

# Maya Tiwari

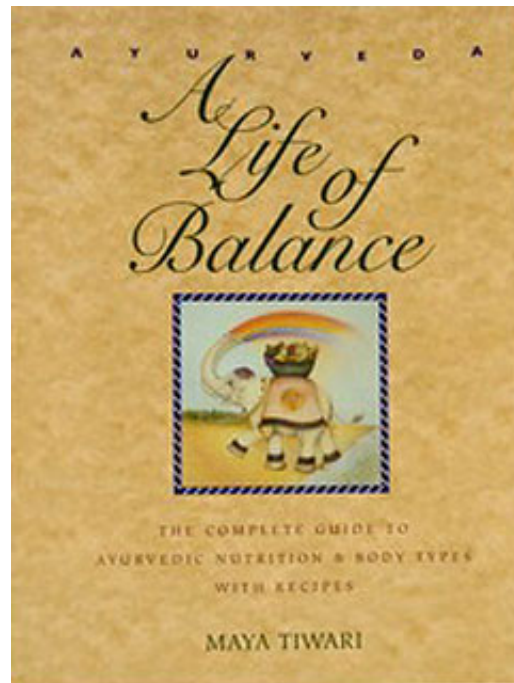
## Ayurveda: Life of Balance

Reading excerpt

[Ayurveda: Life of Balance](#)

of [Maya Tiwari](#)

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# INTRODUCTION

*Hope is nature's way of enabling us to survive  
so that we can discover nature itself.*

*Swami Dayananda Samswati*

The pervasive forces of protection are always at work. How else can a city like New York—my oasis of comfort for two decades—survive all the abuse, misuse, corruption, and decay rendered upon her? For years, I was washed clean by her pink northern lights at dusk. Her rivers absorbed my pain and the enormous collective pain of all her inhabitants. To live there was to know beyond a doubt that a power greater than the sum of humans exists and protects us, in spite of ourselves. Cosmic intelligence seeps through impenetrable walls; signs and symbols of life speak clearly, if only we would listen.

For many years I lived in Greenwich Village, across from a very small square. Each day as I walked past the park, the pigeons scurried about for scraps of bread fed them by the homeless and elderly. One day as I walked by all the pigeons flew away. That was the day I discovered that I had cancer. The journey that ensued took me through the darkly shadowed valley of my innermost self.

My purpose in writing this personal story is to share my discoveries as a seeker. Cancer has been my greatest teacher. Like a compass, it has guided me toward the path I have since been treading. It has given back to me my "memory," and the ability to make wholesome choices and to examine my motives. In short, it has taught me how to be alert to the significance of my being here.

I believe that no recovery is by chance. Mine was the result of a deliberate choice to live, to make peace with myself and to dissolve my cancer, which I had created inside of me. Before this resolve set in, I went through a dark period of fear followed by a longer stage of having blind faith in several well-recognized physicians and established medical institutions. Soon after being reassured that my

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condition was benign, I learned it was not. It had migrated throughout the body and taken firm root in my liver; a malignant mass had also formed next to my kidneys. The pace of my physical failing was simply accelerated by the many rounds of radiation therapy. An array of baffled physicians began offering me various comfortable ways to exit the planet.

While in the warm, false embrace of morphine following my tenth surgical operation, I understood that I would most assuredly die unless I ran from what was then the fifth medical facility. The raw truth had impacted and, for the first time in my life, I felt lost. Years of anger and frustration, along with pain, surfaced. Anger at allowing myself to be thrown against those cold walls with no reprieve; frustration with those scientific chaps who had no regard for the cause of my condition; pain from realizing I had no choice but to audit my life and my agenda for it.

I knew that I would come face to face with my reasons for trying to kill myself at such a young age. Examining every detail of my past with a microscope was crucial to my new agenda—my recovery agenda. My biggest discovery in the process was that the real battles had begun long before my cancer surfaced. During this period of soul searching, I had to be extremely honest with myself and have consistency with my disciplines. I recognized that my cancer was born of me and because of me. / was the problem, and yet invariably also the solution.

Solitude was essential to the primal probing of my innermost self. That winter, I isolated myself for three months in a small cabin in the undifferentiated white of the Vermont winter. If I was going to die, I had to set certain things right with myself. As I kept the wood fires burning, I ceaselessly emptied myself of fears, pain, hopes, dreams, and disappointments. Days ran into nights unnoticed because of the tears. I understood how death had become an unconscious solution to my grief, and how all my actions had been channeled to that end. I saw how well I had manipulated my life, and how its successes had been founded on an enormous myth of my own construction.

I was guilty of tampering with the subtle forces of my primal self. I had been brought up in a traditional Hindu home in British Guiana, three generations re-

moved from mother India. By the age of fifteen, I had decided to recarve my life to fit an image of my own choosing. This action was rooted in the false belief that I had the power to live separately from the circumstances of a painful childhood, that I could totally replace the family, the tradition, the lineage, and all the beauty and anguish that were an intrinsic part of my personal heritage. In sum, I had created a second life.

What I had not counted on was the factor of memory: the unerasable record of layer upon layer of both resolved and unresolved past impressions. The truths too painful to deal with; the unrealistic expectations of myself; the childhood agonies I had run from; the loose ends of family ties; the primal anger that stemmed from generations of being uprooted—all these were stored intact. They became the fodder for my recovery.

This division in myself, this second life, was the primary reason for my cancer. According to the Vedic scriptures, there are pursuits in life common to all human beings: *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*. Dharma is one's alignment with what is right as defined by the universal laws of nature; artha is the natural pursuit of wealth; kama is the natural pursuit of pleasures; and moksha is absolute freedom or liberation from all actions of artha, kama, and even dharma. The cycle of rebirth can only end through moksha, when direct knowledge of the self is known. Moksha, freedom from human limitation, is considered the last accomplishment of human life. Although the pursuit of wealth and pleasure is admittedly a natural part of life, when the means defy the laws of universal dharma, that pursuit becomes a living hell. Dharma, the universal law of nature, is part of every society, every tradition, every religion, as it is part of every human being. By common sense, we are aware when we rub against the grain of what is right.

Through that Vermont winter, I cossetted myself in the warmth of a raging fire only to feel the desolate cold of my inner being. How many inner signals I must have missed to find myself confronted with this fatal situation. How wrong I was in trying to rewrite my destiny. For those few months, my nightmares became reality as I delved into all my unconscious

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agendas. Cancer, indeed, has a way of knocking us down in order to get us out of our own way.

According to the Vedas, the ancient sacred scriptures of India, six qualities are necessary to succeed in any venture: proper effort; perseverance; courage; knowledge of the given pursuit; skill and resources; and the capacity to overcome obstacles. While these qualities brought me great success in the material world, ironically I had neglected to apply them to my life as a human being. As a result, my shallow success inevitably had to collapse. I had tampered with universal forces and thus was deprived of their invincible protection.

Finally I reached the bottom and felt that to continue to live would be too brutal. Too tired to pursue answers to the great mysteries, I prayed to quietly slip away. In the agony of this prayer, a vision of my father appeared. I had severed all ties with my father and family twelve years earlier. As his image appeared to me my life began to turn inside out. The floodgates of cognition burst open, and memories of the past washed through my mind. All the closets were being emptied; all the monsters were pouring out. As I beheld his face—humbled by the years, seasoned with wisdom, quiet and compassionate—I was startled not to find the terrifying giant of my childhood. He seemed to know of my grief and was appearing to remind me of something I had forgotten since childhood. That something was *karma*. The word dropped like a bomb. The inescapable, the inevitable. What was death but a cosmic reaction to all actions in life, a notch in the wheel of life, and a guaranteed rebirth.

According to the Vedas, a human birth is not easy to achieve. Once the human body materializes, whether we understand it as due to karma or to natural selection, the factor of free will and the power of self-reflection come into play. The human birth is the only one endowed with the capacity to make choices. Each choice we make fuels the turning of the wheel of karma. Once we recognize this innate power, we must take responsibility for all our actions. I saw that to slip away silently would only compound my errors. I would then incur even more pain in the next life on the continuum of the life cycle. For death, according to the laws of karma, is but a brief silencing of memory.

The Atman, which is the immortal spirit in each of us, continues, as do the collective memories of all our lives, which serve as essential guides through all time. Our choices and actions determine the nature of our rebirths. We are fully accountable for the choice to die, like the choice to live. If death was not the absolute resolution, what was my big hurry to stop spinning the wheel of life? I had to act according to the dharma. I had no choice but to see this birth through to its proper conclusion. Cancer showed me the false notions of my ways and the truth of the saying, *Dharma raksati raksatah*: if you protect dharma, it will protect you.

One day after three months, I left Vermont with the full knowledge that I would live. From that day on I felt death's grip loosen. Free of my old burdens, I had a lightness and a certain serenity. I took complete control of my life. Most of my recovery had in fact occurred during those few timeless months. Upon my returning to the world and having several tests, no sign of cancer was present in my blood. Prior to Vermont, the growth rate of my tumors had been rapid. Now only the tumor above one kidney remained, and it was about the same size as before. It was clear that my purging had arrested the disease, and that I was on the winning side.

Since the remaining tumor was inoperable, I was presented with a new set of options. A complete diet and lifestyle change was inevitable, but these changes would take a long time to finally rid my body of the tumor. Fears lingered, as I was still unable to trust that the intelligence of nature, my nature, would rid my body of all foreign matter as the connection to memory and my inner being strengthened. I looked into a course of chemotherapy treatment. Although I had lost faith in the scientific medical practices, I was still dependent on the scientists, with their obsession to achieve the end regardless of means. I understood that before my Vermont sojourn, I had been absent from my own healing process. Now I wanted to rid my body immediately of the tumor and confront the challenge of assuming full responsibility for my actions. At least I was going to be very present and involved in the curative process. To rid myself of my residual enemy, I sought and found a doctor of great

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reason and science with whom I could work.

Under his supervision, three erudite diagnosticians were enlisted to review my biopsies, old and current. Everyone agreed on one point: it was a very rare strain of cancer. This was, at least, a good beginning. I implored them to tell me the exact nature of my condition; no more shots in the dark. I tested the patience and genius of my doctor and found his kindness and genius rare. Together, working with method, reason, and prayer, we eventually succeeded. My body was totally free of any signs of cancer. He quickly encouraged me to reunite with my family, who had since migrated to Canada due to the internal conflicts in British Guiana.

Upon returning from an embracing reconciliation with my family, I went back to sit in my park in Greenwich Village. This time the pigeons stayed and scrounged around uninterruptedly for food. I knew then that I was free of my cancer. I knew that I need never go back to the hospital for further blood tests. The cognitive memories of my past and future had become so powerful that they would guide me through this weave of form, motion, and sound called life, until in time even that weave would be erased by the eternal consciousness.

Now the real work was to begin. It was time to test my bravado, for it takes courage to live a simple, decent, and honest life. I learned to accommodate and forgive the people who caused me pain. I learned to forgive myself for my own trespasses. Little by little, I increased my quiet time.

As the daily routine became a daily discipline, the grace in my life increased. I began to aid fellow cancer patients, most of whom were left helpless by conventional therapies. I was asked to meet with a young man named Russell who had prostate cancer. His father, who strongly supported conventional therapy, was quite concerned that his son opted for the alternative course of macrobiotics. When I saw Russell in Newport, Rhode Island, two years later, his radiant health and good looks commanded my attention. He had cured himself of cancer through the use of wholesome foods and activities, and through the recognition of the oneness between his self and the supreme spirit.

I was beginning to understand that it is the spirit of light, air, soil, and the river which appears as this densely packed energy I call my body. As humans, we become so thickly absorbed in our separate and false realities that we lose our memory of being. In order to heal, we need to remember our being. Every action we perform flows from the immovable axis of our spirit.

I began to apply a constant alertness in my life. My practice of yoga asanas and meditation began. Studying natural means to good health became part of my daily life. While I continued to live and work in New York, with all its distractions, for years after my cancer bout, my focus was on the dharma and values important to my newly found freedom. My life became wholesome and conscious. I enjoyed the grace of my beautiful friends Aveline and Michio Kushi, pillars of the macrobiotic way of life. I began home studies in Oriental medicine, and finally my search led me to the discovery of Ayurveda, the mother of all healing sciences.

Perhaps it was my Hindu lineage that created such a deep desire in me to delve into this ancient wisdom of God, man, and nature. My studies of Ayurveda are based on the collected Sanskrit works, Samhitas, of Charaka and Sushruta, and an array of Ayurvedic works by masters such as Vaidya Bhagwan Dash, Pandit Shiv Sharma, Dr. Vasant Lad, and Dr. Robert E. Svoboda.

It has been twelve years since I began practicing and studying the general disciplines of naturopathy. This book is a synthesis of my life's discoveries. The unerasable truths and knowledge I found within myself lie within each of us. We can all tap this storehouse of cognitive memories. My story is one of how disease establishes itself in a body that refused to acknowledge its roots, that denied painful or unpleasant experiential memories. By severing part of my experiential memory, I had severed my deeper roots to the earth and my cosmic connection, as it were, in the form of my cognitive memory. I devote some of the first chapter in this book to examining the significance of cognitive memory in wholesome and healthful living.

Although this book is based on the Ayurvedic system of wellness, I have extracted and fused informa-

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tion from many systems and global practices. Most recently I have delved into the endless well of nectar, Vedanta—the end portion of the Vedas dealing with the study of self-knowledge.

After my father's death, the Lord's abiding and abundant grace blessed me with the arrival of my beloved teacher, His Holiness Swami Dayananda Saraswati. I lived with my teacher for several years and began my official studies in Sanskrit and Vedanta. Though I no longer live at the ashram, the presence of this great sage is continually with me as I study and imbibe his great wisdom and guidance in the daily dispensation of living.

I begin this book with a peace invocation from the Vedas.

*Svasti prajabhyah paripalayantam / nyajena margena  
mahim mahisah Gobrahmanebhyah  
subham astu nityam I lokah samastah  
sukhino bhavantu  
Kale varsatu parjanya / prthivi sasya salini Deso  
yam ksobha rahita I brahmanah santu nirbhayah*

May people be happy. May the peacemakers  
righteously rule the Earth.

Let there be welfare for animals and people  
of wisdom at all times.

May all be happy. May it rain at  
the proper time. May the Earth  
produce grains.

May this world be free from famine. May people of  
contemplation be fearless.

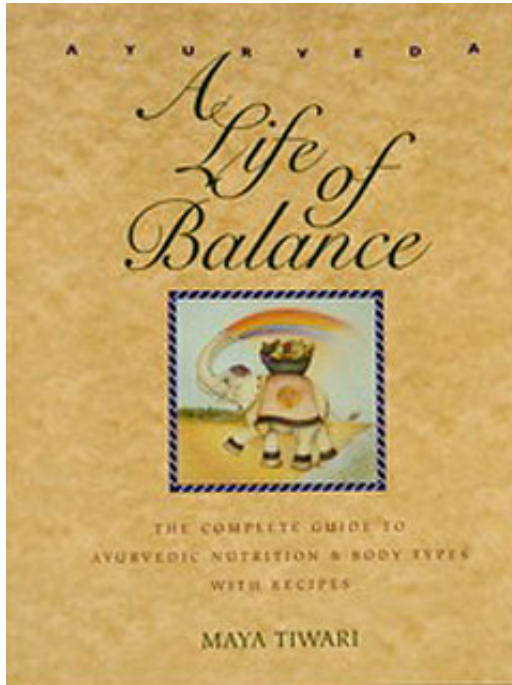
I write this book to explore the nature of the human universe. From the beginning of time, the ancients referred to both the body and the universe as food. Christ, at the Last Supper with his disciples, shared the bread, which symbolized his body. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna, in conversing with Arjuna, refers to his body as food and as the consumer of food. We are the air, water, soil, and light of this planet. Every

grain of sand, every mountain range, every river, and every leaf contains the same elements. We celebrate nature in our very nature. We eat from nature what is within our nature. The food body of the universe is our personal food body. There is no difference.

I also write this book to refresh our cognitive memories. I use many ancient precepts from the Vedas to paint images that were originally transmuted in the fire of the universal mind. These pictures vivify the essence of being. They stir the cognitive memories of the *ahamkara*, the individual self, so that we may remember the Atman—our true timeless and boundless nature.

I explore the transformation of the five elements, which interlace the "material" of our being. Body types, or *doshas*, are a paradigm of the universal pattern. When we understand this microcosm, we are fully aware of reflecting the macrocosm. The foods, menus, and recipes given here are culled from the myriad of essential spices, herbs, grains, legumes, vegetables, fruits, and seeds of the planet, all woven in a state of balance by the Vedic principles of life.

Each body type has its own special practices or *sadhanas*. These are wholesome and abiding activities that are attuned to nature and that have been refined through the memory of all time. The sadhana inherent within each life form is prodded by memory. Every stirring within tree and animal, every stillness and transmutation within mountain and earth, every flow and confluence of streams and rivers, every leap of a kangaroo, flight of the deer, hop of a rabbit, gait of a tiger, fluttering of a sparrow, gliding of an eagle, every motion signifies sadhana. This is the pattern based on the memory of the universe. I propose we introduce sadhana into our lives as a wholesome guide to remembering nature. Sadhana stirs our cognitive memory and revives the lost art of beauty, grace, and accommodation. Through sadhana we are able to garner the vibrations of the universe to help us meld with the earth body.



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