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Rubbed Wrong by Life?

Johari advocates daily massage and a non-toxic diet

With Tara Katir in Kapaa, Hawaii

Asked for his favorite anecdote about massage, Harish Johari related how one fine morning he was walking with his friend, Andras Fricsay Kali Son, the prominent German theater actor, along the bank of the river Ganga in Haridwar, India. "A man nearby had a small stand of oil bottles and a mat," Johari recalls. The man didn't know English, and Andras was helpless with Hindi, but the man wanted to give Andras a massage. He sat on the mat, waving his arm and tapping his thigh, gesturing for the German visitor to come. But Andras did not understand the gestures and thought the man was challenging him to a bout! So Andras began preparing, telling Johari, "Tell him to hold on. I will take off my shirt first." Johari rapidly clarified that the poor man just wanted Andras to lie down for a massage!

Riverside massage parlors are just one example of how common and popular massage is in India. Johari, a seasoned practitioner (and recipient) of massage from childhood, describes in his new book, *Ayurvedic Massage* (available in six languages), how integral massage is to Indian life today. "You don't need special clinics. Family members of all castes

perform it on each other," Johari told Hinduism Today in a phone interview from Vermont, shortly before returning home to his native India from his yearly visit to the USA. Indian massage is actually already present in America, he said, for the common "Swedish massage" migrated to Europe via Persia long ago.

Massage is one piece of Hinduism's complex mosaic of healing traditions, traceable back 6,000 years to the Atharva Upaveda. Even today, in a world vastly different from Vedic times, they are dynamically alive, practiced by millions around the globe. Ayurveda, the "Science of Life," postulates fundamental principles for the proper functioning of our bodies. Massage in ayurvedic texts is exhaustively delineated, right down to the measurements for oils and pastes. Its main purpose is to enhance blood circulation and to expel toxins from the body. "Diseases do not go near one who massages his feet before sleeping, just as snakes do not approach eagles," one ancient text says. It is also a rejuvenator, giving relaxation and purifying the mind.

Massage, Johari writes, is the first friend one has from the time of birth. Babies are massaged beginning six days after birth. Why so young? Because babies cannot move their bodies much. Massage increases their circulation, preventing dehydration and skin cracking, and their bodies grow quicker, with strong, resilient skin. Johari explained to Hinduism Today that "Massage for baby girls prevents facial hair. I noticed that women in the West have to shave. But women in India do not, because they were massaged from an early age. I feel afraid to see some Western womens' faces with so much hair." Other countries also massage their babies, including Iran, Bhutan,

Burma and Thailand.

Growing children learn to massage elders, and upon marriage, massage continues as a daily routine for the couple--healing and reducing stress. It is a cleanser for the body, which is bombarded with air pollution, impure foods grown with pesticides and the stress of fast-paced living. When asked how busy people can be expected to massage for one hour daily, Johari replied, "Do they have a different body from us? No. They can get sick and miss work while healing themselves. Or, they can massage a little every day, and not get sick! If you can't massage for 45 minutes straight, try to at least 25 minutes in the morning and 25 minutes before bed."

In his well-crafted book Johari gives us formulas for oils he has acquired from saints, ayurvedic doctors and folk people in India, assuring us they may be used without fear of harm. General body massage, for dryness, memory, for cold and poor circulation, for women of differing ages, for hair, for excess body heat and for newlyweds and couples--each category has a clearly written recipe of oils to use for maximum and safe results.

Johari's discussion of "The Role of Vibrations in Massage" (he means energy, not vibrators) is intuitive. Massage is a miracle of touch--energy is exchanged between receiver and giver. Thoughts and feelings are transferred to the receiver's body, Johari says. In India, therefore, outside the immediate family, men generally massage men and women massage women. This avoids unnecessary energy waste and entanglements between the sexes. He also gives instructions to the massager

how to raise his energy by breathing patterns; the massager should visualize himself as a servant of the Divine, transferring energy into the receiver.

A chapter on "practical guidance"--from beauty massage to the therapeutic massages for specific ailments--teaches how to relax one's hands, work with the rhythm of one's own heartbeat, how to approach the recipient's body, kneading joints and muscles and how to use oil. Use of tobacco, alcohol, meat, fish, eggs or any nonvegetarian food should be avoided by those seeking a beautiful countenance, according to the section on beauty massage. Johari said he can identify a meat-eater while massaging him. "He smells bad. One who eats foods like vegetables, fruits and nuts and has pure thoughts, smells like sandalwood."

Not to be forgotten are animals. "Especially cats and dogs," says Johari. "And cows love to have the flap of skin under their neck massaged." He notes guidelines for massaging animals are codified in Ayurvedic texts.

Can real benefits only come from a professional?

"Professionals can help," says Johari, "but not too much, because they have to massage so many people that they get tired. But if I massage you and you massage me and we don't massage others, then we can spend more time massaging each other. Especially if the wife is massaging the husband, then he is lucky. It is better than anyone else could give. I am quite fortunate in this regard. At home, if I go and lie down, I automatically receive a massage from my wife, without me even asking her!"

People's lives often change after being massaged. Johari says that some become vegetarian because they feel better without meat in their body. "I tell people the body can easily digest vegetarian food; nonvegetarian food is difficult. The body spends more energy digesting meat than energy it gains from the meat. Meat-eating also makes one cruel. Vegetarian food is less toxic. During massage, I explain that the toxins we are removing from the body come from food, and vegetarianism produces less toxins."

Johari has not only written an easy to follow instruction book on ayurvedic massage, but has included within the book specific guidelines on purity as understood and practiced by orthodox Hindus. You will definitely want to refer to this text in learning and practicing massage for your family, because it is written with high-minded guidelines for the inner and outer well being of the giver and the receiver. And because we can all use a rub now and then.

TO ORDER AYURVEDIC MASSAGE, WRITE TO: INNER TRADITIONS, DEPT. H, P.O. BOX 388, ROCHESTER, VERMONT 05767 USA PHONE: 1-215-238-4466, WEB: www.GOTOIT.COM