

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Hello and welcome to Unstress, I'm Dr. Ron Ehrlich. Now, if you were to ask any forward-thinking medical practitioner where health care is going in the future, personalized medicine, that is an individual approach recognizing that everybody is different is the way of the future. So today's topic is interesting for many reasons, not the least of which it takes a personalized approach to a person's health and it's thousands of years old. It's Ayurvedic medicine. It's been around for all that time and been in a constant state of development. It is so interesting for many reasons.

One, it recognizes that detoxifying cleaning of the system is important. Two, it recognizes that on the one hand, your genes are important but on the other hand, it's the things you expose your genes to. Nutritional, environmental, thoughts and lifestyle that determines how those genes are expressed. And three, it's a way of identifying variations in body types and subtypes.

My guest today is Dr Shankardev Saraswati. He was on a few episodes ago, talking about finding life's meaning. Go back and have a listen. It's a great episode. Shankardev is a medical practitioner, he trained in Sydney, Australia, has practised medicine for over 40 years. His practice currently focuses on psychotherapy and apart from a very eclectic mix of psychotherapy, his approach also incorporates meditation, yoga, nutritional medicine and of course Ayurvedic medicine in his practice.

He's also a great friend and we caught up for this interview in my home office, face to face, which I always enjoy with my guests if it can be arranged. It's not always easy. At some point, it may get into a lot of detail but don't be put off. Let it wash over you and realize that personalized medicine is far more complicated and involved than the simple disease symptom prescription model which characterizes our current chronic disease management system we call healthcare. I hope you enjoy this conversation I had with Dr Shankardev Saraswati.

Welcome back to the show, Shankardev.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Thanks, Ron.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Shankardev, last time we spoke, we touched on a subject which I think is of interest to most people and that is finding life's purpose.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: We did.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: And we talked about chakras and we talked about meditation. And we touched on Ayurvedic medicine and I wanted to get you back to explore that a little bit more. Can you give us a little bit of a historical perspective on Ayurvedic medicine?

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Sure. Well, the word Ayurveda, ayus, means life and Veda means knowledge. So it's the study of life, longevity and the things that prevent us from living full lives and having a healthy long lifespan, a healthspan. And it's been around for a long time. It's evolved out of the Vedic sciences, so the Vedas in India go back a long way and they are the Indian classical texts, the original texts, that describe all of the various

sciences required for society to survive. So architecture, politics, war, health and everything. So the whole thing. And religious and spiritual studies as well. The vedas are well known as being the source of Indian religious life but they are also the source of many other sciences.

And so Ayurveda came out of this tradition. And so one of the things we discussed last time was the relationship between the chakras and Ayurveda.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: And I realized that I have made a mistake which is exactly why you're back today.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Exactly. To get to the truth.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: To get to the truth.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Which is that they're kind of all related. They all came out of a fundamental language which is part of the Indian culture or the cultures that have come together into that part of the world, a part of the world that has had, in some areas in particular, unbroken and continuous civilization without kind of a loss of cultures for example in Europe, we've had periods of dark ages and so on. Whereas the thing about India is that it's a country or it's an area, geographical location that protected a lot of these sciences that came from different parts of the world and were amalgamated and the good things were absorbed into it. And Ayurveda is this sort of medical system that is based, like Chinese medicine, on an elemental study, the study of the various elements that make up life and they're basically earth, water, fire, air, space or solids, liquids, fire as a transformative element, air as all gases and space as the container for everything.

And they all come out of philosophy. And the yogic systems and the tantric systems and the chakra systems and [inaudible 00:06:05] and all these things, they all come out of a philosophy called Sankhya. There are six main or seven, maybe eight main philosophies of India, classical philosophies. And one of those is called Sankhya which is the enumeration of the elements that are required to make up the world we live in. And these are very profound, simple and yet simple philosophies that give us these wonderful maps by which we can understand who we are. Sankhya is probably one of the great and probably the least accessible of the philosophies. It hasn't had as much press as other things have had.

And Ayurveda is sort of an offshoot of that because Sankhya gives us you the structure of ... What's the structure of the mind, what's the structure of the body? The senses, the motor organs of the body, the various building blocks, how does it all fit together? And it does it in a very sophisticated, very elegant system. And it's a meditative system so that when you start to read or study these things, you can go into a meditative state and internalize them by experiencing these various forces at work.

And that's what's so good about the whole of this kind of more embodied approach to science. It's not a head science, it's a lived science and a philosophy. And Ayurveda is an offshoot of that. And it's a very practical and at the same time a very useful system in terms of not just treating patients as a physician but from the patient's point of view of having certain metaphors that we can use that comes out of this tradition and we

can use to understand what's going on inside us, inside our bodies, to have a lived experience of the illness and an understanding of the various causative factors that may be at work in your life, the relationships between the elements in the body and the elements outside of the body. And therefore, inside, what to change and why to change it and then to see and to be able to impose experiments on oneself. So, if I do make these changes, do I have a different experience? So this is what Ayurveda is really, this is what it's always been. A very experiential philosophy, a very experiential system and a very practical system.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: What's interesting, as you said that, as well, firstly, this historical perspective. It's been around for a long time. We're talking thousands of years. So that is a long time. You know, we're predating certainly the Greeks, are we?

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Well, there are different forms of the sciences. So, I'm not a historian so I can't give you the exact date but I do know that for example many of the systems that we see today had a proto system, a previous form that evolved and became more and more sophisticated. And of course, Ayurveda is an evolving science. And it's been around. But its roots are very ancient, I'd say. That's the key.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: and interesting, too, that it has been a continuous culture which is certainly something to hold up as an example because the jury is still out on Western civilization. I mean, we've been going for in its present form since the Industrial Revolution which is now 200 years old. If we make it through a 1,000, I think we'll be doing well, let alone several thousand. But the interesting thing is that this predates ... You know, we have this preoccupation in the West with science. It's things have got to be scientific and particularly came about around Newton's time, Descartes, everything is broken down into its smallest parts to understand it. And that has led us into a system of medicine that's very much focused on symptoms and dealing with the chronic disease and what is the best medication to control the inflammation, the depression, the osteoporosis, et cetera et cetera. It's a very narrow and reductionist view.

And I find that interesting that how did we make sense of this of how we lived in ancient times? And it was bringing together these various basic elements that makeup life.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: And they're kind of universal principles. We're going to talk about them, I think, as we move along. You want to ask the various Doshas and so on which are very interesting. But the key is that Western science has become a sort of very ... We're very detached from it as a patient, we go to a doctor and we don't understand what's going on. We know that we get a diagnosis, Western medicine isn't always that ... Hasn't developed a precise understanding of causation. We're looking at, as you say, the manifestation of imbalance. And the symptoms that arise and the signs that arises. And then we treat those and we're trying to, I think, because of the commercialization of medicine, we're looking, trying to pinpoint this one thing that's going to make a difference to everybody who's got the same condition.



And there are lots to be said for that because it's not ... We shouldn't underestimate the power of that process as well but I think what happens is that when it's isolated from a deeper understanding of the totality of who we are and-

Dr Ron Ehrlich:           How we fit into the world.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati:       And how we fit into the world and how the world fits into us and how various forces ... If we can get a handle on the various forces that are at work within the body and mind, then we can come back to a kind of a deeper understanding of what we're doing. And a context in which to place the various things that we're doing rather than, as you say, the fragmentation of medicine into these multiples specialties that don't communicate with each other and have their language.

Dr Ron Ehrlich:           We become good at describing a symptom and then just giving it the label as a diagnosis which is nothing more often than the description of what the doctor sees in front of them. But in a more elegant form that makes it sound like they have understood what is causing the imbalance. But, the Ayurveda goes ... I love that, life knowledge. Ayurvedic. Life and knowledge.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati:       And illness.

Dr Ron Ehrlich:           And illness.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati:       But focusing on illness.

Dr Ron Ehrlich:           On imbalance.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati:       To bring it back to balance.

Dr Ron Ehrlich:           Yeah, yeah. So you mention the Doshas. Tell us a bit about how it is structured, how we identify imbalances.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati:       Okay. And just before we go there, it might interest you. Here lies the common ground between Ayurveda and the chakras.

Dr Ron Ehrlich:           Okay, thank you.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati:       There you go.

Dr Ron Ehrlich:           Thank you. Because I did say to you last time that I thought the chakras, oh yes, of course, so Shankardev, the chakras are part of Ayurvedic medicine and no, no, Ron, we'll replay that, I'll cut that. So no, we won't. But enough to say that there is a connection.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati:       There is a language. And so the foundation of life, in Sankhya, are the four ... We can bring it down to these four organs of mind, the higher knowing mind. Sort of intelligence within the body. An ego structure, an identity, and a

thinking mind, all sort of surrounded in a fourth structure or function called memory or individual consciousness. So they are four organs of mind. The higher mind, the ego, the thinking mind, the sensorial mind, and the memory or the individual consciousness. They are four elements.

And then the other five elements, so earth, water, fire, air and space, so there are these nine elements. I think I said 74. Nine elements are fundamental to all of life and the meditation on these nine elements can give you deep insights into how the body and the mind operate from this very ancient wisdom tradition which gives tremendous insight into what makes up a human being. If I wanted to cook a human being, I wanted to make like a chocolate cake, I'd get-

Dr Ron Ehrlich: You'd get the fire, earth, water, air, space.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Yeah.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: High mind.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Yeah, you get all these things.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Thinking, sensory and memory.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Yeah, you get a whole lot of things, mix them up and get a human being.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Okay.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: And so, we're structured around these fundamental elements. So for example in the spinal cord, in the chakras, the earth is in the base of the body because it's the densest of all the elements. Then water, which is the second, a little less dense than the earth, that's higher than that. Fire, which is less dense than water, is higher than that. So you get this hierarchy of these elements. Air is above fire and space is above the air. And chakras are organized around these fundamental, elemental principles. And the whole body, you know, if you understand how the body operates, earth pulls things down into the base of the body, water is nurturing life-giving, fertilizing, so it's related to the sexual chakra, it's related to fertility. Fire is digestion in the belly, the air in the lungs. Space is in the throat and the mind, there's four elements of mind, are in the head. So there is a hierarchy based on the most subtle at the top to the grossest at the bottom and the human body is organized around it.

And those five elements are in us and everything in life and there lies the common factor that makes us part of the world we live in. We are not separate. We are from earth, what is it, from dust to dust and ashes to ashes and all of that, as we go back. So the Doshas are forces that enable those. And so the chakras are a subtle level, a much subtler level than the Doshas and that's the problem. When you're talking about chakras, you're talking about a level of consciousness that's sort of archetypal, it's deeper, it's into the psyche. When you're talking about the Doshas, you're trying to experience those five elements in a more gross form in the physicality of the body.



Dr Ron Ehrlich:           And how they present themselves.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati:       And they present themselves in different ways. And so you have to be able to get these elements to live together. And now these elements have relationships with each other. And those relationships are lovers, friends, and enemies. So, space, which is kind of a paradoxical element, whether it exists or doesn't exist is kind of a strange thing to think about, it's a paradox. And space is called the mother of all the elements. And from space arises air and then comes fire, then water, then earth. And the four elements, earth, water, fire, air, they have these relationships I described before. Lovers, friends and enemies.

So the lovers are earth and water because when they get together, they hug each other and they're very hard to separate. And of course, that leaves to air and fire and they love each other because fire creates wind, they fan each other. They make each other grow. The enemies are obvious. Earth and wind, they're opposite, they're antagonistic. So the earth is motionless and the wind is constantly in motion and so they stop each other's function. The wind is constantly trying to make the earth move and the earth is constantly trying to stop the wind from moving. And the other one is fire and water, of course, that's the other enemy, they put each other out.

And then the friends are water and air and fire and earth. So you have to have a way, especially for those enemies to function together in the body. So fire and water, how do you do it? You get a pot, you separate them and then you create hot water. And so this bringing together of these elements, the forces that enable that to happen in a way that's functional and it works and it creates life, they're called Doshas. And the word Dosha means a fault. It means a fault.

And, this is more of a philosophical thing but what happens is, as a result of these Doshas bringing the elements together, they create both lives and they create illness. So there's a kind of a trade-off that occurs. And the three Doshas are Vata, which brings air and space together.

Dr Ron Ehrlich:           That's V-A-T-A?

Dr Shankardev Saraswati:       V-A-T-A, yeah, Vata.

Dr Ron Ehrlich:           Air and space together.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati:       Air and space.

Dr Ron Ehrlich:           Okay.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati:       Pitta. P-I-T-T-A. Fire and water. They're the enemies. So Pitta is the element that allows fire and water to function and Kapha. K-A-P-H-A which is earth and water and they're the lovers. So, there are only three Doshas. You only need three Doshas. And they create everything in life. They create all of the various functions. So you



can say Kapha is everything that is building a physical structure. All the things that create ...  
Because earth and water creates-

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Earth and water are friends?

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: They're friends.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: But they create structure.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: In principle, the friendship and enmity and love-

Dr Ron Ehrlich: They go well, they complement.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: They do. But that's used in a different context.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Okay.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: That's used in a different context because yeah ... We'll get into that later, I think. Let's not get off track. Easy to do. So the Doshas, you've got earth and water that creates the physical structure, the tissues, all the lubrication, the building of the cellular structure. Because the earth is also ... An English translation of a word that means form. That which gives form. It's a force. So the earth is not just nutrition or heavy physical objects. It's a force. Earth is a force in itself that creates form. And Kapha is a force that takes the force of earth and the fertilizing power of water and joins them together to bring fertility into the matter and to grow the matter.

And that growth has to be done in a certain way because if Kapha is somehow not juicy enough, then the tissues are dry and they lack substance. So these are the metaphors. If it's too juicy, there is too much growth, then you're going to get the growth of tumours and various other things in the body. So you've got to have everybody balanced. So the force of the earth, the force of water are joined by the force of Kapha.

Then Pitta is a force which unites fire and water. So, hot water, so all the various forces ... So, fire is the transformative principle. It is about changing, it's about cooking things. So fire is really about cooking, digesting, so its main function is to digest things that are in your body and to process them and to burn up the impurities and to cook food so that you can take in the ...

Dr Ron Ehrlich: It's almost like an agent of change.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: It's an agent of change. And it's transforming. So for example, if I have carrots for a meal and I chop those carrots up and I eat them, the fire will transform those carrots into elements that become chakrative. So, the carrot becomes me. So the ability to take something from outside of your and put it back into your tissue and make it yourself is under the control of the fire element and it can only function when it's with water in this form, otherwise it's going to burn the tissue. So all the enzymes, acids in the body, these are all under the power of Pitta.

And then Vata is the principle of air and air is a force that drives everything else. So fire is transformative, air drives movement and change in the body. And so for example, the tissues grow and change shape under the power of Vata. They're being driven by these forces to grow. In its most gross form, it's breath. But it's also the movement of all the nerves, all the muscles, all your thoughts, they're all driven by this one force. So these three forces operate together. And they become a kind of a focal point by which we can categorize and structure our understanding of every single thing that operates in the body. And then we can bring it all together into this kind of ... We can see how they relate to each other, how these forces relate to each other.

Dr Ron Ehrlich:           And we're all ... Well, we're not one or the other, we're combinations of this, of these three Doshas.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati:       Everybody is born with a certain amount of each of the elements. Some people have more earth, some people have more water, some fire. And so on. So, if you have more earth, you're going to be more solid, you're going to look like a brick. Do you know? So these very square guys, big square hands, square bodies, they have a lot of earth element, a lot of Kapha. Some people have got more heat, some people got colder. Some people are drier, some people are oilier, some people kind of have got more juice in their body and so on.

So we're all born with a ratio of these Doshas. We're born with either one of the dominant or you can have two dominant and rarely you can have three equal. And based on that, your body will take on certain shapes. And this occurs at birth. This distribution of the elements occurs at the moment the sperm and the ovum-

Dr Ron Ehrlich:           At conception

Dr Shankardev Saraswati:       At conception. When they meet. Depending on the state, on the energy, on the elements they're carrying, what genetics they're carrying, will determine our genetic predisposition to being hotter or colder, heavier or lighter, drier or wetter in our body, more Vata, more Kapha, more Pitta. So what we do is we say that everybody is born with a certain nature and we give, in Ayurveda, we give people a ratio. So three Vata means you got three times ... You got maximum Vata. Two Pitta and one Kapha means you're primary Vata, secondary Pitta, tertiary Kapha. So your body would be thin, you'd be probably drier, you'd move around a lot, you think a lot and you have all the characteristics of having a lot of air element in your body.

Dr Ron Ehrlich:           There was this ... One of the things that impressed me when I learned a bit about this was that because in Western medicine now, we have this idea of genetics which is what we were born with. But this new and exciting concept that has hit Western medicine in the last, I don't know, five, 10, 15 years, is epigenetics which is how the environment, how our thoughts, how the things we're exposed to attach to cell membranes and cause genes to express themselves in a certain way. You know, Ayurveda, thousands of years, this is not a new concept to Ayurveda, is it?

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Not at all. And, yeah, so the two concepts here, one is this nature you're born with and the second is what's called your present state of health. The word for your nature in Sanskrit is [prakrit 00:28:38] and that's the ratio you're born with.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [inaudible 00:28:42]?

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Prakrit. And the present state of health is called [vikrut 00:28:48]. And so what happens is that that primary ratio that you're born with, in Ayurveda medicine, you're aiming to maintain that forever. So if you're born with more air and you're always thinner and you want to be a bit heavier, then you can do it but you can never become as heavy as someone who has a lot of Kapha, you just can't do it. And someone who's got a lot of Kapha ... A lot of people come to me or used to, not so much now, but in the older days when I was doing a lot of Ayurvedic medicine, people would come to me, people who are very Kapha and they say, "I want to look like a model on the front cover of this magazine, what herbs do I need to take?" And so we'd say, "There's only so much," I'd have to explain gently the truth of this.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Yeah, yeah.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: So, yeah, so epigenetics and this concept of virusvikrut go hand in hand that our environment shapes us and so we absorb the elements. So if I have a lot of air or fire or water in my body, I'm going to absorb the elements from the world and say I've got a lot of fire and the world is hot, I'm going to have a lot of heat in me and a lot of heat goes into me from the world. So, my heat levels are going to go up. And that's going to cause inflammation.

And then, say for example, if my ratio when I was born was Vata two, Pitta three, Kapha one, so a lot of Pitta, a lot of fire, I'm in a very hot, damp environment, it's been a hot summer here in Sydney, very damp, then all that's going to go into me and my ratio is going to go up, I'm going to become Vata two, Pitta four or Pitta five, Kapha one, I'm going to become imbalanced. And I'm going to feel really out of sorts. And especially for someone who's Pitta dominant, someone who's got a dominant Dosha, they're going to suffer more from heat than someone who had Vata or Kapha dominant because they're cooler.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: So, I imagine that you are far more vulnerable if you are significantly more dominant one of these Doshas than the other. If I was a ... I don't know, let's pick a number, I'm Kapha four, and a Pitta one and a Vata one. Do you know? I mean, am I more vulnerable if I am more dominant in one of the other?

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: If you get imbalanced in one of the Doshas you're dominant in, it's harder to remedy it generally because your body's producing it a lot. And so you're not only battling the fact that you're producing it a lot but the environment you're in might be feeding it into your body. So it's about relationships. The elemental idea is this beautiful idea that we're leaky. We put into the world and the world comes into us and it's all based on this elemental ratio. So, if I'm Vata dominant, for example, which is very common in our society, and so I have V3, P2, K1, and I'm rushing around all the time because I have to rush around,



all the technologies driving me, I'm driven by the screen then it's going to be very hard for me to get that Vata to stay in balance. I'm going to be pushed out of balance very quickly.

And each one of these Doshas has certain tendencies. So people who are Vata dominant are always moving, they just never stop. They're fidgeting, they can't put on weight. They can't put on weight because their nervous system is so active that they're just fidgeting all the time, burning up calories. People who are Kapha dominant, they tend to be very sedentary. They don't like to move because the earth in them is very stable, they're very stable. So for them, they prefer just to be very still and not ... That would be their natural preference. Of course, for the Vata, they have to stop moving to balance. So it goes against their nature. For the Kapha, they have to keep moving to balance. So that goes against the inherent nature of that particular elemental ratio in them.

And of course, the Pitta people, the hot people, are very focused as people. They have tremendous concentration like fire. They're very focused, they're always trying to get to the heart of the matter. They can be a little obsessive-

Dr Ron Ehrlich:           Sounding very familiar to me.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati:       They could burn themselves out by overdoing that. There's just one more interesting fact there to look up. So, it's hard to go against the dominant forces in you. But, if you use your higher mind, you use that intelligence, then you will understand what's going on and you will put strategies in place and live out those strategies so that you stay healthy and that's the whole thing.

Dr Ron Ehrlich:           I mean, this is a follow on from our discussion last time we met where we argued that there's probably never been a more important time in human history to know oneself because pretty soon, technology is going to know us better than we know ourselves.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati:       And just on that point, so this knowledge, if you know your Doshic ratio, if you can get a rough idea of it, and it's not always easy to know your nature, it's easier to know your present state of health because you can see what's manifesting. And if you can understand that a Vata imbalance will mainly be dry, some dryness, lack of nourishment, emptiness, too much space in the body, too much movement or you get wind, irritable bowel, you get this changing, a lot of changing symptoms, then you can say, "Well, this is a Vata problem, I need to bring some strategies that are going to reduce that air and space element in me." If you have a lot of heat and inflammation then you need to put strategies that will reduce Kapha.

And so the self-knowledge, the thing about Ayurveda that I love, because in India, it's practised almost the same way as Western medicine is practised, you go and sit ... A lot of people, a big queue of people going to see the physician, they just sit in a line, outside the door and he comes or she comes, takes the pulse, writes a prescription. It's not exactly the idealization but in the West, what we've done is we've taken more than meditative self-knowledge component and we've said, "Look, use this knowledge to understand yourself. Am I hot? Pitta. Am I dry? Vata? Am I undernourished? Vata. Am I too

heavy? Do I have too much kind of congestion, too much mucus, too much fat in my body then Kapha." And then based on that, depending on your understanding or through education, you can make changes if you want to. But it is a life time's work.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Health, that is life, isn't it?

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: That is life.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Life is a life time's work. That is a profound statement if ever there was one.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Beautiful, I love it.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: How do we determine ... I mean, you're looking at me and you're saying this guy is a ...

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Pitta.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Pitta, okay.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Definitely.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: And why do you say that?

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Well, because, Ron, you have a certain reddish complexion. So the good thing about this Ayurveda-

Dr Ron Ehrlich: This is audio-only but people are going to have to use their imagination.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: They'll have to trust me on this. I'm a doctor. Trust me.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: No, no, go on. Reddish.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: So how do you know? So each of the Doshas has characteristics, Vata is light, dry, rough, erratic, and astringent and has these qualities. Pitta is hot, wet, sharp, has a foul smell. So, you know, for example, body odour, BO is Pitta, or if someone takes their shoes off and they've got a very strong smell coming from their feet, that's too much Pitta in the body. And Kapha is sort of like heavy, smooth, it's mucus, it's like mucus. So each one has its characteristics. Pitta is fire and so the metaphor also extends in the fact that fire is red, mainly. Most of the fire is red. And so people who have a lot of redness in their body, a lot of blood, colouring, that's a clear indication of Pitta.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Pitta dominant.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Pitta dominant, usually. Not always because you can be bidoshic. So, for example, say you were someone who had a lot of Pitta but you also could

put on weight easily which would make you potentially bidoshic dominant. You could have two Doshas dominant. One is Pitta and the other is Kapha because Kapha is the weight. And then what would happen with bidoshic is I'd do history from you.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Of course.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: And I'd say, "In summer, what do you feel? In winter, what do you feel?" A pure Pitta will be hot the whole year round and someone who's got a lot of Kapha as well would find in winter, they may put on a bit extra weight, their temperature goes down and so on. There are degrees of these things. But, to do a diagnosis is not ... I mean, you're quite straightforward.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: You've kind of alienated me from my audience being red-faced, BO, smelly feet.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: You're a very balanced Pitta. I should say, he's-

Dr Ron Ehrlich: No one is going to want to see me again, I mean-

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: His feet smell great. And he's very balanced and because he walks the talk.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: I'm on an 80/20. But let's not go too far down that path. The other part that intrigued me, also, about Ayurvedic as it does about Chinese, too, is tongue diagnosis. You mentioned you're feeling a pulse.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Yeah, you can do pulses. There are lots of ways. So basically, we do a history and we find out ... Probably one of the most important questions we ask is about digestion. Pitta dominant people have very good digestion, they have regular bowel movements. Kapha people have a little bit, and this is an Ayurvedic thing, we write into the stools.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: I know, look, I'm doing programs on what does your poo say about you. So we are right at home. Our audience is just hanging out for this kind of information.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: So Kapha people have greasier poo as a rule and they're a bit more sluggish. And Vata tends to be erratic, often dry, constipation, gas, and so on. So you could be a Kapha person Prakrit, your basic nature is Kapha but you got a Vata disorder and so you would have constipation and dry stool. So then that's how we ... Digestion is a big part of it, body temperature, the seasons, you know, which seasons affect you more. And a general history would be ... But also looking, just looking at you, we look at the body type because it is a body type.

So Vata tends to be, generally, thin, tall, thing, or more extreme sort of weights. Pitta, very muscular as a rule, very defined muscular shape. Kapha, as a rule, is more like a pear-shaped. So we look at the body type. Then we could look at pulse and pulse is an art form. Not an easy thing too-



Dr Ron Ehrlich: Because pulse is not, as we in the West would understand it, taking the heartbeat pulse or is there more to a pulse?

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: It's much more to it. Well, just as in Chinese medicine, each side has at the wrist near the thumb, the base of the thumb, we would take the pulse and we put three fingers on and then you press the first finger down and feel that and that's associated with certain organs in the body. Second finger pressing down, related to other organs. So there's a light touch and a deep touch. You do that on each side. And you get a sense of the characteristic of the energy of the person.

I was just talking to a Chinese practitioner talking about pulses and he said, "You know, the pulse speaks to you after a while." He's a experienced pulse taker, pulse diagnostician. The tongue is also used and that's used to look at various things. The cracking in the tongue would be dryness that would be Vata. A white coat would be Kapha. The redness would be heat and then you can look at the heat in different parts of the body. So if you have heat at the tip of your tongue that often indicates heart ... Too much maybe emotion, Pitta emotion, the anger or frustration in the heart space.

And so yeah, we look at the emotional states as well. For example, Vata people tend more to anxiety and insecurity, Pitta people tend to be very grumpy, irritable, angry, frustrated, obsessive, that kind of thing.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: I know it well.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Me too. And Kapha tends to be ... And I'm a Vata Pitta by the way. Full disclosure.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Full disclosure.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Yeah, full disclosure. With a strong-

Dr Ron Ehrlich: I wouldn't have picked it myself but I'm going to take your word for it.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: I'm a strong, strong Pitta. And the Kapha tend more to sort of grieve in sadness because the water elements with tears, melancholy, they're very attached. So each of the elements in us, we're kind of living out these elemental natures. And yeah, so we can use all of these things to understand a person's body type and thereby diagnose potential what's going on from a health point of view, recommend remedies and lifestyle recommendations for the future.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: And in terms of re-establishing a balance. I mean, knowing one's predominant predisposition is one thing but so much of this, you talked about those four in the space elements, the higher, the ego, the thinking.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: That's the mind.



Dr Ron Ehrlich: The memory, the mind.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: The mind.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: This is where I imagine meditation has a powerful role to play?

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Very much so. And in fact, mental illness tends to be dominated by Vata, by air and space imbalance. And within that, you can have all three Doshas can be imbalanced. So you can have a mental illness that's Vata dominant which is pure anxiety, you can have depression, you can have different types of depression, Vata depression, Pitta depression, Kapha depression.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: And your approach to those would be different, depending on the body, what their base nature was, what their Prakrit was?

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Yeah, yeah. Prakrit.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Prakrit.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Basically, we try to ... Well, it's not always easy to understand someone's Prakrit. Because sometimes, the epigenetics is so ... The changes in the body over the life from early trauma, early life events or lifestyle changes, people with certain lifestyles can cover over that so much, the thickness of those changes over a lifetime. So you may not ever get to understand the precise Doshic ratio they were born with. But you get an indication and you deal with what's in front of you. So you deal with what's in front of you.

But, what's the question again? Mental illness and meditation.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Meditation. Because so much of this in the space, this higher, ego, memory, you know, this, I imagine, the meditation is important.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Meditation is crucial, especially for the development of the mind and for prevention of mental illness. And that's what we're seeing now in the West with this sort of this latest kind of development of mindfulness as a tool which has come out of the study of Eastern systems. And so the higher mind would help you if you ... Meditation awakens the higher mind and takes you out of the thinking mind which is the lower mind, which is caught up in senses and the outer world. The role of thinking is to be able to try to work out what to do in the world, what do I do next, what's going on? I think it's this or is it that? Constantly trying to plan and gain as much positive wellbeing and joy and satisfaction and to avoid as much pain and sorrow. That's the function of the ego and that's the function of the thinking mind.

And the higher mind links us to a very different part of us, to the psyche and to the spirit and to our intuition and to a kind of a deeper intelligence in us that enables us to kind of feel and recognize what's good and what's not good for us because that's called a knowing mind. So I know what's good for me or I don't know what's good for me. So

if because of some imbalance in the Doshas or my body my higher mind is dull, exhausted, I've been drinking too much, I've been eating poorly, I'm not sleeping well, I got a lot of worries, I have to think about what to do, my kids, my work, my life, my money. If the higher mind is switched off, then we're disconnected from knowing what's the right thing to do and then that is one of the great causes of imbalance of the Doshas.

And so you're constantly having to think, "Is this right? Or how do I make a decision?" So indecision becomes a major, major problem. Except for Pitta people who always think they know what's right.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Okay. No, no, I'm still with you.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: So meditation turns on the higher mind. It takes you out of the fog.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Because what we spend so much time doing is thinking and observing and seeing how the world around us is impacting on us. But, the time for meditation is that rare moment and for many people no moments of quietly looking inward and kind of getting an understanding of what we are feeling. That's kind of ... It's amazing. I mean, we've kind of on our bucket list of things to do ... Not bucket list but to-do list is, "Yeah, I've got to meditate, I've got to get into that, that's important." And yet, we don't, many of us don't. What's holding us back? Too busy? The mind's too busy?

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Well, it comes back then to Sankhya because Ayurveda is based in Sankhya and Sankhya is the philosophy that is kind of the theoretical basis of yoga and the spiritual sciences or the sciences of consciousness. And so Ayurveda deals with a much grosser superficial part of the human being. It doesn't deal with the spirit. It doesn't deal with the psyche as much. That's more for yoga and these other philosophies. And so in those philosophies, there are the three fundamental forces that are in the universe. And they are light, luminosity, darkness and in between those two forces, desire or momentum. And you can see these are physics. So luminosity, light, is a physical force, momentum is physics and the darkness is kind of inertia. Inertia which causes things to take form. So it's this inertia which causes the Doshas to come together which creates the elements out of consciousness. This is philosophy.

This inertia, this force, which was given a name in Sanskrit called Tamas, it's this gravitational pull of stuff from the subtlest into the most gross dense form, into a body, into a form. Earth. And that force is enormous. It is enormous. When you study these things, the study of these three philosophical concepts, light, darkness and the momentum, the movement between light and darkness which I think we touched on in the last podcast we did, that is something that is liberating to understand. And what happens is when the force of darkness is greater than the force of light then we lose touch with our self, we lose touch with the subtle parts of us and we start to depend on external forces and depend on more sensorial and material, grosser forms to try and feel the suffering we feel from the disconnection to self.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: And those distractions are all around us, constantly, and bombarding us, literally bombarding us constantly with the need to ... Well, it's about consumerism, you know? We're kind of encouraged to be good consumers, we're rarely encouraged to be good citizens. And this is this light-dark imbalance where the darkness, it sounds like a Star Wars thing, but that's true.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Star Wars is based on archetypal powerful psychic forces and that's why it resonates so well with us all.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: And so this resistance or inertia if you like, but more than inertia, actually resistance, to explore this meditation which we know all is good for us is a fascinating paradox in our modern world.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Absolutely.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Because you talk to ... I'm sure if we stopped a hundred people randomly in the street, a good proportion of them would have said, "Yeah, I've tried meditation all right. I'd like to give it a go." But then you ask that hundred how many are doing it and not enough. And I include myself in that, too. I mean that's a work in progress.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: The resistance has a natural function. It's important that structures maintain their shape and don't change too much. I have to wake up in the morning and recognize who I am. So I start a degree of stability. So we need a bit a degree of resistance. It's not a dark or a bad thing. And, for a lot of people who don't come to meditation, who neglect it, it's protective. It's like the ego is protecting itself, it's protecting you, its function is to protect you. The ego's function is to make sure that you're healthy. It grabs on to the thinking mind and it says to the thinking mind, "Plan so that I survive. I need to survive." That's the fundamental, the instinctual driver of all living creatures, the will to live.

And, that's very primitive. But, to go beyond that requires that we kind of cook. So this is an evolutionary philosophical concept which encapsulates Ayurveda. Ayurveda has been used to allow people in the Indian subcontinent who are very interested in spiritual studies to dive deep into themselves and to stay healthy because it's not an easy thing to dive into yourself and explore the mysteries of the unconscious you and stay healthy because the process in these more advanced levels of practice puts a lot of pressure on for change. And that change puts a lot of pressure on the structure.

So Ayurveda is being used in society to keep families healthy. But for people exploring the depths, who want to go into the depths, it was used so they could create a balance as they went along and not hurt themselves. So, you know, in order to get to the point where you, as a soul, want to take on the challenge of going within, not just relaxation which is the majority of people who do meditation now are doing it for relaxation, to manage anxiety, just to relax and to have that short break, a gap from the endless challenges, the endless stimulation, demands, responsibilities. So we just have this time out and we know how healthy that is.

So, to go beyond that and to try and really ... It requires a ... You have to get to a certain point in your own soul's evolution to want to do it, I think. And then something changes, and especially it happens to most people in the middle of their lives. You've lived a good life, you've done it all more or less, hopefully, it's been good for you. And then you sort of thing, "What's it all about?" And you're at the top of the hill looking down and you can see the end is not that far off. It makes you think what's this all about. So that's when meditation starts to be able to create radical change in who we experience ourselves, how we experience the body. So there are these levels.

But for most people, the other thing that stops them is that they know they need to relax. But, they're pulled. They're weak. We're pulled by these forces.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: I wonder whether there's these two kinds of practical elements to what's holding people back and this is my observation here is the physical position of it. Sitting is, for me, a problem. I find sitting for my lower back not always-

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: In a chair?

Dr Ron Ehrlich: In a chair. Or even supported with my back. I find a much more comfortable position was for me lying down.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Sure.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: And so physically, sorting out a position that we traditionally think, I have to sit with my legs crossed in a sitting position. So I think that's one thing. The other one is, being hard on ourselves. You know, we have this image of what it should be. And yet, it's not. And so we-

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: What should it be?

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Well, I guess it should be a quietness in the mind and not a drifting of the mind. And yet, when the mind drifts, we are hard on ourselves. And think, "Oh, God, I'm just not [crosstalk 00:58:04]"

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: That's the misunderstanding of what meditation is about.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Yes.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: I think.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: So that's why I raise it.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Yeah, good question.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: I wanted to sort of say, "Okay, the physicality of it, I think I've sorted it out because I realize my physical limitations of sitting for 20 minutes." So I found a

comfortable position. But the second part is being hard on myself when what's happening is not happening as I think it should. And that's misinformation.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: And that's often because we get our information from reading books about these wonderful experiences people have, exalted states of inner silence and peace and bliss and so on. But the stages of meditation are well understood by all the traditions, mainly. And you know, initially, when you start to go in and explore the mind, there's rebellion. The mind does not want to do what you want it to do. So we say that the first stage is ... So meditation goes through these stages of oscillation between restlessness and dullness. And the restless stage is divided into the monkey mind, the drunken monkey. And the drunken monkey bit by a scorpion.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: That's given me something to think about.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: And then there are three stages of dullness.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Yeah, I know them.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: I know them well, too. And so you go through stages. Yeah, one of the greatest misconceptions is that if I'm thinking ... Meditation, if my mind is active, I'm thinking. I'm not doing it right. And in fact, just the opposite. You've taken the lid off, all the stuff's just pouring out, you just got to be able to sit with that, let it happen, and step back and observe. And then the mind will quieten itself and there's nothing you need to do. But that will take time. And most people want an experience, they want something to happen quickly.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Well, I think being permitted to allow that to happen is a good first step.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Yeah.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Now, look. We could, honestly, we could talk for hours.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: I know.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: And we may well again. But, now, let's take a step back here because you know, we're talking about Ayurvedic as a system of interpreting imbalance, of firstly understanding who we are and what we are in basic terms, both genetically which we've called Prakrit.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Yep, and vikrut, epigenetics.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: And vikrut which is the epigenetics. And understanding where our imbalances are. What would you ... Now, for the person's who's listening to this going, "I found this interesting about Ayurveda, what would be your takeaway message to them?" One or two, three or four tips.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Okay. Well, I think it's useful to study this. I mean, it's one of the things that we're doing on our website is putting a course up that is geared towards self-education. Ayurveda as self-education versus Ayurveda as it's traditionally practised in India as a kind of herbal medicine without education. And so there are some good books you can read. I think some short courses on Ayurveda are good, you get to understand the Doshas. I think the key thing is to understand the three Doshas, to understand Vata, Pitta and Kapha and try to see, put on your Ayurvedic glasses and look at the world from an elemental perspective and say, "You learn the characteristics of each, you learn the characteristics of Vata, Pitta, Kapha." And that's all you need. That's kind of the essence.

I mean, it's a complex medical science, it has geriatrics, it has pediatrics, I have surgery. In Ayurvedic texts, I don't know exactly how far back, hundreds of years or thousands of years, probably hundreds of years back, they prophesied that one-day science would evolve to the point where herbs could be injected directly into the body, into the bloodstream. So these were in the texts.

So they had foreknowledge of possibility. So it is a complex medical science. But, from the point of view of most people, meditation number one, meditation on your own body, so you'd read about Vata, Pitta, Kapha. There are always lists of the characteristics that go with it.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: And not to get preoccupied with the oneness of ... I mean, I can imagine people going, "Oh, what am I?" But you could be a combination of. But you're dominant.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Yeah, just observe each one of the elements in yourself. Am I dry or wet, am I hot or cold here? Which season do I feel good in? We-

Dr Ron Ehrlich: We just touched on. We've just thrown out a lot of ideas here. We're not about to diagnose people.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: No.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: But, you were saying about meditation as well.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Yeah, meditation. So you read about it and then you just try to meditate and see what do I feel? And I think it's important to recognize you're going to be confused in the beginning. Most people are. It does take a bit of time. When I used to teach courses on this, life courses, I used to tell my students it's going to take you three cycles of the earth around the sun to understand how these Doshas work because each cycle, you'll get to know a little bit, you go through winter, you go through spring, summer, autumn and in each season, you'll feel different things. And then I always said, "Come back and do the course again." Always at a reduced price, of course. And then revisit.

The thing is that we live in a world, as you said before, we're trying to get the knowledge. There is so much information, we can't digest it. And that creates indigestion. So these sc sciences, these wonderful sciences do take a bit of time to embody, to

make it ... And even then, it's good to talk to people, find people. Of course, as I said, on our website coming up this year, we'll be doing an Ayurvedic course, for sure. And my emphasis is to bring it back to the foundations, bring it back to the simplicity. The beauty of Ayurveda, the beauty of these things is that it comes back to a few elements, these nine things.

If you meditate on the higher mind, you meditate on your identity, you meditate on the concept of identity because every disease has its ego, its own identity and each disease are going to be a Vata disease or a Pitta disease or a Kapha disease. Everything in life can be classified. So you start classifying the world and you start to see how you relate. So you got to get out of the kind of looking for the answers outside of yourself, look back within. And then you connect with the world and you feel the world. That's what you were saying before which I thought was really interesting and very to the point. You start to feel the world and you start to have these adjectives because just to finish off, perhaps, or to take us down another rabbit hole is the fact that the Doshas ...

See, Ayurveda classifies the world into substances that can affect us. And everything in the world is a substance. And the substances are nouns and they carry qualities. The qualities are adjectives. So for example, if I say water, that is a substance, right? It's a noun. And we define a noun by any word you can put a or the in front of. So the water. And then it carries qualities. So when I drink a little water, it could be hot water, the adjective is hot. Or it could be cold. And so the water is the substance that carries with it a certain power. The adjectives are the power that the substance carries into your body. So if I know my Dosha and I know I'm hot, I know I have to be careful about how many hot substances I put into my body. So hot water, hot spicy food, certain substances that are going to be heating, certain spices are no good for me. I have got to avoid excessive exposure to sun or heat or I've got to learn to antidote.

So the good thing about Ayurveda is also that it's not about rejecting things, saying, "You can't do anything." It's saying, "This substance is going to aggravate or increase the Dosha in your body, therefore, if you're exposed to that or you want to expose yourself to that because you like spicy food," and India is full of spicy food, man, you know, it's spicy.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: My favourite cuisine.

Dr Shankardev Saraswati: Then learn to antidote it. What substances do you combine with that food or with that substance? You go out in the hot sun, have a cold shower. Stay in the shade a bit, cool down, make sure your body temperature cools down. So it's that kind of science, yeah.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: Today, we covered Ayurvedic medicine and in a future episode, we're going to explore traditional Chinese medicine. We have so much to learn from the past. The question is, are we willing to listen and more importantly, are we willing to learn? Modern medicine is fantastic we all know that. And many of us, myself included, have benefited greatly from the expertise of some amazing practitioners and amazing technology.



It's just that a good deal of our healthcare system has become a chronic disease management system. A great economic model, just not a particularly good health model. Apart from his practice here in Sydney, Dr Shankardev has some fabulous resources and online courses on his website, bigshakti.

We will have links to that in the transcripts of today's episode. Now, don't forget about the Unstress app, it's also available in the Apple app store and the Google Play. Just search Unstress and download on your devices. It's an easy way to listen to each episode and get access to some great resources. Check out the drop-down menu and you can also listen to some short YouTube clips. So, until next time, this is Dr Ron Ehrlich. Be well.

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