

Foreword by Dr. David Frawley

AYURVEDA Lifestyle Wisdom

A Complete Prescription to Optimize Your Health,
Prevent Disease, and Live with Vitality and Joy

ACHARYA SHUNYA

BOOK EXCERPT



INTRODUCTION

The Art of Ayurveda Lifestyle

I didn't realize how sick I was until I got healthy." At twenty-two, Brittany Barrett was taking eighteen pills a day—prescription medications from physicians who told her there wasn't much they could do about her pain and nothing they could do to cure her illness. She had been diagnosed with ulcerative colitis. "My body was literally eating holes into itself," she said, "and my life felt like it was on hold. I had moved back in with my parents. There were times when I had to remain close to a bathroom. It was devastating. I tried to keep a positive attitude, but I was numb. I was depressed. I went to support groups, but that made me even more depressed."

After just a year, this San Francisco Bay Area resident became free from the condition that had once plagued her. She healed herself through the Ayurveda system of health and healing, which is India's traditional and time-proven method to establish physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. It is a way of eating, a way of living, a way of approaching life itself—and it is inherently medicinal.

I have been imparting Ayurveda lifestyle wisdom for the last twenty-five years, and I am grateful that I have lived the principles outlined in this book since birth. My teacher, my guru, was my grandfather, Baba Ayodhya Nath, a renowned Vedic teacher and healer of his time, and the line of wisdom bearers in my family goes back uncountable generations, all the way back to the holy *Rig-Veda*, the oldest wisdom scripture, originating in India. When I was nine,

my guru formally initiated me into rigorous study of the Veda, along with three important bodies of knowledge that originate from the singular Veda: namely, Ayurveda for abiding health, yoga for a pure mind, and Vedanta for elevation of spiritual consciousness.

I now impart this same timeless and transformative wisdom through a traditional schooling format called the gurukulam, in which the authentic teachings—derived from original ancient texts as well as instruction from my guru (my grandfather) and our uninterrupted lineage dating back several thousand years in India—come alive through embodied and experiential education, including lifestyle, well-being, cooking, diet, healing, god-consciousness, meditation, and yoga. My students feel uplifted, peaceful, balanced, happier, healthier, blessed, confident, and on the path to self-mastery. But perhaps even more important, students feel part of an ancient tradition and trusted lineage in which they feel held—and at home.

I will never forget the evening when, giving a talk on the fundamentals of Ayurveda lifestyle wisdom at a Bay Area bookstore, I found myself watching an exceptionally beautiful young woman in the front row who sat staring at me with tears running down her face. I could see that she was taking in every word. Afterward, Brittany Barrett introduced herself and said, "You've changed my life. I'm going to pursue my health because you have inspired me." What had ignited her was the message that her body was not broken, but rather that an ailing body

is out of balance, and whatever it is about the body that's out of balance can be brought back *into* balance. It was quite a different message than the one this troubled young woman had been hearing for years from Western medicine!

Britt was touched by my talk, and I too was touched—by the strength of her intention. That night, I dreamt of this young woman. In my dream, I took her hand and led her back home to the sacred town of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, India. It was here that I learned the Ayurvedic principles I teach. The dream turned out to be somewhat prophetic because Britt did, indeed, follow me—not to India, but into an exploration of Ayurveda.

A few weeks later, Britt registered for a three-day retreat on getting in touch with one's inner *shakti*, or “spiritual power.” Making such a connection within oneself is fundamental to Ayurveda. Though at this particular retreat I didn't lecture on Ayurvedic dietary recommendations, I do always make certain that retreat participants eat correctly by providing healthy, balanced meals cooked from fresh foods appropriate to the season. I hadn't reckoned, however, that participants might show up with their own food! This is exactly what Britt did, following her ideas, gleaned misinformation, about what she “needed” to eat to address her digestive problems. She sat down at the dinner table, telling other participants, “Oh, your food looks so good! It's too bad I have to eat this,” and unpacking a meal of raw fruit and yogurt.

It's a funny thing about food misconceptions. In the West, yogurt, with its live cultures, is often seen as a miracle food, and fresh fruit is thought to be as pure as water itself. This is not, however, the case. I discuss this in much greater detail in later chapters, but for now, I will simply point out—as one of my senior students did that day to Britt—that fruit and

dairy are an incompatible food combination and, taken together, are quite difficult for the body to digest.

At the time, Britt thought, *These ladies are really nice, but they don't know what they're talking about!* It was, of course, Britt herself who didn't know. And how could she? Her medical doctors had told her that her diet made no difference in ulcerative colitis; she need only continue taking her eighteen daily pills. To her credit, Britt saw the inherent fallacy in this—how could food be unrelated to digestion!—and so she explored the diets she found in the media. This was how she'd found my lecture in that bookstore.

Britt walked away from the retreat with a list of five things she was to do daily:

1. Wake up early each morning at a set time.
2. Have an altar in her room and put fresh flowers on it every day.
3. Every morning, meditate on her healing for fifteen minutes.
4. Stop eating (or minimize her consumption of) harmful foods— toxin-generating foods, such as yogurt, cheese, processed foods, and cold foods like raw salads.
5. Eat beneficial foods such as mung lentils, or green gram; homemade Ayurvedic buttermilk; clarified butter, or *ghee* (Ayurvedic clarified butter); and good spices like turmeric, cumin, fennel, and ginger.

These lifestyle and dietary principles, especially numbers 4 and 5, are discussed in detail in later chapters, but this simple list was enough for

Britt to work with. And work with it she did. Every day she went down this list, and before long she noticed that her bowels were less erratic and that her mood was beginning to elevate.

I feel this kind of transformation is a testimony to the power of Ayurveda. With just a few lifestyle changes, instrumented daily, the body becomes strong enough to begin healing itself. This is because Ayurveda principles and foods work with—and never against—the body's innate intelligence.

Recognizing the undeniable improvement in her health from following five simple precepts, Britt signed up for the beginner's self-care course at my school, Vedika Global. I designed this course with people like Britt in mind, to help them awaken to health. Students learn the basics of Ayurveda lifestyle under the direction of experts. Students are given the fundamentals to support a healthy lifestyle and eating habits. In addition to going over theory, in every class they also cook healthy foods, timeless recipes that heal each time they are consumed. Learning these skills, students are then able to awaken their own self-healing. Britt, as it turned out, was inspired to study further.

By the end of her first year of study with me, Britt's ulcerative colitis virtually disappeared, and she was completely symptom-free. She was also able to wean herself off prescription antidepressants she had been taking since she was sixteen years old, and you can imagine how proud she felt about being free from those chains!

What had begun as a year of self-healing was transformed into an unquenchable thirst for knowledge of this magical science! Britt then completed a three-year practitioner-level training with me, and since 2012 she has been attending to clients herself, offering them advice and giving to them a list of five daily directions that is quite similar to the one she received herself.

The profoundly personal and deeply enriching style of my traditional gurukulam's training (a spiritually transformative educational process based on the ancient Vedas) immediately and irrefutably deepens self-awareness. Britt's journey went beyond academics into real life, into a living, breathing immersion in Ayurveda lifestyle wisdom under my watchful eye, and this built profound confidence in her. Step by step, Britt transformed her health, and as she did this, she matured emotionally and spiritually until she was prepared to give back to society. Today, she is featured on popular blog sites and in magazines and is in the process of launching a television show on healing with food. Moving from desolation to hope, from isolation to connection, Britt has become a light for her community in her own unique way, and Ayurveda lifestyle wisdom has successfully anchored her at every step. Seeing my student give from the fund of knowledge she has received makes my heart overflow with gratitude. I bow again and again to the great sages, the *rishis*, who selflessly granted us this invaluable knowledge of Ayurveda. I thank my primary teacher, my guru Baba Ayodhya Nath, who passed this treasure on to me, precisely and without shortcuts, along with the certainty that health of body, mind, and soul is our inherent state, that it is our human birthright.

In the final analysis, Nature is the grandest of all teachers. It is Nature herself who beckons us to come home to her by following Ayurvedic lifestyle practices, which are nothing other than manifestations of natural laws of the cosmos. Ayurvedic wisdom reminds us that our entire life is an opportunity to make the natural yet discriminating choices that will bring us into balance and reclaim the deep spiritual harmony that lies within us.

Let us explore the living wisdom and Ayurvedic lifestyle practices that changed the

life of this young woman. Perhaps you, too, can benefit from adopting an Ayurveda lifestyle!

Ayurveda: A Path to Self-Fulfillment

It is said that some five thousand years ago, India was home to the spiritually evolved beings who were the rishis, or sages, of Ayurveda. After a prolonged spiritual quest and untold years of meditation, these great souls elevated their consciousness to the point that they could receive the special healing wisdom that is known as Ayurveda. This Sanskrit word translates as “the knowledge of life.”

To rid ourselves of the suffering that afflicts body, mind, and soul, we do not require specialized technology to combat disease (and “dis-ease”). What we need is an affirmative knowledge of life and how to lead it in such a way that in each moment we experience being in alignment with Nature, which is both our source and destination.

Thus, Ayurveda is a science of conscious living that originated in ancient India, that flourishes today in modern India, and that extends its influence worldwide. Ayurveda teaches a lifestyle that, when lived, prevents disease and optimizes health and well-being.

Ayurveda addresses body, mind, and spirit in one sweep. It restores hope and wholeness in a gentle and constructive fashion. Rather than struggling with disease, Ayurveda opens us to our own natural wholeness. Ayurvedic principles remind us that we are self-healing creatures and that we can maintain—or regain—good health by choosing healing foods, a balanced lifestyle, and inner calm.

The Gateways of Positive Change

Ayurveda is the recorded insights of visionary, spiritually inspired, out-of-the-box scientists,

the rishis, who were keenly in dialogue with the transcendental realities of life. You could say that these sages were the original researchers who discovered Ayurveda and advanced its use among the rest of humanity.

Ayurveda’s sages observed Nature deeply, meditating on her rhythmic changes—the days, the seasons, the phases of life in birth, aging, and death. They concluded that while change is the essence of life, it is possible to adapt to these changes artfully and, by so doing, to reap abiding health. Balance in our adaptation to change means health, and the lack of balance translates as ill health. These teachings became encoded over time in the great science of Ayurveda.

The natural wisdom that humanity once possessed when we all lived close to Nature has been collectively forgotten. This is not anybody’s fault, as such. The urbanization of our natural landscapes has forced on us forgetfulness and alienation from Nature. For this, humanity pays a large price. Thankfully, however, Ayurveda reminds us that we have nothing to fear, for there is no such thing as a permanent damage. As long as we are alive, we can embrace new beliefs that spawn fresh choices and reap new fruits. New beginnings are the essence of life.

In fact, Ayurveda reassures us that these changes in Nature are actually gateways, lending opportunity for a deeper communion with the essence of life and abiding health, which is our true nature. To pass through these gateways, however, requires life wisdom and alignment with Nature. The sages, therefore, teach humanity perhaps its first lesson on how to navigate Nature through an artfully lived lifestyle, first and foremost.

Wellness Encompasses Both the Material and the Spiritual

The *Rig-Veda*, the oldest of India’s scriptures

and the source book of the Indian worldview, declares, “The truth is one: the wise call it by many names.”¹

This is a greatly liberal perspective. Truth, precisely because it is truth, need not be artificially broken up into realms of existence and operation—one truth for the external world, which is the territory of the scientist, and one truth for the internal world, which is the focus for the mystic. Rather, truth is one, indivisible and nonnegotiable, and the living being is a perfect meeting ground of the material and the spiritual dimensions of truth. In Ayurveda, this truth is known as *satyam*.

Consequently, Ayurveda is a unique medical science that is beyond the limitations of scientific or physical realism (materialism), which claims that only matter is real and that all else is imagination. Nor is Ayurveda limited to spiritual idealism. It is, rather, a judicious mix of the material and the spiritual in terms of both relevant levels of understanding and of healing. Ayurveda offers a highly creative and original understanding of the human plane of existence and its challenges to health from the perspective of both the material and the spiritual.

This is why Ayurveda does not force us to box ourselves into being either 100 percent spiritual entities or 100 percent material entities. Ayurveda accommodates both paradigms in recognition of our inherent multidimensional existence. This position is mature, to say the least, and five thousand years ahead of its time. Transcending opinions and differences, it offers the benefit of inclusiveness to us all. While the sages of Ayurveda were deeply spiritual, they were also dedicated to scientific rigor and methodology. And this is how the sages were able to glean the highest transcendental truth that lies both within and beyond the world of matter.

Ayurveda is both a gentle, nurturing, mothering, healing art—a way of living in

alignment with Nature and with humankind’s spiritual essence—and an efficient, matter-of-fact, methodical way of correcting, balancing, and fixing health through the protection of good health and the prevention and management of disease. Ayurveda goes beyond dogma to recognize and highlight the fact that life cannot be understood by only one set of mechanisms or theories. Thus, Ayurveda accommodates a variety of designs and wellness strategies.

Learning the Old but Ever-New Principles of Ayurveda

Ayurveda’s fundamental principles have stood the test of time. They are in as much use today in the twenty-first century as they were in ancient times. The survival of Ayurveda is a living testimony to the accomplishments of its scientist sages. Ayurvedic concepts have delivered consistent, and at times astonishing, results over time. This book weaves these same eternal principles through lifestyle teachings. The practices you encounter in this book have stood the test of time. They were valid then, they are valid today, and they will be valid tomorrow.

I am fortunate to have studied with a modern-day sage of Ayurveda, my guru, my grandfather and teacher, Baba Ayodhya Nath, whom I simply refer to as Baba. It is a generic name, spoken affectionately, in the same way that in the West we might call someone Grandpa. Baba is also the title used all over India to address holy people. Perhaps these mystics, sages, and seers are known as baba because they are collectively regarded as India’s spiritual elders.

Baba was born in 1900 in northern India, into the family of a renowned Hindu saint and yogi with an uninterrupted lineage going back untold years. Baba overcame early childhood disease and went on to live ninety remarkably healthy years, impacting his community with

his spiritual radiance, charismatic leadership, profound Vedic knowledge, and social service. In my formative years, I lived with my Baba and our extended family in our large ancestral home, built by Baba's great-grandfather in the holy city of Ayodhya in northern India, renowned because King Ram, who was considered an avatar of Lord Vishnu, was born there, according to the ancient Hindu epic Ramayana. So it is a pilgrimage town for millions still today.

Over the years, Baba bestowed on me the spiritual wisdom of the Vedas and began my initiation into the transformative wisdom of the related Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, two of the most sacred Vedic texts expounding a rare, universal spiritual philosophy (known as Advaita Vedanta) teaching self-actualization (*dharma*) as well as Self-realization (*mukti*), which is the same as God realization (*moksha*). His teachings of Ayurveda were truly classical, based on core texts, hands-on, practical yet poetic, and sublime at the same time. Baba's fierce, unflinching belief in the living body's inherent intelligence to heal itself (with the help of Mother Nature) became my core belief system too. To this day, I may look at a dying person, and instead of feeling dismayed, I connect with what is vital and amazing in that being, even in that terminal stage. And often enough, the so-called "medical miracles" begin to transpire too. Baba told me, *"Never lose hope, as hopelessness is the disease that precedes all symptoms."*

Baba's out-of-the-box personality, calm presence, continuous state of god consciousness, and profound teachings impacted my soul in deeper ways than I could have been aware of at that young age. My essential education happened through observation of a spiritually realized being. I watched how Baba faced the ups and downs of his own life—and how he chose to respond to them from a place of inner restfulness cultivated through a committed art of

living inspired by Ayurveda. I listened to Baba's wise words even before I could fully understand them. It has taken me the rest of my life to comprehend and integrate the impact of the valuable gift of the knowledge Baba imparted to my soul. My body and mind were those of a child, but my soul was apparently ready to receive this wisdom. As a result, my life today as an educator and leader in Ayurveda revolves around the paradigm-shifting conversations I had with my Baba.

I believe the direct teacher-student relationship is special and potentially superior to any academic, test- and degree-based system for spiritualized sciences, like Ayurveda, yoga, and Vedanta. This personalized process of training creates the meticulous transfer of knowledge, experience, and expertise—the central matters on which wisdom is founded—that cannot be imparted except through a kind of apprenticeship, face-to-face, knee-to-knee, as has been impressed on my soul by decades of learning from my guru, Baba.

This was the main way Vedic knowledge was transmitted from the beginning of Indian civilization until the social, political, and educational structures started disintegrating with multiple invasions and finally Muslim rule beginning in the twelfth century. Next, colonization attempts by the Portuguese and French, and finally imposition of British imperial rule starting in 1857 all but destroyed this indigenous and highly spiritualized process of education. I am so fortunate that I got to study in one of the few remaining grassroots institutes of such rarefied education. So the gurukulam process is the old way, not a new way of education, just not so common nowadays.

I know Baba's soul guides me intimately as I write this book. I will be communicating his profound teachings on lifestyle to you through these pages. Throughout, I share some of my conversations with Baba—and my own first

glimpses of Ayurvedic principles, which I received in the traditional way, sitting at the feet of a master. So on that stormy night so long ago, Baba taught me about a grand state of health that is entirely possible for each human being. If we honor and anticipate this extraordinary state of health, we will manifest it. Our own natural health is so much more than the absence of disease sought by Western medicine. It is an abundant, fruitful, flourishing, and overflowing state of well-being.

Never underestimate the physical body. It holds the great power that lies latent inside you,

there for you to discover and to own. When you are unwell, never look at your disease alone, become weary in heart and spirit, and give up. Know that your body is a field of healing potential. Your body too is like the Earth, where seeds of health lie dormant, patiently waiting for rain. Much like monsoon flowers, your body simply waits for you to give it just a little bit of love, and the invisible potential will actualize into blossoms of health. Recognize the amazing regenerative power of your body, a power that exists in all of its tissues and in each and every cell. Given half a chance—with the right



One night, as Baba and I sat inside watching the monsoon rains pouring down, he said, “Shunya, within your body lies buried the rare and potent ability to regenerate.” That year, the monsoon came after a tremendous delay. Everything had dried up in northern India. Even our favorite river, the vast Sarayu that flowed through town, was so shallow that my older cousins would wade almost all the way across to the other side. On this night, the heavens had unexpectedly obliged us, and we listened to the rain pound down almost violently, as if making up for lost time. The sky lit up dramatically with lightning bolts that sparked across the horizon. Ominous and gigantic cloud masses were bursting with deafening explosions above our house.

In my hometown, whenever the thunderclouds bellowed, we children cried out too, beckoning each other to splash in the puddles and streaking through the narrow streets yelling, “*Baarish aayi! Baarish aayi!*” (“Here come the rains!”), as if our neighbors might somehow miss the spectacle of this huge rainstorm without our calling it to their attention.

Peacocks, who lived by the hundreds in this river town, would spread their beautiful feathers majestically on the rooftops and riverbanks, performing an ethereal dance in the rain that, each year, held us spellbound. That night, I confess, I was a bit overcome by Nature’s sound and fury. I wondered how our family’s cow, Nandini, was doing in the lightning. The cowshed was warm and dry, but would all of this sound frighten her? Should I make her come sit by Baba too? She was only two years old, after all, and I was eight, so like any older sister, I often worried about her.

Later that evening, Baba told me about the powerful storm gods, the unstoppable spirits that “empty the udders of the sky” and bring life-giving rain to the earth. Known in the Vedas as the *Maruts*, these subtle forces know intimately the powerful medicinal herbs that grow on high mountaintops or deep inside the belly of overflowing rivers. “We refer to such extraordinary elements and phenomena of Nature as *devas* or *devata*.” By this, he was saying that they are gods or godly.

“Why is this meaningful?” Baba asked in the way that he did when he fully intended to supply the answer from some Vedic text. He then did so: “By knowing one handful of earth, all earthen articles become known. The Veda reveals to us that one Ultimate Reality, Brahman, pure divine consciousness, is the substratum of all beings, all worlds, and all gods—and having known that, nothing else remains to be known. To a mind that has been initiated into this macro-understanding of divinity, the various forms of Nature—the five elements (ether, fire, air, water, earth) as well as the stars, sun, moon, clouds, rain, lightning, storms, rivers, mountains, planets, and, of course, our beloved mother planet Earth—are all revealed to be identical with the common truth of our existence. Truly, these are illumined forms within the common web of divine consciousness.”

“See Shunya,” he said, “how the Veda has given us the original vision of oneness even amid the plurality of our experiences. There is neither a multiplicity nor hierarchy of gods. There is merely the recognition of oneness and sacredness everywhere.”

I liked his message that we live in a world charged with devas. Even if I did not have the words to express my Baba’s teachings that night as the Maruts drenched my home, my Baba was putting into words my own spiritual intuition. He gave expression to the experience of sacredness in every nook and cranny of our existence. I had felt this all along, even though I wouldn’t be able to express it in words until many years later.

Every morning, I enjoyed wading into River Sarayu. “She is my very absolute favorite devi,” I had concluded in my eight-year-old heart. There was also our aged Peepal tree, which is also renowned as the Bodhi tree, under which Gautama Buddha had gained enlightenment. Every morning, my mother would chant a special Vedic hymn, the Aswatha Vriksha Stotram, to this most sacred tree of Hindus, evoking its myriad blessings. I was told that my numerous sage ancestors, beginning with Rishi Vashishtha from Ayodhya, had meditated under its deep foliage, and we always approached it with the words, *Vriksha rajaya namaha*, meaning, “I bow to the deva of trees.” Besides, that was my favorite tree to climb. In fact, my own list of devas was endless. I was grateful for and reassured by these devas and my feeling of connectedness with everything.

Amid dramatic lightning, and our evocative conversation on gods and goddesses, we sat in serenity sipping a warm drink made with Nandini’s fresh milk. My mother added saffron, turmeric, and other herbs according to my Baba’s medicinal recipe. Baba continued talking in his quiet and deeply reassuring voice—both his voice and his words taking away my fear of the thunderclouds. He explained that although they are fierce and often their will is almost demonic, the Maruts are actually divine healers. What they do benefits all that live on Earth. Human beings, animals, and plants would all wither and die if the Maruts did not force the clouds to release, drenching our planet with life-giving moisture. “See Shunya,” Baba said, “soon all will be green, juicy, and filled with sap.”

As Baba described Nature’s “divine healers,” a wave of joy arose in my heart, along with a desire to thank the loudly bellowing Maruts, but the hot-spiced milk flooding

my mouth made me gulp instead. I kept quiet, listening to Baba. In my child's mind, I did not know if it was story time or teaching time, as they were often one and the same with my Baba. I just knew it was something important, something I would need to tell the whole world about one day.

He spoke then about how our barren and dried-out Earth, exhausted from the burning heat of a parched summer, was being restored to a moist and green abundance. I knew that tomorrow, on my walk to school, I would find tiny flowers and grasses and herbs that had not been there the day before. Overnight, a bleak landscape would have burst into life and colorful splendor.

And it did. For the rains are messengers of life and the promise of continuity, herbs, fertility, abundant crops, health, and happiness to all. The circle of healing always continues. It will not be stopped.

“As human beings,” Baba said, “we too can be rejuvenated. We need to mindfully apply God's special ingredients.” By this, my grandfather meant the special foods and herbs that have but one dharma (purpose), and that is to rejuvenate. As the rains rejuvenate the Earth, any part of the body treated by these sacred and natural medicines can become rejuvenated. We will be bursting with health, in all its awesomeness, in the same way the Earth bursts forth with new life when there is rain. This is a natural law. 🌿

nutrition and positive living conditions—the body wants to self-heal.

Death is certain, but as I teach my students, disease is optional. We are not born inadequate; we are perfect as we are, by design. Life is not tomorrow or yesterday; life is today, here and now in the choices we make in the present moment. This realization is most important. This one shift in our consciousness, from fighting disease to evaluating our lifestyle choices today, can lead us to the magical fruit of true and abiding well-being from within.

The power to self-transform at every level—body, mind, and soul—is the promise of Ayurveda. The sages who crafted Ayurveda were consumed with the notion of exploring the body's natural intelligence, its inherent immunity to the wear and tear of living. When we consciously cultivate good health through mindful lifestyle practices and rejuvenating food and medicine, our bodies can become transformed. We can

manifest a state of health that is vibrant with ease, energy, and flow. This is Ayurveda.

Ayurveda Defined

The term *Ayurveda* is self-defined. *Ayu* refers to “life” and *veda* refers to “knowledge.” It is “knowledge of life” as a whole that Ayurveda elaborates, and through its name, Ayurveda's wide scope as a science becomes clear. Hence, Ayurveda should not be seen as merely another natural system of “fighting” disease. Rejecting a disease-based mind-set, Ayurveda promotes vigorous and joyful health consciousness, first and foremost, by enriching the quality of our lives. Ayurveda does this by asking us to choose measures that promote our well-being, such as consuming a pure, fresh, cooked diet and adopting daily and seasonal rituals. A renowned Ayurvedic sage known as Rishi Sushruta or Sage Sushruta, who is thought to have lived in the

first to second centuries, is considered the father of holistic surgery in Ayurveda, along with being the author of one of the most important treatises on this subject. He has provided a wonderful definition of health that demonstrates this ancient modality's truly expansive vision. According to Sage Sushruta, a healthy person is one who enjoys balance in the fundamental physiological factors—including the three *doshas* (*vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*, which I will discuss in depth)—as well as steadiness in the digestive and metabolic processes, firmness of the biological tissues, and efficiency in the excretion process. When such a person's faculties of sense perception, mind, and intellect are in harmony with the inner Self, known as *Atman*, then *swastha*, or the optimal state of health, is achieved.²

Thus, in Ayurveda, health is a state of well-being due to a balance of the physical body, the senses, psyche, and the spirit. Ayurveda's definition of health—perhaps the oldest definition of health we have from a systematic medical paradigm—goes well beyond the scope of Western medicine's definition of health as “the absence of disease.”

The World Health Organization (WHO) takes this Western definition further: “Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”³ Yet WHO has yet to include the spiritual dimension, and so Ayurveda's definition is more expansive.

Ayurvedic medicine approaches the health of human beings in all of our many dimensions: not only in body and mind but also in soul. Through Ayurveda, we can hope to gain health and well-being in all our complexity: physical (*sharirika*), mental (*manasika*), sensorial (*airndrika*), social (*samajika*), and of course spiritual (*adhyatmika*).

In Ayurveda, all of our experiences are valid, each and every one of them. In Ayurveda, we

are not dismembered organs, structures, and functions. We are more than our parts; we are whole. We are in all, and all is in us. And these are not just my words; these are the teachings of ancient sages of Ayurveda.

Today, there is considerable rhetoric about the value of perceiving, diagnosing, and treating patients holistically, yet thousands of years ago, Ayurveda forwarded a wholly practical and usable system to implement these holistic ideals in health, including health's interconnecting links with environment, society, and culture.

Let me give you an example. A man named Duncan came to Vedika Global looking for freedom from the symptoms he was suffering from—and found instead *swastha*, a state of deep health marked by inner freedom and fulfillment, an experience so intense and joyful that he exclaimed, “I feel like a billion dollars!” Do your visits to medical doctors' offices leave you exclaiming with this kind of joy?

FEELING LIKE A BILLION DOLLARS WITH AYURVEDA!

Duncan came to Vedika Global for a basic course on Ayurvedic self-care for beginners. That was four years ago. In the intervening time, he has come back twice to take the same course. I asked him why, and he grinned. “I come back for the food,” he said.

He was joking. Though he obviously loved the food, Duncan was taking in much more from our classes than just good food. This sixty-eight-year-old man was a true seeker, actively exploring modalities for his own healing. Five years prior, he had been leading a full and creative life, giving no thought at all to the health of his body. Duncan had a degree in psychology and a three-decade career in data processing. In his spare time, he volunteered at his child's school and took classes at dozens of colleges, finally earning

a master's degree in creation spirituality. He was in the process of constructing his “dream home” on a hilltop, surrounded by twenty-five acres of green beauty, when he fell from the roof and his life changed dramatically.

Surgery helped him walk without a cane, and a bouquet of complementary modalities—trigger point therapy, myofascial tissue release, acupuncture, chiropractic, and a great deal of therapeutic massage—almost eliminated the remaining aches and pains.

Then, in the following year, Duncan discovered Ayurveda, and as his health awakened from within, one by one his remaining physical problems were resolved. Initially, just eating Ayurvedic cooking four nights a week—two at Vedika Global and two with another student who made him *khichadi* (a dish made from rice and lentils)—led to his losing ten pounds of extra weight in the first few months “without even trying!” And he didn't feel as if he were sacrificing anything on those “healthy” nights; he found the food delicious and satisfying.

By the end of his first two-month course, a post-nasal condition was gone, a troublesome itchy cyst disappeared, and a lifelong issue with constipation was resolved. Also, after learning the Ayurvedic approach to hydration—a few sips of water when thirsty, not forcing down eight cups of water a day—he no longer needed to urinate every two hours through the night. And with the Ayurvedic guidance on easing into sleep, he now fell asleep much more readily. While he had been getting as few as four restless hours of sleep each night, he was now sleeping soundly for six or seven, and when he was awake, Duncan was “on the go.” He said, “When I discovered Ayurveda, I told myself, ‘I feel like a million dollars!’ After eight months as a student, I now feel like a billion dollars!”

In the longer term, the help Duncan received from Ayurveda was truly priceless. At

age sixty, he had begun taking pharmaceuticals to deal with moderately rising blood pressure and experienced the negative effect these drugs have on the bladder. Now, because he paid attention to when he woke up and went to bed, gave himself a daily oil massage, and followed a simple Ayurvedic diet, Duncan was able to successfully eliminate all pharmaceuticals from his daily regime. Recently, his lab tests were the best they had been in five years. He wrote in a blog, “One of my goals now is to live healthy, happy, and pain-free for thirty more years, on top of my own mountain in my little RV, surrounded by trees, peace, and quiet, and incredible views of nature. Thank you, Ayurveda, for making me believe this is possible!”

The Original Green Medicine

As a canonized system of thought, Ayurveda recognizes one fundamental truth: *The closer we are to Nature and her ways, the healthier we will be. The farther we wander away from Nature, the more we will suffer.* The Ayurvedic sages recommend conscious living by aligning our inner nature (the microcosm) with external Nature (the macrocosm). This is why, in Ayurveda, the individual and his or her larger environment—which is societal, interpersonal, climatic, and also geographic—are seen as intimately intertwined. The quality of our lives is not an afterthought that has a casual impact on our health; it is the most important aspect of our health.

Accordingly, Ayurveda reintroduces humanity to natural laws, so we can appreciate the fact that our inner nature is really one and the same with outer Nature. Learning and experiencing this essential unity, we begin to relax at our deepest level. Rather than struggling against Nature's laws consciously or unconsciously, we start to actively cooperate with Nature.

This is really all we have to do. When we simply stop our battle and allow Nature to take over, abiding health reasserts its presence along with all its attending comfort, relief, and joy. It's as simple as that. Hence, this book on Ayurveda is all about reacquainting us with natural laws and rhythms. These teachings of health are codified as the lifestyle teachings of Ayurveda.

Cultivating Peace Before Health

Ayurveda demonstrates how to cultivate peace with our physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of existence. In the peaceful garden of Ayurveda, health awaits us quietly and with none of the attending drama of insurance companies, drugs with side effects, and forbiddingly high-risk experimental surgeries. Inside the peaceful garden of Ayurveda, the flower of health awakens naturally, breathes the air that is peaceful, absorbs the warmth and radiance of a natural sun, sips the water that rests on its petals, and thrusts its roots deeper into the Earth. Ayurveda reminds us that health is not the source of well-being; well-being is the source of health.

Since the body itself manifests from the laws of Nature, then the body is nourished by Nature's own loving, caring, and eternally peaceful helpers:

- Pure drinking water that nurtures our being and quenches physical and metaphorical desires
- Peace with Mother Earth and peace with her environment, who is our first mother and life sustainer
- Organic, seasonally appropriate foods, cooked with love and the spices that sustain us
- Exercise that recharges us and infuses us with vitality
- Sexuality that fills us with pleasure and laughter
- Sleep that nurtures us in the lap of the divine Mother
- And finally, in a mind tranquil from the rest, meditation that takes us back to our spiritual center

With all of these helpers at our service, we experience total health.

How profound are the insights of Ayurveda, existing thousands of years and declaring that a body well rested, well fed, comfortable in its natural rhythms, and supported by peaceful contemplation will rejuvenate itself, again and again. This is the promise of Ayurveda.

Fortunately for us, the sages did not copyright the health-empowering wisdom or claim that this knowledge is meant only for people who look or worship like they did. Instead, they acknowledged eloquently the existence of collective suffering and, with benevolent compassion, professed that Ayurveda is universal knowledge to be rid of this suffering. Ayurveda is, then, a noble

gift for all humanity, and it will remain relevant in every era and applicable for all of life—including plants and animals.

Ayurveda attempts not to eradicate disease but to enhance our inborn immunity and strength so that we can withstand disease and always enjoy good health. Ayurveda is a way of leading a wholesome life, a path of mindful living by which we become masters of our own destiny and meet with satisfaction our life goals, including those of abundance, pleasures, self-actualization, and self-realization. Ayurveda not only gives us back our right to earthly health and well-being, but also gives us opportunities to connect with our transcendent spiritual essence. The best part of all is that this path to health is extremely economical: you can craft your health and claim your well-being by employing Ayurvedic principles in your home, kitchen, and garden and on your humble meditation couch.

The Path of Ayurveda Lifestyle Wisdom

In many ways, lifestyle wisdom embodies an entire life journey taken up mindfully, daily. In this sense, Ayurveda lifestyle is a path to health. The Sanskrit word that describes this path to health is *swasthavritta*. The goals of *swasthavritta* are to maintain the health of the healthy, to avoid premature aging and untimely death, and to promote a healthy and totally happy life.

Some overarching themes from the science of Ayurveda, which impact us as we journey on the path to health, explain the connections between our state of health and the cosmos. I briefly address these themes below. Additionally, throughout this book, I introduce the three cornerstones of this journey, namely: sleep, sex, and food. These three areas are of greatest

importance if we are to be truly healthy.

Unity of the Macrocosm and the Microcosm

Fundamental to Ayurveda is the understanding that the microcosm (in this case, the body), known as *pindanda*, is no different from the macrocosm (Nature, or the universe), known as *Brahmanda*. This means that you and your environment are essentially one. If you think about this, it's obvious. You and the universe are made of the same "stuff." What India's scriptures call the five physical elements (space, air, fire, water, and earth) comprise the human body and every other aspect of Nature.

The Macrocosm and Microcosm Are in a State of Constant Interaction

The interaction between an individual being and the world is represented by chronological rhythms—day and night, the turns of the seasons. There is a need to construct a lifestyle that acknowledges these rhythms. This lifestyle must allow the human body to adapt to the changes that are occurring in the environment. Western tradition has us following uniform prescriptions for every day of the year. Yet, to remain in alignment with a changing macrocosm, it is important that we change our eating and lifestyle practices to reflect the change of the seasons.

A Lifestyle Following Multiple Rhythms

Ayurveda health teachings (*swasthavritta*) include detailed hygiene routines (*dinacharya*) to be followed from the time we wake up until we go to bed as well as seasonal lifestyle precepts (*ritucharya*) that work in conjunction with the daily lifestyle according to the time of year.

The Three Pillars of Health

The three pillars of health, as mentioned previously, are sleep, sex, and food, and each of these is given extensive attention in the science of Ayurveda lifestyle. When all three are in balance, a human being is rightly nourished (not over or under), adequately rested (not more or less), and sexually active (in a balanced way). Lacking a critical balance in any of these three human needs, we can and will suffer from a myriad of disorders, ranging from headaches to infertility.

Throughout this book, I will discuss lifestyle practices to balance these three pillars along with other foundational Ayurvedic philosophies and health-promoting principles and traditions.

The Lifestyle Clock

In any period of twenty-four hours, there is a clock ticking, a clock that Ayurveda tells us to be mindful of because it maps energetic changes in the macrocosm with the change of time. Hence, we are asked to engage in life activities like sleeping, awakening, eating, and exercising in alignment with the macrocosmic energetic shifts. Without the knowledge of Ayurveda, we may still instinctively follow the clock anyway—since we are creatures of Nature, and thus, intuitively, we may do what is required of us, such as look for food around noon—but with Ayurveda’s help, we can make sure that we are on mark. Ayurveda explains the reasons for the rhythm, and knowing the reasons helps us stay aligned with Nature’s clock. That is why the chapters of this book are arranged according to time of day, beginning with waking up and ending with falling asleep.

At times, our busy lives seem to demand that we live in another rhythm in order to “get things done,” and then we may miss the cues from our inner clock. Technology has made it

possible for us to do anything at any time. We can cook food at any time of the day or night. We can darken our living quarters and sleep all day. We can stay up all night working on our computers. In these ways, our natural bio-cues can become tangled. If this has happened, then we can rewire our brain to follow Ayurveda’s lifestyle clock. Following this clock externally allows our internal energies to sort themselves out and align with the rhythms of Nature.

Three Fundamental Forces in Universe

The reason this lifestyle clock is so important to us has to do with its relationship with the three fundamental forces described by Ayurveda called the doshas—pitta, kapha, and vata. I describe the doshas at some length in chapter 1, but let me mention them here in brief because our inner clock is influenced by them—they are in constant flux in the cosmos and impose a variability in the physiological processes of all living beings. In that sense, doshas drive our “life engine.” The doshas are of three types and can be summarized based on their active (pitta), static (kapha), and variable (vata) nature.

Throughout life, from birth to death, it is the doshas that work nonstop to sustain the very process called “life” and what it takes to remain a living and functioning organism. The doshas bring about growth (pitta), sustenance (kapha), and ultimately dissolution (vata) or death of cells. They represent our ability to anabolize (kapha), catabolize (vata), and metabolize (pitta).

Kapha dosha is static in nature. The substratum of bottom-line solidity that we possess, the “is”ness of the body, or we can say the solid nature of the body, is represented by and maintained by kapha dosha. However, our solid body is not inert; rather, it is marked with chemical, metabolic, and thermal processes.

This is the domain of pitta. Finally, the body with its solid and chemical nature is also alive with movement, vibration, motion, and rotation. Movement of both subtle and gross nature, from that of thoughts to that of the bowels, is the domain of vata dosha.

And what do the doshas have to do with our inner and outer clock? Everything!

Due to macrocosmic and microcosmic alignment, fluctuation of doshas in the cosmos impacts our inner clock. At particular times of the day, one of the three doshas will peak in the cosmos and thereby influence our individual state of physiology and psychology. Ayurveda advises a mindful protocol to work with this flux. Let us examine further.

Static energy: The static or dull state of energy known as kapha dosha peaks in the macrocosm typically from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Hence, at those times, the body and mind will reflect the corresponding kapha dullness, since macrocosm and microcosm are inherently aligned. Therefore, we may experience sleepiness, heaviness in limbs, and even desire to procrastinate important projects. Lifestyle wisdom dictates that we must consciously undertake activities of an opposite nature during these times, activities that are “active,” to counteract physiological and psychological dullness, such as walking, working, or exercising, and not add to the dullness by sleeping, idling, or mindless eating that simply knocks us out.

Active energy: When the active and thermal energy state, known as pitta dosha, peaks—from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m.—it is best to engage in activities that counteract excess heat generation, rather than add to it. So Ayurveda advises choosing shade, mindful resting, deep breathing, gentle play, or

even art therapy to calm a sharp mind state. In fact, one must eat a big enough meal to satisfy the increased appetite from cosmic thermal-energy increase. Conversely, subjecting the body to the direct rays of the sun, heavy exercise that generates heat, or a hot sauna may not be the best choice at this time of the day. However, the pitta in macrocosm can be put to good use to finish pending tasks, to write an essay or blog, or to accomplish anything else that requires the mind to be active.

Variable energy: Finally, when the variable energy known as vata dosha takes over in the macrocosm—from 2:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.—variability in all our physical and mental processes begins to manifest itself. Our energy, mental clarity, and even digestion become variable, and we may feel moody. In such a condition, I recommend you pause, regroup, and mostly wait it out (if possible) or only accomplish routine tasks. Practices that relax the being, such as meditation, yoga, and deep breathing, are also great at this time since they create a counterbalancing effect.

Thus, the same dosha influences us twice in a twenty-four-hour cycle. However, we are asked to respond differently each time. Table 1 summarizes this.

The Ayurveda daily lifestyle flow is based on keeping in mind these three fundamental energy states. Throughout this book, I discuss the play of the doshas in each individual, the effect of the doshas on such topics as diet and exercise, and the need for each of us to bring the doshas into balance. The following list is an ideal daily routine according to the Ayurveda clock—in other words, based on the doshas. Each recommendation in this routine is based on the status of the fundamental energies at that time of the day. More information about many

of these recommendations can be found in the chapters that follow.

Awakening: Wake up at or before 6:00 a.m. Wake-up time should be ideally an hour and a half before sunrise, as discussed in chapter 2, “Celebrating an Awakened Sky.”

Elimination: Ayurveda provides a wealth of wisdom to ensure we take this aspect of our lifestyle seriously and benefit from its daily purification of body and mind, which is discussed in chapter 3, “The Importance of Elimination.” It is important to make this a habit; once it is, we can eliminate wastes and toxins at the right time, with ease, and without undue symptoms of “dis-ease.”

Morning refreshing and spiritual practices: Splash your eyes, drink some water, bow to sun, perform the rituals revering the sun, and meditate—described in chapter 2.

Dental hygiene: Follow the three-step Ayurveda dental hygiene practice and the five-step plan for oral health as outlined in chapter 4, “The Art of Naturally Sparkling Smiles.”

Self-massage with warm oil: Unless it is contraindicated, this practice is done before showering every day. See chapter 5, “The Delight of Oiling, Bathing, Sense Care, and Beauty Rituals,” for detailed instructions.

Shower/bath: This follows oiling, always. For details and to construct your own bathing products, turn to chapter 5.

Five-sense self-care practices: Most of these practices are done after bathing or showering. See chapter 5.

Exercise: Any cardiovascular exercise must be done before eating. See chapter 7, “Sleep, Sex, and Exercise,” for additional instructions on exercise.

Yoga and pranayama: Yoga poses and deep breathing can be accomplished either before an oil massage or after bathing and either with cardiovascular exercise or as your main form of exercise. They can also be done independently at any later part of the day as long as your stomach is somewhat empty. Refer to chapter 7 for details on exercise and yoga.

Meditation/worship: This is optional since formal worship rituals are a culturally prescribed practice and are not a universal recommendation. Either way, whether you have an altar or not, a few minutes of connecting with universal divine presence in silence or through chants is recommended. I share morning, bedtime, as well as mealtime *mantras* (sacred sounds, words, or phrases that are repeated during prayer or meditation) in appropriate sections.

Breakfast: The first meal of the day must be eaten before 8:00 a.m. You can, of course, eat it much earlier, as long as you are done with your morning practices. It all depends on what time you get up. The earlier you begin your morning routine, the sooner you will become hungry. For the best bio-regulating benefits, you must try to stick to the same routine—even on weekends! See chapter 6, “Crafting Sacred and Seasonal Meals,” and appendix 4, “The Ayurvedic Diet Resource Guide,” for recipes as well as seasonal recommendations. Always eat breakfast, or any other meal, according to the season and based on the strength of your digestive fire. The digestive fire is not necessarily dosha-based. If possible, eat all your meals facing north or northeast. You will find these suggestions and more in chapter 6.

TABLE 1 Daily Dosha Cycle

	Daytime	Nighttime
Static (Kapha)	6:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. Go against the flow: wake up; be active by choice.	6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Go with the flow: slow down more and more for better sleep.
Active (Pitta)	10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Stay active outwardly: work, eat, digest.	10:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. Stay active inwardly: do not work or eat; metabolize.
Variable (Vata)	2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Relax, regroup, take it easy; take a short nap if required to regain energy.	2:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. Sleep in first part and begin to wake up anytime 4:30 a.m. onward; a great time for yoga, meditation, and other spiritual practices.

Post-breakfast until lunchtime: Plan on doing your most productive and intellectually challenging work in these morning hours. This is pitta time, which helps the mind solve problems and sort issues most expediently.

Lunch: Lunch can be the biggest meal of the day since it is the time when sharp energy, or pitta dosha, peaks. This impacts the digestive fire, which also peaks at this time. Lunch should ideally be consumed between noon and 12:30 p.m. and should never be eaten after 2:00 p.m., which is when vata time begins, and the digestive fire can become a bit erratic and troublesome in digesting a full meal. If for any reason you have to miss lunch, then after 2:00 p.m. you can eat a light, warm snack or drink boiled, spiced milk. Chapter 6 provides the seasonal dos and don'ts and appendix 4 provides the recipes.

One hundred steps: If you can, after lunch sit in thunderbolt pose (*vajrasana*) and then walk one hundred steps. This little bit of physical exertion counteracts energy of dullness or kapha

building up in the body. Whatever your doshic constitution may be, do not lie down on your bed or slouch in your chair to take an after-lunch nap. After a little bit of physical exertion, return to your work.

Five-minute pause at 2:00 p.m.: An early afternoon relaxation break, even just a five-minute pause, is important because the variable energy state, vata, is about to begin. This break will help center you in advance. Sipping warm water is good as heat counteracts vata (for energy- or dosha-balancing rules, see chapter 1, "The Science and Spirituality of Ayurveda"). Separately from the hot water (as we never mix the two), you can also enjoy a tablespoon of pure, raw, uncooked honey. This is especially good if you are losing energy. Then you can once again return to your work. After 2:00 p.m., however, try to keep the work you do light, certainly not physically intensive work. Once again, this is the time of vata, and it's not when you want to help a friend move to a new apartment.

Five-minute pause at 4:00 p.m.: If you skip the break at 2:00 p.m., it will be critical to take a snack break at 4:00 p.m. And you could take both breaks if you can fit them both into your work schedule. These five-minute self-care breaks go a long way toward supporting your well-being. This is a great time to enjoy a seasonal fruit by itself, to have a small portion of a vata-balancing cooked snack (either sweet or savory), or to drink a hot beverage. Do not, however, have the beverage with a snack and do not eat dairy or yogurt with the fruit. See chapter 6 for snack suggestions and information about the recommended size and seasonal appropriateness.

Exercise option: From 5:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., you can include an evening yoga and pranayama session. This allows you to center yourself for the evening ahead. Yoga also relieves you from fatigue that can build up during a working day. This should be a lighter session overall than the morning session as the energy at this time remains variable. If you have time constraints (you have to get dinner together or help the children with their homework or you have myriad other tasks pulling at you), then at a minimum, plan on a short walk or simply sit in a quiet area and do deep-breathing exercises with your eyes closed. Even five minutes of this will help reenergize you. See chapter 7 for ideas.

Dinner: Have your evening meal before 7:00 p.m. It should be the lightest meal of the day as static energy has begun, so your digestion may not be as sharp as it was in the daytime. This meal should, of course, be both seasonally attuned and easy to digest. See chapter 6 for meal ideas and rules. If you are skipping this meal, then at least sip hot water or, if your digestive fire permits, drink boiled spiced milk slowly and calmly.

Post-dinner until bedtime: If weather permits, after dinner, take a peaceful walk, by yourself or with family or friends. Then engage in pleasant activities you enjoy—read, practice self-care and self-love, pray, meditate, meet with friends and family. This is not a time to do much work on the computer, go through files, handle bills, perform heavy housekeeping, do chores, and so forth. Do only the easy, routine tasks that also allow you to enjoy pleasant company, entertainment, or spiritual study opportunities.

Pre-bedtime practices: To benefit from the static energy that ends at 10:00 p.m., you should prepare for and go to bed by 10:00 p.m. The kapha energy in macrocosm will help induce sleep in microcosm (that's you!) more efficiently. See chapter 7 for rules and recommendations regarding a good night's sleep. If you are active sexually, Ayurveda recommends that it is better to have sex at night before sleeping than in the morning right after awakening. Chapter 7 also contains recommendations on Ayurvedic sex practices.

Bedtime: Try to incorporate the good sleep practices of Ayurveda, given in chapter 7, into your routine. Even if you do not have sleep issues today, these practices will prevent problems from coming up in the future. Certain spiritual contemplations and nighttime mantras are also elucidated in chapter 7.

How to Use This Book

This book is designed to support your understanding and application of the precepts of Ayurveda lifestyle wisdom. I recommend that as you go through chapter 1, "The Science and Spirituality of Ayurveda," you make notes on whatever seems most pertinent to you. Then, in the chapters that follow, feel free to turn to any topic that most interests you, in whatever order suits you best. In this way, you

will find all the necessary information you need to construct your own personalized lifestyle using Ayurveda lifestyle wisdom.

Later, you can return to the book at your leisure, and I hope often, to continue your journey of exploration. Ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu has said, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” So, simply relax and take one step at a time, and even as you take this single step, you will come closer to your goal of vital health and abiding well-being.

Ayurveda lifestyle wisdom is applicable in sickness as well as in health. It protects the health of the healthy, and it restores lost health in the diseased. It does the latter indirectly, by connecting us back to the larger rhythms, the intelligence of Nature. After all, it is the distancing from Nature that is at the root of all disease.

Hence, no matter what stage of life you are in and what grave diagnosis hangs over your head, the good news is that you can begin to live an Ayurveda-inspired lifestyle today. You can check in with your doctor if you wish, as that is always a good idea, but these practices are not “medical,” as such, and do not demand a change in your prescriptive regimen at all. Mostly, let common sense guide you as to what lifestyle changes you are ready to implement right away and which ones you wish to explore later, or never. It is never a compulsion.

If you are working with an Ayurveda practitioner already (for overcoming a specific disease), then I am sure he or she will be pleased you are reading this book and implementing its recommendations, which complement disease management (typically the domain of an experienced practitioner, not this book).

Each and every practice laid out in this book is sourced from the ancient and authoritative core texts of Ayurveda (known as Shastra), and hence, you can be confident that you are interfacing with authentic knowledge, made accessible for modern

sensibilities. The lessons on lifestyle are not based on “maybes.” You can learn from the ground up so that you can begin to use your own discrimination and experience to see that Ayurveda lifestyle wisdom is indeed reflecting a universal truth.

In the end, let me suggest that you practice patience. Ayurveda lifestyle is no quick fix, but if you sincerely follow the advice laid out in this book, within a few weeks you will begin to experience tangible benefits such as a perceptibly reduced stress level, improved sleep, better immunity, increased physical stamina, improved mood, greater mental clarity, enthusiasm, cheerfulness, and enhanced creativity.

You deserve health. When you follow Ayurvedic injunctions on right living, eating, thinking, sex, exercise, sleep, and leisure, you will be living a lifestyle that is resonant with Nature’s intelligence. This lifestyle will protect your life and enhance your physical, psychological, social, moral, and spiritual health. You will manifest the health you deserve.

A Well-Lived Day

Sometimes I like to think of the world of Ayurveda as a great mystic forest filled with healing foods, medicinal rivers, and waterfalls that convey blessings. This forest dwells outside the periphery of a notorious urban landscape, which incessantly robs us of our health and well-being. Anyone who enters the forest of Ayurveda and merely sits in the shade of its vast and ancient trees is greeted by the ancient sages who teach the lesson that true health is the birthright of every human being. This lesson tells us that each of us is a self-healing entity who can utilize Nature’s abundant tools to restore, renew, and recreate ourselves and that we can do this at any time of our choosing.

As you turn and start walking toward Ayurveda’s enchanted forest, the world as you know it

today—with its conflicting medical theories, alarming side effects, collapsing short-lived studies with millions still suffering from uncontrolled, ravaging diseases, and drugs that punish with untreatable and irreversible consequences—will be left behind like a bad dream.

There is a winding path through this enchanted forest of Ayurveda. Walking this path requires our inner wakefulness and our acceptance of personal responsibility for navigating our lives. Slumbering, self-deceptive, and passive states of mind are not helpful to those of us who wish to walk the Ayurvedic path.

Habits of self-neglect and self-betrayal may initially seem easy. Like weeds, they crop up and thrive through our inattention. Bound in self-defeating habits and addictions, dependencies, and negativities, many of us live quite artlessly. The lifestyle of Ayurveda is itself an art form, a means wherein we are encouraged to meditate on, to plan, and to weigh carefully our options—and, only then, to choose.

Once we enter the forest, the beauty of the exotic and majestic tree of mindfulness begins to naturally make us more attentive, to help us find and get rid of our own “weeds”: habits of laziness,

gossiping, oversleeping, slouching, missing meals, overeating, and general chronic mismanagement of time and space. These are the bad habits that undermine our health and create stress in our lives. With a little effort on our part, this tree of mindfulness enchants us into becoming mindful.

Ayurveda lifestyle wisdom, learned with patience and allowed to soak into your soul, acts as a weed destroyer. The knowledge contained in this wisdom has the power to recondition your consciousness and take you beyond your negative habits so that slowly and steadily you transcend the default modes that no longer serve you and gratefully learn new ways of self-care.

For thousands of years, my family has shown humanity a joy-filled path to abiding health of body, mind, and soul. And today, I share my knowledge, most humbly, with you. I invite you to make every day a health-protecting and health-reclaiming day, simply by the art with which it is lived. I remember my teacher Baba telling me that “*a well-lived day is medicine unto itself.*” Indeed, his wisdom teachings gain significance more than ever today, and I am excited for the amazing health and well-being that will manifest through this book.

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