

The Purpose of Health

Caraka-saṃhitā 1.15:

*Dharmārtha kāma mokṣāṇām ārogyaṃ mūlam uttamam.
Rogās tasyāpahartāraḥ śreyaso jīvitasya ca.*

"Health is the best foundation for the four aims of human life: dharma, artha, kāma, and mokṣa. Diseases take these away, as well as goodness and life itself."



"Health is wealth, health is a covetable possession indeed.
Health is a valuable asset for one and all."

- Swāmi Śivānanda

In our modern world, it seems that many of us have become increasingly health-conscious. For example, according to *ota.com*, "Organic is the fastest growing sector of the U.S. food industry. Organic food sales increase by double digits annually, far outstripping the growth rate for the overall food market..." (www.ota.com/resources/market-analysis)

With this recent trend, perhaps it is fair to ask the question: "Why health?" Is health important to us simply because we believe it will allow us to "feel good" or to avoid disease? What is our underlying motive for our pursuit of health?

According to the ancient science of Ayurveda, health does indeed have an important purpose and role to play throughout our life

journey. This "purpose of health" includes, but also goes much deeper than the mere prevention of disease.

Caraka, one of the great classical authorities on Ayurveda, teaches us in his Caraka-saṃhitā that health is the best foundation ("mūlam uttamam" in Sanskrit) for the attainment of the "four aims of life" (known as "puruṣārthas"). These four aims of life are called Artha, Kāma, Dharma and Mokṣa. They represent four goals that, when attained, are considered to bring one a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction.

"Artha" represents the meeting of our basic material needs in life - such as our need for food, water, shelter and the money required to attain these things. "Kāma" represents our need for enjoyment. Some examples here can include love and romance, entertainment, hobbies, etc. "Dharma" can be thought of as 'right conduct', and signifies living in a way that is ethically sound and in harmony with the laws of nature. "Mokṣa" means final liberation, freedom, or enlightenment.

According to the ancient Indian seers (ṛṣis), a life oriented toward fulfilling these four aims is a balanced life - and one which enables us to thrive.

Considering that health is said to be the 'very best foundation' for the four Puruṣārthas suggests that health truly is of utmost value, and that it has a deeper, profound purpose beyond just the prevention of disease alone.

