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**File: ■ Ayurveda
■ Nepal**

HC 011243-446

Date: April 13, 2012

RE: Ayurveda in Nepal

Tillotson A, Caldecott T, eds., with Bajracharya VMB. Ayurveda in Nepal. *J American Herbalists Guild*. 2011;10(1):5-11.

The recently published *Ayurveda in Nepal: Volume One: Ayurvedic Principles, Diagnosis and Treatment*, The Teachings of Vaidya Mana Bajra Bajracharya (Shelbyville, Kentucky: Wasteland Press; 2010; see www.ayurvedainnepal.com), edited by Dr. Mana's son and successor, Dr. Madhu, Tillotson, an Ayurvedic practitioner, and, Caldecott, also an Ayurvedic practitioner, is excerpted. Drs. Mana and Madhu are part of an unbroken 700-year family tradition of Ayurvedic practice in Nepal. The family clinic has treated many thousands of Nepalese and international patients. Dr. Mana wrote 47 books in Sanskrit and Nepali covering all aspects of Ayurvedic medicine. This is the first to be translated into English and to be made available electronically as well as in print.

The excerpt includes Dr. Mana's simply told autobiography from the book's introductory material. He was born in 1930 in Kathmandu, the fourth of five sons. Family members have been priests among Newari Buddhists since medieval times. In addition to priesthood, the family practices Ayurvedic medicine, vowing to help mankind and never charging for consultations. Buddhism and Ayurveda are studied jointly. The family's extensive library includes many unpublished texts of Ayurvedic medicine. Mana's grandfather was at one time the royal physician of Nepal.

Mana's father, who joined his own father in work and study, died young in an accident. Mana and his brothers carried on the tradition. At age 17, Mana began formal Ayurvedic study, having mastered Sanskrit. Continuing his Buddhist and Ayurvedic studies for eight years, he also studied painting and sculpture, finding them useful in learning about human anatomy and the herbs used in Ayurvedic medicine. He married in 1945 and eventually he and his wife had a son (Dr. Madhu) and four daughters.

In 1955, finally free to choose his own studies, he walked for two years in Nepal and India, studying Ayurveda's medicinal plants, collecting, and painting them. Returning to Kathmandu, he began to treat patients under supervision. During the next 15 years, he practiced medicine, studied English, and began to meet people from other countries. He also read Western medical texts, starting a new family tradition. In 1969, he began

teaching Buddhism and Ayurveda to Westerners and treating foreigners. His Western contacts made him aware of the need to preserve Ayurvedic knowledge in writing and encouraged him to find ways to explain Ayurveda to Westerners. He wrote about Ayurvedic topics, eventually producing the books to be presented in this ambitious undertaking. In 1975, he became chairman of the Nepal Ayurveda Association.

In 1976, Tillotson nearly died from dysentery and blood poisoning complicated by underlying diabetes while traveling in Afghanistan. Urged to return to the US as soon as possible, he instead went to Kathmandu where he had heard of a great healer: Dr. Manu. Manu was able to help Tillotson, who became his apprentice. His story, although not excerpted for this journal, also appears in the first volume's introductory material.

The excerpt does include part of the book's first chapter, "The Foundations of Ayurveda." "Ayurveda" is Sanskrit for "science of life." Life, the state of being alive, includes body and mind. Manu writes, "It is the ultimate goal of the mind ... to pursue happiness and to reject suffering." Yet suffering, or disease, is felt by all living beings. The study of the mutual coordination of mind and body is the main concern of Ayurveda. In Ayurvedic theory, happiness both follows from and promotes actions that support good health.

Ayurvedic medicine began in ancient times and is attributed to Hindu deities. The *Vedas*, holy books of the Aryans who once occupied the lands around the Himalayas, were written during 1000-3000 BCE and supposedly contain knowledge transmitted to humans by Brahma, the Hindu creator of the world. While all of the *Vedas* include some medical information, the *Atharva Veda* is especially rich in this lore. Calling this supernatural origin "interesting," Mana credits ancient Aryans' "sages and saints" who saw that disease impeded human liberation and became the first Ayurvedic practitioners.

In about 700 BCE, Bharadwaja, one of the most renowned of these physician-sages, said to have learned directly from Indra, Hindu king of the gods, became Ayurveda's first medical teacher. One of his students, Atreya Punarvasu, began the actual historical record of Ayurveda by describing a conference held under Bharadwaja's chairmanship and attended by medical scholars from throughout the Himalayan region. The conference lasted about three years, taking on the task of compiling complete and authentic Ayurvedic texts. Attendees discussed, debated, and shared knowledge, and produced many key texts, including the *Charaka Samhita*, concerning internal medicine; the *Susruta Samhita*, on surgery; the *Kashyapa Samhita*, on pediatrics; etc.

—Mariann Garner-Wizard

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