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**Volume #: 57**

**Holy Basil (*Ocimum sanctum*)**

*Part I*

## Holy Basil (*Ocimum sanctum*)



- **Common Name:** Holy Basil, Tulsi, Sacred Basil
- **Latin Name:** *Ocimum sanctum*
- **Family:** *Lamiaceae*
- **Parts Used:** Aerial
- **Geographical Distribution:** Holy Basil is native to the Indian subcontinent and grows throughout Southeast Asia. Holy Basil is easily propagated by seed or cutting and you can find it growing in warm regions around the world.

Holy Basil is considered to be one of the most sacred plants in the Indian tradition. Its Sanskrit name translates as “the incomparable one,” capturing how revered this herb is. Holy Basil is a *sattvic* herb, the Ayurvedic principle of light, perception, and clarity. These principles translate to nearly all of its medicinal actions and influences on the mind, body, and soul.

Holy Basil is used to open the heart and mind to spiritual devotion and the purity of awareness. Its violet flowers correspond to the crown *chakra* and help strengthen your connection with your soul and divine nature. With its ability to lift the fog that can block the mind and heart, Holy Basil truly is an incomparable plant.

## Part I: The Five Keys of Holy Basil

<u>Taste</u>	<u>Actions</u>	<u>Affinities</u>	<u>Energetics</u>	<u>Tissue States</u>
Pungent	Nervine	Nervous	Hot	Cold/Depression
Bitter	Adaptogen	Digestive	Relaxing	Wind/Tension
Sweet	Nootropic	Upper	Drying	Damp/Stagnation
	Carminative	respiratory		
	Antispasmodic	Immune		Reduces <i>vata</i>
	Circulatory	Febrile		Reduces <i>kapha</i>
	stimulant	Endocrine		Increases <i>pitta</i>
	Diaphoretic	(insulin		
	Blood sugar	metabolism)		
	regulatory			
	Diuretic			
	Galactagogue			

Holy Basil is pungent, bitter, and slightly sweet. It has a complex flavor profile, though I personally find it to be primarily pungent. Holy Basil's pungent flavor relates to its circulatory stimulant property. By improving blood flow, Holy Basil warms the body, improves digestion, and stokes the vital force. The bitter taste alludes to its digestive affinity, and its sweet flavor indicates its restorative or *rasayana* quality, which strengthens and rejuvenates the body, mind, and soul.

In terms of Holy Basil's herbal actions and affinities, it has a strong affinity for the nervous system and has nervine, adaptogen, nootropic, and *shen* tonic actions. There are many types of nervine remedies. To better understand Holy Basil's nervine action, here's a breakdown of the main categories:

Nervine trophorestoratives, like Milky Oats (*Avena sativa*), are the mildest, and you often need to take them for a prolonged period to feel their effects. These herbs restore functionality to the nerve cells, repair damage, and are deeply rejuvenating for the entire nervous system. Nervine sedatives, like Holy Basil, are up next, having a more overt calming effect on the mind. You can typically use these throughout the day without feeling particularly tired or sleepy, and they can even be used as a study and focus aid since they ease stress and anxiety. Lastly, you have nervine hypnotics, which can produce feelings of euphoria in large doses, like Kava-Kava (*Piper methysticum*) or induce a state of sleepiness, like Hops (*Humulus lupulus*). These are typically the strongest in terms of their sedation and potential drowsiness inducing qualities.

As an adaptogen, Holy Basil helps you adapt to stress and develop greater emotional resilience by regulating your stress hormones production. Studies in mice have shown it to reduce elevated levels of corticosterones. Used correctly, adaptogens can help your body and mind to cope or adapt to the various stressors that it encounters, thus promoting restoration and longevity. Holy Basil's nootropic action refers to its ability to improve cognitive functioning, such as focus, memory recall, and concentration. With Holy Basil's uplifting influence on the heart and mind, it is used as a *shen* tonic and uplifts them during dark times. This nootropic effect, from my understanding, is really a result of the combination of its circulatory stimulant and nervine effects (driving blood flow into the brain and nourishing/protecting the nerves).

Holy Basil is commonly used today for its effects on blood sugar regulation and Type II diabetes. The clearest explanation for this is its effects on insulin metabolism, possibly by enhancing cell receptor sensitivity to this hormone. Its influence on the adrenal glands, ability to lower stress, and regulating effects on the stress hormones is also highly supportive for both insulin resistance and full blown diabetes.

Continuing with its herbal actions and affinities, Holy Basil is carminative, circulatory stimulant, and antispasmodic. Combined, it has quite the affinity for the digestive system, especially if the plant material displays some bitter flavors. With these actions, it effectively increases circulation to the entire GI, encourages healthy digestion, and alleviates cramps, spasm, and gas.

Lastly, Holy Basil has an affinity for the immune system and febrile mechanism because of its diaphoretic and circulatory stimulant properties. As a relaxant diaphoretic, it relaxes the capillary beds, peripheral circulation, and opens the pores to induce a sweat and help break a fever. Since it is also potently anti-viral, anti-bacterial, and anti-inflammatory, it is highly useful in a wide range of coughs, colds, flues, and general feelings of being "unwell." Its warming and antispasmodic action make it particularly helpful of the upper respiratory tract and infections that occur there.

Holy Basil is warming, drying, and relaxing. These energetic patterns are apparent in how it impacts the body and mind. Its warming qualities are exemplified by its carminative, diaphoretic, and circulatory stimulant properties and overall ability to stimulate and awaken the *agni*, or digestive Fire. Like many warming plants, Holy Basil is drying and stimulant. Lastly, Holy Basil is relaxant and eases muscle and mental tension through its nervine relaxant and antispasmodic actions.

Hopefully, you're starting to see a pattern here. Between its herbal actions and energetics, Holy Basil is an excellent plant for cold/depression, damp/stagnation, and wind/tension tissue states. As a warming and circulatory herb, Holy Basil stokes the fire of the mind and body, making it an excellent plant for people with depressed or slowed-down functioning. This can be exhibited physically, such as constipation, or mentally, like depression and brain fog. With its warming and drying energetics, it dries the damp/stagnation tissue state. Lastly, with its relaxant energetics, antispasmodic actions, and affinity for the nervous system, Holy Basil has a balancing effect on people with patterns of excess wind/tension. Lastly, its adaptogenic,

nervine trophorestorative and *shen* tonic properties help restore strength to someone who has been dealing with the wind/tension state for too long and feels weakened and depleted as a result.

From the perspective of Ayurveda, Holy Basil lowers *vata* and *kapha* but increases *pitta*. It reduces *vata* with its relaxant and warming properties and lowers *kapha* with its drying energetic and pungent taste and ability to stimulate vitality in the organs. Because Holy Basil is so warm and stimulating, it can increase and imbalance *pitta*.



### *Prabhava*/Specific Indications

Holy Basil is uplifting and disperses stagnant or depressed energy, whether it's in the body, mind, heart, or soul. This depressed energy can show up physically as the inability to get warm, feeling heavy after eating, and slow digestion. Mentally, there can be a lack of inspiration and feelings of depression. Spiritually, Holy Basil is for soul loss. It's helpful for people who feel spiritually lost or disconnected from themselves and want to foster a deeper and more authentic connection with their innermost selves. I like to think of Holy Basil as balancing and countering the energy that arises physiologically during depression in all facets of the self.

#### •Pulse and Tongue Indications:

- Cold/depression: In patterns of cold/depression, the tongue is often pale in color and has a thick or white coating. The pulse is slow, weak, dull, and may be hard to find. Other signs of

cold/depression include poor circulation, cold hands and feet, and chronic low energy and lethargy.

- Wind/tension: With an imbalance of wind/tension, the tongue will quiver upon extension and move erratically. The pulse will feel tense, taut, and wiry. It may feel as if you are plucking a tight guitar string and that it is “stretched lengthwise.”
- Damp/Stagnation: In this pattern, the tongue will typically have a thick coating and it may appear puffy or swollen with ridges and scalloped edges. If the coating is white, it indicates cold, and if yellow, it indicates damp heat. The pulse will typically feel obscured, slow, sluggish, and languid.

- Psychological Picture:

In Ayurveda, Holy Basil is a *sattvic* plant. This means that it has a nourishing and revitalizing quality on the mind, body, and spirit. According to Katheryn Langelier, founder of Herbal Revolution, Holy Basil “helps bring a sense of wholeness and wellbeing to the entire body. . . easing the body’s stress response and bringing a sense of peace, harmony, and realignment.” It brings you closer to the sacred within and helps “break up old stagnant patterns of energy, thoughts, and emotions, bringing renewal to our mind and heart.”<sup>1</sup> A plant treasured for its soothing and uplifting effects on the mind, there are many ways people use the flower essence to bring greater clarity and higher understanding into their daily life.

Personally, I like to think of Holy Basil as a remedy very specific for a psychological picture likened to a thick, stagnant, congealed swamp. The mind feels foggy, cloudy, and oppressed. The thinking is unclear, difficult to focus, as if one has cotton balls in their brain. Indeed this plant has classically been used as an antidote for the mental fog and confusion that can happen from excessive Cannabis smoking.

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So those are the Five Keys for understanding Holy Basil holistically. This is your foundation for understanding every medicinal plant that you study. BUT, that’s not quite enough to effectively *use it holistically*.

For that, be sure to tune into Part II, where I’ll be covering the core Clinical Patterns for Holy Basil. This will get you beyond thinking in terms of what this plant is “good for” and into seeing the key patterns in people that help you match the plant to them for the most effective usage.

So keep an eye on your inbox, more details to come!

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<sup>1</sup> “Tulsi” <https://www.herbalrev.com/products/tulsi-flower-essence>