



Review Article

DAIVA AS DRAVYA: RECONTEXTUALIZING DAIVAVYAPASHRAYA CHIKITSA THROUGH THE LENS OF ATHARVAVEDA AND PSYCHODERMATOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa, one of the three main categories of treatment in Ayurveda, is often perceived as spiritual or religious therapy aimed at alleviating diseases caused by unseen forces (*Adrishta*). Although this form of therapy has often been ignored as non-rational or non-clinical, a deeper analysis reveals its organized and purposeful nature. Ayurveda is an *Upaveda* of the *Atharvaveda*. *Atharvaveda*, the fourth *Veda*, is a primary textual source that closely aligns with Ayurvedic philosophy and practices. It presents many *Sukta* (hymns) that directly address disease, mental imbalance, possession, poison, infertility, and skin afflictions, often prescribing ritual and verbal treatments that mirror *Daivavyapashraya* practices. *Sukta* like *Kushthanashana Sukta*, *Kriminashana Sukta*, etc., reveal the early integration of *Mantra* and other disciplines into therapeutic frameworks. By re-evaluating *Daivavyapashraya* through the *Atharvavedic* lens, this study highlights its foundation in textual tradition and its relevance as a valid and well-organized healing system. It bridges spiritual, psychological, and somatic domains, making it particularly applicable to the management of psychosomatic and psychodermatological conditions in the present era. This recontextualization encourages the inclusion of *Daivavyapashraya* in integrative medicine, emphasizing its preventive, promotive, and curative aspects. This review advocates the concept of “*Daiva as Dravya*,” viewing divine interventions as therapeutic elements rather than abstract metaphysical concepts.

INTRODUCTION

The *Atharvaveda* is the fourth *Veda*. The name comes from *Atharvan*, meaning priest, and *Veda*, meaning knowledge, which refers to “knowledge of the *Atharvan* priests.” *Atharvan* is also synonymous with *Bheshaja*, meaning medicine. It is known as a storehouse of practical knowledge for daily life. Compared to the other three Vedas, the *Atharvaveda* was added later and focuses more on everyday concerns, such as health, protection, healing, and household rituals. The *Atharvaveda* differs in language from the *Rigveda*, preserving older Indo-European features. It consists of 730 hymns and around 6,000 *Mantras*, organized into 20 *Kanda*.^[1]

About one-sixth of its content is borrowed from the *Rigveda*, and most of it is in verse, using various *Vedic* meters, except for *Kanda* 15 and 16. There are two main versions (recensions) of the *Atharvaveda*, viz. *Paippalada* and *Shaunakiya*.^[2] Though the *Paippalada* version was once thought lost, a well-preserved manuscript was rediscovered in Odisha in 1957.

Just as each person has a unique genetic code that defines their physical characteristics, the soul is also believed to carry *Karmic* impressions, shaping one’s emotions, tendencies, goals, and life experiences across births. Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, recognizes this connection between the body, mind, and spirit in both health and disease. Based on this understanding, Ayurveda describes three main types of treatment, viz. *Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa* (divine or spiritual therapy), *Yuktivyapashraya Chikitsa* (rational treatment through medicines and diet), and *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa* (mental healing or

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psychotherapy). Among these, *Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa* holds a special place in contrast to *Yuktivyapashraya* and *Sattvavajaya*, which are more clinician-centered or psychotherapeutic. *Daivavyapashraya* is inherently transpersonal, invoking divine or cosmic principles as healing agents. It involves the use of spiritual tools such as chanting *Mantras* (sacred hymns), wearing gemstones (*Mani*), fire rituals (*Homa*), religious fasting (*Upavasa*), and acts of atonement (*Prayaschitta*). This form of treatment is used especially in conditions thought to arise from unseen causes or past *Karmic* actions. Ancient Ayurvedic scholars have recommended *Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa* for various diseases, including *Rajyakshma* (a wasting disease), *Jwara* (fever), and different types of *Kushtha* (skin disorders).

Although *Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa* is deeply spiritual and rich in traditional practices, when it is studied or taught academically, it often does not include *Suktas* and *Mantras* from the *Atharvaveda*, which are the original *Vedic* source of many healing chants and rituals. This study aims to connect the traditional spiritual methods of *Daivavyapashraya* with both ancient *Vedic mantras* and modern science. It looks at its traditional roots, how it is actually used, and how it might work through the mind and immune system.

METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a comparative literary review approach. Primary sources included *Brihatrayi* viz. *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, which were analyzed alongside *Atharvaveda Suktas*. Secondary sources included clinical trials, review articles, and case reports published between 2000 and 2024. Secondary data from integrative dermatology studies and neurocognitive *Mantra* research were compiled from research databases such as PubMed using keywords such as “*Daivavyapashraya*”, “*Mantra*”, “*Psychodermatology*”, “*Ayurveda*”, “*Atharvaveda*”, “*Sukta*”, and other scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles to propose a psychospiritual and immunological relevance.

RESULTS

Definition of *Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa*

“*Daivamadṛṣṭaṃ Tadvyapāśrayaṃ, Tacca Yadadrṣṭajananena Vyādhipratyanīkaṃ Mantrādi; Yadi Vā Daivaśabdena Devā Ucyante, Tānāśritya Yadupakaroti Tattathā; Mantrādayo Hi Devaprabhāvādeva Vyādhiharāḥ, Balyupahārādiprītāśca Devā Eva Prabhāvadvyādhīn Ghnanti*” (Cakradatta Tīkā- Caraka Saṃhitā Sūtrasthāna 11/54)

According to *Chakrapani*, *Daiva* refers to the divine or supernatural causes, and *Vyapashraya* means

something that relies upon it. Thus, *Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa* refers to a mode of treatment that depends on divine means such as *Mantras*, *Homa*, rituals, and offerings to address diseases caused by unseen or spiritual factors.

“*Tatradāivavyapāśrayaṃmantrauśadhimaṇimaṅgalabalyupahārahomaniyamaprāyaścittopavāsasvastyanaprāṇipātāgamanādi ||*” (Caraka Saṃhitā Vimānasthāna 8/87)

The *Charaka Samhita* clearly outlines the components of *Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa*, namely *Mantra* (hymns chanting), *Aushadhi* (medicinal herbs), *Mani* (precious stones), *Mangala* (performing good deeds), *Bali* (sacrificial rites), *Upahara* (offerings), *Homa* (auspicious fire), *Niyama*, *Prayaschitta*, *Upavasa* (fasting), *Swastyayana*, *Pranipata*, and *Gamana* (visiting temples or sacred places), etc.

Mantra: *Mantra* can be defined as sustained repetition (*Mananat*) of that which protects (*Trayate*) from all miseries arising from bondage or cycles of birth and death. For example, there are several *Mantras* mentioned in Ayurvedic texts, such as *Mantra* for *Agada Prayoga* in *Kushta*^[3], *Mantra* for *Sukhaprasavarta*^[4], *Vishnu Sahasranama*^[5], *Visha Chikitsa*^[6], *Raksha Mantra*^[7], *Siddha Mantra*^[8], *Navagraha Mantra*^[9], *Mantra* for *Praharshana*^[10], *Jatakarma Mantra*^[11], *Graha Shanti Mantra*^[12], and *Mantra* before administering *Vamana* medicine^[13].

Aushadhi and Mani Dharana: Tying medicinal plants on the affected part is called *Aushadhi Dharana*, and wearing *Ratnas* as a preventive and protective measure against *Anushangha Vyadhis* is considered as *Mani Dharana*. For example, in *Greeshma Ritucharya*, *Mukta Mani Dharana* is mentioned.^[14] In diseases of *Pittala Prakruti* and its *Chikitsa*, *Mukta Mani Dharana* is advised.^[15] Wearing *Vajra*, *Marakata*, *Sara*, *Pichuka*, *Vishamushika*, *Karketana*, *Sarpamani*, and *Vaidhurya* was suggested to prevent snakebite and poison spread.^[16]

Mangala: Performing good deeds for auspiciousness and divine blessings is called *Mangala*. For example, before *Virechana Vidhi*, *Mangala Karma* should be performed.^[17] For *Bheshaja Grahana*, *Mangala Devata Archana* is prescribed,^[18] and before *Vamana Vidhi*, *Mangala Karya* should be done.^[19] In addition to this, *Daana* means generosity, charity, or giving alms without expectation of return, at the proper time and place. The *Bhagavad Gita* classifies *Daana* into three types: *Sattvika* (given selflessly to the worthy), *Rajasika* (given with expectation), and *Tamasika* (given with contempt or at the wrong time/place). In *Harita Samhita* for *Papa Dosha Pratikara*, various *Daanas* are explained in *Dwiteeyasthana*, such as *Swarnadana* in *Meha*, *Shwasa*, *Bhagandara*, and *Kasa*. In *Bhrama*,

Murcha, Jala, or Annadana is mentioned. *Panduroga Chikitsa* begins with *Godana, Bhoomidaana, and Swarnadana*. Lastly, in *Kushtha, Godana, Swarnadana, and Annadana* are described.

Bali: A ritual offering (*Naivedya*) to deities, meant to pacify cosmic forces like *Varuna, Agni, Surya*, etc., whose imbalance causes diseases. For example, *Tilatandulaka Bali*^[20], *Bhoota Odana Bali*^[21], *Brahmaraksharta Bali*^[22].

Upahara: It refers to unconditional offerings to God. For example, *Narayana Bali* is performed for abnormal deaths (e.g., suicide, drowning, snakebite) as mentioned in *Garuda Purana*.

Homa: It refers to a fire ritual, synonymous with *Yajna*, using medicinal woods for purification and healing. For example, *Shanti Homa, Daarvi Homa*^[23], *Jwara Homa*^[24] is mentioned in cases of *Abhishapa* and *Abhichara*. Similarly, *Putreshti Yajna* for progeny.

Niyama: It refers to disciplines that regulate psychological and physical balance, ensuring social and

Probable Mode of Action of Mantra

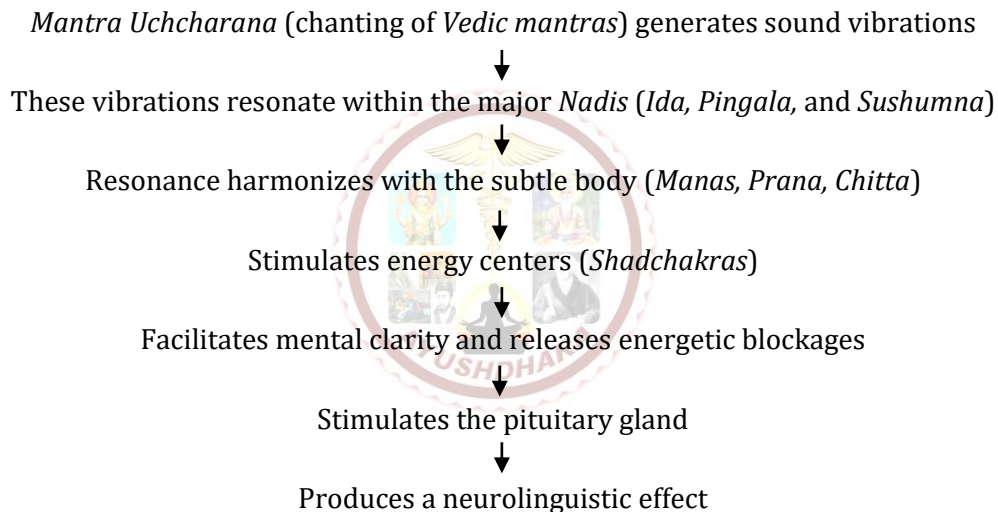


Figure 1: Flowchart showing the probable mode of action of Mantra

Atharvavedic Mantras/Sukta for Diseases

Kushthanashana Sukta- I [Atharvaveda, Kanda 1, Sukta 23, Verse 1-4]

This ancient healing chant calls upon special night-growing herbs, *Rama, Krishna, and Asikni*, asking them to restore natural skin color to those suffering from leprosy, vitiligo and other skin discoloration conditions. The prayer speaks directly to these dark-colored or blue-tinted medicinal plants, explaining that since they come from a dark place and grow in dark soil, they have the power to remove white skin spots when applied. It specifically mentions how white patches, *Kilasa*, whether appearing under the skin, can be eliminated through this combination of sacred herbs and divine *Mantras*, showing how the *Vedic* tradition combined herbal medicine with spiritual healing for skin disorders.

personal well-being. For example, in *Vrana Raksha Vidhi*, five *Niyamas* are described as *Akrodha, Guru Shushruta, Shoucha, Ahara Laghava, Apramada*. In *Yoga Darshana*, five *Niyamas* are *Shoucha, Santosha, Tapa, Swadhyaya, and Ishwara Pranidhana*.

Prayaschitta: It refers to austerity and repentance through spiritual disciplines to wash off sins of past and present lives.

Upavasa: It means fasting, and is defined as mental proximity to God. It is one of *Dashavidha Langhana*.

Swastyayana: It means prayers often referred as *Swasti Vakya* and *Shanti Mantra* for universal peace and protection from cosmic influences.

Pranipata: It refers to humble surrender to God, teachers, or elders which symbolizes ego-removal and blessings.

12. Gamana: It refers to visiting *Kshetras* and *Tirthas* to purify *Samskaras* and eradicate disease through sacred influence.

Kushthanashana Sukta- II [Atharvaveda, Kanda 1, Sukta 24, Verse 1-4]

Originally, the healing plants existed as bile inside *Suparna*, who was like their father. Then, a powerful goddess named *Asuri* defeated *Suparna* and transformed this bile into medicine. This special medicine then became part of the blue-colored healing plants. *Asuri* first used this treatment for skin diseases like vitiligo and leprosy, it is so powerful that it can completely cure these conditions and restore healthy skin. The chant says to the plant: "Your mother was beautiful, your father was beautiful, and since you come from such beauty, please make this person's skin beautiful and healthy like you." It calls upon these dark-colored healing plants that grew from the earth through divine power, asking them to heal damaged skin and bring back its natural, healthy appearance.

Kriminashana Sukta [Atharvaveda, Kanda 2, Sukta 32, Verse 1-6]

This *Vedic* hymn is a powerful prayer asking the rising and setting *Surya* to destroy all harmful germs on earth with its rays. It describes how various kinds of disease-causing organisms, whether crawling, white, four-legged, or oddly shaped, are crushed and eliminated. The speaker calls upon the spiritual strength of ancient sages like *Atri*, *Kanva*, *Jamadagni*, and *Agastya*, using sacred *Mantras* to destroy and grind the germs. It further states that through the use of medicinal herbs, not only are the leading germs (like a king and his minister) destroyed, but their entire lineage and hidden forms are also wiped out. Even the tiniest, invisible germs are removed. Finally, it mentions breaking the harmful parts of the microbes,

like their horns and venom sacs, so they can no longer cause pain or spread disease.

Kesha Vardhana Sukta [Atharvaveda, Kanda 6, Sukta 137, Verse 1-3]

This ancient verse says about a sacred herb believed to promote long, healthy hair. It recalls how sage *Jamadagni* once used this herb to help his daughter's hair grow, after it was brought by sage *Vitahavya* from the home of sage *Krishna-Kesha* (whose very name means "black-haired"). The blessing in the verse wishes that hair, once short and measured by fingers, should now grow as long as the span of both arms. Just like riverbank grasses grow quickly and firmly, the prayer asks that the person's black hair spreads around the head, growing fast, with strong roots, smooth tips, and healthy strands all through.

Table 1: Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa in Ayurveda vis-à-vis Atharvaveda

Component	Contexts in Ayurveda	Contexts in Atharvaveda (AV)
Mantra	Sacred words for healing, protection, and spiritual purification.	<i>Kushthanashana Sukta-I</i> [AV, Kanda 1, Sukta 23, Verse 1-4], <i>Kushthanashana Sukta-II</i> [AV, Kanda 1, Sukta 24, Verse 1-4], <i>Kriminashana Sukta</i> [AV, Kanda 2, Sukta 32, Verse 1-6], <i>Kesha Vardhana Sukta</i> [AV, Kanda 6, Sukta 137, Verse 1-3]
Japa	Repetition of sacred names/syllables for focusing mind and invoking deities.	Implied throughout AV rituals, rhythmic chanting is used in healing hymns
Homa	Fire sacrifice to purify the environment and pacify cosmic forces.	Fire-based hymns: [AV, Kanda 2, Sukta 19 (<i>Agni</i>)] and [AV, Kanda 4, Sukta 32 (<i>Homa</i> as disease remover)]
Tapa	Severities to reduce karmic burden, self-purification.	Symbolic references to penance and asceticism [AV, Kanda 11, Sukta 5]
Upavasa	Fasting for discipline, detoxification, and spiritual elevation.	Implied in <i>Atharvavedic</i> rites, invoking restraint before rituals
Daivika Aushadhi	Herbs empowered through mantras and ritual usage.	[AV, Kanda 6, Sukta 57 (Herbal amulets)] and [AV, Kanda 1, Sukta 23 (herbs like <i>Asikni</i> , <i>Rama</i> , <i>Krishna</i> for <i>Kushtha</i>)]
Mani Dharana	Wearing gems/ minerals to harmonize energies and protect from unseen influences.	[AV, Kanda 10, Sukta 5 (stone, metallic amulets)] and [AV, Kanda 19, Sukta 32 (amulet for invincibility)]
Daana	Unselfish giving for <i>Karmic</i> cleansing and <i>Dharmic</i> merit.	[AV, Kanda 12, Sukta 4 (importance of charity and giving)]
Mangala Karma	Auspicious actions/ rituals to invoke blessings and prevent disease.	[AV, Kanda 10, Sukta 3 (<i>Varana</i> ritual)] and [AV, Kanda 19, Sukta 60 (blessing rituals)]
Bali	Offerings to pacify elemental or divine forces (<i>Varuna</i> , <i>Agni</i> , <i>Bhuta</i>).	[AV, Kanda 3, Sukta 12] and [AV, Kanda 6, Sukta 99 (<i>Bali</i> as offering to cosmic beings)]
Upahara	Voluntary offerings without expectation.	[AV, Kanda 6, Sukta 12 (ritual offering of grain/food to unseen forces)]
Niyama	Ethical discipline and	Implied through various lifestyle hymns

	personal pledges that purify mind and life conduct.	
Pranipata	Surrender to divine/ <i>Guru</i> to shed ego and receive guidance.	No clear or exact references to <i>Pranipata</i> in the <i>Atharvaveda</i> .
Gamana	Visiting sacred places to dissolve <i>Karmic</i> impressions and receive spiritual resonance.	[<i>AV, Kanda 12, Sukta 1</i> (sacred geography, earth prayers)]

Utility of Mantra as *Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa* in Modern Diseases

The Institute of Applied Dermatology (Kerala) has published clinical reports and reviews on multimodal protocols combining Ayurveda, *Yoga*, and conventional medicine for chronic skin diseases such as psoriasis, lichen planus, and lymphedema, showing effective remission and improved quality of life.^[25] Evidence-based integrative dermatology validates layering Ayurvedic therapies with psychosocial management for chronic dermatological illnesses. Systematic reviews and clinical studies show that 'OM' chanting significantly reduces stress, anxiety, and depression, with improvements in heart rate variability and autonomic measures; effects are comparable to some primary care interventions for anxiety and mild depression.^[26] Studies also identify OM chanting as enhancing positive affect and immunological markers (e.g., salivary IgA), suggesting psychoneuroimmune modulation.^[27] *Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare* is the *Maha Mantra*. *Maha Mantra* chanting has demonstrated mental health benefits, including alleviation of anxiety and improved well-being in a recent study.^[28] Ayurvedic protocols, including mantra chanting and *Panchakarma*, are reported to benefit autoimmune skin conditions (psoriasis, rheumatoid arthritis), with case studies supporting remission and reduced flare-ups.^[29] Ayurveda's psychodermatology bridges neuro immune cutaneous-endocrine (NICS) theories with classical views of *Manas Dhatu*, *Prana*, and *Sattva-Rajasa-Tamas*.^[30] Contemporary discussions stress the role of belief, meditation, and rituals in reducing neurogenic inflammation and psychosomatic flares, mirroring both Ayurvedic and modern models of chronic skin disorders.^[31] A controlled study found significant immunological benefits (elevated salivary IgA) and improved positive mood in healthy adults following group mantra meditation.^[32] Immediate effects of OM chanting include parasympathetic activation and profound relaxation, as shown by heart rate variability studies.

DISCUSSION

If a drug/medicine (*Dravya*) has a measurable effect on physiology and pathology, and mantra chanting does the same, then the mantra (as a vehicle for *Daiva*) is functioning as a therapeutic agent like a *Dravya*. The therapeutic application of *Atharvavedic Mantras* for specific ailments, such as AV 1.23 for *Kushtha*, AV 5.4 for itching dermatoses, AV 4.12 for *Vitiligo*, and AV 2.31 for spirit-related afflictions, is deeply embedded within the Ayurvedic paradigm. These conditions, classified as *Doshaja Kushtha* (dosha-originated skin disease) or *Karmaja Vikara* (disease arising from past actions), necessitate a multi-tiered approach. When standard *Yuktivyapashraya Chikitsa* fails, the primary intervention becomes *Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa*. This modality employs ritual elements like *Mantra Japa* (chanting), *Mangala*, and herbal-ritual topical applications, which are designed to engage the patient's belief system to address the mind-body-spirit axis.

The purported efficacy of these rituals finds compelling support in modern neurophysiology, which elucidates their impact along bio-psycho-neuro-immunological pathways. The ancient claim that *Mantras* purify external karmic residues and transform internal *Samskaras* (mental imprints), aligning with the principles of *Sattvavajaya* (mind control and psychological therapy) and epigenetic recalibration, is now measurable. Scientific studies reveal that practices like *Om* chanting for just five minutes increase parasympathetic activity, evidenced by improved heart rate variability, and deactivate key limbic structures such as the amygdala and hippocampus. This neural downregulation of the brain's primary stress, fear, and memory centers provides a mechanism for the enhanced relaxation and emotional regulation described in ancient texts.

Broader research on *Mantra* meditation confirms these effects, showing reduced default-mode network activity (improving focus) and entrainment of brainwaves. EEG studies demonstrate that regular recitation enhances alpha/theta wave activity, which is tied to states of calm and neuroplasticity. These changes are so consistent that neurofeedback methods can train patients to self-regulate patterns linked to

anxiety, depression, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This neurological shift is accompanied by biochemical benefits, including documented reductions in cortisol, decreased anxiety, and improved social connectivity. Ultimately, these *Vedic* rituals, often integrated with yoga-based interventions, appear to be sophisticated techniques that leverage the brain's innate plasticity to reduce stress biomarkers and promote holistic healing, effectively bridging an ancient spiritual practice with modern scientific validation.

The use of *Mantras* in healing also comes with certain challenges and ethical concerns. Sometimes, *Mantras* are used in a superficial or misguided way, such as being pronounced incorrectly, taken out of context, or even commercialized, which can reduce their true spiritual power and show disrespect to sacred traditions. For proper and effective use, practitioners must be well-trained in the *Vedas*, Sanskrit *Shlokas*, rituals, and even Ayurvedic medicine. When untrained or careless healers use *Mantras*, it harms both their effectiveness and credibility. Another important aspect is ensuring informed consent, since spiritual healing is closely tied to belief, therapists should always explain clearly what the practice involves, what results can be expected, and what other options are available, so that patients feel respected and understood. Most clinical correlations are anecdotal or based on non-randomized studies. Controlled trials are needed to assess biochemical, endocrine, and neuroimmune responses to *Daivavyapashraya* rituals. There is potential for developing integrative protocols that combine classical *Mantras* with biofeedback, *Rasayana* therapy, and dermatological treatments in institutional settings.

CONCLUSION

Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa, traditionally viewed as divine or spiritual medicine, reveals profound psychosomatic and neurobiological relevance when examined through the lens of the *Atharvaveda* and modern science. Far from being primitive, it may represent one of the earliest forms of personalized mind-body-spirit medicine. An evidence-based reinterpretation of these rituals can enrich integrative healing models in psychosomatic and dermatological care.

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