

The Ayurvedic Definition of Authority

It has been said that knowledge is organizing power and in the context of health it implies the prevention or/and cure of disease. The question must be asked: “Who has this kind of knowledge?” Certainly in modern times there is much debate about who has this knowledge. The licensed M.D.’s and surgeons have the legally recognized medical authority but there is much clamor these days about toxicity of drugs and the on-going incurability of cancer, arthritis, diabetes, Alzheimer’s and many other chronic and degenerative disorders. Looking into the classical texts one finds numerous statements that serve as a guide to answering this important question of “Who should be regarded as an authority?” The discussion begins with a statement from Suśruta about the scope and complexity of the knowledge of the Science of Life (Health). Then Caraka describes the attributes of an authority in general and a physician, in particular.

- Suśruta (Su Ut XIX.15) says the science of medicine is as incomprehensible as the ocean. It cannot be fully described even in hundreds and thousands of verses. Dull people who are incapable of catching the real import of the science of reasoning would fail to acquire a proper insight into the science of medicine if dealt with elaborately in thousands of verses. The occult principles as explained herein would sprout and grow and bear fruit only under the congenial heat of a (medical) genius. A learned and experienced (medical) man would therefore try to understand the occult principles herein inculcated with due caution and with reference to other sciences.
- Su. Su. IV.6 By the study of a single shastra a man can never catch the true import of this (science of medicine). Therefore a physician should study as many allied branches (of science or philosophy) as possible. The physician who studies the science of medicine from the lips of his preceptor, and practices medicine after having acquired experience in his art by constant practice, is the true physician, while any other man dabbling in the art, should be looked upon as an imposter.
- Caraka (Su. XI.18-19) gives the following definition of authority: those who are free from rajas and tamas and endowed with strength of penance and knowledge, whose knowledge is without defect, always uncontradicted and true universally in past, present, and future are āpta (those who have acquired knowledge). śiṣṭa (expert in the discipline), and vibuddha (enlightened); their word is free from doubt and is true because, being free from rajas and tamas, how can they speak a lie?
- Caraka Su. 11.27 defines authoritative scripture: Authoritative scripture is the Veda or any other source of learning which is not in disagreement with the Veda, is composed by critical scholars, approved by noble people and implemented for the well-being of the people. This is the authoritative scripture. From the authoritative scripture it is known that charity, penance, religious sacrifice, truthfulness, non-violence, and celibacy lead to perfect well-being.
- Caraka states the investigation of a knowledge proceeds with four features—pratyakṣa, anumāna, āptopadeśa, yukti (Ca. Su. 9.17) pratyakṣa, anumāna, aitiḥya, aupamya (analogy) Ca. Vi.8.33, 40-43 but that sources of knowledge about disease characters are three-fold—authority, perception, inference ((Ca. Vi. 4.3-5, Ca. Vi. 8.83). Authority is the statement of the āpta (credible persons). Āptas are those who possess knowledge devoid of any doubt, indirect and partial acquisition, attachment and aversion. The statement of persons endowed with such merits is testimony; on the contrary, the faulty or otherwise statement of a drunkard, insane, fool and attached person does not come under testimony. Perception is that which is acquired with the sense organs and mind directly. Inference is the reasoning supported by invariable concomitance.

Caraka remarks in various locations of his treatise that the expert physician is known by the following:

Āyurvedic Concordance

- Those should be regarded as the knowers of Ayurveda who are able to deliver tantra (treatise), sthāna (section), adhyāya (chapter), and praśna (topics) distinctly by the way of textual statement, textual interpretation, and recapitulation. (Ca Su XXX.16)
- Excellence in theoretical knowledge, extensive practical experience, dexterity and cleanliness are the qualities of a physician. (Ca Su IX.6)
- He is the real physician who knows the timely application of reducing, promoting, roughening, uncting, sweating, and checking measures. (Ca Su XXII.4)
- The physician who knows the entire body always from all aspects knows the science of life in its entirety—thus promoting happiness in the world. (Ca. Sa. VI.19)
- Having memory, being proficient in rational management, self-control, and presence of mind is the physician capable of treating with combination of drugs (Ca. Su II.36).
- The most comprehensive statement of the physician, to wit (Ca. Su. XXIX.7): The Lord Ātreya said—The physician of high descent, well-versed in scripture, having practical knowledge, expert, clean, skillful, self-controlled, well-equipped, having all the sense organs (normal), knower of constitution and course of action, be regarded as promoters of vital breath and destroyers of diseases. Such (physicians) are free from doubt in anatomy, embryology, physiology and pathology, and also in the distinct knowledge of etiology, prodroma, suitability in relation to curable, curable and incurable diseases; are interpreters of the three-fold Āyurvedic principle of brevity as well as details along with the three-fold group of drugs; application of thirty five roots and fruits, four fats, five salts, eight types urine, eight milks, six plants of latex and bark,, groups of drugs useful in five ointments, six hundred evacuatives and five hundred decoctions; well-acquainted with the conduct prescribed for the healthy in relation to food and drinks, standing, walking, sleeping, sitting, quantity, substances, collyrium, smoking, snuffing, massage, rubbing, non-suppression and suppression of urges, physical exercise, suitability, examination and knowledge about the sense organs and the conduct of the nobles; doubtless in four-legged therapeutics with sixteen qualities, nature of disease, three desires, knowledge about merits and demerits of vāta, capable in management of four-fold unction with twenty four media and sixty four appliances; experts in various procedures of various types of measures, such as unction, fomentation, emesis, purgation, etc.; well-versed in head-diseases etc. diseases caused by proportional variation of doṣas, diminution, boils, abscesses, three swellings, various associations of swelling, forty eight locations of diseases, one hundred forty specific diseases, the despicable –over-obese, over-lean, along with causes, symptoms and treatment, wholesome and unwholesome sleep, insomnia and over-sleep along with the causes and treatment, six measures reducing, etc; symptoms and treatment of disorders caused by over-saturation and under-nutrition; etiology, symptoms and therapeutic management of blood disorders and also of mada, mūrçhā, and samnyāsa, well-acquainted with dietetic considerations, food items wholesome and unwholesome by nature, group of the best ones, eighty four āsavas (expressed juices), properties and actions of drugs according to rasa and anurasa, proportional variations in combination of rasas, antagonism, properties and actions of food and drinks classified in twelve groups, properties of after-drink, nine points regarding food, movement of food, wholesome and unwholesome food along with its good and bad effects, the diseases located in dhātus along with their treatment, ten seats of heart-rooted vessels; accordingly well-versed with brevity and details, in the entire treatise and its acquisition, retention, understanding, application, measures, health, time, physician and instruments and expert, while endowed with memory, intelligence, learning and rationale, in implementation not conflicting with his noble qualities and in dealing with all the living beings with friendly manner like parents, brothers, and kinsmen. Endowed with such qualities, Agniveśa are promoters of vital breath and destroyers of diseases.

Suśruta makes the following declaration:

Āyurvedic Concordance

- Suśruta (Su Su XXI.46) states: He who fully knows about the accumulation, aggravation, movement, differentiating qualities, the respective sites in which the doṣas are lodged in their aggravation and about the respective symptoms in connection with the disease manifestation is worthy of title physician.

Bibliography

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