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One dynamic man helps popularize an ancient Indian therapy as a modern-day health miracle

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It's June, 10, 2003, and we have just arrived at Ayushakti, a clean, modern, two-story ayurvedic clinic in a peaceful suburb of Mumbai. We join a growing crowd of people that have been gathering here since early this morning. A few are ayurvedic students, but most are patients. A great many of the latter are afflicted with ailments that have been diagnosed elsewhere as incurable. They are not only from India. Some have come from as far away as Europe and America. It is indeed a mixed and varied group of souls, but they all have one thing in common. They are here to see the famous Dr. Pankaj Naram and his lovely wife, Smita.

Dr. Naram is an ayurvedic physician who is considered a foremost master of marma vidya, the science of marma. He specializes in the application of marma chikitsa, marma therapy. Marma is a Sanskrit term which means "pressure sensitive point " and in this context refers to those regions of the body which when touched or pressed release "energy blockages " that result in a general or specific improvement of physical, emotional and mental health.

First, we walk through the clinic's ayurvedic restaurant and pharmacy on the ground floor. We are impressed. It's so beautifully organized and clean. Later we will find that everything that we need for our full in-house treatments can be obtained here. After browsing a bit, we walk upstairs to await our appointments in a large, light, well-ventilated room that is packed full of patients, yet doesn't seem crowded. Dr. Naram is hard at work behind closed doors in his office, but his staff is buzzing

everywhere. The atmosphere is electric.

Soon a radiant member of Dr. Naram's staff emerges to invite all of us foreign folks in to watch him work while we wait. Walking into his office is like entering a temple. There he is, smiling brightly, dressed in a spotless white Nehru suit. Dr. Naram stands only a little over five feet tall, yet he radiates a vivacious dynamism that pervades the entire clinic with an unshakable sense of confidence and security.

Right now he is busy with a middle-aged lady who is suffering from severe pain in her leg and walks with a limp. He adjusts her knee and demonstrates for her how she should walk. He tells her that she should always start walking on her right foot and explains how, for her, the simple error of starting on the left foot has resulted in the very health imbalance she is now experiencing. Next he turns to a male patient who is lying face down on a massage table. After applying pressure at certain points along his spine, he sprinkles a combination of herbal powders on his back and vigorously rubs them in. Turning to us, he explains, "This holds the treatment inside."

As we watch Dr. Naram work, it looks like he is administering chiropractic adjustments. Yet, as we observe more closely, we realize that what he is doing is quite different. There is no physical manipulation of a jolting or intrusive nature just a quiet, concentrated, steady pressure applied on carefully chosen body points. Later we will experience this for ourselves and discover that the "removal of energy blockages" that is supposed to be occurring during these sessions is a very real thing quite pronounced and easily felt.

Marma therapy predates similar practices like acupuncture, acupressure, reiki and chiropractic. This is authenticated by the fact that marma vidya is documented in ancient Sanskrit scripture which verifiably links it to the early history of Indian medical practice. Some say that acupuncture and acupressure were derived from marma vidya by traveling Chinese who studied the art in India and took its fundamental principles back to China where they were modified. Today, the most important difference between marma therapy and acupuncture is that marma points are larger in size and do not follow nerve meridians as acupuncture does.

When we asked Dr. Naram about marma, his comment was less academic. "Marma

shakti (energy) is released by the practice of a secret art and science, " he said. "There is really no specific manual for this treatment of the body, mind and emotions. Marma shakti itself is the manual." During a seminar that occurred later that evening, Dr. Naram explained to us that marma therapy is used for all types of ailments, including jet lag, high blood pressure, bone and muscle pain, asthma, headaches, arthritis even epilepsy and psychological disorders.

When we met with Dr. Naram for our personal consultations, we liked him immediately. He told us not to worry, that our problems were now his problems, and that he would take care of us. Indeed, this is exactly what occurred. In fact, the changes that we both experienced by the end of our -day stay there were so remarkable that we had to discuss with each other exactly how we would describe it all back home without sounding evangelical.

My (Isani's) physical ailments were the beginnings of arthritis in my knees and eczema on my hands small problems compared with those of many others here at the clinic. From my pulse alone it could be detected with embarrassing accuracy that during early childhood I had suffered from coughs, colds, febrile seizures, toxic antibiotics and "suppressed anger." My program of remedies included marma treatments, nine herbal combinations taken internally and a variety of oil and herbal massages.

Although each patient's personal routine differs according to individual needs, all programs follow similar guidelines. First comes the preparation. This usually lasts around 15 days and can happen at the clinic or at home before coming in for treatment. Following the preparation, highly customized individual treatments occur at the clinic under close supervision. These treatments alternate between cleansing and nurturing and continue for varying lengths of time, depending on the severity of the ailments.

Although the doctor sees hundreds of patients a day, he shows fresh enthusiasm and kindness for each and every one. As far as Dr. Naram is concerned, this positive approach is crucial. A complete healing, he explains, can only occur when there is mutual cooperation between the doctor and patient. So he always asks the patient, "Do you want to get better?" Of course, the patient answers, "Yes." He then assures the patient that together they will make a positive change and invariably they do.

No one can believe that Dr. Naram treats hundreds of patients a day. We didn't either until we saw it for ourselves. Actually, much credit for this must go to his well-trained staff. They all move like he does quickly. There is never a wasted moment. When one patient is done, another one is waiting. Dr. Naram himself is never still and rarely does just one thing at a time. While he is taking a patient's pulse, he is also reviewing his file. Sometimes an entire family sits together at his desk as he examines all of their individual health needs at once.

Dr. Naram and his wife give countless hours of free care to the poverty stricken, yet count among their 250,000 patients thus far, the Dalai Lama and a whole roster of Bollywood stars. Today, 20 years after they began their work together, they have established 60 Ayushakti Health Centers worldwide and have fully trained 45 medical professionals. They travel constantly to serve at their clinics and recently spent a week at "ground zero " in New York City, giving free treatments there. When we ask the doctor why he drives himself the way he does, his response is simply, "This is my life's work."

Dr. Naram tells us a touching story of how he met his guru. As a very young man, he heard of a 109-year-old Tibetan monk named Ram Dass who lived in a remote jungle and possessed ancient medical scriptures passed down to him through a line of gurus that traced their lineage back to the physicians of the Buddha. Young Pankaj decided he had to learn from this great sage and began going to him daily. Each day, however, the sage would tell him, "Come back tomorrow, " until finally, Pankaj fell before the sage in tears of desperation pleading, "What must I do?" On that very day, his apprenticeship began, and three years after that, he received his formal initiation. Later when Ram Dass passed away, Pankaj inherited his sutras, containing the very herbal combinations used by Ayushakti today.

Now, after three weeks and a day, it has come time for us to leave this clinic. We have enjoyed ourselves immensely here and have learned a great deal. Certainly, the procedures that we have endured have been far more pleasurable than any "cure " should be. All of our health problems have been addressed and some are completely resolved. Others will require more work at home.

Each of our individual treatments cost \$1,500. This includes the cost of meals, pulse readings, marma and pancha karma treatments, medicinal herbs, outings, cooking classes and air conditioned living quarters for a full three weeks.

On the way out, we meet a village woman who, after her husband died of AIDS, discovered that she had contracted the disease herself. She explains to us that after only six months in Dr. Naram's care she is now without symptoms. Certainly, she is grateful to God for her miraculous recovery, but mostly she thanks Dr. Pankaj Naram.