



# Light on AYURVEDA

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# Jyoti on . . .

Maya Tiwari

Maya Tiwari is a spiritual leader, author, and founder of the Wise Earth School of Ayurveda, Mother Om Mission, and the Living Ahimsa Foundation. In this very frank interview Maya elaborates on her personal beliefs on Ayurveda and diet as well as her life dedicated to Ahimsa.

Interviewed by *Sue Clark*

**SC :** Would you say you are passionate about Ayurveda and diet?

**MT :** My passion for Ayurveda grew out of abundant love for Mother Nature; I could no longer separate the Earth Goddess from the healing energy contained in her seeds, her bountiful *prāṇa* and foods. Having lived



most of my early life in a simple village of less than 500 people along the Corentyne Coast, Guyana, it was easy to reach back into the pure essence of childhood where prolific life flooded the landscape; paddy fields flowing in gentle breezes, heaps of coconut trees reaching for the skies, mango, pineapple and banana, papaya trees touching base with the earth. As I re-embraced my culture, I was naturally drawn to Ayurveda while nourishing myself with its salubrious diet consisting whole grains, legumes, and seasonal vegetables, fruits, ghee, milk and a myriad of spices and herbs. I love food! But it is my unflinching adoration of nature that continually heals and rescues me.

We cannot realize the massive significance the role of food plays in our health and well-being until we don't have it. The way I see it, the greatest impoverishment in the world is the lack of healthy food, water and air. For most of my life, I have been privileged to have

abundant nourishment. Re-invoking the imperative education of *sādhanā* (honoring Mother Earth and living in accord with her rhythms) the basis of Wise Earth Ayurveda, comes from my own experience with nature enraptured as it were in the wellspring of ancestral wisdom. Whilst Ayurveda's vast knowledge has led me to write tomes about this subject, nothing could have prepared me for the abundance I am about to reap from living these last three years with the sparsity of food, air and water. Let me explain.

In December 2009 I took Living Ahimsa World Tour on the road. My primary reason for so doing was to fulfill my passion to serve the work of *ahimsā*, whilst healing from an onslaught of food and water poisoning. I left my beautiful forest temple-home, meditating deer, chanting cows, and howling dogs, and lived out of a suitcase for three years instead. Hosted by kindness of many wonderful folks, I guided the practice of *ahimsā* and embraced a thousand or more beautiful souls in six countries, and kept on moving. However, destiny seemed determined to keep me away from the *sādhanā* of preparing my meals; for each time I settled for a while, my food, water and air once again became contaminated. For the most part, I survived on whole milk, baguette and avocado. And apart from continual exposure to the toxic environment, and mental weariness my health continues to flourish. I understood that years of *sādhanā*

practice that were kept stored in the cellular memory of my *dhātus*, bounced me back to good standing each time I was felled. In *Ayurveda: A Life of Balance*, I wrote, “food is memory, eating is remembering.” And so it was that my remembered knowledge of nourishment continued to feed, and nurture me through these years of deprivation. Albeit, I miss the luxury of clean air and water and the feel of *sādhanā* in my limbs, and taste of the good earth in my mouth, I have not felt deprived and have actually gained a few pounds. This reality helped me to dredge deep into the crevices of soul and found me a faith that is far greater than any I have known before. Faith is the greatest act of nourishment. When we recognize that every experience is rooted in the spinning web of our own *karma* we become more accepting of whom we are in the situations we are thrown in. Transcending difficulties makes us stronger and more resilient since in this crossing we are being nourished directly by the soul. The ultimate nourishment is in our soul which is broadcast throughout our being in the memory of loving and having been loved. This is the highest *sādhanā* we can practice. It is marvelous to observe Ayurveda’s Inner Medicine principle at work and be able to strengthen the palpable wisdom of our individual *prakṛti* and live with seasonal authority; to follow nature’s cyclical cadence and know what to do, what to avoid; and recognize when “less is more.” This is my happiness formula. This is the Ayurveda I have been sharing with the world for the past thirty-two years.

**SC : Did you follow an Ayurvedic diet after your Cancer diagnosis?**

**MT :** Following my recovery from cancer at the tender age of forty-four, I dove into the studies of Holistic Medicine, (both Ayurveda and Oriental Medicine). Recognizing that I needed to make radical changes in my life, I began life’s adventure anew, with strengthened emphasis on honoring a life *ahimsā*, and have since sustained my strength, vitality and buoyancy

for almost four decades. Through Ayurveda, I am continually reminded of the most peaceful way of eating, thinking, moving, working, meditating, and sleeping.

**SC : Do you feel that diet is an essential part of your Ayurvedic lifestyle?**

**MT :** Food is our principle nourishment. It is an essential part of a healthful life, and central to the Ayurveda lifestyle. Ayurveda places great emphasis on *āhāra* (food). The seers describe food as *annam* – that which grows on the earth and which sustenance is intended for humans to feast, digest, nourish, and nurture body, mind, and spirit. To understand food we must familiarize ourselves with the memories from which we emerged, to which we shall return, and which sustain our continuous well-being. The three templates that sustain and nourish life are food, breath, and sound. According to Ayurveda, food is the only medium that carries *ojas*, *prāṇa*, and *tejas* (the subtle energies) that sustain memory: Food is memory. Unlike Western medicine, which treats disease in relative isolation, Ayurveda traces the roots of illness to our responses to what we encounter.

**SC : Have you found a particular diet that suits you? Is it strictly Ayurvedic? Indeed, is there in your opinion one Ayurvedic diet?**

**MT :** The Ayurveda diet is based wholly in nature’s intelligence. Ayurveda offers us the vast spectrum of foods, and condiments to choose from, it is not one diet or regimen; it is flexible, ever changing with seasonal and geographical rhythms. It teaches us to prepare a meal for the whole family to imbibe, and not just individualized meals for each Body Type. It is a cohesive way of living in community, once we abide by the golden rules of Mother Nature: Healthfulness and prosperity are the primary goals of Ayurveda for which it provides specific *sādhanās* – sacred everyday practices for living in harmony with Self and Nature: *Dinacaryā* (daily practice); *ṛtucaryā* (seasonal practice); *sadvṛtta* (moral observance).



**SC :** Much of your work seems to involve helping people to realize the essential part of cooking to home and family. Is this something you feel strongly about?

**MT :** There is nothing more glorious than bringing a family or community together than through the wholesome feast of intelligently prepared foods straight from the rich, golden earth of Mother Nature. Working with the Ayurveda ways of gathering and preparing foods enhances the sanctity of spirit, cleanses the vibration of the hearth, and grows love in leaps and bounds. Food, when prepared with Nature's honor, is love – the magical ingredient with which we can feed, nourish and nurture the entire world. I know the Divine Grace will restore me once again to the heavenly abode of my sādhanā kitchen; in the meantime, I carry these brightly lit gems in my heart.

**SC :** How do you manage to create awareness of Ayurveda, diet, cooking in a modern city like New York?

**MT :** I grew up in New York City, and following my recovery from ovarian cancer my father taught me to bake chapattis in the earth in a small park in Greenwich Village called Jackson Square. Some years later I began the Wise Earth School of Ayurveda in this sublimely creative city. For most people, living in massive cities affords a richer involvement in some form of community life. Amongst organic farmers market, health food stores, and natural purveyors of wholesome foods, we have nearly 300 such institutions in this city. Combined with the burgeoning movement of yoga throughout the

world and the attraction of millions of people to its sister science of Ayurveda, New York City arguably remains the number one city for holistic motility. We can now find an Ayurveda meal offered in several fine restaurants.

**SC :** Your most recent work concentrates on ahimsā. Can you elaborate on just how Ayurveda and diet fit in with your concept of ahimsā?

**MT :** *Ayurveda's first dharma is ahimsā: Beginning with food.* The ṛṣis espoused ahimsā – living in harmony with all life through the transparent and conscious act of non-violence and non-hurtfulness. The living principle of ahimsā informs that each life form – including space, air, water, earth, forest, and even a speck of sand – possesses consciousness and energy. According to Vedas, ahimsā is the foremost human obligation in fulfillment of *dharma* (divine law). For the system of dharma to be universally valid, it must meet all the necessities of life – it must provide love, compassion, support, health, prosperity in all states of existence to all peoples, and must be adept at serving the manifold needs and conditions of all communities. Ayurveda meets all the universal requirements of a dharma system. From the beginning, the Vedic tradition has advocated harmony among all peoples and all life forms, and this awareness has led to the ethical virtues common in Hindu lifestyle that are based on ahimsā; in other words, reverence for all forms of life and the protection of nature's resources.

We are at a critical juncture in the evolution of spiritual understanding. Do we have the spiritual resources necessary to meet the present challenges? Evidently we do. For timeless eon, the essential truths of living in accordance with divine law proclaimed by the ṛṣis, have been common knowledge throughout the world and confirmed again and again as necessary to the welfare and harmony of life and living.

Ayurveda gives us the knowledge to cultivate the reverence that allows human consciousness

and its infinite diversity to express itself in oneness. Unfortunately, our modern lifestyle with its acquired dependencies and deep-rooted imbalances alienates us from harmony. Human actions have severely trespassed nature's resources. For example, we attempt to artificially 'enrich' our foodstuffs with vitamins and minerals which previously were removed from them at great cost; or assault the edible plant and other species by integrating and/or trading their life-generating DNA components between them to "create new scientific discovery". Genetic manipulation of our food deliberately alters the *tanmātra* (energy quanta) so that the food at its very essence forgets what it is supposed to do when we ingest it. We are nourished not only by the vitamins, minerals, and enzymes in food, but also by its resonant field of memories that commune with our tissues. When that memory is tampered with, the resulting food doesn't satisfy our physical, mental or spiritual needs. We overeat in a futile attempt to assuage our real hunger.

Modern science and technology constantly struggles to control that which they have fragmented and are attempting to reconstruct 'scientifically' to create a false whole. These deranged actions of our humankind have escalated the loss of species and the destruction of the rain forests and its prehistoric life. As a result the memories they carried with them that necessarily fill the web of life to maintain universal stasis, is lost. Humanity must recover its intrinsic memory of *ahimsā* (compassion) if we are to survive our present predicament. *Ahimsā* is a commitment to harmony. There can be no peace on Earth until we eradicate the mentality of violence. For this, we have to stop killing. If the paramount *karma* of humanity is to manifest peace, then we must first understand what it means to live peacefully. Peace cannot be gained without the personal cultivation of inner harmony and health for all humankind and compassion for all species. Health and harmony cannot be achieved at any level while any form of life

suffers. Health cannot be partial to the human species at the expense of other species. By divine ordinance, every species has a primordial and fundamental right to life and to live. The primeval right of the human is the right to live. The primeval right of the animal is the right to live. Vegetarianism as a way of peaceful living is a primal necessity toward the cultivation of *ahimsā* – inner harmony, inner health and world peace.

**SC : By 'showcasing' ahimsā in this way, is it your hope that more people will have a greater understanding of how ahimsā can effect their diet and lifestyle choices?**

**MT :** Absolutely, my journey is about *ahimsā*, fostering it within myself so it becomes as luminous as the sun for the benefit of all of humanity.

**SC : What three simple steps can people take to bring ahimsā into their lifestyle?**

**MT :** Upon awakening each day, affirm these intentions clearly:

- I make this the best day of my life, no matter what!
- I will not hurt myself, or others.
- I love the animals and will not eat them.

**Maya Tiwari** is a spiritual leader and teacher who has been praised by the Parliament of World Religions for her work in fostering wellness and interfaith understanding. Called the "Mother of Ahimsa", Maya founded the Wise Earth School of Ayurveda, Mother Om Mission, and the Living Ahimsa Foundation. She received the prestigious Dhanvantari International Award in 2011 for her pioneering work in Ayurveda education, and the Rishi Award from AAPNA for her outstanding work in Ayurveda. Maya is a best-selling author whose books include *Living Ahimsa Diet; Women's Power to Heal; Path of Practice; Ayurveda: A Life of Balance; Secrets of Healing;* and her latest work, *Love!: A Daily Oracle for Healing*. <[www.mothermaya.com](http://www.mothermaya.com)> and <[www.ahimsalife.com](http://www.ahimsalife.com)>

## Milk: First Food on Earth

Opinion Editorial from *Maya Tiwari*

Ayurveda considers milk to be the first and most complete food on earth. The Upaniṣads and other religious scriptures mention milk as a sacred food for human beings. The Old Testament, for instance, refers to the Promised Land, to which the Israelites are guided by God, as the “land flowing with milk and honey”. The cow as the giver of milk is considered the most auspicious animal by virtue of the food she provides. Called “go” in Sanskrit, the cow bears the same name as Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is also called Gopāla, the lord who protects both the sacred scriptures and its knowledge of the earth’s sacred food.

Milk was traditionally collected well after the delivery of the cow’s calf, so that it could be properly digested by the human system. From this salubrious food come buttermilk, butter, yogurt, and ghee. But milk is sattvic (peaceful) only when it is fresh and its quality remains pure and unadulterated. Milk has been used widely but not wisely throughout the ages. Because of the corruption prevalent in today’s animal husbandry, we are in danger of losing this first food of the earth. The cruel treatment of animals as well as the arsenal of poisons, chemicals, and hormones used in the cows’ feed all contribute to the misery of this beneficent animal and the impairment of its life-sustaining milk. When butter, yogurt, and ghee are made from the organic milk now being produced by many small dairies, they are our most nourishing and healing foods. Among them, ghee stands out as the elixir of excellent health.

Milk is the elixir of health – that is milk that comes from a happy cow who has not been contaminated by violence and an artillery of poisons.

If we were to remove milk from our nutrition, we would not only be hurting the health of humanity but also the health of the cows. We cannot help them through the expulsion of their sacred ability to produce milk, the nectar that supports the memory of wellness on Planet Earth. Instead we must



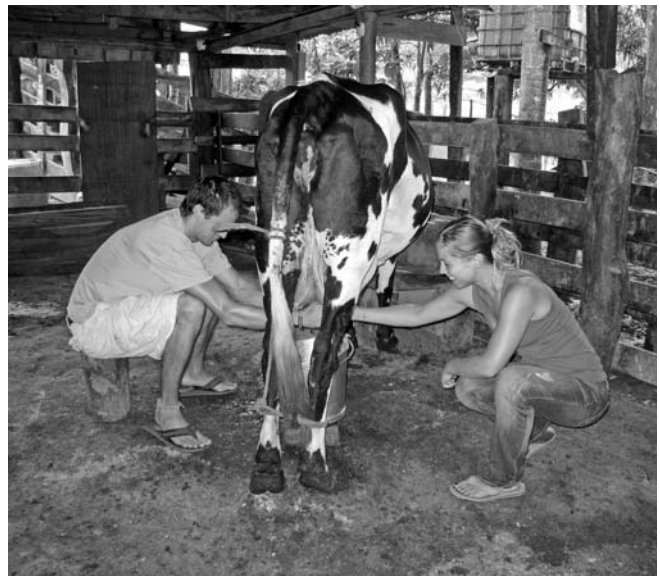
support the animals, and passionately advocate the changes necessary to stop the violence against them, we must educate our farmers and teach them how to respect the animals and to adopt caring, and humane husbandry. We must pray for their well-being, and imbibe their milk so that their precious memory of service to the earth is preserved. In the act of prayer, we must go a step farther and drink a mouthful of the poisoned milk, so that the cows’ pain may be mitigated through our collective conscious intent. This is a small sacrifice to make to preserve the sacred beingness of the cow! The primary intent must be for wholesome dairy husbandry, where the cow is loved, cared for and valued as an indispensable member of the community! Once this feat is accomplished, we can once again enjoy milk as the gold standard for the good health of humanity.

As a *śākāhārī* (vegetarian) we are never oblivious to the pain of another, be it man, woman, child, animal, or plant. We condemn the cruelty waged against all animals in the unconscionable commercial industry of bludgeoning greed. In truth, for thousands of years, my tradition of Hindusim that has brought

the gems of Yoga, Meditation, Ayurveda, Jyotiṣa, Vāstu and countless sacred arts that serve the One Spirit of humanity has advocated vegetarianism as a way of life – the kind path toward loving all beings and honoring Mother Nature and all of her species, forests, waters, skies, and earth. Milk is our first food. Sacrificing milk as a food doesn't address or solve the egregious crimes against the well-being of the cows. In boycotting the use of milk, we are adding to the punishment of the cows. In essence, what we are doing is tantamount to saying: "To protect your welfare, we will throw away your, God-given gift, your milk." It doesn't and will not evoke a more humane existence for them. We can no more suppress or eradicate the milk of a mother who feeds her newborn than we can throw away the billions of gallons of milk that cows naturally produce. The logical answer lies in joining force to lobby for the transformation of dairy farmers and the humane education for the farmers across the world to adapt and use the humane principles of organic husbandry, wholesome work for the care and protection of the animals whilst allowing the cows to produce the quantity of milk they would naturally produce without being forced into pregnancy for this purpose.

For thirty-five years, I have been at the start, enmeshed in the fold of the burgeoning movement in the U.S. for a joyful earth, wholesome food, and happy farmers. At the Wise Earth School for Ayurveda which I founded in 1981, we have taught thousands of practitioners to live the life of *sādhanā*, simplicity and kindness to all beings. My teachings are pro-active in stopping violence against the innocent animals, and Mother Earth. Imagine my surprise when I was told by a well-known Yoga Studio in New York where I had appeared numerous times before that they could not host my workshop any longer because as they put it, "you are not vegan." First off, vegetarianism is about compassion, kindness, and simplicity. It is not about exclusivity, setting privileged trends, or vacant verbiage about being humane or spiritual. As we say at Wise Earth, "Food for one must be food for all!"

We are at the pivotal juncture of the earth's history where we must build a better world for all of humanity; where the animals are treated with dignity, respect, and compassion. Animals are beautiful beings capable of suffering, feeling pain, and experiencing



emotions. They have the same rights that each and every person does – that is to live their lives in blissful harmony with and on Mother Earth. The cow, in particular, is seen as the mother of nourishment in my culture. In our well-meaning, fervent passion to protect the animals, let us not delegate the maternal function and food of this animal to go waste. Instead, let us honor this magnificent creature's service to humanity and protect her cosmic memory so she may continue to sustain the energy of nourishment upon this earth. The *ṛṣis*, Vedic seers, inform that cows support the earth's memory for peaceful nourishment.

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