

48. Vehicle care

DOCTORS agree that illness is caused through faulty food habits and foolish ways of spending leisure. But, they do not seem to know that food is a Word that connotes a wider variety of 'intakes.' Every experience that is drawn through any of the senses in 'food' has an effect on one's health. We say "food for thought"; whatever we see or hear or smell or touch has an effect on the body; good or bad. The sight of blood makes some people faint; or, it may be some bad news, that administers a shock. Allergy is produced by unpleasant smells, or when something intrinsically unwelcome is contacted or tasted. A sound mind ensures a sound body; a sound body ensures a sound mind. The two are interdependent. Health is essential for happiness; happiness or a capacity to be happy, whatever may happen is essential for physical health, too.

The food we consume should be tasty, sustaining and pleasant. It should not be too 'hot' or too saltish; there must be a balance and equilibrium maintained. It should not arouse or deaden. *Raajasik* food enrages the emotions; *thaamasik* food induces sloth and sleep. *Saathwik* food satisfies but does not inflame the passions or sharpen the emotions.

Five types of bath prescribed in the scriptures

Nature has many mysteries in its make-up. Man is able to unravel only those that are cognisable through his five senses; he does not realise that there is a vast unknown beyond the purview of the five faulty instruments of perception that he has. For example, from every being and thing, constantly, without intermission, millions of minute particles and millions of vibrations are issuing forth. Certain substances like camphor emanate so much of these that a lump disappears in a few days. The bodies of others affect us by these emanations and we too affect them in the same way. For good or bad, we are interacting in this manner, inescapably. Naturally, the growth of the body is affected, as well as its health and strength, by the contact or company we develop. These emanations are intensified when dirt accumulates, or sewage collects, or drains are choked. Sanitation rules are framed to reduce the possibility of disease spreading from such areas.

Five types of bath are prescribed in the Hindhu scriptures, in order to maintain physical immunity from the emanations of others. First, we have the 'mud bath,' wherein fine mud is applied over the body and kept on for some time before being washed away. Second, the 'Sun bath' is recommended, because the rays of the Sun are powerful disinfectants; they feed as well as freshen.

Third: bath in water. If the water is a flowing river, considered holy, and if the bath is taken after propitiatory hymns etc., the bath will cleanse the body and, at the same time, elevate the spirit. The fourth type is the 'air-bath,' when the body is, exposed to the cool breeze, and its salutary effect. The fifth and last type is the 'ash bath,' where the body is given a coating of fine ash or *Vibhuuthi* (sacred ash), revered as the mark of Shiva. The ash guards the body from evil contacts and the deleterious effects of the vibrations proceeding from others; it also sanctifies and purifies the vibrations of the individual wearing the ash, for, it reminds him always of the inevitable end of all that one feels as one's own, except the Lord who is the very person himself.

Uncleanliness has become a popular cult

Untouchability as a social practice must have had its origin in the realisation of this truth. But, practices like avoiding contact with demeaning or defiling men or things later became a ritual, a

hollow round of negations. Those who are ridiculed for observing such restrictions and taboos are finding it difficult to explain the inner significance of their behaviour. These observances originated from the anxiety to earn length of life and strength of body, so that the seeker might gain the goal. The Geetha speaks of *yukthaahaara vihaarasya*---"habits of feeding and recreation which are controlled and regulated." The gross part of food is discarded as faeces, the subtle part is transformed into muscle, blood, etc. and the more subtle of the subtle aspects are transmuted into the mind and its activities. That is why the sages have prescribed certain limits and levels of food, in order to promote the spiritual urges and prevent contrary tendencies.

But, nowadays, as a result of the downgraded time-spirit, food that damages the spiritual urge is being increasingly favoured! The elementary rules of personal cleanliness are neglected in the name of 'novelty and neospiritualism.' Bath is given the go-by. Oral hygiene is not cared for. Damaging habits are cultivated and tolerated. The mouth is the gateway of the physical mansion; if the gateway is foul, what can we say of the residence and the inmates! Uncleanliness has become a popular cult; it is necessary to keep away from its votaries, for, cleanliness is next to Godliness. Unkempt, dishevelled, dirty heads and bodies denote unkempt, dishevelled intellects and minds.

The body will shine if the character is fine

Of course, it is true that many sages and saints paid little attention to personal cleanliness, since they were always on the higher plane of nearness to Reality. Imitating them without the inner conviction that one is not the body but that one is the Universal Indweller .can only be hypocrisy and exhibitionism. *Eeshwara* swallowed the poison that emerged from the Ocean; but, mortals cannot do the same, even to remove the minor poisons of the world. Develop equanimity, install in the mind the faith in the Divine and then you get the authority to neglect the claims of the body, with impunity. You cannot challenge the wisdom of the sages and ask, what harm is there if I too behave likewise! Great harm will certainly ensue, when you venture into these realms of the spirit with the ego bloated big.

The body has to be carefully and tenderly fostered; it is a precious gift, a very complicated but well co-ordinated machine, given for achieving a laudable task. Its exterior too must be clean and full of the charm of goodness. The skin of the fruit of *Aanandha* (divine bliss) is the physical body; the succulent flesh is the muscle, bone and nerve; the hard uneatable seed is the evil that gets mixed up in life; the juice which the fruit offers, for which the tree was planted and nourished is the Bliss it shares with all. The body will shine if the character is fine; service of man and worship of God will preserve its charm. The Lord will be watching with a thousand eyes the least activity of man to discover any slight trace of selfless Love sweetening it.

In the past, illnesses were cured by the simple remedies that nature herself provided,--roots, tubers, fruits, leaves etc., rest, change of residence, regulation of diet, *saadhana* (spiritual discipline) etc. But, now man lives in an age of tablets and injections. Do not believe that health is retained or maintained through doctors; nor can drugs alone guarantee it. Were that So, the dead should all be alive now. Well, examine whether the doctors themselves follow the advice they offer to others. They are victims of the very habits which they advise against! They condemn smoking and drinking intoxicants as dangerous to health, but, they indulge in both, and thereby, encourage the very evils they condemn!

This is the type of health-advisers that we have! In every field---spiritual, moral, .economic, political, and literary---absence of proper leaders is the root cause of all the distress, anxiety and fear that torment the world.

You are embodiments of the Divine *Aathma*. Do not crave for recognition and respect from others; crave rather for winning Grace from the Lord. In the pursuit of that aim, do not be misled by the emergence of obstacles and obstructions.

Prashaanthi Nilayam, 16-10-1974