



YSN Vol. 3, No. 1 – January 2015

## **Love Sustains Life!**

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***“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”  
Martin Luther King, Jr.***

The great Indian wisdom of Ayurveda advises us: “aapthopasevi bhavet aarogyam,” which translates to “love everyone as your own and good health shall be yours.” Of course, western positive sciences could not be less concerned with this advice; but then, western positive sciences do not make sense in many areas. Scientific findings, per force, keep changing faster than can be kept up with. Even the concept of space and time of both Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein have been shown to be seriously flawed. When we think of reductionist medical science consisting mostly of statistics, one must wonder whether medical science is really a science at all! One reads daily in media sources, including so-called science journals, about many studies that present diametrically opposed results with the passage of time and robustness of the study.

“This makes one healthy,” reports a study, which is immediately overtaken by another study that concludes: Ha, it does not! Wait, does it? Maybe so, but alas, no, and so on. These drips and drabs cause people to lose faith in such short- term, cross-sectional cohort studies. The longest study that we have to date is the MRFIT (pun intended) study, which analysed risk factor data in two groups of healthy men – one with intervention to set things right, and another, the control group. Alas, in the end, the study proved to be a boondoggle, making a mockery of the risk factor hypothesis, which is netting billions of dollars in medi-business. MRFIT elegantly showed, however, that while the final risk of premature death looms large, there are no true risk factors. This has upset our applectart.

Longitudinal observational studies running into decades and centuries are the bedrock of Indian wisdom, which I do not intend to call science. This wisdom has arrived at certain aphorisms for healthy and happy life, which are for all time, and unalterable. Curiously, there are several relatively very long term studies in western science that have been observing two groups of individuals for nearly eight decades, such as the Grant Study of 284 Harvard sophomores, which started in the 1930s, and has expended more than \$20 million over the years, overseen by more than three people at different times since its beginning. There is another equally long Stanford study, which initially selected 1,444 children from many schools in the area, with the aim of studying genius. This 1921 effort was called The Terman Study, named

for Lewis Terman, one of America's well known child psychiatrists. Soon it became evident that the Terman Study could throw light on how people lived to be happy and healthy.

Today, when many people around the world are living into their tenth decade, the longest longitudinal study of human development ever undertaken offers some welcome news for the new old age: our lives continue to evolve in our later years, and often become more fulfilling than before. Interestingly, this echoes the salient concepts of Indian wisdom. Currently, George Vaillant follows these human subjects of study into their nineties, documenting for the first time what it is like to flourish far beyond conventional retirement. Reporting on all aspects of male life, including relationships, politics and religion, coping strategies, and alcohol use (its abuse being by far the greatest disruptor of health and happiness for the study's subjects), "Triumphs of Experience" shares a number of surprising findings.

For example, "the people who do well in old age did not necessarily do so well in midlife, and vice versa. While the study confirms that recovery from a lousy childhood is possible, memories of a happy childhood are a lifelong source of strength. Marriages bring much more contentment after age 70, and physical aging after 80 is determined less by heredity than by habits formed prior to age 50. The credit for growing old with grace and vitality, it seems, goes more to ourselves than to our stellar genetic makeup." What do these last two studies show? "Quit smoking, stop drinking, exercise, keep warm and healthy relations with your friends and family, and know that money doesn't necessarily make you happy. But mostly importantly, keep in mind that you will transform and progress constantly until you die."

To sum up the longitudinal studies mentioned above and the Indian wisdom that correlates with them, the following observations can be drawn:

- Happiness is life. Full stop.
- That the only thing that really matters in life is your relationships to other people.
- Being laid back and lazy can kill you. Hard work helps.
- In fact, a number of longitudinal studies agree on the quality most connected to a long and successful life: conscientiousness. The subjects who lived the longest in the Terman Study were the conscientious people.
- A little worry is good for health and happiness; it is good to be optimistic, however.
- Unlike catastrophizing, moderate worrying often conferred real benefits to health. One example: James, tactful and sensitive, was something of a worrier throughout his life, but his concerns prompted him to take better care of his health, especially after the death of his wife.
- There is always hope in life.
- Time and time again, the Grant Study showed that those who came from loving homes did much better than the less fortunate.

These and other studies have shed light on tips for survival under difficult situations:

- “Perceive And Believe
- Manage Your Emotions
- Be A Quitter
- Be Delusional
- Prepare... Even If It’s Too Late For Preparation
- Stay Busy, Busy, Busy
- Make It A Game
- Get Help And Give Help”

All these read as if from ancient, timeless Indian wisdom, showing that longitudinal studies such as these reveal holistic approaches and solutions, unlike our reductionist science.

***“I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.”***  
***Martin Luther King, Jr.***