

# AYURVEDA Lifestyle Wisdom

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

ACHARYA SHUNYA

# CONTENTS

	Foreword by Dr. David Frawley . . . ix
	Preface . . . xi
INTRODUCTION	The Art of Ayurveda Lifestyle . . . 1
CHAPTER 1	The Science and Spirituality of Ayurveda . . . 23
CHAPTER 2	Celebrating an Awakened Sky . . . 53
CHAPTER 3	The Importance of Elimination . . . 89
CHAPTER 4	The Art of Naturally Sparkling Smiles . . . 111
CHAPTER 5	The Delight of Oiling, Bathing, Sense Care, and Beauty Rituals . . . 131
CHAPTER 6	Crafting Sacred and Seasonal Meals . . . 175
CHAPTER 7	Sleep, Sex, and Exercise . . . 217
A FINAL WORD	Releasing Healing Intentions into the Universe . . . 253
	Acknowledgments . . . 255
APPENDIX 1	List of Recipes . . . 257
APPENDIX 2	Healthy Elimination Resource Guide . . . 259
APPENDIX 3	Oral Health Resource Guide . . . 275
APPENDIX 4	The Ayurvedic Diet Resource Guide . . . 285
APPENDIX 5	Glossary of Sanskrit Words . . . 329
	Notes . . . 333
	Index . . . 343
	About the Author . . . 359

## 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 adaption 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."<sup>1</sup>

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.



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. 🌿

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 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