

Monday, 28 October 2024

Honoring the Discipline of Healing: Panchakarma, Rhythms of the Body, and the Wisdom of the Guru

1. Respecting the Boundaries of Panchakarma

Some people on our team find it challenging when asked to refrain from certain things during treatment. This difficulty can be a clear indicator of underlying attachment or resistance.

See, *Panchakarma* is a process of cleansing the body and mind, removing impurities. It can be a rigorous procedure, even risky, as we are directly engaging with the body's physiology. So it's not about my instructions, or another doctor's or nurse's instructions—it's the science and texts of Ayurveda giving these guidelines, based on well-established reasons.

Example of the Risks of Non-Adherence

Let me share an example. Every year, we sponsor a devotional orchestra during the Vaikom Temple Festival. Three years ago, I invited our team, except for those undergoing *ghee* therapy or purification procedures, who were advised to stay at the clinic. Due to my busy schedule, I didn't verify who came along. During the orchestra, one of our guests from Canada suddenly gasped for breath and then collapsed into cardiac arrest. I performed CPR, and she survived, but later we learned she had been on *ghee* therapy that day. She assumed it would be fine since it was a small dose and she had been here before. This incident highlights how fragile the *Panchakarma* process is and why strict guidance is essential.

Many clinics and hospitals say they offer *Panchakarma*, but the procedures vary widely. Here, we treat serious diseases with an intensive, thorough approach. That's why we take your vitals every morning, monitor blood pressure, and so on. You have come to address significant health issues, and we handle it all with utmost care and devotion.

For instance, for the first 13 years of this hospital, I also treated snake bites. Now, with anti-venom available at Vaikom Hospital, I no longer do it, as my guru advised. My guru, a toxicologist who treated thousands of snake bites and hundreds of rabid dog bites, instructed me to offer this service for free. As a landlord, he treated people for free throughout his life. Following his guidance, I did this work for years, but eventually stopped due to the added stress. Now, we handle equally difficult cases here, charging the same as we do for general treatment.

Even among Ayurvedic hospitals, those who treat complex cases are becoming fewer. It takes dedication and knowledge to run a center in this way. I spend at least half an hour to an hour

with you daily, and we do *homam* (fire ceremony) regularly—tools uncommon in most Ayurvedic centers. This approach allows us to harness a universal support system in facing the risks and challenges of these treatments.

Active Participation in Healing

Please remember, you are an active participant in your healing process. Healing is demanding; it requires self-control and commitment. While I can't communicate every detail of what you're going through, we provide printouts for each procedure, which you must read, sign, and ask questions if needed.

2. Menstruation and Fire Ceremony

This is an important point. During menstruation, or any elimination process (such as a wound, flu, or other expulsion of impurities), one should refrain from participating in the *homam*. This guidance is for everyone, regardless of gender. Menstruation, for example, is a natural, purifying process, as it removes dead endometrial layers from the body. We request people with flu, bleeding wounds, or other active eliminations to avoid *homam* to prevent aggravating their condition.

Some view this as exclusion, but it's really about respecting the body's needs. Menstruation and elimination processes are inherently purifying, and participation in the intense energy of a fire ceremony can disrupt these processes.

In India, it is common to see similar restrictions in temples. Menstrual and other eliminative conditions are often the only common ones specified. This approach may feel selective, but it reflects frequent conditions people face. The focus is not exclusion, but care for health and well-being.

3. The Role of Guru

I've mentioned my *guru* several times, so let me clarify the meaning. In Indian tradition, *guru* doesn't imply mysticism but refers to a teacher, especially one who imparts specialized knowledge. The word *guru* combines *gu* (darkness) and *ru* (removal), meaning "one who removes darkness." A *guru* can teach any discipline, from carpentry to spiritual sciences. My *guru* was an Ayurvedic physician, a true torchbearer who passed on experiential knowledge, guiding me through what cannot be understood through books alone.

Before his passing at age 99, he treated snake bites with mantras and avoided mystical topics, focusing instead on practical medicine. He was deeply respected, and the term *guru* was used by the local community, who recognized his wisdom.

Each element in our practice, whether following strict procedures in *Panchakarma* or respecting body rhythms during the *homam*, is rooted in an understanding of interconnectedness and respect for tradition. A *guru* embodies this understanding, bridging practical knowledge with profound insight, making sure that each practice serves the highest good.

