

# Āyukusala and Āyurveda

**Venerable Dr. Āyukusala Thera (AT) answers the questions of Venerable Ayya Vajirā (VA)**  
Interview held on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2006 in the Āyukusala Assama, Hokandara, Sri Lanka

- VA:** Bhante, when I read your paper about *Patient's Participation in Ayurvedic Cure* (see the text attached), several questions arose in my mind. In that paper you speak not only about the patient's participation in the cure and about the relation between the patient and the doctor, but also about the functioning of the whole organism. Āyurveda, or in Pāli *āyubbedā*, is the holistic approach to health developed and practiced within the Buddhist culture. In your text you mention three types of life energies called in Sinhala *tri-dosa* or *tun-dosa*. The connection between *dosa* in Āyurveda and *dosa* in the Buddhist psychology of Abhidhamma occurs to me. Please, Bhante, do elaborate on that.
- AT:** Yes. Venerable Lady, these are basically two questions, two themes you are opening. First is that Āyurveda or in Pāli *āyubbedā* is the Buddhist system of medicine. Yes, it is. The Hindu health system in India is based on Atharvaveda. However Āyurveda has disappeared from India together with Buddhism, which vanished there about thousand years ago. Of course, the Indian people know about the Buddha, but they think, as the Hindu say, that Buddha is an incarnation of their god Vishnu. They know about the methods of Āyurveda and some may even use this word, but their conception is different from the original Buddhist *āyubbedā*. The Indian doctors, called *vaidyas*, may use the same herbs and the same oils as the Sri Lankan. But those *vaidyas* work in a different way than the *veda-mahateyas*, the Āyurveda doctors in Sri Lanka. So this is the first point of your question. Yes, Āyurveda is a Buddhist system of medicine.
- VA:** ...and the second point?
- AT:** The second thing you speak about are the three *dosa*, the three types of disturbance. *Dosa* is disturbance. And the *dosa* of Āyurveda is the same as *dosa* in the Buddha-Dhamma. Buddha speaks about the three healthy roots, *kusala hetu* or *kusala mūla*. These are motivation roots, which are healthy, namely the generosity, the loving kindness and the intelligent insight. Hm. So these are *kusala mūla* or *kusala hetu*. And Buddha speaks also about the three *akusala hetu* or *akusala mūla*, which are the roots of pathological development of suffering. And those three unhealthy or pathological roots are called in Pāli *lobha, dosa, moha*. The *lobha* is a sort of upsetting due to attraction, attachment, greed. The *dosa* is the disturbance by repugnance; it is disturbance in its proper sense of hateful, refusing, disturbing sense. And *dosa* is often translated just as hate, which can be valid in a very general sense. But it is rather repulsion, pushing away. The third unwholesome root or root of suffering is the *moha*. *Moha* is a sort of disturbance by darkening, obscuring. Well. It is often translated as ignorance or not-knowing. It is in fact blurring or obscuring, which makes things unconscious, not known. So *lobha, dosa, moha* are the three roots of suffering in the Buddha's Teaching. And one of them prominent in the health disturbance is the *dosa*, which is of three types. Then it is called *tun-dosa*.
- VA:** Bhante, could you be more specific about the relation between the three *akusala mūla*, that is the three unwholesome roots of suffering and the three types of *dosa*? Some people speak about the three *dosa* as about three types of energies, that is, as if they were some positive qualities.
- AT:** Positive qualities in Āyurveda are called *guna*. The same in Buddha-Dhamma. The positive qualities of the world, which we can experience by the senses, are called by Buddha the *pañca kāma guna*. This world of senses is called *kāma loka*. The word *kāma* means sensuality, senses, that is something, which has the qualities of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and touching. So these are the five qualities of the senses called by Buddha *pañca kāma guna*. Of course, the term *guna* is used in many various other contexts, too. The qualities of Buddha, which are ritually remembered by every Buddhist, also by the Buddhist Āyurveda doctor, are called *Budu-Guna* in Sinhala and *Buddha-Guna*, in Pāli.
- VA:** How are, Bhante, these *guna* qualities related to the *dosas*?

**AT:** In Āyurveda, there are specifically three *guna* qualities, which are being talked about as life qualities. These are the qualities of *rajas*, *tamas* and *satva*. So *rajas guna* is the heaty quality, *tamas guna* is the quality of endurance or heaviness, and *satva guna* is the quality of balance, clarity, clearness, these are the qualities. But the *dosas* are not qualities, *dosas* are disturbances. And they are disturbances of three types. The feverish type is *pitta dosa*. *Pitta* is not the same as *rajas*. *Pitta* is fever, feverish disturbance, whereas *rajas* is the general quality of fire. *Pitta* is something unhealthy heating. Well, burning fever, feverish, fierce. This is *pitta dosa*, one out of the *tun dosa*, three disturbances. That one, which causes too much heat in the body, fever, burning sensation, inflammation and so on. But the festering inflammation, which produces suppuration and putridity, is caused by the *semha* or *kapha dosa*. *Semha*, *shlesma* or *kapha* is the disturbance by heaviness, slowing down, sluggishness. It has the quality of bitter bile, festering inflammation, of phlegm, of pus. So this is the quality of sluggishness, of phlegm, called *kapha*. And the third *vāta dosa* is windy. It has sort of blowing and dissipating quality. As when the wind blows into the heap of dust, so it dissipates. It is the quality of fluttering, of not being anchored. Fluttering like butterfly. But also the windy inflating flatulence. Well. So the three disturbances *dosa*, are the fever *pitta dosa*, the phlegm *kapha dosa*, and the windy *vāta dosa*. And these three *dosa* are...

**VA:** ...all of them are various types of disturbance.

**AT:** Yes, in all of them are sort of refusal, repulsion, disturbance in the sense of *dosa hetu* same as in the Abhidhamma. But the *lobha hetu*, the attraction, is something, which is not repulsive disturbance, instead it is deficiency, lack of something, something is wanted. *Lobha* is greed in the most general sense. Greedy trying to get something, which then develops into the form of attachment, of clinging *upādāna* based on desire *tanhā*. And of course it can be desire for the sensual things, then it is called *kāma tanhā*. It can be desire to grow, to become big, well, like a tumor, then it is called *bhava tanhā*. It can be desire to destroy, *vibhava tanhā*, to annihilate, to kill, to destroy something or to destroy oneself. But this *vibhava tanhā* is still a type of *lobha* of upsetting due to trying to get something, which means, that it is different from the hateful type disturbance of *dosa*. Well. These are the *lobha hetu* and *dosa hetu* according to Abhidhamma. According to Abhidhamma we have also the third one. That is *moha hetu*, the root of motivation to make things unconscious, to darken them. This is the darkness of blurring, obscuration, to make not known. And this *moha* is sometimes translated as unknowing and equaled to *avijjā*. Well, it is in fact opposite to *vijjā*, which means knowing. But here the *moha* comes very close to the opposite of that *satva* principle used in Āyurveda, as we talked about it earlier. Thus, Venerable Lady, the Āyurveda knows three qualities, namely *rajas*, *tamas* and *satva*. These are the *tri guna*. And Āyurveda knows three disturbances, the *tri dosa*, which are part of the unwholesome motivational roots explained by the Buddha in Abhidhamma.

**VA:** So, Bhante, it means that those three *dosa* are not positive qualities. So *dosas* are disturbances.

**AT:** Yes.

**VA:** But many people think, that they are sort of positive qualities, these *tun dosa*... So how is this possible? Today with the modern Āyurveda, with the offer of Āyurveda in Europe and ...

**AT:** Well, there are at least two things to explain this. The first is the marketing. Well, business. When they are selling Āyurveda to Westerners they have to offer some basic notions what it is about. And without much knowledge, the catchword of three *dosa* became the choice of those businessmen. Now they sell the fever, they sell the pus and they sell the flatulence. So they would sell you fever *pitta dosa*, they would sell you *kapha dosa* and they would sell you *vāta dosa*. And when questioned, they say these are qualities and they would even explain that they are necessary for certain functions. Well. It is nonsense, which became a commonplace.

**VA:** For the functions of organism, Bhante, the qualities are important...

**AT:** According to Āyurveda, the positive qualities *guna* are responsible for the functioning of the organism. Yes. There is also that other thing. The general loss of knowledge... and there might be also a sort of shift of meaning due to it. The ancient Āyurveda doctors were often *bhikkhus*,

that is Buddhist monks, who knew the Buddha-Dhamma. The most famous ancient book on Āyurveda is *Caraka Samhita*, a Compendium by a *Caraka*, that is by a wandering monk. And another famous author is the Bhikkhu Ātreya. So those ancient *veda-mahateyas*, those old Āyurveda doctors, knew the whole Dhamma, they understood the Buddha's teaching as a whole system of life-mastery, called *āyu-kusala*, which is just complemented by the healing system of life-science, called *āyub-beda*. They knew the pathology roots *lobha*, *dosa*, *moha*, as well as their opposites *dāna* or *alobha*, *mettā* or *adosa*, and about *paññā* or *amoha*. But nowadays those people, who sell Āyurveda, they don't know much of Buddhism. And so they develop their public relations and advertisement strategies upon selling fever, phlegm and flatulence.

**VA:** They know only about a part of the whole system of Āyukusala as the Buddha taught it.

**AT:** Yes. But you know it, Venerable Vajirā, you are doing daily *pūja*, in which you recite several suttas. And there is in the *pūja* one *sutta* where those *tri dosa*...

**VA:** Yes, in the Girimānanda-Sutta are enumerated *pitta-samutthānā ābādhā*, *vāta-samutthānā ābādhā*, *semha-samutthānā ābādhā*.

**AT:** Yes, exactly. So these are the diseases *ābādhā*, which are due to *pitta*, due to *kapha* or *semha*, and due to *vāta*. Hm. And these *ābādhā*, these three *dosa* diseases they are just three of eight. Buddha speaks about eight types of the diseases in the Girimānanda Sutta. And these are the diseases due to the injury, due to the wrong handling, due to the thermal changes, due to the attack, and also due to the *kamma-vipāka*, which we would call psychosomatic or ethically caused diseases. So all these eight types of diseases are known in Āyurveda.

**VA:** Bhante, I would like to make this interview very simple just not theoretical but rather practical. The paper about *Patient's Participation in Ayurvedic Cure* aims down to the point of direct experience of a patient in the healing process...

**AT:** Yes. I was using that paper with mostly German speaking patients. But you have read the English version of that paper, but the original version was in German. The patients who came to that Āyurveda Niketānaya Barbeyn got the paper and I had with them twice a week meetings, in which we were going through the paper and they were asking questions. Those people were neither Buddhist nor medical practitioners. They were patients and they wanted to know...

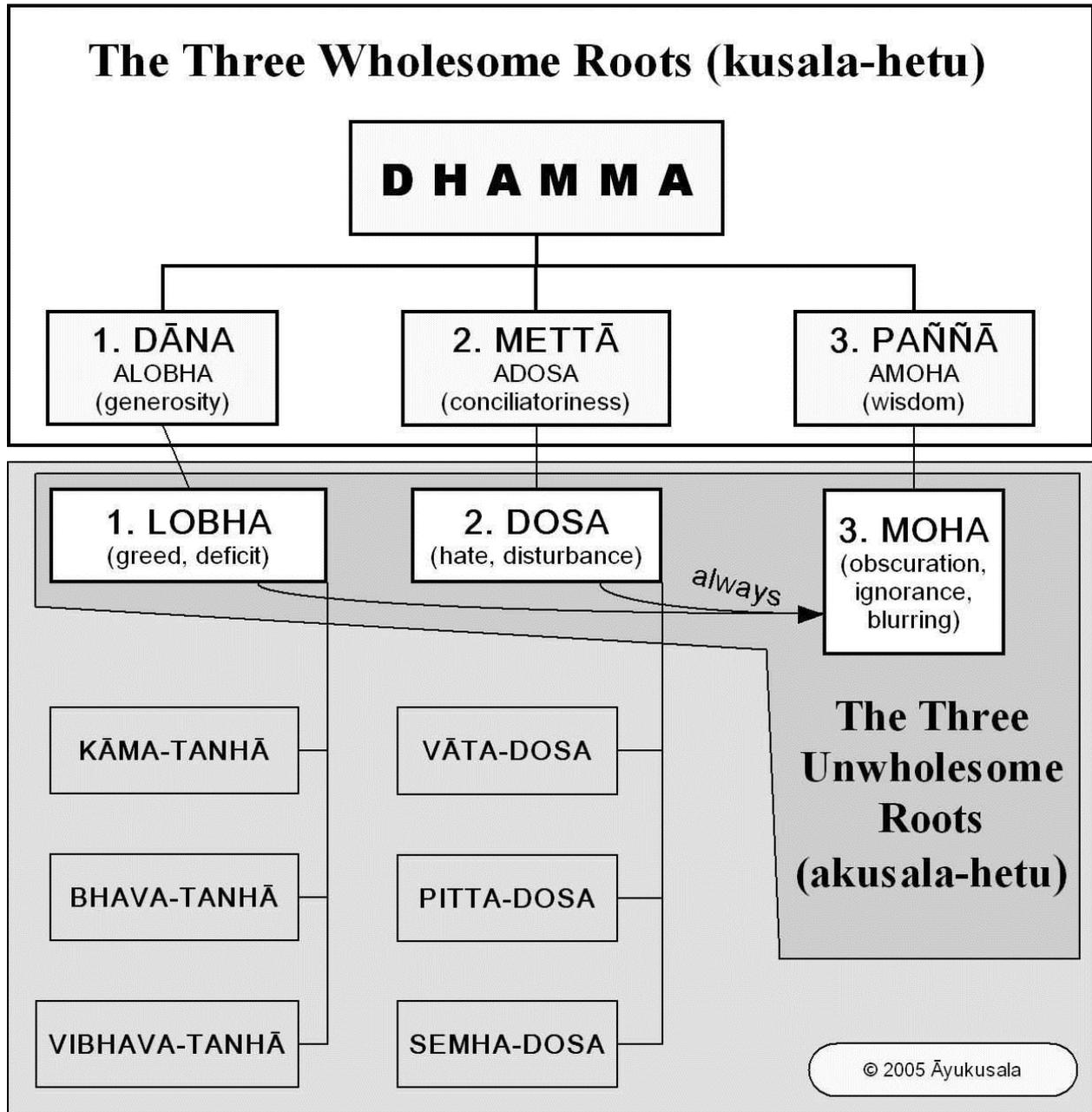
**VA:** ...and it came to my mind that Āyurveda is not only for the Buddhist people...

**AT:** Sure, sure. One doesn't have to make one a Buddhist to use Āyurveda. But there are three realms of Āyurvedic treatments, which include also what we would call religion. All three help healing so as to enable skillful *kusala* mastery of life *āyu*. These realms of treatment are called *vyāprāsa* or *vyāpārana*, and it is the bodily treatment is just only one of the three. *Yutti-vyāpārana* is the bodily treatment, which deals with everything one gets into touch or *yutti* with the body. That is the food, the herbs, the oils and so on. Then there is that psychological treatment, which includes meditation and yoga exercises. And this deals with that *satva* issue. Clarifying the quality of *satva* is the task of *satva-vyāprāsaya*. Then there is that spiritual or ethical aspect of treatment dealing with the divine or *deva* or *daiva* issues, it is called *daiva-vyāprāsaya*. The Buddhist meditation doesn't come into that spiritual treatment but into that psychological one. In that spiritual treatment are included the ritual and ethical issues, of course, for Buddhists, it is the Buddhist rituals. Thus the Buddhist would do the ritual of Five Ethical Decisions *pañca sīla*. But Āyurveda patient, who is a Muslim or a Christian should work upon Muslim or Christian ethics. The Christian patient would take... would remember the Ten Commandments, the same with Jewish patient. And one doesn't have to make one Buddhist to use Āyurveda.

**VA:** Exactly! Bhante, thank you very much for explanation. I would like to ask also questions to each paragraph of that text *Patient's Participation in Ayurvedic Cure*, but that would be rather another interview. So, thank you very much for what we have done. Thank you.

# Āyukusala & Āyurveda

Āyukusala is the Buddha’s Teaching (*Dhamma*) how to master life (*āyu*) skillfully (*kusala*).  
Āyurveda is the method of health care that was developed within the Buddha’s Teaching.



The wholesome roots (*kusala-hetu*) motivate actions (*kamma*) that have pleasant results (*vipāka*), whereas actions motivated by the unwholesome roots (*akusala-hetu*) lead to suffering (*dukkha*). Āyukusala uses the training methods to develop ethical action (*sīla-sikkhā*), meditation (*samādhī-sikkhā*), and wisdom (*paññā-sikkhā*). Āyurveda works with the body-contact (*yutti-vyāpārana*), the person-balancing (*satta-vyāpārana*), and the spiritual harmonizing (*dibba-vyāpārana*). There are diseases caused by three bodily disturbances (*ti-dosa*), namely wind-diseases (*vāta-ābādha*), feverish diseases (*pitta-ābādha*), bilious diseases (*semha-ābādha*), further, the combined diseases (*sannipāti*), due to climate (*utu-parināma*), negligence (*visamaparihāra*), injury (*opakkama*), and psycho-somatically caused diseases (*kamma-vipākajā-ābādha*) – as enumerated by the Buddha in the Discourse for Girimānanda (*Girimānanda-Suttam, Dasakanipātapāli, Anguttara Nikāya*).