

[Traditional Hindu Science of Health Is Now as it Always Was](#)

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An Interview with Dr. Svoboda

Dr. Svoboda, 32, is a general Ayurvedic practitioner, born in America, who resides in Floresville, Texas. After college in the US, his inner-search into natural healing took him to Kenya where he learned from the Shamans of the Pothok tribe. Next he visited Nepal, where he was even more impressed by the Ayurvedic tradition. With the help of Pundit Shiv Sharma he gained acceptance to the Ayurvedic Medical College at Poona University, despite his ignorance of Sanskrit. After 6 years of study and 4 additional years in India, Dr. Svoboda had earned his degree (with honors) at the College and was proficient in Sanskrit, Hindi, Gujarati and Marathi. Dr. Svoboda's cassettes and lectures on Ayurveda are entertaining, lucid and comprehensive. His home-study course is used at Dr. Lad's Ayurvedic training school in New Mexico. Currently, he is writing a workbook for self-discovery of one's Ayurvedic body-mind type. In the following interview, conducted in June by Chris London of Hinduism Today in Vancouver, Canada, Dr. Svoboda speaks candidly on Ayurveda in the West.

Hinduism Today: Dr. Svoboda, what is your aim as far as Ayurveda is concerned?

Dr. Svoboda: To do whatever is within my capacity to introduce the study of Ayurveda into the West and to encourage people to use it for the no self-health maintenance.

Q: What is your special interest?

A: I'm mainly interested in metallic medicine: silver, gold, copper, mica, iron, tin, zinc, mercury, sulphur, arsenic.

Q: Are these the alchemical medicines of the Siddha system of S. India?

A: They are alchemical methods and medicines of the Ayurvedic system, some of which were derived from the Siddha system of Tamil Nadu. After all, the famous Nagarjuna, who originated many of these, was resident for many years at the famous Jyotirlinga of Shree Shailam in southern Andhra Pradesh.

Q: Do orthodox Hindus use Ayurveda more than agnostics or members of other religions?

A: Perhaps in Kerala. Elsewhere, traditional Hindus along with most everyone else have the mistaken impression that allopathy, [the opposite of homeopathy] is the appropriate medical system.

Q: Do you consider yourself a Hindu?

A: Not really. I have sympathy for all religions. However I believe that the Vedic and Tantric ways of life are exceedingly beneficial, and as appropriate today as they were in the past. But I don't regard myself as a sectarian Hindu, except when it is convenient.

Q: Such as getting into "Hindus Only" temples by flashing your letter from the Arya Samaj attesting to your Hinduness, or reciting the Shree Sukta in order to get in the Shree Rangam temple?

A: Precisely.

Q: What Hindu path do you follow?

A: I do as my guru told me to do, which was to perform certain varieties of meditation, japa, homa, tarpan, marjan, brahma-bhajan, and on special occasions to do extra homa.

Q: Although you are an Ayurvedic medical professional, you seem to be more interested in spiritual disciplines.

A: Yes, because I believe that Ayurveda is an essential prerequisite for the study of yoga, and that yoga is an essential prerequisite to the study of tantra. It is illusory to attempt to study either yoga or tantra without first becoming proficient at Ayurveda.

Q: Were many of your fellow medical school students also initiated into mystical teachings?

A: Very few. The majority, aping as they did the West, were interested only in obtaining their certificates so they could get out and start earning money.

Q: How would you compare your academic training with your guru disciple training with Vimalananda?

A: I regard the knowledge I obtained from him to be infinitely superior. He made it extremely easy for me to understand the inner depths of Ayurvedic lore.

Q: Are the more esoteric aspects of Ayurveda, such as omens of death and exorcism, taught in Ayurvedic medical schools?

A: Very briefly. A student seriously interested must seek specialized teachers outside the school.

Q: What do you think is most missing from Ayurvedic medicine today?

A: Ayurvedic doctors. At least 95% of the students who went to Ayurvedic medical college during my studies ended up practicing allopathy. The reason is economics. Also, the popular belief is that Western medicine is somehow better because it is Ayurveda and other forms of medicine like it are somehow worse because they're traditional, and tradition is something to be avoided, not cherished.

Q: Isn't there career success to be had for quality Ayurvedacharyas?

A: Very much so. Many Ayurvedic consultants make a lot of money. But unfortunately while a lot of Ayurvedic information is taught in the colleges, they really don't teach how to understand Ayurveda. The quality of the conceptualization is rather low. You really can't blame the students when they're not taught all the secrets.

Q: What is the hidden secret of Ayurveda, as is the title of your book?

A: There is only one disease: the disease of desire. In fact, Vaghattacharya, the famous Ayurvedic writer, opened the Ashtanga Sangraha with Ragadi Rogan, meaning "All diseases beginning with desire." Since desire is the first disease, we must know how to deal with desire, and that varies with each individual. Some desires have to be indulged in. Others must not be indulged in. Certain desires must be carefully restricted. Food, sleep and sex must be carefully controlled in order to maintain optimum health...

Life is meant for the satisfaction of legitimate desires, and for eventually comprehending the transitory nature of desire. So if one lives one's life in a satisfactory way, one can eventually go beyond desire without repressing it.

Q: What is the most damaging misconception about Ayurveda?

A: That because it's old and from India that it's not a useful medical system. The fact is that because it's old, its theories and techniques are proven and time-tested.

Q: What do you think of the TM movement's endeavor to introduce Ayurveda to the west?

A: It is a good thing. I have met some of the leaders and they seem to be very dedicated, bright individuals. I am sorry that they seem to feel they possess a monopoly on Ayurveda, that the meditation mentioned in Ayurveda is strictly TM, and that it is essential to make a large profit out of Ayurveda. I am glad they are trying to popularize Ayurveda; I just think they need to be circumspect about it.

Q: Certainly you must think that Maharishi's having M.D.'s trained in Ayurveda is a step in the right direction.

A: I can understand to some extent how M.D.'s could give a veneer of legitimacy. But after so many years even acupuncture is still not accepted by the conservative medical establishment in America. I believe that something as foreign as Ayurveda never will be. And what really disturbed me when I was invited to audit a TM Ayurveda course was that M.D.'s are given 22 hours of video-taped instruction and a one-week intensive course in Fairfield, Iowa, and are awarded the title "Ayurvedic Physician." I feel that this is a denigration of individuals like myself who spent six grinding years in an Ayurvedic medical school and made some effort to really understand Ayurveda. An Ayurvedic physician has to think in a way that is strictly Ayurvedic, and that is something that has nothing to do with Western patterns of thought.

Q: What of Maharishi's authentic Vaidyas?

A: Many, including Pandit Brhiaspati Dev Trigunaji and Vd. B.P. Nanal (who was my teacher and Dr. Lad's teacher in Poona) are no doubt the highest of high-flight Vaidyas. And the TM movement treats them with great respect.

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