

## ***Dinācārya: Changing Lives Through Daily Living***

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*The puruṣa or self-conscious personality is born from Rasa. Therefore an intelligent person should carefully preserve his bodily rasa by adopting a proper regimen of diet and conduct. – Suśruta<sup>i</sup>*

*Dinācārya* (daily routine) is one of the single most powerful Āyurvedic tools for improving overall health and wellbeing.

Āyurveda, literally “the science of life,” seeks to support a rich, flavorful life on all levels. The Sanskrit word *rasa* translates as “juice,” “sap,” “taste,” or “flavor.” It is also the name of the primary nourishing, grounding, cooling, liquid substance of the body that is associated with plasma, lymph and chyle.<sup>ii</sup> Every cell of our body requires *rasa*. If *rasa* is healthy, we are likely to feel vital, satiated, content and find enjoyment in life. Having an optimal *dinācārya* is one important way to support healthy *rasa*.

An ideal *dinācārya* takes advantage of the shifting qualities in each time of day, season, and environment in determining the best activity to engage in and when to engage in it. For example, because “like increases like”—a law of Nature, according to Āyurveda—we observe that the relative heat of midday increases the power and capacity of *agni*, the digestive fire. This means that the middle of the day is the best time to eat our main meal. In that way we are taking advantage of the natural increase of heat.

While we can take advantage of the natural qualities throughout each day, there are also circumstances where we need to adjust our actions to counteract the natural qualities of a given time. For example, dawn is a natural time of change—from darkness to daylight. While we can take advantage of that transformational energy to encourage a fruitful meditation, the grounding, quiet stability of a meditation practice may also serve to counteract the potentially anxiety-producing aspect of change.

If we are interested in gaining, regaining or maintaining a healthy equilibrium, it is incumbent upon us to recognize the qualities inherent in times of day and our environments,<sup>iii</sup> and learn how to engage with them in a manner that maintains balance. Sometimes this means taking advantage of the qualities inherent in our environments, and sometimes it means learning how to counteract them. The best action for each part of the day, and the best response to our environment will, in part depend on our individual constitutions. What will feel good to one person may cause irritation or anxiety in another.

Though there are certain elements of *dinācārya* that may need to be tailored to our unique needs, there are guidelines outlined in the classic ancient Āyurvedic texts<sup>iv</sup> that can benefit most of us, most of the time. Why an ideal *dinācārya* can be such a powerful tool for change, healing, and health, can be better understood if we are familiar with the Eastern medical principle of microcosm vs. macrocosm.

## The Principle of Microcosm and Macrocosm

There is a principle accepted by Eastern medical traditions including Āyurveda, pertaining to the relationship between microcosms and macrocosms. Here is how Caraka, an ancient sage of Āyurveda describes it:

*The individual is not different from the universe.  
All natural phenomena in the universe exist in the individual.  
The wise desire to perceive all phenomena in this way. --Caraka<sup>v</sup>*

Everything that exists in the macrocosm exists in the microcosm, and the reverse is true as well: everything that exists in the microcosm exists in the macrocosm. Let us look at some various examples of this principle at work.

In Āyurveda, a common application of this law is in the elemental macro and microcosms. In the human being, as well as in the universe, there are five archetypal, creative elements—earth, water, fire, air and ether—and three forces: one that governs movement, one transformation and the third structure. In the Universe these forces are called *anila*, *sūrya* and *soma*, respectively. In the human being, they are the *doṣas*: *vāta*, *pitta* and *kapha*, respectively. *Anila* and *vāta* are both associated with space, air, change and movement, among other things. *Sūrya* and *pitta* are both associated with transformation and heat, among other things and *soma* and *kapha* are both nourishing, grounding and cooling forces.

The microcosm will always reflect the macrocosm. For example, in the fire of summer—governed by *sūrya*—we may have more of a tendency to suffer from internal *pitta* conditions, such as ulcers, anger or skin rashes. The macrocosm of the seasonal environment is affecting the microcosm of the human environment.

The microcosm affecting the macrocosm might be expressed in the now famous example of the butterfly flapping its wings in one part of the world and this affecting whether patterns on far away continents. Sometimes clearly expressed and at other times subtle or difficult to perceive, the Law of Macrocosm and Microcosm is nonetheless a fundamental principle in Āyurveda that can have profound implications.

If we apply this principle to the passage of time, we see temporal microcosms and macrocosms. In these, each time cycle is a microcosm of the next. There is the 24-hour cycle where night gives way to light, which again yields to darkness. This daily rhythm goes on and on and on, mimicking the grander, more macrocosmic cycles: The cycles of seasons, where new growth of Spring matures in Summer; Autumn yields harvest and then surrenders to the cold, dormant months of winter, that once again melt into the birthing energy of Spring. There is the cycle of life, from conception to birth, childhood, middle age, old age, death and—if we accept the idea of reincarnation—to rebirth. Some spiritual traditions talk about cycles of ages, where an age of light and wisdom gives way to increasingly dark and ignorant ages, and finally returns again to an age of light. All of these cycles have resonance with each other. As the musical note C revisits itself again

and again, going up or down the scale in various octaves, archetypal experiences repeat in each temporal cycle.

In relation to *dinācārya*, we can be particularly interested in the relationship between the 24-hour cycle microcosm and the macrocosm of the life-cycle of a human being. In the morning when we wake, our senses and consciousness transition from sleep to daily reality, in a similar way as when our senses awake when we are born and transition from life within the womb to life outside of it. We become more active in the middle part of the day, as the middle portion of our lives tend to be more ambitious and active and then we slow down in the evening, preparing for sleep, as we slow in old age, preparing for our ultimate transition to death. We could say this, then: that early morning roughly corresponds to pregnancy, birth and early childhood. Morning corresponds to later childhood, midday to midlife, and late afternoon through twilight equates to old age or the twilight of life. Nightfall signifies death and, if we accept reincarnation (not a necessity to benefit from the practice of *dinācārya*), nighttime would correlate with the mysteries encountered by the un-embodied soul between lifetimes.

If the macrocosm of our lifetime can be affected by the microcosm of one day, it follows that it is important *how* we spend that day. The sages who first delivered the precepts of Āyurveda were well aware of this and outlined guidelines for a healthy *dinācārya*; guidelines we can adjust according to seasons and our various needs and constitutions.

While we may have little or no control over the grander cycles of ages, the seasons, or even our present lifetime, we do have an opportunity each day to take advantage of a new day. And how we spend the microcosm of a day may affect the macrocosm of a lifetime.

It is of particular interest to note that, while general life principles are given as guidelines to live our daily lives, the bulk of specific directions for *dinācārya* are geared towards a morning routine, from waking sometime between 3am and dawn, to meditating, grooming, exercising and bathing. All this takes place before breakfast. From breakfast onward we are left to our discretion, to apply ethical living to our particular needs and patterns. Before we look at the rest of the day, let us consider why is so much emphasis given to the early morning routine.

### **Why the Emphasis on Mornings?**

Years ago a new patient came from out of state for an office visit. Over the course of the consultation, I learned she had several health issues that had plagued her since early childhood. She felt they were possibly related to her birth, and early childhood, which had both been difficult. As the conversation progressed however, I sensed skepticism and dubiety in her, about Āyurveda, as she hinted she had only come for the consultation at the urging of a friend. I felt she perhaps had firmly relegated Āyurveda to that section of the brain the “practical” among us reserve for All Things Woo-Woo. I considered prescribing certain herbs or regimens that might address her maladies—but I rather thought she may not do anything I suggested. She already thought Āyurveda was weird and, as an extension, so was I. So I decided I had nothing to lose. And got weirder.

My only suggestion was that she wake at dawn, find a way to feel love at that time and, in that loving mood, apply some sweet essential oils to a few *marma* points (similar to acupuncture points) specific to her conditions, and then sit quietly and focus carefully on Good Things: God, Nature, the Universe—whatever she considered divine. I didn't give her herbs, dietary suggestions, other lifestyle regimens—all usually essential components of an Āyurvedic prescription.

She looked at me like I had two heads. I thought I would never hear from her again.

About six months later I received a card from that woman, expressing gratitude. Every single one of her symptoms was gone. She was a new woman.

Why did this work?

Who ever really knows? But here's why I think it might've worked then, and why I think it works well in many situations. And why I think Āyurveda places so much emphasis on morning routines.

I think the healing comes from the potential we can tap from the relationship between early morning and early human development, introduced above. Let us explore this a little more.

If indeed the early morning time period relates to pregnancy and birth, we would suspect that there would be similarities between the two. And indeed there are. One striking similarity is that both times are governed by what Āyurveda calls, "*vāta*"—a biological force associated with periods of change, transition, movement, the nervous system, formation of neural pathways and all mental and physical movement.

If we look more closely, we see that *apāna*, the downward moving form of *vāta*, becomes particularly active around both dawn and birth—the primary reason that many people tend to have bowel movements in the morning, and why the baby moves down the birth canal during birth. and moves from one reality—inside the mother—to another—life outside the mother. *Prāṇa*, or life force—our vital energy also related *vāta*, is a subtle and practical intelligence that is especially active in the morning, as our senses transition from sleep to wakefulness and as, at birth, a baby's consciousness adjusts from life inside the dark womb to life outside the womb. *Vāta* and the stirring of *prāṇa* are natural and dominant experiences of both morning and birth.

In a subtler, but powerful role, *prāṇa* organizes the energy and physical matter in the developing fetus during pregnancy. If dawn relates to birth, pre-dawn hours would relate to pregnancy.

It would stand to reason that damaging or healing influences on *vāta* would be particularly significant during both the early morning hours and during early human development, when we were in the womb, being born, or experiencing our first months or years of life. If the mother is calm and healthy during pregnancy, *vāta* functions

optimally and the fetus's development and birth are more likely to progress in a healthy manner. If *vāta* is disturbed during pregnancy or birth, the life of that new human being may be negatively affected.

Both Āyurveda and Western medicine recognize that what happens to us in utero and early in life is crucial in forming lifelong patterns and rhythms, because our organs, tissues, emotional patterns and proclivities are developed during this time. Patterns established during this time are often difficult—sometimes thought impossible—to change. Trauma during these critical formative stages aggravates *vāta* and often creates *khāvaigunyas*—challenge areas—in various organs or systems or proclivities. Sometimes these can have a negative impact on our physical, mental and emotional patterns throughout our lives.

For example, one person may feel a vague, free-floating sense of anxiety for her entire life. Another may have always had a weak digestive system or impaired cognitive abilities. Still another may find herself unable to have healthy intimate relationships. Often there is a sense of hopelessness about changing these tenacious patterns.

Whenever we see a pattern that dates back as far as we can remember in our lives, we can guess it has its inception in conception, pregnancy, birth or very early childhood. I frequently see patients with difficult lifelong physical or emotional patterns resulting from trauma suffered in utero, during birth or in childhood. Often they feel a sense of hopelessness about changing these patterns. Sometimes we are even taught in Āyurveda or other medical modalities that these conditions are impossible to change.

Could it really be true that something we had no control over as a developing fetus, or an infant, will negatively affect us for the rest of our lives? That our ability to have intimate relationships, to trust, to digest physical or emotional experiences is forever and unalterably afflicted?

It was the opinion of my guru, that there is always hope for change and healing. He told me “a doctor should always think that he will be able to find the goodness—she will be able to find the cure of the pain of the person.” He didn't tell me there were certain conditions that were impossible to treat. He told me that the outcome of a treatment was not my concern. That was in the hands of God, but that it was our job, both as doctors and patients, to make the efforts.

So, what efforts might we make?

Gratefully, we have a loophole. If we apply our Law of Microcosm and Macrocosm to this dilemma, we see that we can use predawn through early morning as a window of opportunity to go back in time to change, heal and re-pattern early, stubborn, negative patterns, or to reinforce positive ones that were ingrained during our formative early life. Each new day ushers in a cascade of new possibilities and a shower of second chances. We can focus on pacifying *vāta* and encouraging the smooth flow of *prāṇa* in these early morning hours.

*Vāta*, by nature, is easily affected by influences—both positive and negative. Each morning we have a new opportunity to take advantage of this fact and engage in *vāta*-pacifying activities during these times.

If we follow the daily routine that the Āyurvedic sages recommend, we will be counteracting *vāta*'s mobile, changeable qualities with the stability of routine. Since the sweet quality pacifies *vāta*, we can enjoy sweet sounds, fragrances, images, tastes, sensations and meditation.

The meditation and oil massages outlined in the daily routine, as we will see below, both serve to pacify *vāta* and promote the smooth flow of *prāṇa*. Additionally, notice that all the sense organs—the eyes, ears, nose, skin and mouth are cleansed or oiled. Because the sense organs are associated with *prāṇa* and the channels of the mind,<sup>vi</sup> we are cleansing and renewing our mind and perception each morning. When we do this, we pacify *vāta*, *prāṇa* flows freely, our mental and physical apparatus becomes well organized and we are delivered into the new day as a healthy individual.

The first moments of a day set the tone for the day, as birth and the early days of an infant's life impact its lifetime. If we allow the first attention of the day to be peaceful, grateful and infused with a sense of joy, we are delivered into the new day as a healthy individual. And perhaps we are thereby healing the relative macrocosm of our in utero and birth experience at the same time, thereby benefiting our entire life.

### **Daily Morning Routine<sup>vii</sup>**

The *Caraka Samhitā* and the *Ashtāṅga Hrdayam* are two ancient classical Āyurvedic texts still referenced today. These classics outline a routine for daily conduct. They begin with a morning routine as follows, and then go on to discuss general approaches to life that are beneficial. *(Please note that these items are from taken from the ancient classics and therefore may sound a little archaic).*

#### ***Wake up during brahmamuhurta***

*The healthy person should get up (from bed) during brahmamuhurta, to protect his life.<sup>viii</sup>*

*Who gets up early to discover the moment light begins? Rumi*

*O traveler get up; it is dawn. It is not right that you continue sleeping. One who awakes, he finds, One who is asleep, he loses.*

*Get up and open your eyes from slumber and meditate on your Master. Kabir*

*Brahmamuhurta* is the name for the early hours of each day. There are varied opinions about exactly which hours constitute *brahmamuhurta*.

Amitabhan, author of the article “Wake up Before Dawn” and associated with contemporary saint Amritanandamayi Ma (Ammachi), says the *brahmamuhurta* time period covers “the one and a half hours before sunrise,” when the sky has a “rosy-red

hue. A few stars may also be visible.” The tradition associated with Sivananda Yoga says it begins at 4am. The tradition of *Surat Shabda Yoga* includes 3am through dawn, and calls *brahmamuhurta*, the *amritavela*—the time of “elixir” or “ambrosia.” As this is the tradition into which I am initiated, this is the time span I will consider in this exploration.

From Ammachi to Swami Sivananda, to my own lineage and even to Christian traditions, these “ambrosial hours” are emphasized as being the best time for meditation and prayer. The *Ashtāṅga Hṛdayam* teaches that they are also ideal times for “study and obtain *brahma* or knowledge.”

Dr. Vasant Lad also tells us that, in the early morning, “there are loving (*sattvic*) qualities in nature that can bring peace of mind and freshness to the doors of perception.”

Guru Arjan Dev Ji Maharaj says, “always go on remembering Him, and every morning rise up early and make the efforts. Take the food of the devotion of Lord Almighty, then you will have *no difficulties at all*.”

Often the reason given for why this time is so ideal for meditation and obtaining knowledge is that the outer environment is serene and the mind is quieter at this time and more inclined within and less inclined to feel it is missing out on important jobs of the daylight.

In addition to these reasons, we have also seen how the law of microcosms and macrocosms associates the early morning with early human development. This is where the healing potential lies. We have a chance, each morning, to replace traumatic early-life patterns with calm, healing new ones.

The first moments of a day, like the first seconds of an infant’s life, are minutes that can set the tone for an experience. If we allow the first attention of the day to be peaceful, grateful and infused with a sense of joy, it is more likely that our day will be pleasant and, since days comprise our lives, that our lives will be pleasant. Waking before dawn, daily, preferably at the same time each morning, supports all our senses being refreshed as the light arises, and creates a routine that instills stability that is useful to counteract *vāta*, which tends towards irregularity. (*Note: The exception to this may be exhausted, weak, sick, very young or old people who may require extra sleep*).

When we wake, coax ourselves into a loving, receptive mood, to begin our *dinācārya* during *brahmamuhurta*, we are able to enjoy the nourishing effects of love in the same way we might have received—or wanted the experience of safety and love during our in utero and birth experience. We pacify *vāta*, *prāṇa* flows freely, our mental and physical apparatus becomes well organized, and we are delivered into the new day as a healthy individual. And perhaps, as we have seen, we are healing our in utero and birth experience at the same time, thereby benefiting our entire life.

### ***Eliminate***

Early morning is a natural time to urinate and have a bowel movement, as *apāna*, the downward flowing energy in the body, is active at this time. This is a time when we should not be in a rush, and should allow time for the natural rhythms of our bodies to carry out their functions. *Triphala*, a mixture of three dried, powdered fruits, is commonly used in Āyurvedic medicine to support regular bowel habits and healthy digestive tracts.<sup>ix</sup>

### ***Brush teeth***

*Neem*, an extremely bitter herb, is said to be especially good for oral health. These days, there are *neem* toothpastes available. Bitter, astringent and pungent herbs are said to be best for fighting cavities, as they are *kapha*-pacifying and often have antibacterial and antiviral activity.

### ***Scrape the tongue***

This is best done with a smooth tongue scraper made of gold, silver, copper, tin, brass or stainless steel. Tongue scrapers are U-shaped and it is most effective to hold the two ends and scrape from the back to the front of the tongue several times; each time discarding the collected material. Then swish your mouth with clean water and spit out the dirty water.

This routine cleans and freshens the mouth far more than simply removing plaque from the teeth. It also offers an opportunity to consider the appearance of the tongue coat daily. If the coat is thick, it is better to eat a simple, easy-to-digest diet until it clears up, as the coat is an indicator of the health of the digestive tract and the rest of the body. Ideally, the coat should be easily scraped off, leaving a pink, uniformly shaped tongue with no coat, but it should not appear raw either. If you are not sure what a healthy tongue looks like, most young children still have healthy looking tongues, as long as they don't have colds, are on pharmaceutical drugs, or are ill. If your tongue is not clean after you scrape it, it is a good idea to check with an Āyurvedic practitioner to learn if there are simple changes you can make to improve your health.

### ***Drink a glass of warm water***

It is good to drink warm water after brushing your teeth and scraping your tongue, as you will not then swallow the bacteria collected over the course of the night. It can also aid in peristalsis and so may help stimulate a bowel movement.

### ***Gargle with warm sesame oil***

Gargle with warm, untoasted sesame oil to provide strength to jaws and voice, development of face, maximum taste and relish in food. Āyurvedic classics teach that this practice benefits the throat, lips, prevents dental cavities, roots the teeth firmly, reduces dental sensitivity and pain and help make the teeth strong enough to chew even the hardest food items.



### ***Massage gums with warm sesame oil***

Āyurveda teaches us that when *prāṇa* circulates smoothly, blood will circulate smoothly, and will carry nutrition to, and waste from, tissues, thereby supporting their health. My periodontist agrees with this, as he has explained to me that the health of my teeth depend on the health of my gums. Massaging the gums with warm, untoasted sesame oil increases *prāṇa* and blood flow to the gums. If you have gum disease, you might try massaging them with *neem* oil, as *neem* is considered to be antibacterial.

### ***Apply daily cooling salve or cool water to your eyes***

The eyes have a lot of work to do, especially in this computer-dominated age. Dr. Vasant Lad regularly recommends the use of a drop of food-grade rose water or castor oil in each eye and I have experienced benefit from this practice, but it is important not to put anything in your eyes without the guidance of a trained health care practitioner who knows you and your eyes. If you are not able to consult with someone or if you are not comfortable putting anything in your eyes, you can simply splash some cool water in your eyes, to cool and refresh them.

### ***Meditate***

*O traveler get up; it is dawn-it is not right that you continue sleeping.*

*One who awakes, he finds, One who is asleep, he loses.*

*Get up and open your eyes from slumber and meditate on your Master.*

*Kabir*

From Āyurveda to Ammachi to Swami Sivananda, to Christian and other religious or spiritual traditions, early morning hours are emphasized as being the best ones for meditation, prayer and obtaining true knowledge, as we have seen.

During these hours, the environment is serene; the mind is quieter and more inclined within. There is a quietness and peace in the predawn hours that help center the mind and refresh the senses. Within these hours are found the seeds that will form the new day and, as darkness gives way to light, the spiritual aspirant can take advantage of this transformational quality to enhance her own inner journey towards enlightened consciousness.

Whenever my Guru ji would put us in meditation in these hours he would say “Never understand meditation as a burden. Always do it lovingly.” As with anything the saints say, there are secrets to this that go deeper than the obvious meaning. The obvious meaning here is that love and longing pull us closer to the Divine, while doing *sādhana* as a chore may render it little more than an exercise in concentration. However, it is possible that approaching our *sādhana* with love can also aid our physical, mental, emotional well- being and serve to reformat negative patterns that may have been established in utero or during birth. We will explore this more, below. This loving attitude will exert a healing influence on the *vāta* that is predominant during the *brahmamuhurta* hours, and the relaxation will allow for the smooth flow of *prāṇa*.

*Prāṇa* is the equivalent of “*qi*” in Chinese Medicine and martial arts and it is well known in Eastern paradigms that *qi* can not flow if the practitioner or patient is not relaxed. So, if we are tense and result-oriented or rushed while we do our spiritual practices in the morning, the *qi* or *prāṇa* cannot flow and this results in disturbance in the body, mind or spirit, where *prāṇa* flows. On the other hand, if we are so relaxed that we sleep through these hours, we encourage *tamas*, or the force of inertia in our lives, to create obstacles to the free flow of *prāṇa*.

### ***Chew aromatic herbs***

Cardamom or mint is readily available. These can be chewed well and swallowed. The Āyurvedic classics teach that this practice leads to increased clarity, relish for life and food as well as freshening the mouth.

### ***Exercise***

*...lightness of the body, ability to do hard work, keen digestion, depletion of excess fat, stable and distinct physique accrue from exercise. Persons suffering from diseases of vāta and pitta, children, the aged and those having indigestion should avoid it.*<sup>x</sup>

Exercise to the point of excessive sweating and exhaustion is a product of the common “more is better” approach that often prevails in many modern cultures. It is easy to think that nothing much is happening when we watch a *yogi*’s slow progression from one posture to the next or the *qi gong* practitioner who may not sweat or even breath heavily, but if we simply observe adept practitioners of restorative yoga, *tai qi* or *qi gong*, we can find that they are in pretty good—sometimes very impressive—physical condition. Āyurveda teaches that it is ideal to exercise to half your capacity. That is, to stop at the appearance of sweat on the forehead, nose, armpits, joints of the limbs and the beginning of a dry mouth. This too is only recommended for a strong person and in cool seasons. Otherwise only mild exercise is optimal. Āyurvedic classics detail many problems that arise from too much exercise, including bleeding diseases, difficult breathing and emaciation. Excessive exercise, along with insomnia, too much sex, laughing, speaking and other endeavors that spend excessive *prāṇa*, exhausting the person.<sup>xi</sup>

In general, it is best for *kapha* individuals to exercise strenuously. Weight lifting, brisk hiking, jogging, running and energetic forms of yoga all serve to energize and stimulate *kapha* folks in a positive manner. *Pitta* people do well to exercise moderately. Swimming, brisk walking, moderate hiking and challenging but moderate forms of yoga are good choices. Those with a predominance of *vāta* benefit most from gentle exercise like brisk walking, gentle restorative yoga, *qi gong* or *tai qi*.

### ***Abhyanga or Warm oil self massage***

*Abhyanga should be resorted to daily. It wards off old age, exertion and vāta aggravation. It bestows good vision, nourishment to the body, long life, good sleep, good and strong skin... It should be avoided by persons suffering from kapha aggravation, who have just undergone purification therapies (like emesis, purgatives etc.), and who are suffering from indigestion.*<sup>xii</sup>

*As a lubricated axis becomes strong and jerk-resistant, the body becomes firm, smooth and free from vāta and tolerant of exertion and exercise.<sup>xiii</sup>*

One unique feature of Āyurvedic medicine is its generous use of oils for therapeutic purposes. *Abhyanga* is the anointing of the body with warm, often herbal oils. While it is beyond the scope here to detail what oils to use and how to perform *abhyanga*, it is a powerful medicine, especially for pacifying *vāta*, and you can learn details from Appendix C in the book [Balance Your Hormones, Balance Your Life](#) or in the article, [Abhyanga: Āyurvedic Oil Massage](#).

### ***Administer nasya (nasal) oil***

*Nasya* is an oil or an herbal oil that is either applied to the inside of the nostrils, or sniffed in through them. It is taught that it benefits the head, face, hair, vision, smell, hearing, stiff neck, headache, facial paralysis, lockjaw, rhinitis, migraine, head tremors, veins, joints, ligaments and tendons of skull; that the face becomes cheerful and well developed, the voice melodious, stable and grave. The Āyurvedic classics advise us to keep out of the wind and to stay warm, take good food and control the sense organs when we practice *nasya*. Very particular methods of making *nasya* are detailed, including descriptions of many drugs boiled 100 times in pure rain water, with the remaining decoction added to equal quantity of goat milk, etc. While most of us do not have access to all the listed herbs or time to prepare such a concoction, most of us will do well with warm, untoasted sesame oil or herbal oil. It is wise, again, to check with your health care practitioner to determine what would be best for you. I like [Super Nasya Oil](#) at the Āyurvedic Institute.

### ***Oil ears with warm oil***

While some people enjoy filling each ear with about 10 drops of warm oil and leaving it in each side for about 10 minutes, others are more comfortable simply moistening the pinky finger with warm, untoasted sesame oil and lubricating the inside of the ear with this. *Vāta* collects in empty spaces in the body and has a particular affinity with the ears and the sense of hearing, so this practice can help to pacify *vāta*, especially in the ears. It can be effective at helping ear diseases that are due to increased *vāta*, like some forms of tinnitus and loss of hearing, as well as for benefitting tissues and conditions in near proximity to the ears, stiff necks, trigeminal neuralgia and TMJ.

### ***Apply some warm oil to top of head***

Classics advise to moisten the head with warm (not hot) oil daily to prevent headaches, hair loss, graying or thinning hair and to keep the sense organs cheerful and to promote sound sleep.

### ***Foot massage***

Massaging warm oil into the feet, especially the soles of the feet, is said to benefit not only our overworked feet, but also the vision. In the common massage practice called reflexology, each part of the feet represents a different organ or system of the body and so is a micro system that can affect the whole of our body. While most of us can't get a daily, deep massage to our entire bodies, we can get some benefit by giving our feet a good massage each day.

### ***Udvartana***

*Udvartana* is the practice of massaging the body with soft, fragrant powders. It is said to mitigate *kapha*, liquefy fat and produce stability, compactness and strength in the body and to support excellent health of the skin.

### ***Bath & Grooming***

Āyurvedic classics teach that bathing is purifying, aphrodisiac, that it promotes life and appetite; it eliminates fatigue, sweat and dirt, is resuscitative and promotes immunity and strength and valor. It removes itching, dirt, exhaustion, sweat, stupor, thirst, burning sensation, and even, “sin.” Perhaps this is Āyurveda’s equivalent statement to “cleanliness is next to godliness.” While it is so highly rated, there are some specific considerations that the classics outline:

- Pouring warm water over the body bestows strength, but the same over the head, leads to loss of strength of the hair and eyes.
- Contra-indications for bathing: facial paralysis, diseases of the eyes, mouth and ears, diarrhea, flatulence, putrid nasal discharge, indigestion and immediately after eating.
- Along with bathing, one should cut hair, nails, and mustache, keep the feet and orifices (ears, nose, eyes, feet, urethra and anus) clean of waste to promote intelligence, purity and longevity.
- After bathing, apply natural pleasing fragrances, like natural essential oils of aromatic flowers or other plant parts. These produce good smell, longevity, charm, nourishment, strength and pleasing manners.
- After applying a fragrance, dress in clean clothes which are not extravagant but are pleasant to look at. This practice enhances charm, fame, life span, removes inauspiciousness and produces pleasure.
- Wear precious stones, potent hymns and herbs in an amulet.
- Wear ornaments that contain gems, to support *ojas*—a refined substance of our bodies that is responsible for immunity as well as spiritual progress. Gems can also support various planetary strengths and mitigate others, if prescribed by a competent Jyotishi, or astrologer.

### ***Wear footwear***

Just as massaging the feet can benefit vision, Āyurveda encourages the use of footwear to benefit eyesight and tactile sense organs as well as to protect the feet. It is also said to support good energy and healthy libido.

### ***Once weekly apply an irritating drop to the eyes***

*The eye is full of tejas and has risk of troubles especially from shlesman (kapha) hence rasanjana should be used once a week, to drain it...*<sup>xiv</sup>

*Rasanjana is prepared from the decoction of daruharidra (berberis aristata). It is an irritant and so used to produce more lacrimation.*<sup>xv</sup>

It may sound odd to irritate the eye, but there is a reason for it. The eyes contain a great deal of *tejas*, which is a heating and transformative force in the body. *Kapha* can come to protect the channels of the eyes from being damaged by the heat of *tejas*. This *kapha* can then become stagnant. If the eye is caused to significantly tear once a week, this can clear out the channels of the eyes. This should only be done under the guidance of your health care practitioner. These drops should only be applied at night, as the eyes are weaker during the day, and their *tejas* is increased and aggravated by the sun.

## **Adding Love and Focus To Our Morning Routine, To Support Deep Change**

For morning routines to really serve to transform us on a deep level, we can't...hate them.

A healthy morning routine can feel boring. Like a forced march. Like one more component of a life already too filled with obligation and chores.

There are many places a student of Āyurveda, or of life in general, may learn the important physical components of a healthy daily routine. We may enjoy them. Or not. We may instead find ourselves adopting healthy practices, becoming overwhelmed and ultimately choosing to hit our alarms, turn over and fall back asleep and trade healthy routines for lives tainted with attachment to mental, emotional or physical habits that serve us poorly. Habits we know we had better break, lose or change, in order to improve and enjoy life, but find we simply cannot.

Replacing unhealthy habits and patterns with ones that bore us is...not likely to work for long. The unhealthy ones are stubborn and the boring ones are...boring. Why are the unhealthy ones so stubborn, and what can we do to support the new, healthy habits to supplant them?

When we experience stubborn patterns of behavior, thinking, or illness that, despite a great deal of effort, won't budge, it is like these were etched in cement. They've been with us so long that they might as well be. Often, as we have seen, these are patterns that reach back into our early childhoods or even infancy.

In our formative years—when we are infants and young children—the matrix of our consciousness is like wet cement, into which patterns are easily etched. During this entire time, a part of our brain called the nucleus basalis, related to efficient creation of new neural pathways, is turned on 24/7. Somewhere around puberty, the cement dries, and the nucleus basalis turns off. This is efficient, as keeping all those pathways alive requires a tremendous amount of energy. By preserving active patterns and pathways, and pruning away ones that are dormant, we are able to conserve more energy. However it also makes it harder both to erase old patterns and to create new ones.

Hence the difficulty in changing stubborn emotional, mental or physical patterns when we are older.

Wouldn't it be great to have some magic softening serum that we could pour into that cement so we could more easily change our patterns?

There is such a serum. It is called oxytocin, and it renders the matrix into which impressions are made in the brain, more vulnerable to new impressions. It is precisely like softening the cement.

Oxytocin, sometimes called the “love hormone,” or the “cuddle hormone,” is a hormone that increases when we feel a loving connection to someone or something. When we love, we get softer, and so do our brains.

When oxytocin rises, our neural pathways are rendered more receptive to new impressions. Love makes us more receptive to change.

Remember my guru's advice, “Do your meditation lovingly. Don't think of it as a burden”? He said it so often that I stopped hearing it. That is, until many years later, when I learned about oxytocin. If we do our meditations and morning routines lovingly, we are more receptive to change.

Once we have softened the cement, we need to consider how to make a new impression.

Wouldn't it be great if we could turn that nucleus basalis back on?

We can. Through focus. Concerted focus is one of the few switches we can use to reactivate the nucleus basalis, allowing us, once again, to more efficiently create new neural pathways.

The combination of love, which stimulates oxytocin and softens the matrix into which impressions are made, and focus—which reactivates the nucleus basalis—is therefore a powerful combination that makes real change more within our grasp. If we employ this duo in our meditations and morning routines, we create an even more powerful agent of change.

If we are tense, rushed, distracted, or result-oriented while we do our morning routines, oxytocin is not flowing and the nucleus basalis remains dormant. The combination of love and focus, by contrast, has a calming effect on the nervous system, body, and spirit and allows us to more efficiently create new patterns. This dynamic duo can help us truly replace stubborn patterns. A loving and focused morning routine serves as medicine to remedy old patterns and establish healthy new ones.

So, it is not sufficient to go through the motions of a healthy daily routine. We need to be willing to fall in love every morning. This could be with a piece of music, a representation of the Divine, a pet, a parent, a child, a spouse, Nature...the object of our love is not as important as the act of loving itself. It may be useful to pick something impersonal to love, like nature or a representation of the divine or the Good Orderly

Direction (the G.O.D.) of the universe, so that it is a stable recipient of our love, unable to be threatened, but the most important thing is that we fall in love. Every morning.

A healthy morning routine, the most important component of a *dinācārya*—a healthy daily routine— may have a resonance with our in utero development and birth, and may be able to re-pattern old patterns and change our lives, but it will do so more quickly and enjoyably if we employ love and focus.

*Here is a summary of the morning routine.*

#### **A Morning Routine**

- *Wake up during predawn hours*
- *Brush teeth*
- *Scrape the tongue*
- *Drink a glass of warm water*
- *Gargle with warm sesame oil*
- *Massage gums with warm sesame oil*
- *Eliminate*
- *Apply cooling salve or cool water to eyes*
- *Meditate*
- *Chew aromatic herbs*
- *Exercise appropriately for your constitution*
- *Abhyanga (Self massage with warm oil)*
- *Administer nasya (nasal) oil*
- *Lubricate ears with warm oil*
- *Apply some warm oil to top of head*
- *Foot massage*
- *Apply body powders*
- *Bath & grooming*
- *Apply natural fragrances*
- *Dress in clean, pleasant clothes*
- *Wear footwear*

#### **General Life Guidelines**

While the above guidelines outline a daily morning routine, our Āyurvedic classics do not provide such an intensive regimen for the rest of our day. Instead, the Āyurvedic sages understood that, after our morning routine, most of us will go out into the world and need to attend to our jobs and families. However, there are some general life guidelines they include in their discussion of daily routine, that are useful to keep in mind as we go about our business. Some recommendations are simple, like using an umbrella, which is just common sense. Others, like some of the moral ideals, are more difficult to master even in a lifetime. *(Please note that these items are from taken from the ancient classics and therefore may sound a little archaic).*

### ***Use an umbrella***

Use one, if necessary, to protect against rain or intense sun. While the sun is healthy, too much can aggravate the health of skin and increase heat in general in our bodies.

### ***Avoid harsh environments***

Avoid direct breeze, sun, dust, snow, dew, strong winds, or extreme weather.

### ***Maintain a good posture***

Specifically during certain activities. For example: don't sneeze, belch, cough, sleep dine or copulate in improper postures, lest you throw your back out or create some other problem.

### ***Avoid spending time in improper places***

The classics instruct us to avoid the shade of a holy tree or other shrine in which deities reside and to avoid dirty and unholy things. Along these lines, they advise us not to spend the night in trees, social or religious places and, what to speak of nights, to not even spend our days in places of slaughter, forests, haunted houses and burial grounds.

In the modern day we may not believe in ethereal beings, much less be concerned about where they may be spending time, but we can use our intuition to avoid places that feel dark, dirty, contaminated or otherwise polluted or depressing, unless we have good reasons to do otherwise. Such places might include graveyards, slaughterhouses, bars, dark and dirty alleys or other places that tend to attract energies that resonate with these qualities. Whether or not disembodied spirits are a concern to you, it is wise to avoid many of the same places, as they are either places where thieves, thugs or diseases tend to prevail, or are places that may promote a morbid mood...which doesn't help anything.

### ***Don't suppress natural urges***

Natural urges like coughing, sneezing, vomiting, ejaculating, passing gas, eliminating, laughing or crying, should not be either repressed or initiated prematurely by force, lest the smooth movement of *prāṇa* be aggravated. Suppressing these urges can lead to stagnant *prāṇa* or *prāṇa* that is forced to move in an unnatural direction. This is never a good idea, as when *prāṇa* moves in a wrong direction, disharmony and eventually disease is bound to result. For example, repressing the urge to go to the bathroom may lead to constipation, diverticulosis, indigestion or other uncomfortable symptoms.

While not to be suppressed, Āyurveda does recommend covering your mouth when you sneeze, laugh, or yawn. You may not have realized it, but your mother was practicing Āyurveda when she told you the same thing. Spraying our germs around our environment is a good way to perpetuate illness. We can also add that it's a good idea to wash hands regularly, especially when we are sick or people around us are ill. Washing hands, while rubbing them together for 20 seconds, under warm water, is one of the best methods to avoid delivering or recycling germs. No need to get carried away, however, and use Triclosan-laden antibacterial hand-sanitizers every five minutes. It is usually natural to be exposed to our environments, and for our immune systems to rise to the challenges.



### ***Don't unduly strain your body or organs***

Don't sit on your heels (literally) for long; don't make "ugly movements" of the body, or blow your nose forcefully or unnecessarily. This is an odd assortment of admonishments, but useful. Sitting on the heels too long can encourage sciatica. Making "ugly movements" of the body means to make jerking movements, which can encourage pulled muscles. For example, one of my sisters, on her first time out on cross country skis, flailed her arms and limbs in a comical way that made us all laugh, until the next morning, when her low back was so painful that she could barely walk.

Forceful or unnecessary nose blowing can burst local blood vessels, stimulate nosebleeds and can disturb the smooth flow of *prāṇa* in the head.

Another recommendation involves the use of smoke inhalation of certain herb mixes and its proper and improper uses. Smoking is not advisable these days as most people have contraindications for it and the herbal recipes, methods and pipes that were used a thousand years ago are complicated, used for specific ailments, and were prepared in manners and with herbs that are not available to most of us today.

### ***Pace yourself***

It is odd that we often consider fatigue a sign of weakness of character, when we honor other natural urges. If we are hungry, we eat. If we are thirsty, we drink. But, if we're tired, we immediately think, "what's wrong with me?" It may be that there is nothing wrong. We simply need to rest. The Āyurvedic classics advise that we stop the activities of the body, of speech and of the mind before getting exhausted. This can help us preserve *prāṇa* - our life force - and stay healthy.

### ***Protect your eyes***

Don't gaze at the sun for long, carry heavy weight on your head or stare at objects, which are minute, shining, dirty or unpleasant. In modern times, we can include staring too long at a computer screen, smartphone screen, iPod or similar small-screen devices, television or prolonged reading. The eyes have an associated *srotas*, or channel system, that is considered to be an important component of the channel system of the mind. How we affect our eyes affects our minds.

### ***Protect all your other sense organs, too***

The five sense organs are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin. The classics advise that they should neither be too strained nor too lazy. As with the eyes, the other sense organs are also affiliated with the channels of the mind, so affect it accordingly.

### ***Take care with your diet and eating habits***

While it is beyond the scope here to get too deeply into dietary concerns, there are a few guidelines that apply to most people.

- Maintain proper strength of digestion, by eating one-third to one half of the saturation point.

- One should regularly consume whole grains and beans, rock salt, *amla* (a main ingredient in [chyavanprash](#), an herbal jam used regularly in Āyurveda to support health, strength and stamina), pure water, milk, ghee and honey. (These recommendations are for people who digest these substances well and are generally healthy).
- Avoid eating, sex, sleep or studying at dawn or at dusk.
- Eat only after digesting the previous meal.
- Eat the main meal of the day in the middle of the day, when digestive capacity is greatest.
- Eat that which is suitable to you (that you can digest and which is appropriate for your constitution and current condition), in limited quantity.
- Generally follow the guidelines below for *how* to eat:

#### **Enjoy:**

- ❑ Mostly whole, freshly cooked foods including cooked grains
- ❑ Warm, nourishing foods
- ❑ Warm drinks
- ❑ Chewing your food thoroughly, in a calm environment
- ❑ Taking a deep breath after swallowing your last bite, before going on to your next activity
- ❑ Eating meals at regular times every day

#### **Avoid:**

- ❑ Fruit or fruit juice within a half hour of any other food
- ❑ Highly processed foods (like frozen, canned, packaged or fast food)
- ❑ Cold food
- ❑ Raw food (fruits, veggies, salads), especially in the morning and evening. They are okay to have in the middle of the day, especially in warm weather.
- ❑ Cold or carbonated drinks
- ❑ Deep fried food
- ❑ Refined sugar
- ❑ Caffeine, especially coffee
- ❑ Alcohol (the classics tell us not to engage in anything associated with making, distributing or consuming wine)
- ❑ Red meat
- ❑ Eating while anxious or upset

For more specific foods that are appropriate for each individual, it is best to consult with a qualified Āyurvedic dietary consultant.

#### ***Take up means of livelihood congruent with ethical living***

*All human activities are meant for the happiness of all the living beings. Such happiness is based on dharma (righteousness, right moral and personal ethics), hence every person should adopt dharma always.<sup>xvi</sup>*

Āyurveda suggests choosing an occupation that helps you achieve your life goals *and* that is also in accordance with high ethical standards.

The ancient sage Caraka taught that the best way to support healthy *rasa* and protect immunity is to make efforts to maintain a serene mind and to acquire knowledge. He taught that practicing non-violence is the surest way to encourage longevity, developing courage and prowess are the best ways to promote strength, learning is the ideal way to support nourishment, controlling the sense organs is the best method to promote happiness, knowledge of reality is the best method to promote pleasure and celibacy is the best of all paths.<sup>xvii</sup> Caraka was not just a philosopher. He wrote one of the fundamental texts of Āyurveda over a thousand years ago and this text is still referred to today. It is a very practical text. This makes Caraka's advice all the more powerful, as he was a man who well knew the effects of habits, foods and practices on the health of the body.

In modern society happiness is associated with gratification of our sense organs, and that too in short order. If we are not able to satisfy our desires we feel dissatisfied. Caraka teaches the opposite. If we control our sense organs and the desires associated with them, then only we will find a life of contentment. This is closely related to a life of celibacy.

One of my teachers used to say that celibacy relates to all our sense organs. Chastity of the ears requires not listening to gossip or harsh words. Chastity of the eyes requires us to refrain from looking at others with lust, enmity or rancor. Chastity of the tongue requires us to refrain from quarreling, spreading gossip, using harsh, abusive or dishonest words, and to avoid speech that causes dissension, division or discord, speaking with harmful intention. One should speak appropriate to the occasion, with words that are good—ones, which are truthful and pleasant. We can also discipline our sense of taste by consuming a *sattvic* (pure and balanced) diet in moderate proportions, so as not to disturb the digestion and state of mind.<sup>xviii</sup> We can discipline the senses of smell and touch by curbing our desires for sensual indulgences beyond what is necessary, and by utilizing purposeful and healing scents and touches.

Only he is content and happy whose desires are satisfied. It follows, then, that the fewer desires we have, the more likely we are to feel happy or content.

Āyurveda teaches that pursuing a life of peace and study is more likely to ensure happiness than a life of chasing ambition and desire, which is more apt to ensure an exhausted nervous system and an imbalanced mind.

### ***Adopt a middle path***

The classics teach us to adopt a middle path, avoiding extremes in all dealings. This has quite a Daoist flavor as well. We might feel that this does not leave room for passion or enthusiasm in life. However, careful observation may show that those who are practicing life on the middle path may have a more sustainable enthusiasm with a high degree of contentment, whereas one who indulges passionately in his desires never seems to satisfy

them—their passionate highs being followed by disturbing lows. Curbing our desires results in less violence, theft, jealousy and inappropriate or hurtful sexual activity.

***Have compassion with all living beings***

If we were to summarize the rules of conduct that the classics recommend, we could turn to the Golden Rule: *Treat your neighbor as you yourself would like to be treated*,<sup>xix</sup> but we are also given some specific recommendations as follows:

- We need not be naive but neither should we suspect everyone.
- We should give gifts, within reason and help those who have no means of livelihood, who are suffering from diseases or are afflicted with grief, to the utmost extent. Beggars should not be disappointed or abused.
- We should become well versed in the art of adoring others.
- We should serve friends with affection and good deeds.
- We should keep good company; that is, those who try to lead ethical lives.
- We are not to find fault, or perpetuate misunderstandings or faithlessness with our elders, scriptures or other sources of wisdom. On the contrary, they should be worshipped.
- Even the animals, insects and ants should be treated as one's own self.
- One should be helpful to his enemies, even if they are not helpful.
- One should maintain a centered mind in the face of good fortune or bad.
- One should be envious of the cause of the good welfare of others, but not of the effect. That is to say, it is worthwhile to emulate skill and ethical living, but not be envious of its result—like wealth or happiness—in others.

*Here is a summary of dinācārya guidelines after our morning routines.*

- ***Use an umbrella***
- ***Avoid harsh environments***
- ***Maintain a good posture***
- ***Avoid spending time in improper places***
- ***Don't suppress natural urges***
- ***Don't unduly strain your body or organs***
- ***Pace yourself***
- ***Protect your eyes***
- ***Protect all your other sense organs, too***
- ***Take care with your diet and eating habits***
- ***Take up means of livelihood congruent with ethical living***
- ***Adopt a middle path***
- ***Have compassion with all living beings***

**Using a Healthy Daily Routine to Relieve Decision Fatigue**

Most medicine comes with side effects. What's nice is when the side effects are good. A healthy *dinācārya* may help heal physical and mental maladies, but a less obvious benefit is its effect on the phenomenon of “decision fatigue,” something probably more of us suffer from, more often than we are aware.

“Decision fatigue” is a term used in Western science to describe a relatively recently-coined, but likely ancient phenomenon that most of us probably experience daily. Maybe hourly. Like physical exertion, the act of decision-making requires glucose and, like physical fatigue, there is biological fatigue that sets in after a strenuous bout of decision-making. As excess physical exertion causes a reduced capacity for further coordinated, energetic, efficient physical exertion, excessive decision-making, may cause symptoms of decreased ability to make further appropriate or good decisions and choices in our lives.

Does this phenomenon really apply to us? Do we really have to make so many decisions in a day?

When we consider carefully what decisions are, the answer probably is yes.

Generally when we think of decisions, the bigger ones come to mind: Should I go to University? Should I become a plumber or a lawyer? Buy a car? Marry? Have children? Send them to private school? Divorce? But many decisions aren’t so easy to identify as decisions, and yet we encounter them on a daily—sometimes minute to minute—basis, especially when we consider that the act of exerting willpower is intimately connected to decision-making. When to meditate today, when to take that walk, should I walk or do yoga, when to eat, when to cook, when to bathe; should I or should I not eat that tasty ice cream, buy that shiny thing, have sex, listen to this gossip, watch this episode of Friends (again), whether or not to say what is on my mind or show certain emotions, eat alone or with my co-workers? All these things are decisions. Each decision made, or act of willpower executed, contributes to decision fatigue.

Some activities require us to make a surprising number of decisions in a short time. With an average computer-user looking at over 36 websites per day, online activity is generally very decision-making intensive. Should I check Facebook? Follow this or that link? Purchase something? Go get a snack?

Studies show that when we use willpower to repress tears, emotions, urges, or to avoid buying or eating impulsively, our willpower becomes fatigued. And we spend three or four hours resisting desire every day.

It turns out that the more decisions we make over the course of a day, and the more we exert our willpower, the more likely we are to suffer from decision fatigue. The more we suffer from decision fatigue, the more likely we are to make poor choices and the less self-discipline we are left with. Consider this study: when participants repressed their tears and emotions during a sad movie, afterwards, when they engaged in mentally challenging puzzle or squeezing a hand-grip exerciser, they gave up more easily than people who did not repress their emotions during the film. Their will power—like other forms of exertion—could be exhausted. As with other forms of decision fatigue, when we repeatedly exert willpower to repress urges, at some point the dam tends to give way and we begin to make poor choices.

Marketing gurus and seasoned salesman are well aware of this phenomenon and how to exploit it. It is no accident that impulse items are positioned at the checkout counter. You've just navigated yourself around the grocery store, managing some possibly fifty decisions regarding what to buy, what to leave, which brand to purchase, what would be good for you and your family, what to make for dinner, how much to get, etc., etc., etc. You are likely to suffer from decision fatigue by the time you reach the checkout lane, where the candy bars and the magazines await your decision-fatigued self. This is the point when we are most likely to give way to poor decisions.

If we don't exert our willpower and avoid all the tasty treats, we could end up obese and ill. The answer cannot be that we should not indulge all our desires. I grew up hearing from my guru—many times—of the necessity of minimizing or controlling the “five passions”: lust, anger, greed, attachment and egoism. To eliminate these, it was important to control the senses. When we see, hear, taste, touch or smell things, this leads us to desire them, become angry or frustrated when we can't get them, we want more of them, become attached to, and identified with them. Controlling the senses helps control the five passions. Āyurveda also teaches that controlling the senses is also the best way to promote happiness.

But controlling the senses is not so easy. In fact, in a study of more than 1 million people around the world, self-control came in last of virtues people claimed to have.

If we do repress our desires, we end up decision-fatigued and may actually then wind up making poor decisions. And here too we run into yet another problem. There is a well-known tenet of Āyurveda that says that we create disease if we repress our urges.<sup>xx</sup> So now we have a quandary: we need to exert willpower in order to avoid diseases associated with gluttony, and promote a more stable, lasting happiness, but repression is an act of willpower that both increases decision fatigue and may cause disease. What to do?

Don't Panic. There is always hope. We can remedy this conundrum through the practice of *dinācārya*. Studies show that people with the best self-control are people who have built in structure and healthy habits into their daily routines. Instead of wearing down their willpower and creating decision fatigue, they rely on their daily routine to direct many of their actions and save their decision-making energy for the important things. They prefer to avoid crises, rather than manage it. They give themselves reasonable deadlines. They schedule important meetings in the morning and don't allow them to be scheduled back to back. They try to make important decisions in the morning and won't make them when they are tired or on an empty stomach (decision making is an energy, like many, that requires glucose to function well). It seems we have the ability to adhere to a daily routine without taxing our decision-making muscles.

I have read that US President Barack Obama always wears the same clothes precisely because of his awareness of the phenomenon of decision-fatigue. He saves his choice-making for more important matters.

Āyurveda teaches us that it is ideal to wake, eat and retire at the same time each day and have a diet, self oil massage, and exercise—that are all appropriate to our constitutions, and that we meditate at the same time every day, preferably in the early morning hours. Ideal *dinācārya* also includes prescribed ethical behavior. We no longer have to decide when to eat, exercise, meditate, what ethical behavior we wish to adopt, and how we will spend our days. Thereafter, routine becomes discipline. Discipline becomes habit, habit eliminates the need to make decisions, and our mental resources are freed up for new possibilities.

*Dinācārya* corrals our daily activities and behavior onto a prescribed track so we don't need to expend energy deciding how we are going to act, or when we are going to get the most important things done every day.

Another helping factor may be the company we keep. When I was a child my guru wrote me a letter. In this letter, he wrote, “Keep good company. Good company makes a man great.” Company that engages in behavior we wish to emulate can make it easy—even enjoyable—to practice that behavior. Between *dinācārya* and good company, discipline becomes habit and our mental resources are freed up for new possibilities.

I recently read that as many as 15% of our genes are thought to be controlled by circadian rhythms. The ancient sages of Āyurveda knew that how we spend our days alters the course of our lives, and emphasized the practice of *dinācārya*. While times and experiences may change over millennia, the need for a daily routine may be more important today than ever.

If we can heal our mornings and our days, we may be able to change our lives. If we can change our lives, perhaps our communities can change; perhaps even the macrocosm of the ages can change. Here's to the butterfly flapping her wings...

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<sup>i</sup> Suśruta Samhitā: Sūtrasthānam: XIV:11

<sup>ii</sup> *Rasa is derived from the root “Ras” to go, as it continuously flows through and permeates every vital tissue and cell of organism. It is successively transformed into each*

<sup>iii</sup> *Rasa is derived from the root “Ras” to go, as it continuously flows through and permeates every vital tissue and cell of organism. It is successively transformed into each tissue of the body. Rasa flows out of the heart and continuously soothes, maintains, nourishes and irrigates the body by transudation. It supports the growth and life, owing to the dynamic effects of causes which lie beyond the ken of human understanding. The nature and course of this rasa, which runs through the whole system, can be inferred from the growth, attenuation, or other modified conditions of the body. Suśruta Samhitā: Sūtrasthānam: XIV:3*

<sup>iii</sup> ... the different parts of the day and night are marked by variations of heat, cold, etc. The deranged bodily humors such as *vāta*, *pitta* and *kapha* naturally and spontaneously

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*accumulate, aggravate, or subside during the different parts of the day ....* Suśruta Samhitā: Sūtrasthānam: VI:15

<sup>iv</sup> *Ashtānga Hṛdayam* and *Caraka Samhitā* .

<sup>v</sup> *Caraka Samhitā Sarirasthānam*: IV:13

<sup>vi</sup> For further information on the channels of the mind, see Dr. Claudia Welch's Secrets of the Mind: The 10 Channels Revealed, <http://drclaudiawelch.com/shop/books/secrets-mind-ten-channels-revealed/>

<sup>vii</sup> *Caraka Samhitā: Sūtrasthānam*: II and *Ashtānga Hṛdayam: Sūtrasthānam*: II

<sup>viii</sup> *Ashtānga Hṛdayam: Sūtrasthānam*: II:1a

<sup>ix</sup> Triphala is commonly found in India and widely available online or at herbal vendors, like [www.banyanbotanicals.com](http://www.banyanbotanicals.com) and other places. It is good to use organic Triphala, to avoid it entirely if pregnant, during menstruation, and in certain other conditions. It is important to check with your health care practitioner before including this or any herbal compound in your daily routine.

<sup>x</sup> “just as a lion, after vanquishing an elephant.” *Ashtānga Hṛdayam : Sūtrasthānam*: II

<sup>xi</sup> *Ashtānga Hṛdayam: Sūtrasthānam*: II:14

<sup>xii</sup> *Ashtānga Hṛdayam: Sūtrasthānam*: II

<sup>xiii</sup> *Caraka Samhitā: Sūtrasthānam*: II

<sup>xiv</sup> *Ashtānga Hṛdayam: Sūtrasthānam*: II

<sup>xv</sup> *ibid*

<sup>xvi</sup> *Ashtānga Hṛdayam: Sūtrasthānam*: II:20

<sup>xvii</sup> *Caraka Samhitā: Sūtrasthānam*: XXX:13-15

<sup>xviii</sup> Sattvic diet is one that consists of whole grains, pulses, vegetables, fruits and a moderate amount of dairy. It avoids fermented, old, burned food, meat, fish and eggs, as well as intoxicants and very spicy food.

<sup>xix</sup> *Ashtānga Hṛdayam: Sūtrasthānam*: II 46

<sup>xx</sup> *The suppression of any of (these) natural urges may lead to various imbalances and should not, therefore, be repressed or suppressed.* *Ashtānga Hṛdayam: Sūtrasthānam*: IV:1