

Review of the Ayurvedic Pathogenesis (Samprāpti): The Six Stages of Disease (Satkriyākāla)

In Ayurveda, there are many varied causes of *dosha* aggravation both from external and internal sources. If the *doshas* become deranged and remain so as to become vitiated (impaired, spoiled), the body's tissues (*dhātus*) and their metabolic functioning (*agni*) break down, causing illness and disease (*vyādhi*). Early stages of imbalance may be quite subtle and easily missed in today's fast-paced lifestyle. Usually further imbalance and distress is needed to gain a person's attention. Unfortunately, this can lead to a progression that moves a long a path to negative changes in cellular intelligence, functioning and communication with other cells resulting in deleterious tissues changes.

Of course prevention is ideal and is Ayurveda's primary goal. According to the *Charaka Samhita*, only when the physician has failed in this first goal does s/he need to resort Ayurveda's second objective which is cure.

A limitation of western medicine is that it's focus is primarily on the physical level of being with scant forays into non-material domains like the mind – of which it does not yet have a satisfying definition. This means that disease cannot be diagnosed until the patient complaints are identifiable and verified by a lab test or other specific finding. As yoga therapists, we work from within a paradigm that includes the non-physical as potent and at times causative in the onset of disease.

From within this framework, the best time to work with corrective measures is before a physically pronounced disease is even detectable. This allows us to guide clients in remedial actions and practices, and to assist them in charting a course for fairer skies and more tranquil waters - even during life's "full catastrophe" (Zorba the Greek).

Below is an outline of Ayurveda's six stages of progression of disease called the Satkriyākāla. In the first two of the six stages, there are no notable signs and only very subtle symptoms perceived by yogis and very sensitive persons. In the third stage, there may be non-specific symptoms like general fatigue or feeling "off" but again, no signs able to be picked up by western means. Symptoms progress and become more pronounced in the fourth stage. It is only by the fifth stage that symptoms manifest on the food sheath level specific to a particular disease.

Disease begins with the accumulation of one or more *doshas*. The three *doshas*, *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*, are three mind-body operators that govern the body's functioning. Though at the basis of the physical body, the *doshas* themselves are not physical — they are principles of intelligence. When the three *doshas* are in balance, the person enjoys good health. However, through imbalanced diet, lifestyle, and exposure to stress and environmental factors, one or more of the *doshas* can become imbalanced. The first stage of this imbalance is that the *dosha* increases in quantity, or "accumulates."

The Six Stages of Disease

Stage One: Accumulation (Sanchaya)

In this stage the aggravated *dosha* accumulates in its natural “seat” or “home”. Symptoms are mild or irregular. If attention is paid, it is easy to restore balance to the affected *dosha(s)* at this point. For instance, at the site of each *doshas* home:

- *Vata* accumulates in the colon, nerves, or in empty spaces and channels of the body.
- *Pitta* accumulates in the digestive tract, eyes or skin.
- *Kapha* accumulates in the chest and in the fluids of the body, such as the joint fluids in circulatory ones.

Stage Two: Aggravation or Provocation (Prakopa)

While Stage One involves a *quantitative* change in the *doshas* in that it accumulates at its site, this stage involves a *qualitative* change. Here the *dosha* is sometimes called "vitiated," or spoiled, or impaired. It is no longer functioning normally. During the second stage symptoms are more significant, but the provoked *dosha* can still be appeased. In Ayurveda this is usually done via the gastro-intestinal (GI) tract because all the *doshas* can be worked with there with relatively ease. The *doshas* are still in their own sites during these first two stages.

Stage Three: Dissemination or Spread (Prasara)

If the *dosha* is still being aggravated, it will move out of its home and go to another site elsewhere in the body. This change marks the departure of the aggravated *dosha* from the GI tract, making returning it to normal harder to do. Not feeling well and having minor digestive changes or different eating and digestive patterns is an indication of this third stage. (ex. usually loving and tolerating lemon juice and suddenly finding it noxious.)

Stage Four: Localization (Stāna Samsraya)

In this stage the *dosha* now localizes in a weaker tissue outside its main seat and begins to disrupt that tissue (*dhatu*) or organ function. If the *agni* or *tejas* in the target tissues or organ is strong and its channels of flow are in good enough shape, still the *dosha* may return to its site in the GI tract. This is immunity and why *tejas*, *ojas*, and *agni* are so important to promote at all levels and throughout all our tissues. If this is not the case, the aggravated *dosha* will move into that non-fortified space (*khāvaigunya* = defective space) and cause disruption of function.

In this explanation the microcirculatory channels (*srotas*) are mentioned and are a factor in the arrival of the physical level of disease. For instance, if there's a narrowed blood vessel or lymph channel in an area of the body, the *dosha* may settle there, then start to disrupt surrounding tissues.

Ama, the product of incomplete and thus imbalanced digestion, is conceived as channel blocking and sticky. The stickiness of *ama*, like sugary syrup in a petri dish, becomes a breeding ground for disease. For example, if heavy, cold *kapha* accumulates and disseminates with *ama* in channels of the head and neck, this is experienced as a scratchy throat and head heaviness.

Stage Five: Manifestation (Vyakti)

In this stage the *doshas* manifest in the tissues and overwhelm their functioning. Now the disease manifests in its full-blown, clearly identifiable form. In the example above, Stage Five is experienced as a full-blown cold with sore throat and sinusitis.

Stage Six: Disruption (Bheda) also called Chronicity: persisting a long time or constantly recurring

This stage is characterized by tissue and structural change at the cellular level. The disease is now so embedded in the tissues that their innate intelligence is overrun and unable to reverse the situation. Cure is needed. If no outside support heroic corrective measures are made, the disruption of functioning will turn into a long-term recurring or permanent disorder. For example, the *kapha* complaint above could become chronic sinusitis.

Addressing the Stages with Yoga Therapeutic Measures

In Stages One and Two, dietary measures and adjustments to daily and seasonal routines are usually effective in reversing the noted imbalance. By paying attention, and performing regular “housekeeping” and “harmony of soul” actions, the build-up of the *doshas* can be avoided.

In Stage Three and Four, additional activities such taking herbs and performing additional cleansing practices, including relaxation and emotional processing, can restore balance.

In Stages Five and Six multi-modality approaches are very helpful. Consulting with other healthcare practitioners to rectify the diseases progression has been shown to be effective. Intensive residencies using panchakarma and other processes in coordination with western medical care is one possible solution. In the case of serious disease, complementary practices are never a replacement for conventional medical care.