

Āyurvedic Concordance  
ĀMA AND PHYSIOLOGY

Definition--

The concept of āma has numerous definitions and we will explore its meanings with an examination of the some quotations from the ancient saṃhitās. We will also look at its signs and symptoms and finally, we will explore treatment as given in the ancient texts. The word āma literally means “uncooked.” Interestingly, the word for stomach in Sanskrit is called the vessel of uncooked (food)--āmāśya. Thus for the ancient authorities the stomach plays an important role in the development and spread of āma through the physiology. First note the anonymous sutra that describes what it is, followed by a quote from Vāgbhaṭa giving a slightly different picture, and the concluding quote from Caraka describing its etiology.

āmam annarasam kecit kedittu mala saṅcayam  
prathamā doṣa duṣṭim ca kecit āmam pracakṣate Anon.

- According to some accumulated wastes are āma, but according to others it’s undigested āhāra rasa, and according to yet others it is the previously disturbed doṣa. Anon.

uṣmano ‘lpa balatvena dhātumāddamapācitam  
duṣṭamāmaśayagatam rasamām pracakṣate  
anye doṣebhya evāti duṣṭebhyo ‘nyonya mūrchanāt  
kodravebhyo viṣasyeva vadantyāmasya sambhavam Aṣṭ. Hṛd. Su. XIII.25-26

- The first dhātu (rasa), which by the weakness of the (digestive) fire, remaining uncooked and becoming vitiated accumulates in the stomach and small intestine is called āma. According to others āma is said to be created, as poison arises from mixing different kinds of kodravs (grains), by the absolutely excessive quantity and quality of doṣa which disturbs (mixes with) the others one by one. Aṣṭ. Hṛd. Su. XIII.25-26

Sroto rodha bala bramśa gauravānila mūḍatāḥ  
ālasypakt niṣṭīva malasāṅgāruci klamāḥ Aṣṭ. Hṛ Su. XIII.23

- Caraka, Vi. II.7 suggests that all doṣas vitiated from excess quantity of food mix with the undigested food and produce āma.
- Vāg. AH Su. XIII.27 gives additional meaning to āma when it combines with dhātus and malas with the use of the word sāma and in naming diseases involving āma, doṣas, and dūṣyas combined.

SLOKA SUMMARY

From the above sutras āma is:

1. Undigested food in the stomach or circulating through rasa dhātu anywhere in the body
2. Accumulated wastes in the body
3. Increased doṣa in the body
4. Increased doṣas in the body mixed with one another
5. Toxins accruing from unusual/improper food combinations
6. (Kodrava is a grain of cheap nature, eaten by the poor, and said to destroy the ojas of the body Śarṅg. Ch 4.21)
7. All three vitiated doṣas, together, mixing with undigested food.

The following modern notions may be added to these definitions

8. The end product of metabolic activity in the cells
9. Environmental toxins/poisons in air, water, and food
10. Wastes of parasites, bacteria, etc.
11. Unprocessed thoughts, feelings, emotions
12. Unfulfilled desires

NOTA BENE—Digression on notion of waste/mala/doṣa

There is a wide latitude of definitions of āma given by the experts. There is one distinction, however, that may be useful to make with regard to the term. Āma, as an entity in the body, has no usefulness. It has no subsequent functions when produced in the cells, and there is certainly no normal function in the GI-tract or body generally. We have seen above that the authorities talked about the concept of āma including wastes and doṣas accumulated in the body. This is an unfortunate development because the Āyurvedic concept of waste—mala—is not what a Westerner would think. For the ancients the three wastes—urine, feces, and sweat are functionally important in their manifestations. Sweat moistens the skin ( & maintains temperature balance of the body), urine affects fluid (and acid / base balance), and feces is needed to maintain or support the function of the lumen of the colon Vāg Su. XI.4. Caraka says that the term mala—translated as waste—nourishes sweat, urine, feces, vata, pitta, kapha, ear wax, excreta of eyes, nose, mouth, hair follicles and genital hair, beard, mustache, and nails. When beyond normal range treatment is with cold and hot. Ca. Su. XXVIII.4 He states elsewhere (Ca. Sa. VI.17) that the body is made of two broad categories of components: waste products and assimilable products. Those when retained in the body that cause disorders are called wastes: smears, crusts, etc. excreted out of the body orifices (eyes, ears, nose, penis, etc.) dhātus aged and sloughed, vitiated vāta, pitta, and kapha (having been spent also) and other similar materials. The others have the appropriate attributes while constituting the bodily tissues (dhātus). The concept of doṣa has three meanings in Āyurveda according to Śarṅgadhāra ( Ch. 5.23-24) . One of its functions is to sustain and govern the bodily processes, while the other two are detrimental to physiology. The doṣas are vital to life. Further, the ancient authorities had a much different view of life than generally held in the West. Life continues eternally in a repetitive way through rebirth (reincarnation). The concept of rebirth embraced the notion of renewal and thus things that deteriorated and/or died, including wastes (malas) were seen as re-cycled by nature into new life forms. Thus both mala and doṣa are definitely important in the Āyurvedic scheme of the functioning of creation, generally, and the human physiology, specifically. The distinction that should be understood is that wastes, doṣa, or anything else that interferes with physiology is functionally called āma.

Signs & Symptoms—

Āma produces its own signs & symptoms and may mix with the doṣas, dhātus, and malas to produce other signs & symptoms. Often it is the effect of some imbalance which can further manifest as a complication such as in indigestion leading to toxemia. Āma is of two locations: sāmata (in rasa dhātu, etc.) and sāmadoṣa (mixed with the doṣas).

Signs and symptoms of āma: stasis of food, malaise, headache, fainting, giddiness, griping, anorexia, improper digestion of food. Āma with pitta produces burning sensation, thirst, disorders of the mouth, acid gastritis, and other pitta disorders. When combined with kapha is gives rise to phthisis, coryza, prameha and other kapha disorders. When combined with vāta and affecting urine, feces, and rasa and other dhātus it causes disorders of urine, abdomen, and tissues, respectively. Ca. Ci. 15.45-49 (Note from this sutra that āma is not that same as doṣa according to Caraka as he describes the effects of their mixing.)

The signs and symptoms of āma are: clogging of channels, low energy, a sense of heaviness, restlessness, lethargy, indigestion, kapha-type congestion (excess salivation), accumulation of the 3 wastes, loss of taste and physical debility. Aṣṭ. Hṛd Su. XIII.23 (also see Su. Su XXIV.14)

Caraka states (Ci.XV.94-95) stool associated with āma sinks in water due to heaviness while that without it floats except in cases of excessive liquidity, compactness, coldness, and affliction of kapha. Hence by examining patient beforehand whether he is associated with āma or not, the physician should treat him properly either with digestive or pacificatory measures.

Causes of āma—

Ca. Vi II.8 cause of ama. Not only the quantum of food in respect of quantity alone causes over-affection of āma but also the use of food and drinks which are heavy, rough, cold, dry, disliked, distending, burning, unclean, antagonistic, and taken untimely and also while afflicted with psychic emotions such as passion, anger, greed, confusion, envy, bashfulness, grief, conceit, excitement and fear. These also cause over-affection of āma.

Ca. Ci.II.11 two types visucika and alasaka.

Causes of āma according to Caraka are: Agni gets deranged by fasting, eating, during indigestion, over-eating, irregular eating, intake of unwholesome, heavy, cold, rough, and contaminated food, faulty administration of emesis, purgation, unction, emaciation from disease, faulty adaptation to place, time, seasons, and suppression of natural urges. Agni thus deranged becomes unable to digest even the light food and food being undigested get acidified and toxic (śukratvam) Ca. Ci. 15.42-44. That indigestion exhibits the following symptoms—stasis of food, malaise, headache, fainting, giddiness, stiffness in back and waist, yawning, bodyache, thirst, fever, vomiting, griping, anorexia, and improper digestion of food. The severe food toxin when combined with pitta produces burning sensation, thirst, disorder of mouth, acid gastritis, and other pittika disorders. When combined with kapha it gives rise to phthisis, coryza, prameha, etc. and other kaphaja disorders. It produces various vātika disorders if combines with vāta. Affecting urine, feces and rasa etc. it causes disorders of urine, belly and dhātus, respectively. Ca Ci XV.45-49 Ca Ci XV.50 Digestive fire if irregular causes disequilibrium in dhātus because of irregular digestion (of nutrients) and if intense having little fuel dries up the dhātus. The normal agni is a person taking proper food maintains the equilibrium of dhātus by regular digestion.

The weak agni burns the food incompletely which goes either upwards or downwards. When it moves out downwards either in ripe or unripe condition, it is known as the disorder of grahani. In such patients often the entire food is half burnt and the stool is frequent, constipated or liquid. There is presence of thirst, anorexia, abnormal taste in mouth, excessive salivation and feeling of darkness, feet and hands edema, pain in bony joints, vomiting and fever. Eructations have metallic or fleshy odor and bitter, sour taste.

Food in excessive quantity is said as vitiating all doṣas according to experts. When after taking solid food up to the saturating point, and liquids up to the same, vāta, pitta, kapha situated in stomach pressed too much by the food in excessive quantity get vitiated all simultaneously. These vitiated doṣas entering into the same undigested food get located in a portion of the belly and cause distension of abdomen and suddenly being eliminated through upper or lower path way produce separately these symptoms in the eater—vāta produces colic pain, harness in belly, bodyache, dryness of mouth, fainting giddiness, irregularity of digestion, stiffness in sides, back and waist, constriction and spasm in blood vessels. Pitta produces fever, diarrhea, internal heat, thirst narcosis, giddiness and delirium; kapha produces vomiting, anorexia, indigestion, fever with cold, lassitude and heaviness in body. Not only the intake of excess quantity of food gives rise to āma but also food and drink which are heavy, rough, cold, dry, disliked, distending, burning, unclean, antagonistic, and taken untimely and while afflicted with emotional disturbances such as passion, anger, greed, confusion, envy, bashfulness, grief, conceit, excitement, and fear (Ca. Vi. II. 7, 8)

Vāgbhaṭa says the causes of āmadoṣa (āma) are eating: excessive quantity of food, food disliked, that which causes flatulence, which is over-cooked or uncooked, not easily digestible, dry, very cold, contaminated, which causes burning sensation during digestion, is dried up or soaked in excess water; eating when afflicted by grief, anger, and hunger, etc. (AH Su.8.31-33). Vāgbhaṭa also says that consuming suitable and unsuitable foods mixed together (samaśana), large quantity of food before previous meal has digested (adhyśana), consuming more or less food at improper time (viśamāśana) will cause death or dreaded diseases (having caused āma) (AH Su.8.33-34).

## Āyurvedic Concordance

Caraka describes two conditions of āma—visūcikā and alasaka (Vi. II.10-13) In addition to the symptoms above there is vomiting and diarrhea of the āmadoṣa--visūcikā. In alasaka etiological factors are—weak digestion, suppression of flatus, urine, and feces, intake of solid, heavy, very rough, cold, and dry foods. These leads to increase of kapha and subsequent blocking of vāta (elimination). Here all the symptoms of āma above may present plus nothing comes out upwards or downwards. The āma tends to move outward and promote stiffness even over the entire body. This (daṇḍalasaka) is incurable. These toxic condition are known as āmaviṣa (toxemia from āma). They are exceedingly incurable because of its genesis and contradictory management (such as need for pācana and dīpana or fire-containing substances and the need for sustenance while having no agni to digest the āma, medicine and the food).

### TREATMENT

Caraka recommends, for the curable type of āma, that it should be eliminated by emesis with hot, salty water solution and the application of heat and suppository, and no food or drink. In visūcikā, reducing measures at first and then purgative later are suggested. In case of empty stomach, no appetite, and cold and heavy belly use pācana (āma burning) and dīpana (digestion increasing) herbs. One should never eat during this indigestion as the weakened agni is not capable of digesting the āma, food, and the drug simultaneously.

The classical texts advise use of medicines that have pācana action and since āma occurs because of defects of agni medicines that are stimulating to digestion are also advised. Herbs and spices that have the value of pācana are generally pungent to the taste, uṣṇa in vīrya, and katu in vipāka. Ginger, citrak, pippali, black pepper, cayenne pepper are examples of pācana medicines. They have in themselves the heat to transform āma into a liquefied, mobile substance that can be elimination. Dīpana herbs have the attribute to stimulate secretion of digestive enzymes, HCl, and so on. This combined action of pācana and dīpana is necessary to eradicate both the āma and the cause of āma—low agni. Hot water is recommendable for the following reasons: it's digestive stimulant, carminative, quickly transformed, dries up mucus, even in small quantity alleviates thirst (Ca. Vi. III.40).

Caraka gives 10 other ways to increase agni without the direct application of agni (Su. XIV.64):

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1) Physical exercise—vyāyāma                          | 6) Promoting fear in the person—bhaya               |
| 2) Staying in a warm room—uṣṇasadanam                 | 7) Promoting anger in person—krodha                 |
| 3) Heavy clothing—guru prāvaraṇam                     | 8) Poultice application—upanāha                     |
| 4) Fasting—kṣudhā                                     | 9) Fighting (sports, wrestling)—(muṣṭī yuddha) havā |
| 5) Excessive drinking (as in herbal wines)—bahu pānam | 10) Sunning—tapāḥ                                   |

By application of these one can increase the hot and dry attributes which belong to agni's qualities. These do not necessarily increase pitta quantitatively even though the guṇa of heat is increased by quality.

### Sāma doṣa

AH states that sāma doṣas which are spread all over the body, which are lurking in the dhātus and which are not moving out of their places of accumulation should not be forced out (by purificatory measures). Just as attempts at taking out the juice from an unripe fruit leads to the destruction of the swelling place itself, so also it will be very difficult to expel them out. The should be treated with drugs which are digestive and which increase hunger; next with oleation and sudation therapies and finally expelled with purificatory measures at the proper time, and in accordance with the strength of the patient. Su XIII.29, 30 Sāma doṣās which are greatly increased and going out of the body on their own accord, either upward or downward, should not be stopped by medicines for this produces diseases. Such doṣās which are going out should be ignored in the beginning and the patient should be given suitable foods (light); next they should be cooked with digestive drugs or removed out by purificatory measures. AH Su XIII.31-32

But we'd like to point to other simple but practical ways to reduce āma such as, non-suppression of natural urges, hygiene, diet, and exercise:

- Āyurvedic experts associate balance in the physiology with the natural urges--thirteen of them are listed. Honoring these urges assures that the release of āma in the physiology is not restricted through an act of choice (intellectual error). These urges not to be suppressed are listed below. Caraka also lists the complications from suppressing these urges as well as the management (Su. VII.3-25).

- |               |              |  |
|---------------|--------------|--|
| 1) Defecation | 6) thirst    | 11) crying                               |
| 2) Urination  | 7) vomiting  | 12) breathing (from exertion especially) |
| 3) flatulence | 8) sneezing  | 13) sex urges.                           |
| 4) sleep      | 9) yawning   |  |
| 5) hunger     | 10) belching |  |

1) – 3) The processes involving elimination are so important that the lack of or disturbed elimination is described as the source of all disease. For this reason one should move the bowels at least once daily, preferably immediately upon rising. Chronic flatus in the colon is strongly related to arthritic changes.

4) It is easy to understand that when the body wants to release something that this urge should not be restricted but sleep, hunger, and thirst may seem unrelated. Actually, sleep is the time when blood and tissue cleansing are most active. It's also the repair time for the mind and body and emotions (dreaming). If sleep is interfered with then āma backs up and physiology suffers. If sleep is disturbed digestion usually is degraded and if digestion is degraded elimination will be disturbed and we have the vicious cycle of production and accumulation of āma within the body itself.

5) Hunger is the experience we have when the tissues, and the physiology generally, require more intelligence (energy and information). The food nourishes but it also influences digestion and elimination. Dryness in the colon or tissues disturbs physiology--constipation is a common expression of this condition. Food which is warm and unctuous mitigates this dryness in the colon and can aid digestion also. Ghee and olive oil lubricate and soften the channels of nutrition and elimination and thereby promote good physiology. Heat is the basis of the principle of transformation and āma responds directly to an increase in bodily heat. Such foods as ginger, cayenne, and black pepper are excellent for eliminating āma from the physiology. They are also excellent for ridding the intestines of worms.

6) As for thirst the body is mostly water. Water is necessary for flushing wastes and for maintaining the body plasma (rasa)—a nutrition pathway/substance. Drinking hot water is especially recommended to eliminate āma. Heat transforms (cooks) the āma and the liquid helps transport it out of the body. Research shows that older people experience many degenerative functions just from dehydration. So be sure to drink adequate quantities of fluids.

It is important to realize that these urges are just indications from the physiology of the changing needs of the body in its natural quest to maintain balance. The lesson is to just listen to and learn from the body. Health is really just this simple.

- Hygiene addresses the exterior āma by advocating daily bath, clean, attractive clothing, tongue scraping, teeth brushing, and nail cutting, etc. Here in the West we don't think about the tongue as related to health but in Āyurveda it is an indicator of the āma in the digestive tract and a proper routine includes daily tongue inspection. If there exists a coating--white, yellow, brown, e.g., this would indicate some imbalance of physiology and digestion, specifically. There is value in scraping the tongue of this āma as taste and digestion are improved and the source of problems in the mouth is directly removed (the nervous

## Āyurvedic Concordance

stimulation of points on the tongue act as telereceptors for stimulating digestive secretions). Scraping however does not fully treat the source of the imbalance. Long fingernails are a trap for toxins and even intestinal worms. When we touch our contaminated pets, etc. we bring eggs, etc. onto food in handling and to our mouths during eating or scratching,. Therefore, clean, short fingernails are important prevention. [As a point of interest the Āyurvedic literature does not mention the word-equivalent of soap. Bathing in clean water with the use of (essential) oils, herbs, flours, and pastes, however, are indicated as part of daily hygiene. Sesame oil has been shown to prevent the growth of bacteria, fungi, and vires. Generally, oils also serve to lubricate the skin, thus promoting the timely elimination of wastes and toxins (āma). Soaps, by the way, may contain alkali which are caustic to the skin tissue--causing it to become dry and leathery.]

- The role of diet in dealing with āma is paramount. The weakened agni can not digest heavy food nor much quantity. Thus food of light nature and of little amount is crucial to recovery from this condition.
- Another natural āma transforming technique is daily exercise. Āyurveda says exercise is the best at producing lightness, stability of mind and body, and it increases digestive power, physical strength and capacity for work. During exercise bodily heat rises and this heat transforms āma. The increase in the circulatory system provides the vehicle for its elimination. Exercise is also a powerful technique to regenerate atrophied muscles arising from long-term inactivity. And by the way, walking is still the best form of exercise when done properly.

## DISCUSSION

Balance or imbalance in physiology is traceable largely to the quality of either digestion or elimination. Digestion is responsible for transforming all influences from the external and internal environment into something useful for physiology (here by influences we mean: food, pollutants, radiation, and all sensory experience etc.). If digestion is not good enough then the product of digestion may be waste, a toxic substance Āyurveda calls āma. Āma is produced in this case especially when we eat improper food combinations. Certain foods taken together are difficult or impossible to digest or transform properly, such as milk with orange juice (see section Asatmya / Incompatible Food Combining). Āma is also the natural by-product of cellular metabolism (also called free-radicals). Āma thus comes into the body from the environment and is made in the body itself. It is sticky, cloudy, static, heavy, cool, dense and slimy, which qualities interfere with physiology by blocking the channels of elimination and nutrition. Its presence is experienced as heaviness, dullness of mind and digestion, sluggishness, lethargy, sleepiness, depression, coating on the tongue, low grade fever, shifting aches and pains, etc. No matter what it is physically the body can't use it and doesn't want it. It represents that which is non-self and is that which interferes with the flow of intelligence in the body-mind system. Intelligence expresses as the path of orderly change so when disorder occurs then āma often is present.

With modern distinctions of organic and inorganic substances some other distinctions are appropriate. Many of the features of āma, sticky, heavy, etc. are experienced systemically. Indeed, cellular wastes occur pan-systemically. These features have the “look” of organic compounds. Some kinds of toxicity, in the modern sense, however, have yet to be explained. When there is no perception of heaviness, nor a definable stickiness can we still talk about toxins as āma? Heavy metals; e.g. mercury, lead, chromium, arsenic, etc. may or may not lead to systemic symptoms. It is believed that mercury does lead to MS and CFS symptoms but liver failure and other organ dysfunctions are also possible. Organ cancers, Alzheimer's, Parkinsonism, are a few of the possible diseases having a localized expression. As one writer states:

- Lead, for example, ignites a cascade of cell death mechanisms, including intracellular calcium overload and mitochondria defects, in the rod cells of the retina. A similar process could underlie lead's infamous ability to spur permanent neural damage in humans and animals, researchers say.
- Arsenic-contaminated drinking water is causally linked to cancer of the skin, bladder, and liver. Arsenic disrupts normal cell division, or mitosis, and spurs accelerated apoptosis, which may promote

## Āyurvedic Concordance

the destruction of normally viable cells and increase the error rate by which damaged cells escape elimination - an early mechanism of tumor growth.

--Hexavalent chromium, an industrial toxin triggering respiratory cancer, may damage a cell's structural DNA in a similar fashion.

--Mercury is one of the most widespread toxic metals in the environment. Inside the body, the heavy metal alters genetic cell signaling pathways that stimulate the accumulation of reactive autoimmune cells called autoreactive lymphocytes - by slowing their natural rate of death. This may explain why accidental mercury exposure has been linked to the onset and severity of autoimmune diseases such as lupus, investigators speculate. By accelerating or suppressing apoptosis, each toxic metal can trigger a unique form of "aberrant cell accumulation" that "may play a critical role in some of the most severe and debilitating metal-induced afflictions, including neurotoxicity, autoimmunity, and carcinogenesis." (Waalkes MP, Fox DA, States JC, Patierno SR, McCabe Jr, MJ. Metals and disorders of cell accumulation: modulation of apoptosis and cell proliferation. *Toxicol Sci* 2000;56(2):255-61)

The Āyurvedic notion of āma favors the organic definitions yet the inorganic may be just as important, pathologically. Moreover, we need to ask ourselves whether the classically prescribed treatments for āma can be invoked with presumption of success. In the modern paradigm of free radical damage it may be that the notion of rasayana is the very treatment for this kind of toxicity. Research on one reformulation of traditional chyavana prash—Maharishi Ayurveda's amrit kalash is one product that has undergone extensive testing in a variety of models (*in vitro*, *in vivo*) and disease expressions. One notable finding was that cancerous cells placed in a culture medium of amrit kalash only reverted to their prior differentiated functional status. When removed from the culture they continued to function normally. This effect affirms the clinical value of a product shown to have extremely high antioxidant values. (See Hari Sharma's Freedom From Disease for more details about this and other antioxidant products.) These findings suggest that even inorganic (heavy metal) sources of tissue toxicity may be effectively treated by Āyurvedic protocols.

It is easy to think of āma as strictly a physical substance with a physical cause but in fact it has a non-material counterpart in emotions. Āma as emotions of fear, anger, depression, etc. also interferes with physiology. There are two distinct but useful modern models of this relationship of emotions, body chemistry, and disease—The Free Radical Paradigm and the biochemical model of Psychoneuroimmunology (PNI). The former investigates pathology at the level of the electron and describes pathology largely in terms of disturbed electron transport processes. Inflammatory, degenerative, autoimmune and other disorders are merely the expressions of oxidative stressors—emotions, as well as diet, xenotoxins, etc. One hidden source of āma in this model might be anaerobic metabolism. It's highly inefficient and adds vastly greater wastes to the physiology than aerobic metabolism. Here emotions also can influence physiology through the oxidative fight or flight endocrine response, for example. Thus their non-material nature finds material expression in their effect on physiology. The latter model (PNI) is based upon research on the neuropeptide over the past three decades. It has confirmed the role of thoughts, moods, and emotions as agents for the production of chemicals (neuropeptides, hormones, gut peptides, growth factors, etc.) in the brain and body which have been shown to mediate thought, physiology, and behavior. Pathology can be described in terms of the nature and function of the molecules that are produced, circulating, and occupying cell receptor sites—mediating cell activity thereby. This model examines pathology in terms of molecules, not atoms and their sub-species. Phobias, neuroses, and hypertension are non-material manifestations of āma of an energetic or non-material origin. In this model āma may be viewed as those chemicals produced by the emotions that circulate and occupy the receptor sites and block communications of other important events in the life of the organism. Health degrades when receptor sites for immune function molecules are blocked by being occupied by molecules released or produced during the experience of angry feelings.

Perception of reality serves as the basis for a conceptual framework which becomes a belief system. When this framework fails to provide an understanding of things as they really are (and this is the typical human experience) then what results is a kind of āma which degrades physiology. When achievement does not bring

## Āyurvedic Concordance

fulfillment there exists a kind of pinch in activity which continually drives one toward more satisfaction. This āma may be experienced as confusion or delusion and expresses in an extreme form as psychotic behavior.

Since the presence of āma is literally guaranteed by virtue of its inherence in the process of change (metabolism, for example) then the physiology must provide an efficient way to eliminate it--and it does. Unfortunately, there are so many sources of stress-produced āma that the typical individual is not able to avoid accumulating it. What results, of course, is declining functioning--we call this aging. It's not normal to "age" but because we don't make the right choices which reduce stress in life it happens. Āyurveda is about how to release this āma.

Āyurveda emphasizes that awareness through experience of our status as unbounded, immortal, omnipresent spirit is the key determinant in the release of stress (āma). The experience of transcendental consciousness is a spur to improved orderliness in mind and body; conversely the lack of this experience serves to promote mental āma because emotional conflicts and intellectual error tend not to be resolved. Meditation, a technique to culture this expanded awareness, plays a crucial role in a program of stress reduction.

### Summary

In our discussion we have described āma as the cause and effect of imbalance. We noted that it may arise in the body-mind from mental, emotional, or physical causes and it also comes from the environment in the form of pollutants, trauma, situations, and so on. Nature provides for the elimination of this "stuff" in a natural way but in our way of life we tend to make choices which undermine the natural cleansing process. By listening to the body we can make better, healthier choices which may be as simple and inexpensive as proper rest, diet, and exercise. Better quality of life suggests we slow down and be involved in the now or process of living and not only in its goals.

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