

An Ayurvedic viewpoint into Dharma (righteousness) and today's society.

There have been a number of violent incidents recently documented in the media. Some of these incidents have been extremely vicious and have resulted in death which has led me to wonder at how society today is progressing. According to the reports it seems to be full of crime and anti-social behaviour. There is even a new word added to the English vocabulary of ASBO, or the anti-social behaviour order, given to persons demonstrating threatening or alarming behaviour to others.

In my bewilderment of how society is progressing and what it could hold for our future lives, I began to go back to the root of knowledge and to the Ayurveda viewpoint as documented in the ancient philosophy. I found many references to the importance of how we conduct our lives and how this can impact on our health and well-being.

Ayurveda, the ancient philosophy or science of life, has its origins clearly embedded in the Vedic scriptures. A principle idea which dominates the scriptures is the concept of Dharma. Dharma means righteousness, as in rightful conduct and good deeds. In Ashtanga Hrdayam, the Ayurveda treatise set down by the great Acharya Vagbhata, it states that the 'happiness of living beings is based on dharma, and therefore every person should follow righteousness'.

There are also ten wrongful actions stated in the next two slokas and it is the disregard for these which is leading to a more and more disruptive society. The wrongful actions stated include physical, mental and the use of speech. Causing injury to others and stealing are the physical wrongful actions. The wrong uses of speech are: Using abusive or harsh language; not telling the truth; quarrelling or argumentative speech; gossiping; and speaking badly about someone in their absence. The mental unjust actions are jealousy, misunderstanding, finding fault with others and not being tolerant. It can be seen that the verbal and mental wrong conducts are quite commonplace in society today and also not necessarily taken as wrong behaviour. It is all too often that we are judgemental or in an environment where others are and the situation is accepted.

The physical unlawful actions of causing injury to others and stealing are widely not accepted by society. In most religions and societies it is accepted that to harm someone else is unjust. But unfortunately physical harm is becoming more and more commonplace. So how did this disruptive and violent behaviour come about? Acharya

Charaka outlines the yugas in Charaka Samhita and how each yuga or 'age' has given rise to the present situation or the age we are in, the Kali Yuga.

Charaka states that during Satya Yuga, the first age, people were godly. They had the direct vision of the Vedas and behaved according to them. They were endowed with truthfulness, simplicity, non-violence, charity and were devoid of fear, attachment, envy, greed, anger, fatigue and laziness. They were energetic beings and had a long life span. Because of the good qualities of the people, the Earth was also filled with good qualities and this was passed onto the food grains, leading to highly nutritious food.

However towards the end of the Satya Yuga, some people over-indulged leading to their bodies becoming heavy and full of weight. Due to this heaviness, they felt fatigue and this in turn led to them not doing much and becoming lazy. The laziness led to the accumulation of goods and the resulting attachment to them led to the greed of wanting more. With the Satya Yuga ending on this note, the next age, the Treta Yuga started with greed giving rise to malice. Then other negative traits arose one from the other: anger, vanity, hate, cruelty, fear and worry to name a few. A quarter of righteousness or Dharma disappeared during the Treta Yuga and this led to a reduction in the good attributes of the Earth and so a reduction in the quality of food grains. This resulted in the life span of the living beings to diminish and also gave rise to the vitiation of Pitta and Vata doshas (imbalances in the body) which lead to the first diseases. In the same way righteousness and the qualities of living beings decreased in the following ages and has led to the demise in our society now. According to Hindu philosophy, the age we live in now is the Kali Yuga. It is the age where human civilisation deteriorates spiritually and we are furthest from God; hence the increase in crime and violent behaviour.

It is very interesting to note that the qualities of the Earth decreased as the qualities of those living on Earth decreased. The food we take in is extremely important to the state of our well-being, and it is essential that we eat food which is nutritionally as rich as possible. If the environment around us is being depleted of nutrients then this is made more difficult and it is important for us to realise that the energies we project, are also the same as those which come to us. It is 'like attracts like' or so the saying goes. With this in mind, if we have better qualities as the living beings on the Earth it would cause the Earth to have better qualities which would be projected into the nutritional value of the food we eat.

It is extremely easy to categorise the Yugas as mythology and stories but it is also easy to see how if we present a good environment, good energy and well-being will surround us. Similarly if we are negative, the bad actions coming to us will outnumber the positive ones.

Let us take a look back at the verbal and mental wrong actions mentioned by Vagbhata. The verbal ones of using abusive speech, lying and speaking badly of someone in their

absence can be easily eliminated. We need to speak as we would like to be spoken to, and as Vagbhata says speak 'with a pleasant face.' How often do we see people who are said to love each other quarrelling? Why do we often hurt the ones we love instead of loving them more? Once we start being more loving towards our family, friends and the people around us, they will in turn become more loving as they see our actions and there will be a huge snowball effect for society. You may be thinking this is a bit far-fetched but wouldn't it be nice to see where our actions can take us?

The mental wrong doings can also be easily alleviated. Behaviours of jealousy, intolerance, finding faults in others and no awareness or understanding are all traits of the lower or basic self of the individual. We should all be trying to find a higher or more aware self and therefore succumbing less and less to lower personalities within ourselves. Being more loving, caring, tolerant of others and less judgemental are all higher self behaviours.

We can increase these behaviours by being more conscious and aware of our actions. Every action has a reaction. We need to become aware of our actions and the subsequent reactions. Loving thoughts and deeds will lead to loving actions. Similarly disruptive and unkind thoughts and deeds will lead to negative actions.

So how about using our Ayurveda and Yoga teachings to make the environment we live in better and subsequently society as a whole more harmonious. It has previously been seen that the qualities of the Earth and therefore the food grains decreased with the demise of righteousness of beings. We can try and make the food we eat as wholesome as possible using fresh ingredients where possible and cooking and eating with positive thoughts and energy. The Yugas or ages started deteriorating with the wrong use of food. There are many Ayurveda guidelines on how to eat including not eating to a full stomach but also having enough room for water and air to help with the process of digestion. It is also necessary to be conscious of the food we take in and taste each morsel; and not eating whilst reading or watching television.

Staying with the physical aspect of our body, it helps to be consistent with our yoga practice. The practice of Hatha Yoga with more asanas helps with the digestion of food and leads to less over-indulgence. This in turn will help with the fatigue and laziness and thus help to eradicate the negative behaviours that living beings succumb to.

Following on from the physical practice of Hatha Yoga is the practice of yoga on the mental plane, or Raja Yoga. Practising more Raja Yoga will let the mind move into parts of itself which are more loving and the allowance of these parts to flourish will lead to a positive, loving energy in the person. The practice of meditation and letting go as achieved by Raja Yoga takes time to develop in the individual and it is important not to rush the mind into it and let it evolve as it should. The best way to start meditation is to still the mind and air within the body (prana or vata) first with some deep breathing and the alternate nostril breath. Once the breathing is stilled it will be easier to focus the mind on the meditative form. For a positive thinking meditation, think of something

valuable in your life. This can be the smallest, simplest thing such as a flower or the sun. Or it can be more individually meaningful such as a deity, spouse or children. Meditation can start from a few minutes a day and increase as your ability to focus rises. It is a great way to start living more positively and with more loving energy and thoughts.

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