

Tridosha (three humors)

1) 5 elements and their attributes

- a) ākāśa - ether, space – space
- b) vāyu - air or wind – movement, action
- c) agni – fire – burning, transformation
- d) āpas - water – flow, moisture
- e) pṛthivī - earth – substance

The Tridoṣa - The Three Bodily Constitutions

In the Sāṃkhya philosophy the three fundamental qualities of rajas, sattva, and tamas, relate to the forces of Life (Prāṇa), Light (Jyoti), and Love (Prema) throughout the universe. In the body, these qualities are embodied as three “doṣas.”

In Saṃskṛta "doṣa" may mean “defect,” “blemish,” “stain,” “alteration,” or “constituent.” In English, "doṣa” is most often translated as “constitution,” or “humor.” We prefer the Saṃskṛta word “doṣa” which captures the many meaning more aptly.

The tridoṣa are physical / non-physical bodily components which (all) exist in every body. They are the principle components of the body. All of the substances and functions of the body are governed by one or another of the three doṣas. That is to say that if all components of the body were listed and divided into three categories that they would be classified according to the three principles of vāta or wind, pitta or fire, and kapha or water. Like the interaction of the three guṇas sattva, rajas, and tamas which causes the

creation and sustenance of the universe the three doṣas create and maintain the body.

The non-physical Doṣas

The doṣas are non-physical, because there are energetic principles which exist independently from the physical body. The doṣas do not exist in foods, or colors, or thoughts, though these inanimate things do have qualities which will influence the doṣas in the body of a living creature in a predictable way. The qualities of various substances which come in contact with the body are responsible for the development or reduction of the doṣas within the body. The hot quality of a food like cayenne pepper becomes pitta doṣa within the body. These quality of hot is distinct from the bodily quality of pitta but it does assist in the formation of pitta (and all the action, organs, and systems, that pitta governs) in the body. The doṣas are not physical in the sense that they are energetic principles which govern the actions and parts of the body. They are not these parts, but without their existence, these parts could not exist or function. It is through the interaction of the three doṣas that the body is formed and that all its anatomical processes are maintained.

The physical Doṣas

It has been said already that doṣa may mean “change,” “stain”, or “defect”. Like the three guṇas which move constantly and cause change, growth, fluctuation, and dissolution, throughout the universe, it is through the constant change of the doṣas that the body lives, grows, changes, and decays. From the time of birth (and even before) the doṣas in the body change their quantities and qualities continually. This fluctuation inherent to the nature of the tridoṣa is the force which causes all structure and functions of the body. When the doṣas get too far from their state of balance determined at birth, the process of metabolism will break down. At this point, absorption will be hindered and elimination will be obstructed. Toxins will accumulate in the body which resemble the nature of the doṣas which have cause the break-down of the healthy function of the body. Phlegm in the lungs may be cause by any one of the three doṣas for example. Vāta-

type phlegm may appear scanty, dry, and brownish in color. Pitta-phlegm may appear oily, moderate in quantity and yellow or greenish. Kapha-type phlegm may appear thick, mucousy, abundant and white. Phlegm is a natural waste product of the body and not a manifestation of the doṣas per se, though the doṣas may be evident in the phlegm by the manifestation of these specific qualities particular to each doṣa. These sorts of toxic products which appear in the body at the time of doṣic imbalance are said to be a physical manifestation of the doṣas. They hinder the proper function of the body and cause dis-ease. This is the physical form of the doṣas, and this is why the doṣas are called “stains,” or “defects.” The word doṣa may also be translated to mean, that which causes dis-ease or health. It is true that the balance of the doṣas will lead to perfect health and spiritual realization, and that their imbalance will in time cause mental and physical illness, spiritual stagnation, and eventually the death of the body.

1) Vaata – Wind or Air

It is composed of a combination of the air and ether elements. Vāta doṣa is said to consist predominantly of the rajoguṇa (75% rajas; 20 % sattva; 5 % tamas)

2) Pitta – Fire or Bile

It is comprised of a combination of the fire and water elements. Pitta is said to be the doṣa which has the highest predominance of the sattva guṇa, though it does consist of slightly more of the rajoguṇa. (50 % rajas, 45 % sattva; 5 % tamas)

3) Kapha – Water or phlegm

Kapha is made up of a combination of the water and earth elements. It is said to be predominantly tamasic (75 % tamas; 20 % sattva; 5 % rajas)

Correlation to Western Medicine -

The word “humor” comes from the ancient Greek system of medicine of Hippocrates. The traditional system of Western medicine incorporated the concept of four biological humor or substances (sometimes thought of as fluids) which make up the body. These four humors like the three doṣas of

āyurveda were originally considered non-physical principles which related to the formation and function of certain tissues in the body. These four humors may be correlated to the tridoṣa as follows: black bile and yellow bile both relate to pitta doṣa; blood (which is ruled by the air element) relates to vāta doṣa; and phlegm relates to kapha doṣa. The abandonment of this traditional system was influenced by the movement to understand the workings of the physical body in a mechanical, and scientific way by various biologists like Nicholas Culpeper and materialist philosophers like Immanuel Kant. This theory of four humors formed the basis of the Western medical tradition into the 1800's. It was practiced in the USA at the time of the civil war. The concept of four humors was also used by Islamic Medicine and the Greek -influenced system of India called Unani.

prakṛti – Prakṛti means “nature”.

Prakṛti is the balance of the doṣas at the time of birth.

It is determined by the parents physical, mental, and emotional character especially at the time of conception, during pregnancy, and at the time of birth, a persons own aptitude, past karmas, and the astrological timing of conception and birth. This determines an individual's inherent qualities and tendencies toward disease. The prakṛti is different for each individual and it is set at the time of birth, after which it does not change. This balance of the tridoṣa is the normal state for that individual. If the prakṛti is maintained through proper diet and lifestyle, that individual will enjoy a state of health.

Vikṛiti – Vikṛiti means “change.”

Vikṛiti is the current balance (or imbalance) of doṣas. It is caused by diet, lifestyle, and karmas enacted after the time of birth.

The prakṛti will influence the vikṛiti to some extent. A person with a predominantly pitta prakṛti will be more inclined to develop pitta imbalances throughout life. When pitta increases from its natural state at the time of birth, this will cause an increase of pitta in the vikṛiti.

The prakṛti and vikṛti are determined by a qualified āyurvedic practitioner through observing the patient, asking questions, analyzing the māla (waste products), and most effectively through pulse diagnosis.