

Meaning of Ayurveda

Ayurveda is made up of two Sanskrit words: 'Ayu' meaning life and 'Veda' meaning knowledge of. To know about life is Ayurveda. To fully comprehend the vast scope of Ayurveda let us first define "Ayu" or life. According to the ancient Ayurvedic scholar Charaka, "Ayu" is a combination of four essential aspects: mind, body, senses and soul.
Mind, Body, and Senses

We tend to identify most with our physical selves, yet in actuality, there is more to us than what meets the eye. Underlying our physical structure is the mind that controls our thought processes and helps assist us in carrying out day-to-day activities such as respiration, circulation, digestion and elimination.

The mind and the body work in conjunction with one another to regulate our physiology. In order for the mind to act appropriately to assist the physical body, we must use our senses as information gatherers. The mind is like a computer and the senses function as the data that is entered into the computer. Smell and taste are two important senses that aid the digestive process. When the mind registers the entry of a particular food in the gastrointestinal tract, it directs the body to act accordingly by releasing various digestive enzymes.

But if we overindulge the taste buds with too much of a certain taste, such as sweet, we may find that the ability of the mind to perceive the sweet taste is impaired. The body is then challenged in its ability to process sweet foods. Maintaining the clarity of our senses is an essential aspect in allowing the mind and body to integrate their functions and helps in maintaining our health and happiness.

Soul

Ayurveda perceives that before we exist in physical form with the help of the mind and senses, we exist in a more subtle form, as the soul. Ancient Indian seers believed that we comprise of a certain energetic essence that precludes the inhabitation of our physical entity. They hypothesized that we may indeed occupy many physical bodies throughout the course of time but that our underlying self or soul remains unchanged.

This is illustrated by what transpires at the time of death. When the individual nears the time to leave the physical body, many of his/her desires cease to be present. As the soul no longer identifies with the body, the desire to eat food or indulge in a particular activity that used to be a great source of satisfaction for the individual, wanes. In fact, many people have been documented to experience the sensation of being "out of their bodies" .