continue full of vigour, radiance and growth for as long as life is meant to last.

#### THE THREE KINDS OF STRENGTH

The three kinds of strength are the inherited, that which matures with time, and that which is worked for. The inherited is what is natural to the body and the character. That which matures with time develops from the passing seasons and stages of life. And finally, that which is worked for is what comes from the combination of food and exercise.

#### THE THREE SOURCES OF DISEASE

The three sources are the overuse, underuse and abuse of sense-objects, actions, or time.

#### *Overuse, underuse and abuse of the senses*

**Sight** So, looking for too long at excessively bright visual objects counts as overuse. Not looking at anything at all counts as underuse. And abuse would be looking at objects that are too close, or too distant, or that are arc terrible, horrible, shocking, hateful, revolting, hideous or frightening, and so on.

**Sound** Similarly, listening to sounds like thunder, banging, or shouting counts as overuse. Not listening to anything at all counts as underuse. And abuse would be listening to words which are harsh, or about the death of a dear one, or about mortification, or horrifying, and so on.

**Smell** Similarly, smelling smells which are too acrid, pungent, or make one's eyes water counts as overuse. Not smelling anything at all counts as underuse. And abuse would be smelling smells which are stinking, odious, shitty, dank, or smelling poisonous gas, or a corpse, and so on.

**Taste** Similarly, eating things with too many flavours counts as overuse. Not taking any flavours at all counts as underuse. And

its abuse can be pointed out in the context of the specific rules for eating (given in chapter 3.1.21), with the exception of the rule about the volume of food.<sup>21</sup>

**Touch** Similarly, frequently touching things that are too hot or too cold, or taking too many baths, massages or rubs, counts as overuse. Never doing anything like this counts as underuse. And abuse would be frequently having baths, and so on, or touching things that are hot or cold, but doing so in the wrong sequence, or striking an uneven surface, or touching something dirty.<sup>22</sup>

In this context, the sense of touch is unique amongst the senses in that it permeates the other senses. It is in permanent contact with the mind. And mind also permeates the permeation of touch. So, the permeating touch can bring about in each of the senses a particular condition which, because it is deleterious, is 'an unwholesome association of sense and object'.

A wholesome sense-object is one which is beneficial.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Overuse, underuse and abuse of action*

Action is the use of speech, mind or body. Using speech, mind or body too much counts as overuse. Not using them at all counts as underuse. Abuse of the body would include suppressing urges, blustering, tripping on something uneven, falling over, throwing one's limbs down, soiling one's limbs, hitting, scraping, inhibiting the breathing, bruising, and so on.

The abuse of speech would include betrayal, lying, inappropriateness, quarreling, or words which are nasty, disconnected,

<sup>21</sup>The chapter referred to gives eight rules for appropriate eating. All but the rule about quantity can provide examples of the abuse of the sense of taste.

<sup>22</sup>The commentator Cakrapāṇidatta explains 'in the wrong sequence' with the example of someone who, having got too hot with a bath and a dry rub, plunges suddenly into freezing water.

<sup>23</sup>See p. 46 for some explanatory remarks on this passage.

impolite, or harsh. Abuse of the mind would include fear, grief, anger, greed, delusion, pride, envy, and holding false beliefs.

In short, one should recognize that abuse comprises anything improper or forbidden that arises from speech, mind, or body and that does not count as overuse or underuse. So one should accept that these three kinds of action, which are subdivided into three types, constitute a violation of good judgement.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Overuse, underuse and abuse of time*

Taking the year as a period of time, the seasons of winter, summer and the rains feature cold, heat and rain respectively. A period of time which has too much of its own character counts as the overuse of that time. A period of time which is deficient in its own character counts as the underuse of that time. And the abuse of a period of time would be a time which had features which were the opposite of its proper character. Time, then, is called transformation.

#### *Summary*

Thus these three, each of which is threefold, are the causes of disease: the inappropriate conjunction of objects and senses, the violation of good judgement, and transformation. But when they function appropriately they become the causes of the natural state. Indeed, the good or bad state of an existing thing is a function solely of its use, underuse, overuse, or wrong use. Things are in good or bad states depending on the usage which is appropriate to them.

<sup>24</sup>This 'violation of good judgement' (*prajñāparādha*) is a concept of central importance in Caraka's *Compendium*, and represents the most fundamental idea of disease causation in his system. For further discussion see Dasgupta (1969: 2.321, 415–23), and Weiss (1980).