

RUTUCHARYA

SEASONAL PRACTICES FOR 'GOING WITH THE FLOW' OF LIFE

© Jaisri M. Lambert, Ayurveda Practitioner & Consultant
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Introduction

'Rutu' means the movement of time as a seasonal change. The 'hu' (light)-'man' (individuated mind) is considered to be a miniature universe. Adam stands for atom, the primordial matter. The movement of time combines with light to move through cyclical polarities of day and night, youth and old age, digestion and assimilation and inhalation and exhalation, among many other polarities of this creation. Movements of the respirations and heartbeats are expressed within the boundaries of time and space.

'Turiya' or the state of transcended awareness, is still and without movement, but other states of awareness, such as waking and sleeping, are subject to movement and therefore to change. As such they are considered 'kura' or perishable. Love is said to be imperishable, constant and still. "Be still, and know that I am God." Change has functional relationship with changelessness.

Seasonal cycles relate to the earth's axis and are governed by the laws of cosmic 'prana' and 'apana' (involution and evolution) respectively. Solstice is a mid-point of expansion and contraction of the cosmic, pranic inhalation and exhalation.

Time brings changes in the 'guna's' or primordial qualities, and in the 'dosha's' or psycho-biological humors. Seasonal changes influence all living organisms. The normal health of the seasons can be maintained by seasonal rituals and celebrations, which help to uplift group consciousness and bring attunement with cosmic consciousness.

Space and earth elements are considered to be passive, while air and fire elements are considered active. Water can be either active, passive or neutral, depending on its container, one of which can be wind. 'Sama Rutu' or balanced seasons and global health are supported when global prayer services and medicinal peace gatherings help support psychological wellness of the creation. Outer change is due to inner change. Ayurveda is the journey to the inner self, through time and space.

'Rutu Sandhi', or seasonal junctions are times of change and are therefore considered to be 'dangerous', in the same way that an intersection is deemed dangerous - more caution is advised. Cleansing rituals are favored at the change of season because cleansing and rejuvenation bring change. This is why caution is exercised in 'Panchakarma', the ancient Ayurvedic medical science of cleansing and rejuvenation, and why it is suggested that only seasoned, senior practitioners supervise panchakarma.

Spring

In spring, water and fire elements dominate. Spring, when in balance, is a time of cheerfulness, enthusiasm, cleansing, melting, creativity, sprouting, happiness, compassion and pleasure. Rivers become full, pollens increase and outdoor activity increases. Marriages and new purchases are best planned for springtime when renewal predominates.

When out of balance, spring can bring allergies, colds, flu, congestions, laziness, attachment, passion and overeating. Early spring is more kapha-like, when effusions and congestions increase, while late spring is more pitta-like, bringing more rashes and fevers.

During early summer, awaken before sunrise to help maintain warmth, and meditate with the head and body covered in a warm blanket. As spring unfolds, awaken earlier to help reduce the risk of dampness building up in the lungs.

Yoga asana for spring can include sun salutations while facing east and acknowledging the many names for the sun, denoting its many life-bringing and life-sustaining functions. Drink warm water from a copper cup in early spring and from a silver cup as warmth increases externally.

Perform vigorous bellows (bastrika) breath pranayama in the early spring, shifting to gentle bellows breath in later spring.

Spring is an excellent time for cleansing and rejuvenation. Because change is afoot, it is wise to meditate longer, so wisdom prevails during change (vulnerability). During the early morning, kapha predominates, bringing dew, throat congestion and some sluggishness.

As the sun warms the earth in later spring, pitta begins to dominate, and hunger grows, along with desires for activity and accomplishment. In the mid- to late afternoon, the wind picks up and vata begins to arise. This is when we want to do errands and get home for a family dinner together.

Spring naturally induces a desire for planning and planting of crops, ideas and projects. It is a good time for initiative, innovation and taking calculated risks. So, it is wise to maintain a regular routine of daily hygiene habits to help contain new gains. Early to bed and early to rise helps contain the burgeoning enthusiasm of spring. Two to three meals can be enjoyed, according to the increased activity, and according to your prakruti and vikruti.

Summer

In summer, solar energy predominates and can bring increases in heatstroke, hives, peptic ulcer, violence, colitis, diarrhea, sweating and boils. It is better to avoid vigorous exercise and favor swimming, taking exercise during the early morning and descending sun hours, especially after the heat of the day has passed.

It is advised to awaken early by about 5am and follow a seasonally adapted Dinacharya (daily health program), using a silver tongue scraper for jihva (tongue) nirlekhana (scraping away of toxins), and drinking cool water from a silver cup.

Yoga asana for summertime can give emphasis to the camel, fish, cobra, boat, bow, cow and palm tree poses. Moon salutations are suggested for helping cool the nerves, bones and muscles to withstand the increase in environmental pitta, along with avoidance of inverted poses.

Performing shitali pranayama with inner retention at the navel can help cool the G.I. tract, especially the small intestinal region, where pitta dominates. "Samyad Darshan" is a passive meditation on the equal observation of inner and outer phenomenon, very helpful for removing judgment and criticism from the mind.

Use coconut oil for abhyanga, which penetrates to the sweat glands and helps avoid sunburn, rashes and hives. Pinda, sunflower and neem oils are also cooling. Neem oil is said to be a '35' SPF sun block, when frequently applied. Avoid direct exposure to hot sun in mid- to late summer days.

Favor cool showers followed by application of sandalwood essential oil to the crown, third eye, throat, heart, solar plexus and navel. Other sites sensitive to pitta dosha are the carotid, temporal, radial, brachial, femoral, tibial and popliteal arteries, where prana is released into the aura and electromagnetic field.

Consider dressing in white, light blue or light colored, loose-fitting clothing of cotton or silk. The thermo-dynamic action of silk is to be cooling in summer and warming in winter. Use green or gray tinted sunglasses to protect the eyes from photosensitivity, and a wide-brimmed hat to help protect the back of the neck (medulla oblongata) from excessive sun exposure.

Take one tsp. of bitter ghee on an empty stomach on first hunger, to help cleanse the liver, a prominent pitta site of pitta dosha. A light breakfast taken about 8-10am can include barley or wheat cereal cooked with holy basil, mint, cardamom, ghee and/or coconut. Fruit snacks can be apples,

pears, figs, melons, blueberries, prunes, sweet cherries or purple grapes, taken separately from other foods.

Work until hungry for lunch, and take kitchari with coconut, fresh squeezed lime juice and fresh cilantro. Avoid cooking at noontime, but have the food prepared about late morning, or later when the heat begins to wane. A cooling lassi made of 1/4-cup fresh yogurt and equal cool water, with a pinch of fresh cilantro and a pinch of cumin seed powder can be taken with lunch or as a mid-afternoon snack to help the digestion. Another recipe is to add fresh rose water and a tsp. of maple syrup to the yogurt and water before blending.

Avoid making decisions or having heated discussions at noontime. Avoid signing divorce papers in summer. Instead, make decisions in the cool part of the morning or evening, or wait until winter for cool-headedness, when compassion and forgiveness come more naturally. In summer, kledak kapha in the stomach can become dried, along with the other kaphas. Therefore, it is permitted to take a short nap of about fifteen minutes after lunch.

Avoid sour foods such as citrus, garlic, onions, red wine, tomatoes. Also avoid salt, chilies and other heating spices in summer time. Take dinner by sunset or about 7pm. Okra, cucumber, broccoli, fresh raita, and yams and salads are sweet, cooling, bitter or astringent to help balance pitta.

In summer, it is pleasant to take an evening, moonlight stroll, wearing white flowers like jasmine or gardenia, and jewelry of pearls, sandalwood, amethyst, moonstone, silver or malachite. Summer is more for romance than sex, which can be too heating and induce the spread of more S.T.D.'s.

Bedtime can be about 11pm, after rubbing the soles and crown with a little coconut oil, and taking about 1/2 tsp. of amalaki, or Indian gooseberry, with warm water. Amalaki helps assimilation and elimination. Or take cooled milk, which has been first boiled, and then steeped with a pearl in a silver glass or cup. Sleep on the right side for cooling the nervous system and on the left for warming effect.

Fall

During the vata-like autumn season, clear, light, emptying, windy, rough, dry, mobile qualities affect all living beings. Consciousness undergoes adaptation and variation of perception in the body and mind as it begins to turn inward. Proneness to constipation, cracking joints, arthritic pain, insomnia, loneliness, fear and confusion can increase.

It is wise to arise about 6am when there is no wind, and stillness prevails. Use a brass or copper scraper for cleaning the tongue to remove any fermented 'ama', or toxins. Swish for about three minutes with warm sesame

oil, and massage the gums with the index finger to help take care of any tendency of bodhak kapha to dry out the mouth.

Gargle with a solution of 1/4-cup warm water with 1/3 tsp. of haritaki to remove ama and strengthen the teeth and gums, which are subject to weakness and recession in this vata-dominant season. Drink a half cup of warm water that has been steeped with 1/2 tsp. of haritaki from the previous night, to help ensure complete elimination of the colon, the principal site of vata.

Yoga asana is selected to help strengthen the pelvis as the main seat of vata, and to help remove systemic vata. Do gentle forward and backward bends, gentle spinal twists, and camel, cobra, cow, and cat poses. Gentle sun salutations are especially suitable to increase the heart rate, promote sweating, strengthen the joints and ligaments, strengthen the endocrine (glandular) system, regulate the hormonal system, strengthen the abdominal muscles, and calm the mind, while balancing all five sub-doshas of vata.

Shoulder and headstands can be done in moderation, depending on the individual neck strength and age, etc. Lotus and hero poses help to increase devotion, quiet the mind and prepare for a calm day. Always complete your yoga stretching in shavasana to slow the heart rate, and be reminded the beats will cease at a measured point in time. Bring your attention to the whole body from the head to the toes, to relax out any remaining tension into the ground below. Sit up gently by turning to the left, to come to sit in easy pose, resolving to maintain calmness and centeredness throughout the day, avoiding overwhelm.

Pranayama can be alternate nostril breathing with gentle inner retention and the top and bottom of the breath, helping to increase relaxation and oxygenation of the central nervous system. Meditation can be observing the breath as it merges together at the third eye, giving rest, mental equilibrium and quietness to the mind.

Use warm sesame or mahanarayan oil to rub generously onto the whole body and leave the oil on for about 21 minutes in a warm room, to help it penetrate to all seven-tissue levels. Continue to rub the oil into the body, especially the joints and abdomen; then shower with comfortably hot water, but no soap, except perhaps for the private parts. Dry yourself with a vigorous towel massage. Dress with clean, warm clothes in several layers, choosing warming colors and avoiding black and blue garments, because these can increase an undue feeling of vastness and emptiness.

On first hunger, chew a handful of hulled sesame seeds to provide bio-available calcium and other trace minerals to help strengthen the teeth, hair and bones. For breakfast, take oatmeal, tapioca, cream of wheat or soupy foods, and sip hot water to help lubricate your digestion. Protect your ears from the wind when ready to go outdoors to work.

Lunch is best taken about 11am or 12noon, with hearty servings of kitchari, steamed vegetables with oil, soup, chapatti and a little hot water with lemon juice. A short rest is OK after lunch, to help slow the heart rate and respirations, and help build up slesak kapha to nourish and protect the joints, before returning to work.

Supper is best from about 5 to 7 pm, of rice, ghee, soups, and perhaps a concurrent desert of halva or almond paste. Tea of cumin seed, fennel seed, clove, cinnamon and/or ginger will help improve digestion and maintain warmth in the belly. Avoid cold foods like salad.

Gentle evening activities such as home movies, activities with children, preparation for tomorrow and early bedtime of about 9:30 or 10pm help to ensure good rest and a feeling of satisfaction with the day. In vata season or in vata aggravation, avoid vigorous exercise such as jogging, marathon running and heavy weight lifting.

At bedtime, chose a sedative beverage of hot, spiced milk taken about an hour before sleep to provide tryptophan for helping with sound sleep. Add 1/2 tsp. of ghee for additional vata-soothing and ojas (immunity) building properties. Another choice is to take triphala or haritaki tea to help ensure a complete bowel movement on rising the following morning.

General principles for vata management include avoiding loud music, fast driving, excess sex, cold drafts, excess traveling, old food, cold drinks, over-fasting, over-exercising and over-talking.

Winter

Winter season is cold, damp, wet, heavy, cloudy and snowy, like kapha. It is a season of hibernation and introversion, when meditation periods can be longer and deeper. Winter is ideal for indoor projects and focused studies. However, imbalanced winter activities can promote dullness, attachment, bronchial asthma, pneumonia, heaviness, congestive heart failure and a feeling of loss, sadness or melancholy.

It's better to wake up by 4am, though we feel like slumbering longer. Clean the tongue with a copper scraper and swish with warm sesame oil for healthy gums & teeth. A slight gag reflex helps remove any unresolved grief or sadness in the throat. Massage your body with warm sesame oil to help maintain body heat throughout the day, except if there is cough, cold, menstrual cycle or congestion.

Doing 'neti' or warm water washing of the nostrils and sinuses can help keep kapha from accumulating in the upper respiratory region. Taking a hot tub bath with a little camphor or eucalyptus oil or ginger powder can help keep the lungs, a main site of kapha dosha, clear during cold weather.

'Nasya' or nasal administration of medicated snuff or medicated nose drops can help maintain the immunity of the nostrils, a doorway to the brain. Do these actions on an empty stomach, but avoid them during menstruation, pregnancy or under 7 yrs. of age. These actions will help promote a feeling of freshness, endurance and alertness.

Dress with layers of cotton, linen and wool to maintain heat insulation, especially if going outdoors. Maintain moderate indoor temperature, not overly hot, to help prevent drastic adjustments of temperature when stepping outdoors during the daytime for work. Cover the head, hands and feet well to help maintain core body temperature.

Drink hot water with a little lemon juice to help dispel mucous. If the stool sticks to the anal opening or the toilet, take some toilet tissue and dampen it with warm water to wash and remove any particles of fecal material that may stick. Then dab the area dry to help prevent hemorrhoids.

Exercise can be more vigorous in winter, though often we feel like doing less. Aerobic sun salutations and weight lifting are now suitable, to the point of light sweating, not heavy sweating. Bridge, peacock, palm tree, warrior, triangle and lion poses are especially good for winter practice and for kapha individuals. Kapha individuals and those experiencing kapha disturbance can benefit from slowly holding the poses for longer each day.

Brunch can be hot barley cereal with raw honey, or hot rice cereal cooked with celery and hot peppers. 'Linner' can be cooked grains such as polenta, wild rice or couscous served with cooked mushrooms, summer squash, onions, okra, Brussel sprouts, asparagus, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, artichokes, green beans, bitter melon, eggplant or bell peppers. Between these two meals can be snacks of fruits or fruit juices to help ensure timely and complete elimination on rising. Avoid dairy products, particularly yogurt, in winter, especially when the sky is cloudy and overcast.

Resolve to be home by sunset to help ensure safety. Evening activities can be crafts, charades, music or homework. It's wise to sleep early, to feel ready for rising early, to keep kapha dosha in its place, so it does not accumulate. Sleep on the left side, so that the right nostril, which carries a warming current to the body, predominates.

Seasons of Life

The general principles described here also apply to the life seasons of childhood (kapha time), puberty to middle age (pitta time) and menopause to old age (vata time). Time is a causative factor, according to Vaisheshika philosophy, and causes each of us to spend our breaths until the last moment of the earthly sojourn. The quality of our daily and seasonal decisions governs the quality of our passing from this planet. OM SHANTI.