

The role of fragrance in Unani Tibb Medicine

An *attar* is a specific type of fragrance product used as part of the holistic healing system of Unani Tibb Eastern Medicine. Although they can be used simply as scents, also have the additional potential to heal on a physical, emotional, mental and spiritual level. Attars were first produced by Ibn Sina, known in the west as Avicenna, the 11th century Arabian alchemist and physician, who is considered to be the greatest individual physician who ever lived. Prior to this, perfumes consisted only of thick resins and gums and sticky unguents. It was Avicenna, who subsequently developed the use of these attars in healing in a scientific way.

Attar is an ancient Persian and Arabic word, which translates as 'essence' or 'sweet smell'. A person who blends, makes, and is skilled in using attars is referred to as an *attari*. Attars are natural fragrances and are free from alcohol. The addition of alcohol to a flower essence would kill the essence and deem the oil unsuitable for traditional Unani Tibb healing purposes. Traditional attars are concentrated volatile aromatic compounds made from the highest quality extracts, which are extremely popular in the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East and are renowned for their arousing aroma, which is both sensual and spiritual.

The traditional method of producing attars is a specific hydro distillation process. The attar manufacturing process begins with the delivery of fresh flowers in jute sacks, which are then weighed, quality checked and then emptied out into large copper stills to which a similar amount of water has been added. A minimum of 80-100 kg of flowers per kilogram of base oil are required to produce a kg of attar. The mouth of the filled still is then plastered with clay and a lid clamped tightly on it, making it now totally airtight, except for a small hole in the lid through which a pipe of hollow bamboo wrapped either in coconut twine or a coarse cloth is pushed through to collect vapours into a second copper receiver. This receiver remains immersed in a shallow tank of water to help condense vapours. The coconut twine or cloth serves to absorb the heat from the bamboo pipe, preventing it from over-heating from the vapours.

The still containing the mixture of flowers and water is heated from below by wood charcoal or even cow dung. Attendants skilfully monitor the stills to ensure correct temperatures and speed of distillation are maintained for individual attars. They do this by adding or removing wood to and from the fire and by regularly feeling the outside of the still and placing their ears to the still to intently listen for any variation in sounds from within. A skilled *attari* is able, just by feeling the rounded part of the receiver under water, to ascertain exactly when the correct quantity of vapours have condensed inside the receiver. Once that moment then arrives, the *attari* wraps a wet cloth around the body of the still, which temporarily halts the distillation process. The full receiver is replaced by an empty one, which in turn, may be replaced by yet another, with the process being repeated several times and further batches of flowers added each time and water in the tank changed frequently to prevent over-heating. The actual distillation process can take up to six hours.

The oil and water mixture can be subsequently separated, either by running off the condensed water vapour through a small capped outlet at the bottom of the receiver, or by pouring the mixture into an open trough. The base material is then poured into leather bottles to remove sedimentation and excess moisture. The leather of the bottles is semi-permeable, so as it separates, it allows water to flow out, whilst the attar remains. A specific feature of attar distillation is that no separate condenser is used in the process. The long-necked round copper receiver acts additionally as a condenser. Copper is used for the stills, because it is a good conductor of heat. The unique fragrance of the flowers is captured by the base oil in the receiver, which acquires the smell of that particular flower.

The receiver would traditionally contain a base of pure sandalwood oil, but sadly, it is not uncommon nowadays, for sandalwood oil to be substituted with liquid paraffin, or even worse with DOP (dioctyl phthalate). Although attars are still extracted into a pure sandalwood base by specific high quality producers, the attar industry of today has been hit by an ethical and financial dilemma as a result of the rising costs and scarcity of pure quality sandalwood oil. Many attar producers have been grappling with low volumes in a high-margin business, where profits have declined from what were once 900% of costs to a mere 10-20 % margin. This has resulted in higher retail costs and a subsequent decline in sales. In response to this, it is becoming more and more common for liquid paraffin to be used for the manufacture of cheaper attars.

Unfortunately, we have the regrettable situation that whereas when as recently as six years ago, the ratio of attars based on sandalwood oil compared to those based on liquid paraffin or DOP was 80:20, we now have a situation today, where the ratio has inverted to a pitiful 10:90. In addition, DOP is a known carcinogenic agent, recognised as such by attar manufacturers themselves, yet driven by profit margins, they continue to use it. The result is that today, more than ever, it is vital to ascertain the quality of source and supplier when using attars, especially when using these fragrant oils for spiritual and healing purposes.

What is perhaps just as alarming is that the target market of attars has now altered considerably, so much so that almost 90 % of attar production is sold to the tobacco industry to be used as flavouring for their products. The remainder is exported or sold in the domestic market. With this changing face of the natural attar industry, many established manufacturers are now additionally turning their hand to the production of synthetic perfumes. (Behl. 2008)

True healing and desired spiritual effects can only be achieved using pure oils. This is especially true when using attars in the spiritual realm. For the practitioner of Unani Tibb therefore, ascertaining the source and quality of attars to be used is extremely important, and it is essential to use only attars with the purest of base ingredients, which have had no chemicals or preservatives added during their processing, nor have been produced with child or forced labour, nor have caused any negative environmental effects. This is because when the attars are used for healing purposes or spiritual advancement it is of paramount importance that no negative energy is transmitted into the attars. Due to the religious traditions of most of the manufacturers there is strictly no alcohol used in their manufacture; another important factor to consider, as the addition of alcohol has the effect of altering the structure and energetics of the attars. There are of course products available worldwide that are labelled as attars, but do not meet the required standard, so extreme care needs to be taken to select only the purest attars for use, taking into account the aforementioned criteria.

Attars are usually categorised according to the type of raw material used. We have 'floral attars', produced from a single species of flower, e.g. rose, gardenia, honeysuckle, lavender, lilac, lily etc. Then there are 'herbal and spicy attars', which include henna, amber, and musk, for example. Once single scented attars have been produced, it is also traditional practice for several natural attars to be selected and blended together to produce unique scents for use, particularly as perfumes. So although there is a vast range of individual oils of attar, that in addition to their healing purposes are also used in their own right as fragrances i.e. sandalwood, patchouli, lavender etc., many attars are also combinations of oils, sometimes as many as 40, blended together according to centuries-old secret *attari* family formulas. For healing and spiritual purposes, it is more common for single scents to be used, but there are a few notable exceptions, such as the magnificent Janat al Ferdows, translated as 'gateway to paradise'.

As attars are highly concentrated, it is usual for them to be sold in small quantities. The shelf-life of an attar is permanent, with the scent of some attars increasing in strength and becoming more aromatic, as they age. Traditionally attars, were sold in intricately decorated glass bottles, reflecting their high status, magnificence and exclusivity. Attars are even considered by some as the most precious material possessions a person can own. There is an old tradition in the Middle East involving attars, where it is customary as guests are leaving the home, for the hosts to offer them an attar as a leaving gift.

In order to understand how attars are used as tools in healing, and before we look at this in more detail, it is essential to approach with a mindset that has at least a basic comprehension of the Unani Tibb humoral system of medicine and the way that healing is approached in this system.

Unani Tibb Medicine is based on the methods of medicine used and taught in Ancient Greece, Arabia and Persia. These methods themselves, included aspects of Egyptian and Mesopotamian healing methods of even more ancient times. Unani Tibb traces its roots back to the classical Greek physicians Hippocrates (c. 460-c. 370 BC) and Galen (129-c. 217 AD) and the later renowned Arab physician Razi, known as Rhazes in the west (865-925 AD). But, it was the Persian medical scholar Hakim Ibn Sina (980-1037 AD), known in the west as Avicenna, who subsequently developed the teachings of his predecessors into a comprehensive healing system, enriching it with elements of the medical traditions of Persia, Arabia, India, China and Classical Greece. It was in his world famous medical encyclopaedia 'The Canon of Medicine', which was to be translated into Latin in the 12th century, setting the standard for medicine in both the East and West, that Avicenna enriched Persian Medicine with Greek, Islamic, Chinese and Ayurvedic medical teachings to establish what we now refer to as Unani Tibb. The silk route spanning from China and linking Persia, Arabia and India played a vital role in helping make possible the distribution of knowledge between these regions.

A belief central to Unani Tibb is that good health, a contented state of mind, and balanced emotions, represent the normal constitution for human beings. *Tibb* translates literally as 'nature' and *Unani* as 'from Greece'; a reference to classical Greek medicine. As a person can be knocked out of balance by emotional, psychological, social, environmental, dietary or spiritual factors, Tibb uses a holistic set of principles to diagnose and treat various conditions, based on each person's body type, personality and *mizaj* or individual metabolic constitution. Each item of food we eat, or each medicine, herb or scent we use internally or externally, has its own *mizaj*. In addition, a medicine or food that has positive effects for one person may be detrimental to a person of a different *mizaj*. It is this factor that Unani Tibb takes into account when treating patients, subsequently selects for each individual, appropriate herbal treatments and scents in the form of attars, and offers guidance in the appropriate choice of foods and lifestyle for their constitution. An important principle governing Unani Tibb medicine is that no treatment should ever impair the body's natural functions.

In his Cannon of Medicine, Avicenna defined Unani Tibb as: 'the science of which we learn the various states of body, in health and when not in health, and the means by which health is likely to be lost and, when lost, is likely to be restored'. (Howell. 1987 pp 58-59) He promoted the concept that the chief function of a physician is to aid the body's natural forces when fighting a disease. The healing system of Unani Tibb adheres to the humoral theory, which takes as its premise the presence of four humours in the body. The blood humour is referred to as *dam*, phlegm as *balgham*, yellow bile as *safra* and black bile as *sauda*. Sickness and disease are seen as resulting from imbalances in these humours. A physician of Unani Tibb is referred to as a *hakim*; *hakima* if female. He or she will diagnose a patient's condition in terms of a surplus or deficit of one or more of the four humours. They will then attempt to address and ultimately cure these symptoms by administering herbs or attars capable of re-establishing a harmonious relationship between the *balgham*, *dam*, *safra* and *sauda* humours. In addition to herbal treatment, other techniques used to cleanse the body

and restore humoral balance include: *mushil* (purging), *taariq* (sweating), *hammam* (balneology), *hijama* (cupping), and *riyazat* (exercise).

Unani Tibb as a tradition, heals using herbs, minerals, diet and attars in a similar way that a western herbalist would, but before they consider commencement of any treatment, it is essential for a Tibb practitioner to assess the patient's *mizaj*, which can be very broadly understood as metabolic type or constitution, but relating to the basic primary elements. Once this is ascertained, the *hakim* will then suggest lifestyle and dietary changes and prescribe herbs, minerals and attars; the aim being to re-balance the patient physically, emotionally and spiritually. The herbs, minerals and attars have the ability to re-balance, because they too have their own *mizaj* and will be carefully selected to work on imbalances in one or more of the humours.

According to Unani Tibb, there are 4 primary elements, referred to as *arkan*. These are simple individual substances that cannot be dissolved into simpler entities. Any matter found in nature is formed by the combination of these elements with qualities varying depending on the specific nature of each constituting element. Each of these 4 primary elements contains 2 of the properties: heat, dryness, cold or moisture.

FIRE (<i>nar</i>)	=	Hot	+	Dry
AIR (<i>hawwa</i>)	=	Hot	+	Moist
WATER (<i>ma</i>)	=	Cold	+	Moist
EARTH (<i>ardh</i>)	=	Cold	+	Dry

One of these 2 properties is always active and one is passive; 'heat' and 'cold' being active and 'moisture' and 'dryness' being passive. If we take FIRE as an example, it contains the 2 properties of HOT and DRY. HEAT is the active property here and DRYNESS is the passive property. Two active properties cannot be found together in one element, e.g. an element cannot be both hot and cold. EARTH and WATER are 'heavy' elements. These elements are also strong, negative, passive and female. FIRE and AIR are 'light' elements. These elements are also weak, positive, active, and male.

These four elements are the basic building blocks of all substances in nature, including the human body, animals and plants. The Elements are used to both explain the origins of disease and describe them diagnostically. Balanced health depends on a proper balance of these four elements. In addition, each element and their qualities can be further related to seasons, time of day, organs of the body and types of disease, for example. This system of corresponding attributes is extremely important in Unani Tibb Medicine, resulting in a holistic system of diagnosis and treatment.

A person is born with a predominance of one element over the others and this determines their temperament. Healing is merely a matter of balancing these elements or the humours resulting from these elements, through physical, emotional and spiritual channels.

The ratio of these humours in relation to each other will change over a person's lifetime, although most people have one dominant humour. In addition, they change according to the seasons and the time of day. In addition, the effects of one humour can be offset or modified by those of another. No one is born with 25% of each humour, and what counts as an optimal balance for one person will differ from what counts as an optimal balance for another.

A person's temperament or *mizaj* is characterised by these humours and their subsequent effects, and careful study of them assists in the selection of appropriate remedies for each individual patient.

If we consider diseases and herbs with respect to the primary elements and their qualities, care can be taken to select the most beneficial remedies with qualities appropriate to balance a patient's humours. If the attributes of the herb or drug being used to treat do not match those of the patient and the disease, treatment may end up not only being ineffective, but also producing side effects. With modern pharmaceutical medicine, side effects are common and there is usually no way of predicting which patient will react adversely. Similarly, when herbs are taken off-the-shelf, without due consideration for a patient's *mizaj*, treatment may be ineffective.

The humours relate to each of the temperaments as follows:

Blood humour (hot & moist)	relates to	Sanguine temperament	<i>Dum</i>
Phlegm humour (cold & moist)	relates to	Phlegmatic temperament	<i>Bulgham</i>
Yellow bile humour (hot & dry)	relates to	Choleric temperament	<i>Safra</i>
Black bile humour (cold & dry)	relates to	Melancholic temperament	<i>Sauda</i>

It is also common for people to have combined temperaments as in the combinations below:

Sanguine/phlegmatic	Choleric/phlegmatic
Sanguine/melancholic	Choleric/melancholic
Phlegmatic/sanguine	Melancholic/sanguine
Phlegmatic/choleric	Melancholic/choleric

The sanguine temperament is connected closely to the blood humour and the stimulation of the veins and arteries, which provide our bodily energy. Common qualities observed in sanguines are that they have a tendency to a ruddy appearance or redden easily, with smooth, firm, moist and warm skin; are of a medium build; have a good appetite and digestion; have light yellow urine and firm brown faeces; their dreams are mostly pleasant and they are generally of a happy disposition. A sanguine person will suffer more from imbalances during spring or summer, or if exposed to wind or heat. Typical signs of excess sanguine humour are usually related to the circulatory system.

The phlegmatic temperament, closely linked to the phlegm humour, relates to the expulsion of excess and unnecessary substances from the body. Phlegm plays a necessary role in the body during bouts of cold and flu, with copious amounts of it being expelled by the body through the nose in an attempt to clear out toxins and bacteria. The phlegm humour has a beneficial cooling and moistening effect on the heart, and strengthens the function of the lower brain and the emotions. Phlegm maintains proper fat metabolism and the balance of body fluids, electrolytes, and hormones via the circulation of lymph and moisture through the body. On the other hand, excess phlegm in the system can manifest as excessive sleepiness, dullness, slowness, heaviness, forgetfulness, runny nose, poor digestion, and pale and cold skin. Phlegmatic types have a tendency to pale, smooth, soft, cold and moist skin; a short stature, often with a flabby build; poor appetite; slow or weak digestion; thin and pale urine and pale and loose faeces; frequent dreams of water; and apathy. Phlegmatics often suffer from disorders of the central nervous system, such as MS, muscular dystrophy, or cerebral palsy, and disorders in their fluid metabolism.

The choleric temperament is linked to the yellow bile humour, whose receptacle is the gall bladder. The yellow bile humour warms the body and increases both physical and mental activity. The choleric temperament is also closely associated with the nervous system. Choleric tend to have

yellow, rough, warm and dry skin; a short stature with a lean body build; a strong appetite; overactive digestion; and thick orange urine and dry, yellow faeces. Signs of choleric humour excess include: excessive leanness of body, hollow eyes, irrational anger, a yellow tinge to the skin, a bitterness in the throat, a stronger than average pulse, disturbed sleep, and frequent dreams of fire, lightning, or fighting. Those of a choleric temperament may suffer from anxiety, agitation, nervous exhaustion, insomnia, and strokes.

Melancholics, linked to the black bile humour, which has the spleen as its receptacle, have a tendency to brown, rough, dry, and cold skin; a medium or slim body build; a large appetite; slow digestion; thick, pale urine and dry, black faeces; and to suffer from worry or grief. They may often drag their feet, acting as if their bodies were a burden to them and also feel severe physical pain from the slightest of injuries. In 'The Traditional Healer's Handbook', Hakim Chishti describes the black bile humour as 'consisting of a cool and thick earthly aspect which is prone to coagulation and a more fluid, vaporous substance'. (Chishti. 1991 (b)) In normal quantities, this stimulates the memory and creates a practical and pragmatic personality. However, if the coldest part of the black bile humour is not eliminated properly, it can settle in tissues and form tumours. Signs of excess in the melancholy temperament include: irrational fears, rough and swarthy skin, leanness, insomnia, nightmares, a weak pulse, a preference for solitude, thin clear urine, and frequent sighing.

A practitioner of Unani Tibb will assess a person according to the above body types or combinations of types in great detail and treatment will be designed to re-balance any excess of humour using life style changes, therapies, herbs and attars. Hakim Avicenna, who introduced us to the world of attars, also invented the process of steam distillation and was the first person ever to distil the oil of rose. He developed the use of attars for physical ailments using specific scientific formulas and designed an elaborate system whereby attars and flowers were also assigned these properties of hot and cold, moisture and dryness. This allowed treatment of physical conditions by considering the inherent imbalance and temperament of an individual and re-balancing with an attar of an appropriate temperament. Avicenna was also the first person to apply oils in a therapeutic sense to balance the emotions.

In planning treatment with herbs or attars, the practitioner will take into account the fact that plants and their derivatives are recognised, not only being 'hot' and 'cold', and 'dry' and 'moist', but as having degrees of potency of these qualities. So each herb or attar can be hot or cold, and moist or dry in either the 1st, 2nd, 3rd or 4th degree. Therefore, when a herb or attar is sought out, depending on how far out of balance the patient has become, a herb or attar of either a lesser or higher degree of the opposite quality will be selected. The two qualities within the herb or attar may also differ, so for example, a herb or attar may be used, that is hot in the 2nd degree and dry in the 1st degree.

Practical use of attars in Unani Tibb Medicine

Attars used as fragrance:

Only a few drops of attar are required when using as a fragrance. The etiquette in receiving an attar is to offer your right hand palm down, so that the person offering the attar can apply it over the back of your hand. You should then rub the back of the hand on which the attar has been applied, onto your chin and cheeks and across the opposite wrist, rubbing both wrists together, and then across the front of your clothing. When applying directly on yourself, you should place one of the fingers of the left hand over the top of the attar bottle and tip the bottle to wet the finger. Then the tip of this finger should be rubbed well over the back of the right hand. Ideally, before continuing, you should lift the back of the right hand up and hold a little away from the nose and take a few deep breaths to breathe in the essence of the attar. You should now rub the back of the right hand over the back of the left hand, creating some friction and heat, which will release more oils. You can then rub the backs of your hands onto your neck, wrists and clothing.

Attars used as incense:

According to Avicenna, this method of using attars has a particularly strong effect, especially on the heart. This mode of application releases the essence of the oil into the air and disperses it. It is also an effective means of administering the properties of the attar to children or others who are less compliant in using them. 2-4 drops of a selected attar should be dropped onto a piece of charcoal or placed in an oil burner and used in a similar manner to essential oils. (Chishti. 2003)

Attars used in massage:

Attars are excellent to use to treat physical imbalances. They can be used with a carrier oil such as olive oil or sweet almond oil at a ratio of 2-4 ml to 120 ml base oil.

Attars used in bathing treatments:

A few drops of attar can be added to a small amount of milk and mixed to disperse the oil before adding to a bath full of warm water. The advantage of using attars in this way is that the essence of the attar is released, meaning it can be inhaled over an extended period of time. It also enables the whole body to be treated. Caution should be taken not to be excessive.

Attars used as a fomentation:

1-3 drops of attar should be added to approximately 2 litres of warmed water in a container with a lid and shaken vigorously. A further 2 litres of warmed water is then added to this liquid and shaken again. A piece of cheesecloth should now be dipped into this warmed attar water and placed over area to be treated. (Chishti. 2003)

Attars used in meditation:

Attars are frequently used for spiritual practises and meditation. When used for this purpose, before the ritual prayers, before sufi *dhikr* circles, or spiritual chanting, attars are offered to those gathered, who apply them with the hope of being assisted in their spiritual journey by being elevated to another level and their heart opened.

Therapeutic applications of attars:

Attars can be applied in specific ways, to strengthen individual systems of the body. (Chishti. 2003)
For example:

To strengthen the brain	- frankincense and rose are used.
To strengthen the heart	- sandalwood, amber and rose are used.
To strengthen the liver	- amber is used.
To strengthen the stomach	- rose is used.
To strengthen the nervous system	- frankincense is used.
To strengthen the female reproductive system	- rose and sandalwood are used.
To strengthen the male reproductive system	- myrrh, musk, violet and amber are used.

As previously discussed, Unani Tibb Medicine assesses each person according to their particular temperament, which will include elements of heat or cold, moistness or dryness, and the attars, too are classified based on their effect on the human body, and will warm, cool, moisten or dry the body. If a person is suffering from excess of cold, typical signs could include: a weak digestion, lack of thirst, a tendency to phlegm and catarrh and a laxity of joints. Signs of excess heat on the other hand could include: fatigue, excess thirst, a bitter taste in the mouth, a weak and rapid pulse, lack of energy, and inflammatory type conditions. Excess moisture in the body could result in symptoms similar to those of excess cold, as well as puffiness, a tendency to diarrhoea and upset stomach, excess sleep and excess saliva and nasal secretions. Excess dryness, on the other hand may manifest as dry and rough skin, insomnia and wasting of weight.

To take an example, someone suffering from a cold/moist imbalance would be prescribed an attar that had hot/dry qualities. Depending on the degree of cold or moist imbalance, or which of the qualities was dominant, an appropriate attar would be selected. But, further care would still need to be taken to monitor the degree of each quality. So, if a person of a cold and dry temperament required a heating attar for example, it would be inadvisable to prescribe one that in addition had dry qualities of a high degree as this would increase the patient's dryness, but a heating attar with only 1° of dryness would be acceptable.

Examples of heating oils:

Amber	hot 2° and dry 2°
Frankincense	hot 2° and dry 2°
Lavender	hot 1° and dry 2°
Lilac	hot 3° and dry 1°
Lily of the Valley	hot 3° and dry 3°
Musk	hot 3° and dry 3°
Patchouli	hot 2° and dry 2°

Examples of cooling oils:

Jasmine	cold 1° and moist 1°
Myrrh	cold 2° and dry 2°
Rose	cold 2° and dry 2°
Sandalwood	cold 2-3° and dry 2°
Violet	cold 1° and moist 1°

Specific points of application:

In addition to considering the temperament of the disease and the attar and matching these

accordingly, specific points of application are also indicated for individual conditions. For heavy eyelids, itchy eyes or halitosis, attars are applied to the nape of the neck. For pain in the upper arms or throat or to generally relax the solar plexus, the attar is rubbed gently between the shoulder blades. And for any type of tremor of the head or for a range of conditions of the head, face, teeth or ears, drops of attar are placed on the back of the neck. An attar can be applied under the chin to treat conditions of the teeth, throat and jaw or to generally cleanse the head.

Applied to the legs, the attars assist in the cleansing of blood and promote menstrual flow. If placed over the ankle bone, this is specific for suppressed menses, sciatica and gout. The area behind the knee is the application location for ulcers of the leg and foot. The inner thighs are the area used for inflammation of the upper thighs themselves, for haemorrhoids and conditions of the bladder and uterus. Whereas, the area of the front of the thighs is specific for inflammation of the testicles or leg ulcers. To treat conditions of the hip joints and sciatica an attar can be applied to the outer thighs. (Chishti. 2003)

Specific methods of use:

A method of use will also often be specific to the condition presented. For headaches or migraine, attars of violet or sandalwood would be used as either inhalation or as a foot massage. To treat a black eye, 1 drop of rose attar is diluted in 30ml of olive oil and rubbed over the injured area and for an itchy nose 1 drop of rose diluted in 7.5ml of either almond or olive oil and rubbed gently just inside the nose. If there is excessive sneezing, rose attar is again diluted in olive oil at a ratio of one drop to 15ml and rubbed on the outside of the nose, but also on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. If one drop of myrrh, sandalwood or rose attar is diluted in 15ml of olive oil it can be applied to the external ear to help cure earache. And to help those suffering from insomnia or general agitation, 4 drops of either rose or violet attar are added to 4ml almond oil and applied to the soles of the feet, the external ear and the back of the neck.

There is a very precise method to use attars for treating emotional and mental imbalances, including depression. 1-2 drops of an appropriate attar are placed on a tiny piece of cotton wool the size of a small pea. This is then inserted under the ridge (inferior antihelix crus) of the right ear only, above the opening (not inside ear). It is important that this is applied to the right ear and not the left. The essence is absorbed via the cells in the skin and has an immediate effect on the mind and emotions.

To achieve optimum effect, there is also a specific method of using attar of amber, an extremely popular attar, used by both men and women. Attar of amber is produced from the fossilised sap of ancient *Pinus succinefera* conifers. It has a warm, rich, sweet, deep, and sensual smell. The specific method is to place a dot on the index finger of the right hand and rub this between the index finger and the thumb before applying to the third eye, located between the eyebrows, and massaged in gently. This will result in an immediate focus of the mind and increase in perception and mental alertness. Amber is known also to have aphrodisiac properties, is used for treating asthma and rheumatism, and is believed to offer protection against negative energy.

Attars and the heart:

In the medical system of Unani Tibb, the heart is considered the most important organ. Avicenna concurred with the Prophetic tradition of the Prophet Muhammad in this regard:

'There is one organ in the body, which, if it is well, the whole body is well; and if it is ill, the whole body is ill. And this organ is the heart.' (Chishti. 1991(b). p.238)

Avicenna discusses many diseases of the heart e.g. embolism of cardiac arteries and inflammation, but for him, the heart possessed a much greater function than that of simply a muscular pump. He believed the heart to be a reservoir of divine potentialities and to be greatly affected by emotions such as pleasure, sorrow, joy, grief, revenge, anxiety and exhilaration. He considered blockages of the heart to be the result of disturbance of the breath or imbalances of rhythm, for example. Avicenna argued that the first purpose of treatment of any cardiovascular disease was to purify the blood, as he saw the blood as the means to refine the *pneuma* or vital force. This could be achieved by the use of minerals, herbs, diet, climate change or attars.

Avicenna was so convinced of the value of attars in treating heart conditions that he once remarked that 'all aromatic oils are cardiac drugs'. He considered that attars had a unique ability to restore harmony to the human body as well as encouraging the emergence of Divine potentialities. He stressed that 'The vital power of the heart is attracted to aromas. In cardiac drugs great consideration is given to aromas, because the heart is the seat of the production of the vital force of the body'. Of the 63 cardiac drugs mentioned by Ibn Sina, 40 were in fact attars. The heart is also the chief mechanism and tool used to develop and advance the soul. (Chishti 1991(b))

The Rose:

Both the rose and attar of rose have a unique status. Rose is the most superior of all the floral scents and is referred to as the 'Queen of Scents'. The rose symbolises love, truth and beauty. Attar of rose, although elegant and feminine, is also frequently used by men in the Middle East, especially as part of religious ceremonies. There is a sufi spiritual legend, which considers that the first thing ever to be created in the universe was the 'Soul of Prophecy', which was created from the Creator's own light (*nur*). One drop of this perspiration of the 'Soul of Prophecy' was then taken to subsequently create the 'Soul of the Rose'. This tale serves to illustrate the spiritual significance of the rose, which is seen not only as representing love and beauty, but also as a representation of perfection, containing the pure essence and light of the Creator. (Chishti, 2005) In fact, it is the rose that is the very symbol of sufism, also termed, the 'Mother of Scents' and the 'Queen of the Garden'. The allure, splendour, and sweet scent of the rose, can only be found at the very end of a long, tough and very thorny stem. This, for the sufis, symbolizes and parallels the mystic path to the Creator.

The rose is also considered to have the most refined essence of all flowers, and because of this, it is the rose that is traditionally used to absorb and convey the blessings of saints from their shrines. It is traditional practice for visitors to shrines to place rose petals on the tomb of the saint. The visitors will return later and collect the petals they have left. The soul of the saint is considered to be a living thing, which means that the petals left at the tomb are perceived to have absorbed the essence of the saint, and this essence of rose is then used for healing purposes. In the same way, attar of rose is believed to absorb spiritual blessings and the blessings of angels when used in prayer or meditation.

The scent of attar of rose helps create a serene, peaceful and tranquil atmosphere. It also conveys an inner strength, yet at the same time presents an outer softness. Rose works simultaneously on a physical, emotional, and spiritual level. It is a purifying attar and the least toxic scent. It is excellent to use around children, who are often attracted to its scent, and is by far the most common attar used by the sufis. Astrologically, the ruling planet of this attar is Venus.

The sufi path

Attar essences can be collected from many plants, but for use in the spiritual arena, the sufis and their followers for example, have tended to predominantly use those which have been divinely recommended. These include, in addition to rose, amber, frankincense, myrrh, violet, sandalwood, musk, henna, 'oud and Jannat al Ferdous – all of which are pure oils except the latter, which is a blend.

The sufi mystics of Islam, consider attars central to their journey. They believe that, just as human beings, in addition to having a physical body, also have an absolute essence, referred to as a soul, which will be extracted at death, each flower and plant, also has an essence in addition to their physical form. Because these plants are viewed as having such an essence, the sufis consider that beautiful scents in the form of attars, created from plants and flowers, will have a profound effect on the human soul, which itself yearns for beauty. Just as importantly, the sufis believe that angels too are attracted to beautiful scents, and this is why followers of the sufi path apply attars or rose water before their meditation and prayer sessions, hoping to attract angels to their gatherings.

Attars are an integral part of sufi meditation circles, and it is common to see attars offered around the prayer circles and applied before they begin, although many will do this purely in emulation of the Prophet Muhammad as he was renowned to have used attars, rather than due to an awareness of any healing or spiritual properties of the scents. The Prophet Muhammad in fact, was known to have had a special container, in which he stored attars, and there are traditions passed down relating to him applying attars, especially attars of rose and musk, to his head and beard.

Spiritual use of attars:

The highest-level use for attars is considered to be a spiritual one, rather a physical one: that of adjusting and balancing the spiritual stations, and to treat emotional and spiritual health. According to Unani Tibb Medicine, when we treat a patient, we cannot overlook the emotional and spiritual dimension of that person and these dimensions need to be treated alongside the physical body.

'All diseases of the physical body are merely a reflection of a spiritual imbalance.'
(Chishti. 2003. p.14)

The Soul is seen as eternal and unable to be destroyed. It is believed that the soul is placed in the body by the Creator at the moment of conception, and remains with us until death, at which time the spirit and soul separate. The sufis have developed specific spiritual practices to develop the soul and aid the seeker on their spiritual journey, and the application of attars to adjust and re-balance the soul are an integral part of this practice. The sense of smell has long been linked to the spiritual realm and the life story of one of the most famous *attaris* in history serves as an excellent illumination of this.

Farid ud-Din Attar is one of the most respected sufi poets and shaykhs to have ever lived and his works have been translated and are read and studied worldwide. One of his most popular works is *Mantegh e Tir* (The Conference of the Birds). Farid ud-Din was born in Nishapur, north-eastern Iran, sometime between 1120 and 1157, into a long line of *attaris* and grew up surrounded by attars and their magnificent scents and was taught the knowledge that encompassed this field of study. It was typical in those days for medicines to also be sold alongside attars, and so it was in Attar's family business; the attars on the shelves were considered as much a part of medical treatment as herbs and medicines. Attars were part and parcel of the healing process and definitely more than just perfumes. As Farid ud-Din grew into a young man he started work in this family dispensary as an *attari* himself, blending and selling attars, as well as becoming skilled at practising medicine.

This time he spent working as an *attari* was to serve as the basis for the discovery of his spirituality and the beginning of his ultimate spiritual journey. It is believed that he authored much of his poetry in his dispensary.

The story is told that one day a dervish called at Attar's dispensary in the hope of collecting alms for charity, but when he arrived, Farid ud-Din was so occupied going about his business seeing to his patients and selling attars that he completely ignored him. The dervish approached Farid ud-Din for alms a second time but this time in addition, he spoke his thoughts out loud. He wondered, how, when Attar was so busy accumulating wealth, would he manage to depart this world, when it would mean him leaving behind all these material goods he had amassed. Attar simply replied: 'I will give up my ghost as you will'. No sooner had Farid ud-Din said this, than the dervish immediately lay down on the floor. The dervish closed his eyes, declared adamantly: 'There is no god, but God' and passed away. It was this event and encounter with the dervish that changed Attar's life forever and opened his eyes to his future spiritual path. Many of Attar's works focus on cutting ties with the material world. (Friedlander. 1992)

The sufi tradition developed the spiritual use of aromatherapy by relating different scents to the stations the soul passes through on its journey of return to the Creator, and to the various physical, mental and spiritual illnesses that reflect the soul's growth through its respective stages. The soul is seen as our link to the Infinite and attars have a vital role to play in this spiritual journey and are used within each spiritual station to bring about balance. (Chishti. 2005) Over time, as we use attars, we gradually develop more awareness of the subtleties of our souls, which are part of the Divine plan of existence. Sufis consider that we can either experience life from a pure physical point of view or from that of our soul, which is one of a higher perspective.

Each station of the soul is called a *maqam*, which translates as 'resting place'. At the more advanced stages, a sheikh or guide is essential to guide a follower through the phases. These *maqam* are enumerated and described slightly differently depending on the sufi order, but it is usual to refer to between 5 and 7 major stages. Each spiritual station relates to different physical and spiritual ailments or diseases and specific attars are recommended to use at each different stage when embarking on a spiritual journey of advancement.

The initial resting place is referred to as the *maqam an-nafs* or the 'station of egotism' and represents egotism and all the appetites of our physical life. This is the stage we are born into. As infants we have a pure desire for our needs to be satisfied. Adults in this stage also demand their desires to be fulfilled, but these are no longer basic survival needs, but such as: gluttony, wealth, fame, status or sex for example, and the more these aspirations are fed, the stronger they actually become, as they can never be satisfied. In this initial stage, in the station of the *Nafs* the sort of physical ailments to be expected include: obesity, gout, eye disease, hypoglycaemia, jaundice, cancer, heart attacks, alcoholism and drug abuse. Likely spiritual illnesses could include: depression, fear, anxiety, self-doubt, sexual perversion and mental illness. Attars of rose and frankincense are recommended for both the physical and spiritual ailments in this 'station of egotism' and in addition, for this level, attar of musk is used for physical conditions and attar of violet for spiritual conditions. The Farsi word for the burning *nafs* is *atesh*, which means 'fire'. It is a perfect analogy, for just as a small fire, which may burn slowly to begin with, the more we put into it and 'feed' it, the larger the blaze becomes. In the same way, the appetites of the human body grow more fiercely if they persist into adulthood and no effort has been made to control this ego of the physical body, which requires the setting of limits. (Chishti. 2005)

The next station is the *maqam al-qalb*, the 'station of the heart'. Once a seeker arrives at this

maqam, a sequence of events will begin to occur. A move from one station to the next comes as a result of focus on self-development, discipline and appropriate guidance. As they leave the previous station, the seeker will start to reduce the amount of food they eat and limit themselves to eating only *taher* or pure food and drink. They will work on developing themselves, accept responsibility, work with regularity and try and instil courage, kindness and justice as personal qualities within themselves. All these endeavours serve to enhance the condition of their soul. Once they have entered this stage and as they advance, the soul will begin to gain precedence over physical desires, and as a result, excesses start to be driven from the physical body. This toxic elimination process may manifest in physical signs such as skin eruptions, fevers, kidney disease, headaches, sensitivity to toxins, diarrhoea, aches and pains and a general irritability. Emotional and spiritual elimination signs often include an exaggeration of self importance, fear of failure, extreme anger, lack of concentration, and emotional excess. (Chishti. 2005)

Attars are an ideal medium to treat these conditions. They are also used as a preventative measure to keep such sicknesses from occurring in the first place when the seeker enters this stage. They help by retaining a steady balance and by quietening the soul. Amber, rose and musk are the attars that would be prescribed for the physical ailments of the station of *Qalb*. For spiritual and emotional imbalances, sandalwood and violet would be used. Attar of sandalwood, for example, is quietening to all of the senses. All appetites of the body, whether sexual appetite or appetite for food, lust for material things, or fame or self-importance, will all be soothed. Once the station of the heart has been secured, the seeker now has the scope to travel onwards, but the journey is now impossible without the assistance of a guide or teacher. This is because it is difficult to truly view ourselves. We can see a reflection of ourselves, but not our real self, and without a guide, this can result in self-deception, so the seeker needs to be prepared to submit themselves to a spiritual guide. (Chishti. 2005) For all of the more advanced stages from here on, a sheikh is essential to guide followers through them, and to instruct those on the path in the application of essential and intense spiritual practices specific to each stage. Those who attempt to develop on their own are misled by their own *nafs* or ego.

In the spiritual station of *Maqam Ruh*, the 'station of pure spirit', the student on the path could begin to suffer from: corrupted appetite, fatigue, muscular disease, auto-intoxication or psychosis. Attars of 'oud, henna, amber and musk are the appropriate scents to use here. Spiritually, the ailments they may encounter include: arrogance, pride, forgetfulness, self-deception, and lack of concentration, for which attars of violet, rose and sandalwood are appropriate.

Maqam as-Sirr is a spiritual level known as 'the station of Divine secrets', where physical ailments such as feelings of suffocation and pain in the heart may be expected to occur, and spiritual conditions of over-sensitivity, false interpretations, irrationality, disconnection with reality, and even rejection of belief in the Creator. Attars of 'oud, sandalwood and henna are recommended for the spiritual ailments, and Jannat al-Ferdows for any physical diseases. Some seekers become so overwhelmed at this stage that they are unable to leave; they become Divinely intoxicated.

At the levels of *maqam al-qurb*, the 'station of nearness to the Creator' and *maqam al-wisal*, the 'station of union with the Creator', there tend to be no physical ailments, only spiritual conditions such as: excessive ecstasy, incessant weeping, incoherence and total silence, for which attars of rose and amber are recommended. (Chishti. 2005)

Corresponding to each of these stations of the soul, and attuned to specific frequencies, are subtle, spiritual, energy points, termed *lata'if* (*latifa* in the singular). Each *latifa* can be activated by spiritual experiences and practices and attars can be applied to them. These points are vital for

balancing the body's energies and their subsequent imbalance results in sickness. According to the spiritual Masters of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani Sufi Order, there are 7 *lata'if*, which are used in spiritual healing: *Nafsi*, *Qalb*, *'Aql*, *Ruh*, *Sirr*, *Khafa* and *Akhfa*. The *Latifa al-Khafi*, which according to some, is located in the middle of the forehead (between the eyes or in the third eye position) means mysterious or latent. This stage represents intuition and is closely related to the sense of smell. (Mirahmadi. 2005)

The journey of the soul through the different *maqamat* and the *lata'if* energy points, illustrate the role spirituality plays with respect to various illnesses and why the spiritual aspect of our persona cannot be ignored when considering how best to tackle and treat illness and disease. For addressing all imbalances, especially spiritual ones, attars are our closest allies.

‘The art of healing was dead, Galen revived it; it was scattered and dis-arrayed, Razi re-arranged and re-aligned it; it was incomplete, Ibn Sina perfected it.’ (Ansari. 1976)

As part of this 'perfection' of the art of healing, Ibn Sina or Avicenna, as he is more commonly referred to in English, developed the use of attars. These attars are indispensable to the Unani Tibb system of medicine, for physical and emotional healing and spiritual advancement, yet they can also be used simply as aromatic scents. This form of aromatherapy, using attars to restore harmony, is in essence, medicine for the soul. Whether attars are applied directly to the skin and subsequently absorbed via the cells of the skin, or are inhaled via the olfactory system, they can have an almost immediate effect, or they may require time to work with the body to heal. Attars can adjust emotions, states of mind and the spiritual side of a person, and many physical diseases will respond beneficially to their correction. But, the spiritual aspect will always take precedence over the physical.

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