



THE YOGA OF
HERBS

SECOND REVISED & ENLARGED EDITION



AN AYURVEDIC GUIDE
TO HERBAL MEDICINE

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HERBAL MEDICINE

Second Revised & Enlarged Edition

by DR. DAVID FRAWLEY and
DR. VASANT LAD



Tom Lake, Wisconsin

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Lenny Blank, as it was through his effort, direction, foresight and perseverance that it was both begun and completed, as part of his continuing endeavor to help spread Ayurveda to the West.

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PREFACE

The term “yoga” has many traditional meanings. In Ayurveda, the medical science of India, yoga refers to the “right usage” and “right combination” of herbs. A special combination of substances designed to bring about a specific effect upon the body or mind is thus called a “yoga.”

This coordinated or integrated usage of herbs was based upon the ancient Ayurvedic science of herbal energetics. In this is a system for determining the qualities and powers of herbs according to the laws of nature, so that herbs can be used objectively and specifically according to individual conditions. A yogic usage of herbs implies such an harmonic application of the potencies of herbs.

In this book, for the first time, this Ayurvedic herbal science is applied to western herbs, as well as to a few major oriental herbs, both Indian and Chinese. It is the purpose of this book not to present Ayurveda in the distance, as something foreign or ancient, but to make it a practically applied system of herbalism.

We live in a very special, yet very dangerous time, wherein a new global culture is painfully struggling to be born. It is the challenge of our times to integrate human culture and knowledge. It is essential that this process occurs on the level of the healing sciences also. Healing is always a matter of unification. If our healing knowledge cannot be integrated, how can we as human beings find unity among ourselves?

Ayurveda is an eternal system that has already integrated eight limbs of healing within itself, from herbs to surgery to psychology. As such it offers such a point of unification. Its very basis is the spiritual knowledge of the ancient seers of India and the cosmic consciousness in which they lived.

This book is not just a presentation of traditional Ayurvedic knowledge. It attempts to show living Ayurveda, its creative and practical application to changing conditions. It is meant as a bridge between east and west. In this regard, it has been a collaboration of an easterner with profound knowledge of the west and a westerner with profound knowledge of the east. It is our deepest wish that it transmits this spirit of integration and collaboration.

In the application of Ayurveda to the west, most traditional Ayurvedic medicines cannot be practically used. They may consist of special tropical herbs that are largely inaccessible here, or they may contain special mineral substances that can only be used after long and difficult preparations. Hence this book has arisen as a vehicle to make the healing knowledge of Ayurveda applicable to substances that are accessible and possess few potential side-effects.

At the same time, we have also attempted to preserve the integrality of the Ayurvedic healing system. For this we have included special effects of herbs upon the mind, and the deeper psychological and spiritual aspects of healing. Herbalism is part of this broader context of healing and without addressing these deeper issues of human life, no healing process can really be effective.

Sanskrit terms have been kept to a minimum and have been provided with easily understandable translations. For further elucidation of some of the medical concepts in this book, the reader is referred to *Ayurveda, the Science of Self-Healing*, which is a companion volume to it.

The classification of western herbs into eastern energetics is not something that can be done once and for all. Even in Ayurveda differences of classification of herbs sometimes exist between different writers. So we welcome any comments or criticism in this regard and invite all who wish to join us in this work to contact us.

We would like to express our most heartfelt gratitude to the many people, friends and students, who have served as a help and an inspiration to this book, as well as to the many others who are working in a similar direction. May their labors be fruitful.

Dr. David Frawley

Dr. Vasant Lad

May, 1986

sama Fe, New Mexico

FOREWORD

As an herbalist with over 18 years of experience using Western, Chinese and Ayurvedic herbs, I long ago came to the conclusion that without taking into account the overall energetics of herbs and foods in relation to individual constitutional differences, we are bound for tremendous inconsistency and failure. Such an approach keeps us from drawing broad useful conclusions necessary for the prevention and cure of disease. In this, biochemistry alone is simply not enough.

There is much that can be shared between ancient healing systems of Eastern and Western science. Some, imbued with the Western scientific perspective, believe that ours is the most advanced and therefore the only true way. We fail to recognize that there are already fully developed and theoretically articulated medical systems in India and China which have proven themselves effective for more than 3000 years. Ours, however, has only been developed over the past several hundred years.

Ayurvedic medicine is certainly one of the oldest systems with a consistent theoretical basis and practical clinical application. Into its ancient well of profound healing wisdom, some of the greatest doctors and sages have poured their finest insights and discoveries. Yet, to fully appreciate the nectar of this Eastern healing wisdom, Westerners need to overcome their literal and linear process of thought to enter into a nonlinear reasoning approach. Therefore, a perspective

grounded in an intuitive vision of the whole rather than the microscopic view of contemporary science is necessary.

The strength of Ayurveda lies in its broad, all-encompassing view of the dynamic interrelationship between organic physiological processes, external factors including climate, life work and that along with internal emotional stages. In contrast, Western science takes a more particular view based upon specific molecular structure and chemistry. It is paradoxical that both could be describing the same condition in such different ways and with such diametrically opposed viewpoints.

Today many people are drawn to Oriental healing systems and herbology because these approaches offer the promise of a healing system that is at once powerfully effective and gentle with the least danger of side effects. They rightly feel that disease occurs not as an arbitrary phenomenon but for definite reasons which if correctly understood could help to cure and more importantly prevent recurrence.

Ayurveda, with its *Tridosha* or three humours system, is able to provide a complete understanding of the cause of health in terms of a metabolic balance. Disease is simply understood as an imbalance between the nerve energy (*vata*), catabolic fire energy (*pitta*) and anabolic nutritive energy (*kapha*). All foods and experiences have an effect on the overall balance of these respective humours. This is proven by the fact that through adjusting the balance of that only many health problems are alleviated (this is unfortunately still not considered a fact by the majority of Western-trained medical doctors).

Herbs are used as “special foods”, serving to eliminate excesses and strengthen deficiencies. While they may possess a powerful nutritive impact on a weakened body their primary action is to stimulate particular organic functions. This is the more illusive energetic aspect of herbs and indeed of all medicines, drugs and foods that need to be understood. Besides the specific function of a medicine or food, there is a more general effect in that for some who are predisposed, it can, broadly speaking, either raise or lower overall metabolism and stimulate or sedate nerve, nutritive or fire energies which comprise the *Tridosha* humoural system.

The fundamental error of western medicine is to treat the disease rather than the patient. If drugs were prescribed sensitively according to the individual nature of each person, as herbs are in Oriental healing systems, many of the side effects that result could be avoided. The value of using herbs and foods lies particularly in their relative non-specific action or their “mildness.” If one misuses an herb, the results are relatively minor and are generally completed in the short span within a day or so that it takes for the body to eliminate the residues of the herb from the system. It is more difficult with synthetic drugs or extracted concentrates. The liver may be unable to fully eliminate a drug from the tissues and cells of the body because it has not figured out how to neutralize it either for assimilation or elimination. Unable to fully process the substance, it is stored in the liver and tissues or circulates in the body, creating a toxic burden that impairs necessary organic physiological processes.

Before one can fully realize the healing benefits of Ayurveda or Chinese medicine, both of which are “energetic” systems of healing, all foods and herbs must be classified and

understood in terms of their broader energetic effects on overall metabolic processes. I believe that Dr. David Frawley's and Dr. Vasant Lad's book successfully, for the first time, offers such a classification of herbs, including Western herbs and herbs common to both East and West. It is of coincidence that this manuscript should find its way into my hands just at the time that I have nearly completed my own research into classifying Western herbs into the traditional Chinese energetic system. It is also fascinating to see how, in many instances, their method of classification and my own demonstrate the same basic energetic understanding.

Dr. David Frawley and Dr. Lad have made a truly powerful and unique contribution to alternative, natural health care by their creation of this important book. It may take a while for the majority of non-Ayurvedically oriented people to see the practical benefits of this original work. However, it is simply the difference between a hit and miss approach, and the development of a consistent and valid herbal healing system.

This book for the first time will serve not only to make Ayurvedic medicine of greater practical value to Westerners, but in fact, ultimately advance the whole system of Western herbalism forward into greater effectiveness. I flunk anyone interested in herbs should closely study this book whether their interests lie in Western herbology, traditional Chinese herbology or in Ayurvedic medicine.

Michael Tierra, Herbalist

April, 1986

sama Cruz, California

The Yoga of Herbs

HERBOLOGY: EAST AND WEST

Herbs, both in the east and the west, have been the prime medicinal agent in traditional and holistic therapies. In the East, particularly India and China, an extensive and intricate herbal science has been developed. Originating from the vision of men of spiritual knowledge, herbal medicine was then refined by thousands of years of experience. In this regard Ayurveda includes what is probably the oldest, most visionary, most developed science of herbal medicine in the world. Such a fully developed system does not need refinement but rather translation and adaptation. This book begins with the effort of conveying the ancient science of Ayurvedic herbalism to our own modern needs.

Some may be of the opinion that the herbal medicine of India is not relevant to us today. Since its system is ancient and traditional, filled with religion and superstition, we may feel it does not apply. Or we may think its herbs are largely from tropical plants that we can have no access to, or which have little value in our climate, our particular environment. At the same time, many of us realize the necessity of incorporating a spiritual/psychological approach with therapy. Just as physical ailments usually follow emotional imbalances, so we may find the spiritual use of herbs in the Indian tradition of particular importance in our own unbalanced society. Far from being out of touch with today's world, Ayurvedic herbal medicine is needed now more than ever.

While some major herbs in Ayurvedic usage have no equivalents in western herbalism, many common western herbs like bayberry, barberry and calamus are also commonly

used in India, and Ayurveda contains much useful information about them. Even special Ayurvedic herbs, like *ashwagandha* and *haritaki*, may be incorporated into western herbalism, just as ginseng and tang kuei have come from Chinese sources; just as gotu kola, which originally came from India, is now much in use in this country. Many Ayurvedic herbs are common spices—ginger, turmeric, coriander and fenugreek. An impressive pharmacology of Ayurvedic herbs can be put together merely from herbs and spices commonly available in America.

Ayurveda means “The Science of Life.” It does not mean Hindu medicine, nor must its herbalism be considered Indian herbalism. It is a science of living that encompasses the whole of life, and which relates the life of the individual to that of the universe. As such it is open to and includes all life, and all methods that bring us into greater harmony with life.

Ayurveda is not of the east or the west, of ancient or modern time. It is one with all life, a knowledge that belongs to all living beings—not a system imposed upon them, but a resource to be drawn upon freely and to be adapted to the unique needs of the individual in his or her particular environment.

Ayurvedic herbalism gives us not only specific herbs, but a way of understanding all herbs. Ayurveda welcomes the removal of barriers between human beings. The sharing of human healing knowledge must develop for the new age to come. But it must find its place in the immediate world of today. And that is the true purpose of this book.

“The essence of all beings is Earth. The essence of the Earth is Water. The essence of Water is plants. The essence of plants is the human being.”

“Esam bhutanam prthivi rasha, prthivya apo raso-pam osadhayo rasa, osad-hinam puruso rasah.”

Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.2.

THE MANIFESTATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS INTO PLANTS

Evolution is a manifestation of latent potentials. Within each thing is contained all things. In the seed is the tree; in the tree is the forest. Therefore, intelligence is contained implicitly in the many worlds of nature, not only in our human-centered world. Another way of saying this is that consciousness exists in all forms of life. It is the very basis of creation, the power of evolution. Life, creation, and evolution are the stages in the unfoldment of consciousness. There is nothing in existence that is unfeeling, nothing that is profane or unspiritual, nothing without a unique value in the cosmos. Life is relational, interdependent, interconnective, a system of mutual nourishment and care, not only physically, but also psychologically and spiritually.

Consciousness, therefore, is not merely thought, much less intellect or reason. It is the feeling of being alive and being related to all life. Consciousness as pure feeling exists already in the plant and is hidden in the rock, even within the atom itself. Elemental attraction and repulsion are similar to love

and hate, like and dislike. For this reason, the ancient seers of India held that the Self alone exists, that unity is the basis of all existence—that the unity of life is the unity of consciousness.

By this they meant that every living thing was sentient, that everything was, in the sense of consciousness, human. True humanity, which is humane feeling for all life, is at the heart of all life. Plants and animals sometimes show this sense of caring more than certain humans, who have been hardened in their isolated sense of humanity. It is only when we come to look upon all things as human that we are capable of a truly humane existence. Such a lesson is taught to us by plants and herbs whose existence is still grounded in the unity of nature, through which we may return to understand ourselves better.

Man as microcosm contains within himself all the elemental, mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms. Within the plant is the potential of the human being. Conversely within the human being is the underlying energy structure of the plant. Our nervous system, it could be said, is a tree whose plant-essence is human. Therefore, plants may communicate directly to that essence of feeling which makes a true human being.

The Plant Kingdom exists to bring feeling into manifestation. On the plant level, feeling exists in a pure and passive form. The animal and human kingdoms manifest this more actively, more separately, but often with less beauty. Consciousness in plants is on a primal level of unity; therefore it is more psychic, telepathic.

Life forms are stations for the reception and transmission of forces, through which all are nourished. Each thing exists to nourish all others, and, in return, to be nourished itself. In this manner each kingdom of nature serves to receive and transmit life. This life is implicit in light and in the transmission of stellar or astral forces.

The earth, like a gigantic receptor or radio-station, inhales and exhales stellar and cosmic forces, the absorbed essence of which grows and unfolds as life. These forces are not all material, but include subtle energies of an occult or spiritual nature. Plants transmit the vital-emotional impulses, the life-force that is hidden in light. That is the gift, the grace, the power of plants.

Plants bring us the love, the nourishing power of the sun, which is the same energy of all the stars, of all light. These cosmic energies emanated by plants thus nourish, sustain and make grow our own astral body. In this way the existence of plants is a great offering, a sacrifice. They offer us not only their own nutritive value but the very light and love from the stars, from the cosmos whose messengers they are. They bring to us the universal light so that we can enter the universal life. They exist for psychological, as well as physical nourishment. Our feelings, then, are our own inner plants, our own inner flowers. They grow in accordance with our perception of the nature of all life.

Creation is light. In the *Vedas*, the ancient scriptures of India, the great god *Agni*, the principle of Fire, the Divine Seer-Will, builds up the worlds, and makes of all creation a series of self-transformations.

Plants exist to transmute light into life. Human beings exist to transmute life into consciousness, love. These three—light, life and love—are one, each an expression of the other, three dimensions of the same existence. Plants transmute light into life through photosynthesis. The human being transmutes life into consciousness through perception. Through direct perception, the seer is the seen, the observer the observed. The Sanskrit word for the plant *osadhi* means literally a receptacle or mind, *dhi*, in which there is burning transformation, *osa*. In the *Vedas* this can mean not only plants but all entities in creation.

The human being is the plant of consciousness. The plant, which effects a similar process on a “lower level” of evolution, feeds our mind and nervous system to help in this process. As below, so above; all the universe is a metamorphosis of light.

In the outer world, a central sun is the source of light and life. In the inner world, a central sun is also the source of life. This inner sun is our true Self, what the ancients called the *Purusha* or *Atman*. Plants bring us into communion with the energy of the outer sun, while our inner plant, our nervous system, brings us into communion with the inner sun. Establishing the proper link between the outer plant and the inner plant thus completes the circuit of light and life, and establishes the free flow of awareness in which the mind is liberated—unites the sun with the sun, merges the outer with the inner, creates a festival of delight in living.

The proper usage of a plant or herb, during which its true power is released, implies a communion with it. The plant, when we are one with it, will vitalize our nervous system and

invigorate our perception. This means giving value to a plant as something sacred, as a means of communion with all nature. Each plant, then, like a *mantra*, will help to actualize the potential of cosmic life of which it is a representative.

For this reason, many ancient people have had reverence for the plant kingdom. It is not a superstitious awe, nor a mere sensitivity to beauty, but a reception of the power that plants bring to us. The force is not received simply through ingesting the plant, but in our total communion with it.

The sages of ancient India approached healing and herbs with this same consciousness. Theirs was not a science of experimentation, but a form of direct participation. Experimentation implies distance, a division between observer and observed, subject and object. As a result, it is mediated, measured, translated. In dissecting the corpse, the penetration of the soul is missed. Direct perception, or meditation, is the science of yoga. Yoga allows the essence, the thing-in-itself, to disclose itself. When this happens, a full revelation of material and spiritual potential occurs.

The seers, through the yoga of perception, let plants speak to them. And the plants disclosed their secrets—many of which are far more subtle than a chemical analysis could uncover. Approaching plants in the same way today, not as objects for self-aggrandizement but as integral parts of our own unity, the true value of a plant will flourish for our unselfish use.

To become a true herbalist, therefore, means to become a seer. This means to be sensitive to the being of the herbs, to commune in receptive awareness with the plant-light of the universe. It is to learn to listen when the plant speaks, to

Speak to the plant as to another human being, and to look upon it as one's teacher.

THE BACKGROUND OF AYURVEDIC MEDICINE

SPIRITUAL BACKGROUND

In order to understand the Ayurvedic approach to herbs, one must understand the basic system of Ayurveda, which is a complete healing science, including the physical, psychological and spiritual aspects of life.

The ancient seers of India envisioned two fundamental principles behind existence: *Purusha*, the Primal Spirit, the principle of sentience of consciousness; and the *Prakruti*, or Great Nature, the principle of creativity. The union of these two, Spirit and Matter, produces all things.

Yet these two are also one, the primordial Two-in-One, Consciousness and its creative, executive force, *Shiva-Shakti*. Within all things is essence, individuality, consciousness—the *Purusha*. Within all things is also the power of manifestation, the capacity for creative enfoldment—*Prakruti*.

From these two great forces in their initial coming together is born Cosmic Intelligence, *Mahat*, which contains the seeds of all manifestation. Inherent in *Mahat* are all the laws of nature.

The Cosmic Intelligence also exists in the human being as the intelligence in the individual. As such it is called *Buddhi*, the means of awakening, developing fully which one becomes enlightened, a *Buddha*. *Buddhi* is our capacity for perception, our ability to discern the real from the unreal.

But this intelligence, in its evolution into material forms, may give rise to the ego, the sense of separate self, or *Ahamkara*. It is the principle of division as it is only our sense of a separate ego that divides us from the unity of life.

In turn, the ego gives rise to the conditioned mind or conditioned consciousness called *Manas*, which, as our sense of self-consciousness, creates a protective thought-field around itself in which we become bound.

Finally, this links us up with the collective unconscious called *China*, the storehouse of thoughts of all limited mentalities. Through *China* we remain under the influence of the latencies, compulsions and drives of the earlier stages of evolution, going all the way back to the animal realm— and before.

Ayurveda aims at a life in harmony with Cosmic Intelligence, whereby our own intelligence is perfected, so that through it we can return to unity with nature; and through nature to our true self and spirit, the *Purusha*. This is the spiritual background of Ayurveda, which is the same as that of yoga, and the basis of Ayurvedic psychology.

This requires the awakening of intelligence wherein we go beyond the rule of the ego. The ego is the basis for all deviation from nature. Health is natural, *Prakruti*. Disease is artificial, *Vikruti*. Hence, most diseases, except those natural to the course of time, are from the psychological imbalance born of unnecessary self-consciousness.

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