

Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy is a very popular and widely accepted form of “alternative therapy” in our society. Aromatherapy is not merely concerned with the physical properties and benefits of essential oils, but takes things further, in that it seeks to utilise the essential oils to promote emotional and spiritual benefits. Hence it can and should be regarded as a holistic treatment (healing for the body, mind, spirit and emotions) and it is for this reason that it is in opposition to the teachings of the Bible, and so of potential spiritual danger to the born again Christian and indeed to all who seek to distance themselves from New Age or occultic practices.

Essential Oils

Aromatherapy is centred on the use of essential oils. Essential oils are extracts from plants, they can be taken from any part of the plant including the fruit, flowers, bark, seeds, leaves and roots. They are not true lipids chemically speaking but are called oils because they are liquid but not highly soluble in water. Essential oils are very potent and a concentrated source of the plant. For example, it is typical that one single drop of essential oil is one hundred times the potency of the plant counterpart. The essential oil is obtained by steam distillation or by cold pressing. Chemical extraction is also used but is not desirable and the oils are not considered to be true essential oils. The term “essential oil” is difficult to explain as there are a few different theories, it seems to simply relate to the oil retaining the “essence” of the plant of origin.

Safety Concerns

Essential oils need to be handled with great care as they are potentially dangerous and can even be fatal. Extra care should be taken with the very young, with pregnant women and with those who have serious health problems, eg. epilepsy. Essential oils should NEVER be used directly on the skin in an undiluted form. Those who sell essential oils have been known to falsely reassure those who have an adverse reaction that it is simply the skin detoxing and nothing to worry about, that is absolute nonsense. A carrier oil should be used with a carefully calculated concentration of the essential oil/oils that are desired. The casual use of essential oils in the home has become very popular but is not something to be encouraged, measurement by drops is inaccurate and guidelines often vary considerably online. Another worrying trend is the oral consumption of essential oils, this is NOT a safe practice and potentially poses a real danger to health. The other very real danger associated with aromatherapy is the spiritual aspect, the serious danger of engaging in practices that are in opposition to the teachings of the Bible.

History

The actual history and development of aromatherapy is somewhat difficult to ascertain, however, it is widely accepted that essential oils were used by many ancient civilisations, including the Chinese,

Indians, Egyptians, Greeks and the Romans. At some stage the natural plant extracts began to be used for spiritual practices and rituals. Today, as already stated, aromatherapy is the use of essential oils for the healing of the body, mind and spirit and emotions. In the Bible we read of aromatic substances being used, this however is widely believed to relate to infused oils not essential oils as we know them today, distillation was not yet invented at such times.

Controversy

The fact that essential oils have many excellent qualities and beneficial properties is not being questioned here. Essential oils are very useful in medicine and skincare. However, many unproven claims are made regarding their effectiveness against serious illnesses, this is something we need to be careful with, as well as the dangerous spiritual side of aromatherapy. There is no problem with the addition of lavender oil to a balm, or using a blend of essential oils to make a pleasant perfume, the problem lies with the belief that essential oils can promote healing of the body, mind and spirit and offer emotional benefits. At the extreme end of their use we read of magic spells and rituals using essential oils, but the majority of the time the danger is much more subtle. There are many people who simply believe that aromatherapy is a natural way to relax and enjoy the benefits of plant extracts. It is trendy and very popular. The truth is that true aromatherapy seeks to use essential oils to promote "healing" by achieving physical and spiritual equilibrium. I do recognise that there are very likely many therapists who have no intention of engaging in spiritual healing. However, they are associating themselves with those who do engage in such things by being known as an aromatherapist. New age terms like "aura" and "chakra" are central to how it is believed to work, balance is to be restored, blocked energy channels to be unblocked. Harmony of the body, mind and spirit is desired. Aromatherapy may also at times be promoted as a means to enhance your spiritual journey and to actually aid purification of the soul!

Overall, we can see a wide range of dangerous uses of essential oil, some physically dangerous uses and many spiritually dangerous uses. The spiritual dangers may be open or very subtly disguised. It is not uncommon to hear of an aromatherapist who professes to be a Christian, yet they are willingly standing under the same umbrella as those who enter into the spiritual side of the therapy. The important thing is to look at what the Bible teaches us on the matter, we are clearly instructed to "abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5 v 22). In Ephesians chapter 5, verse 11 we are instructed to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them". Obviously if an aromatherapy appointment is booked the customer will expect exactly that, an aromatherapy session. If I booked an appointment for a golf lesson and the professional tutor was to tell me he only taught on how to hold the club I would be very disappointed! Golf involves holding a club correctly and then using it to hit a ball around the course, etc. Titles bring with them certain expectations. A point that is often argued is that the Bible tells us of essential oils being used. As already stated, this is very unlikely as essential oils as we know them were not yet discovered, the oils were most likely infused or possibly resins were used. Aside from that, regardless of the nature of the oils used in Bible times, spiritual "healing" was certainly not involved. Essential oils are a fantastic natural resource but let us remember they are not to be abused in dangerous physical applications or spiritually dangerous practices.