



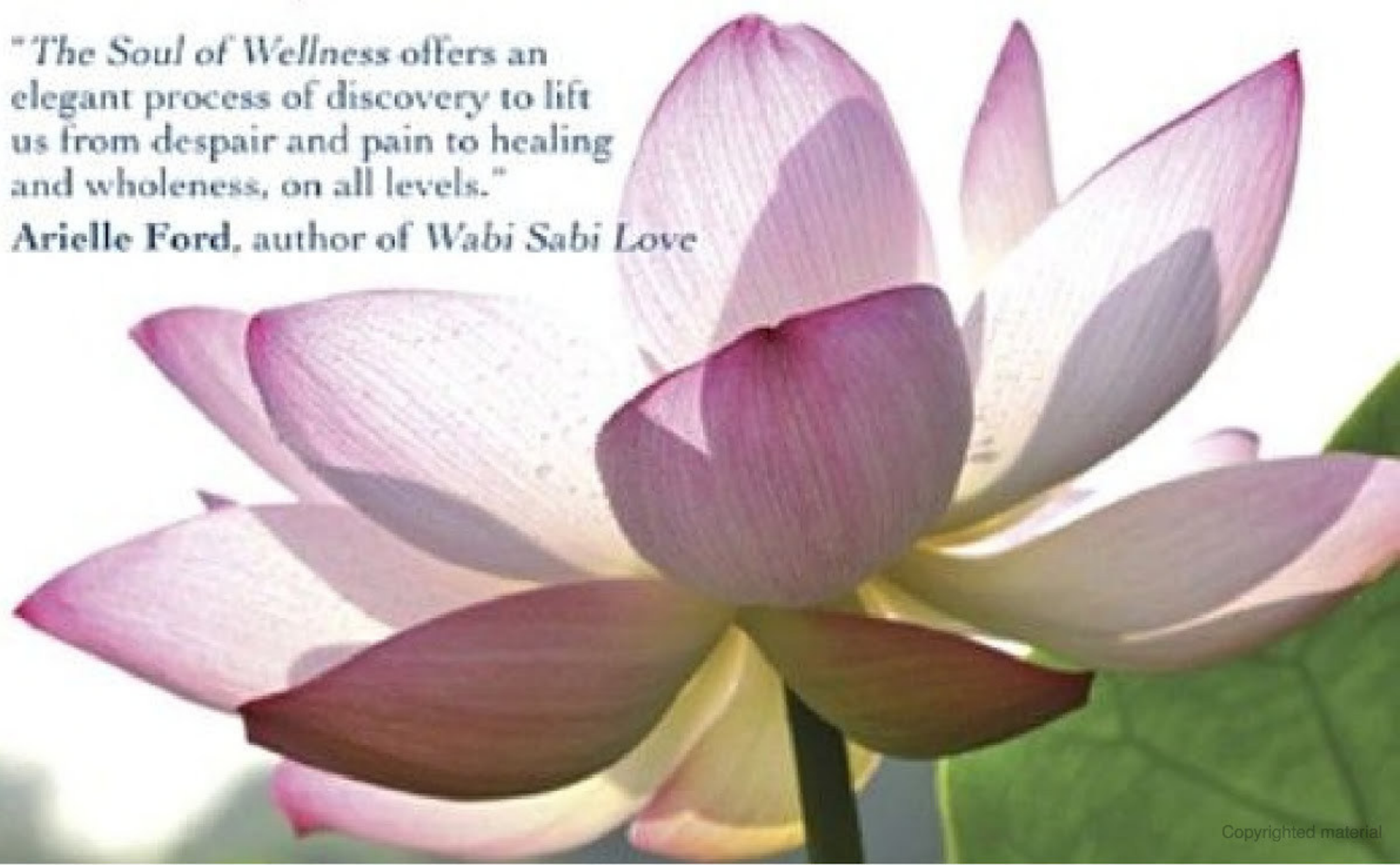
THE SOUL OF WELLNESS

12 HOLISTIC PRINCIPLES FOR
ACHIEVING A HEALTHY BODY,
MIND, HEART, AND SPIRIT

Rajiv Parti, M.D.

"The Soul of Wellness offers an elegant process of discovery to lift us from despair and pain to healing and wholeness, on all levels."

Arielle Ford, author of Wabi Sabi Love



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PREFACE



An Adventure into Wellness

To seek out and discover the fundamental principles of wellness can be an exciting adventure, one that affects all aspects of our lives. It is an adventure that includes coming to understand the power of Spirit to help us achieve maximum wellness in all dimensions. That is what this book is about—how Spirit can become a profound source of healing, harmony, and happiness for each of us. Before we begin this adventure, it may help you to better understand the roots of this book if I tell you a few things about myself and my own journey into wellness.

I always wanted to be a healer. But as a boy, I was unsure of what kind. Sometimes I leaned toward medicine, having a close relative who was a physician. At other times, I thought spirituality was my calling. I pondered deep questions: Why are we here? What is the purpose of life? I even seriously considered becoming a monk.

In time, though, I decided my calling was medicine. I earned my M.D. degree from Delhi University and in 1982 emigrated to the United States, where I took advanced training in anesthesiology. I became a successful practicing anesthesiologist and specialist in pain management. In 1987 I married my beautiful wife and best friend, and we had three wonderful children.

I eventually became Chief of Anesthesiology at a large community hospital. Life was good. I was fulfilling the American dream materialistically, with a large house and expensive cars. Then two crucial factors entered my life.

The first was growing dissatisfaction as I realized that making money was not the key to my happiness. I began to again ask those questions from childhood: What gives life its greatest meaning? What is the source of happiness? The second factor was a serious wrist injury that threatened my work. Several surgeries failed to solve the problem, and I developed reflex sympathetic dystrophy. This resulted in chronic pain in my wrist, arm, and shoulder. I was taking pain medications but not getting better. I decided to try alternative pain management therapies and began a program of regular meditation and visualization. The results were very positive. I was able to continue doing the work I loved. These two factors awakened in me a great interest in mind-body medicine and the science of happiness and fulfillment. I began studying scientific research in the field and spoke to key people such as Deepak Chopra, M.D., Dr. David Frawley, and Robin Sharma. I attended a mind-body course at Harvard Medical School. I began

understanding that wellness is multi-dimensional, encompassing physical, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being, and that the science of wellness should include both scientific research and ancient wisdom. The word “healer” took on a new meaning for me. I realized that I want to be a healer not only of the body, but of the mind and spirit.

I had just started writing about and speaking on total wellness when I discovered I had prostate cancer, and my Dark Night of the Soul began. I underwent surgery for the cancer, but there were complications. Then there were further surgeries and more complications. On Christmas Eve, 2010, I developed a severe post-surgery infection. Shivering like a leaf, with a 105-degree temperature, I was rushed to the hospital thinking I would die. The infection was drained and finally defeated, but I was left with raw, open surgical wounds for weeks after. All of these complications left me physically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually drained.

But my Dark Night continued. I developed chronic pelvic pain from the half dozen urological surgeries I had undergone, as well as severe depression. I was on a combination of anti-depressants and pain meds. Because I was technically physically well with medication, I was deemed well enough to go back to work as an anesthesiologist. But I knew it was not the right thing to do because even a slight error in my judgment could kill somebody, and given all the medications I was on, that slight error seemed possible. I wouldn't do it. I therefore

found myself unable to work and having to go on medical disability. My income dropped precipitously and I had to sell my house at a substantial loss and move to one a quarter the price of my previous house. I had lost my job, my income, my house, all that was—at least superficially—dear to me. It was as if one-by-one the lights were switching off.

But the dearest thing of all I did not lose—my family. My wife's true, unconditional love was my anchor during this emotional tsunami. Due to her love and support and that of the rest of my family, as well as the harmonious balancing effects of Ayurveda and my focusing more and more on spiritual principles, my Dark Night finally passed.

Today, I am well again in all dimensions. But I had to face that long trial to reconfirm and solidify my true purpose. Though I could now return to being an anesthesiologist, it is time for me to go much further. I now aspire to be a healer of all dimensions, while emphasizing the power of Spirit and the underlying spirituality that connects us all. I speak now as a medical doctor who also personally understands the trials of a patient. As a physician, I want to dwell in the Science of Happiness and the medical benefits of ancient traditions like meditation, yoga, and Ayurveda.

You are holding in your hands some of the fruits of my latest efforts to understand and transmit the principles of wellness. *The Soul of Wellness* is about the very essence of well-being—Spirit. It explains some of the many ways Spirit can enter into our lives,

empowering us and creating greater wellness in all dimensions of our existence.

Let us begin our adventure into wellness as we explore together its deepest principles.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to express my sincere appreciation to some very important people in my life and to some special people who provided crucial input as *The Soul of Wellness* was being completed. First of all, I want to thank my mother Swaran Parti, and my father J.C. Parti, for their indelible love and unwavering support throughout my life. You raised me as all parents should raise their children—to believe I was capable of doing anything I set my mind and hard work to. Thank you from the bottom of my heart, Mom and Dad.

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INTRODUCTION



Defining the Soul of Wellness

Wellness is something we hear a lot about these days. We all know the term denotes something very desirable, something we should be seeking. But what, actually, is wellness?

Some might say that wellness refers to physical health and leave it at that. But how about people who are mostly physically healthy, but also very stressed out, lonely, fearful, or unhappy? Do these people have wellness? Not totally. They may have a degree of physical well-being, but not complete wellness. That's because wellness includes much more than physiological health. In fact, wellness has four dimensions, each one essential to your overall well-being and satisfaction with life.

Three Dimensions of Wellness: Body, Mind, and Heart

Three of the four dimensions of wellness are widely

accepted today. The first dimension is *Body*. This includes all aspects of your physical health—your cardiovascular system, immune system, and all the rest. To have *Wellness of Body*, all of these systems must be working together in an efficient, natural way.

Physical wellness is crucial because your body is one of your two fundamental instruments for living. It is through your body that you are able to see and smell the beauty of a rose and hear the lilting call of a bird. It is by means of your body that you can stroll through a park, refinish a bookcase, and change a diaper to insure the cleanliness of your baby. The healthier your body, the better you are able to perceive the world around you and perform a thousand important functions each day.

The second dimension of wellness is *Mind*, your other fundamental instrument for living. Your mind consists of a cognitive (thinking) part and an affective (feeling) part. The cognitive part includes your beliefs, thoughts, and imaginings. Through this aspect of your mind, when it is whole and functioning well, you are able to make sense of your experiences, communicate with others, and plan for your future. The affective part includes your emotions, motivations, and attitudes toward life. This aspect of your mind, when it is healthy, enables you to enjoy a beautiful sunset, feel empathy for a friend, and get excited about a new project. *Wellness of Mind* encompasses both parts of your mind. It includes thinking clearly, taking a positive approach to the world, and finding interest and joy in the world around you. *Wellness of Mind* is essential for living a happy life

steeped in rich, rewarding experiences.

The third dimension of wellness is *Heart*. This dimension consists of your capacity to have good relationships with other people and to do so with generosity and understanding. I use the word “Heart” because traditionally, we think of the heart as the source of our caring for others. It is Heart that takes you out to lunch with a friend, cares for a child who is ill, and enjoys a barbecue with your neighbors. *Wellness of Heart* includes spending quality time with family and friends. It also means showing kindness to others and concern for those less fortunate than you. There is ample reason to believe that happiness and overall well-being depend on living a life with Heart as much as they do on physical and mental health.

These three dimensions of wellness—Body, Mind, and Heart—are three pillars upon which we build our lives. But unlike most pillars, they do not stand totally separate from each other. In fact, they are very much interrelated.

Take the relationship of Body to Mind. We all know that having a bad cold can slow our thinking processes and create emotional boredom. And we know that a good cardiovascular workout can make us mentally sharper and give us an emotional boost. These are just two examples of the countless ways Wellness of Body can affect Wellness of Mind. Similarly, Mind affects Body; Heart affects Mind, and so on through all the combinations. When we create wellness in any of these three dimensions, we promote wellness in the others.

The relationship isn't perfect, of course. We can be rich in Mind and relatively poor in Body, or rich in Body and poor in the relationships that constitute Heart. But in general, an increase in wellness in any dimension helps increase wellness in the others.

This interrelatedness of Body, Mind, and Heart makes it even clearer that to enjoy a rich and satisfying sojourn on Earth—a life full of meaningful relationships, activities, and pleasures—we need maximum wellness in all three dimensions.

Spirit as the Fourth Dimension of Wellness

Most people today recognize the importance of these first three dimensions of wellness. But there is one more dimension that many people barely recognize. Yet this fourth dimension of wellness is as important as the other three for living a happy and fulfilling life. In fact, it is so fundamental that it forms the core, the essence, the very *Soul of Wellness*.

The fourth dimension of wellness I am talking about is *Spirit*.

Spirit is about feeling connected to something much larger than ourselves, something precious, enduring, and of infinite value. For some, the spiritual connection consists of a felt relationship to a Creator or a Higher Reality. Others feel a sacred connection to the natural world or to humanity. For still others, dedication to perennial values such as truth and compassion guide their lives. Embracing our spiritual dimension in any of these ways creates meaning and promotes *Wellness of*

Spirit. This spiritual wellness:

- Helps us make sense of our lives
- Opens us to the goodness and beauty surrounding us
- Gives us a deep appreciation for the world, other people, and ourselves
- Releases the Divinity that resides within us.

Despite its importance, many in today's society have lost sight of this fourth dimension of wellness. Even if they attend religious services or occasionally contemplate the wonder and mystery of existence, these experiences play little part in their daily activities. As a result, they lack the powerful sense of meaning and depth that comes from fully engaging their spiritual dimension. They also miss out on the synergistic power of Spirit to infuse and promote wellness in the other three dimensions of their lives.

Part of the problem may be that people don't understand how Spirit can help create overall well-being. It is easy to comprehend how wellness in Body promotes wellness in Mind and how good relationships (Heart) make us feel better physically and mentally. But it may not be clear how wellness of Spirit can promote our well-being in the other dimensions. Yet spiritual wellness can profoundly affect Body, Mind, and Heart. One way it does this is by clarifying what is truly important to us.

Emily's Journey to a More Spiritual

Understanding through Yoga and Meditation

As an example, consider Emily, a successful businesswoman with a husband and two school-aged girls.

Physically, Emily seemed to have plenty of energy and appeared to be healthy. Mentally, her challenging work kept her sharp. And socially, she was active outside the home, while she also tried to provide quality time to her husband and daughters.

A casual observer might have concluded that Emily was on top of things in regard to Body, Mind, and Heart. But actually, she was less well in those dimensions than she appeared. A main reason was her recent promotion to a more responsible position, which had resulted in a lot of job-related stress. This had led to a rise in her blood pressure and a peptic ulcer. The pressure was also taking a mental toll. She was enjoying her work much less than before, and stress headaches often made it difficult for her to think clearly. Socially, too, things were not as satisfactory as they seemed. Though Emily had many acquaintances, she had no close friends. And most of the events she attended were job-related and gave her little joy. At home, she tried hard to give time to her husband and girls, but worrying about problems at work often made her irritable and distant.

In the face of these issues, Emily had begun questioning her life. She would lie awake at night wondering: Why don't I enjoy things more? Why am I working so hard? What's the purpose of my life, anyway, just to keep making money until I die?

In the midst of this increasingly disturbing and chaotic situation, Emily's aerobics instructor invited her to attend a

yoga class. Yoga? Emily thought. Isn't that something only people who are interested in Eastern religions do? But when the instructor mentioned that yoga was a good stress reliever, she decided to give it a try.

The yoga teacher, a mature woman, was very competent. As she led the classes, she exuded calmness and wisdom. Emily quickly found that yoga did in fact relax her physically and mentally. Soon, she began staying after class to talk with the teacher about the history and philosophy of yoga. She started feeling that an entire world of Spirit was opening up to her. When she discovered that the instructor also taught a class in meditation, she immediately joined. As she learned the ancient art of meditation, she was amazed at how it alleviated her stressful feelings and opened her mind.

When she meditated, she became acutely aware of herself and her surroundings. She would feel herself at the center of a sometimes challenging, but ultimately loving universe that included her husband, children, co-workers, and clients. At home, she started reading the Bible, a book she had not opened since she was a child. There she found many passages that made beautiful sense to her. Her questions about life began resolving themselves. Gradually, she came to see the meaning of her life as centered on simply loving and helping to provide for her family, striving to be a sharp but compassionate businessperson, and enjoying being alive each moment of the day.

In short, Emily began acquiring Wellness of Spirit. As a result, she found her wellness improving in the other three dimensions. At work, problems stopped aggravating and worrying her so much. She could sometimes even laugh at a

problematic situation as she set about tackling it. At home she was more engaged with her kids and husband and was no longer short with them. And two months after she started the meditation class, she found that her blood pressure had dropped back to normal and her ulcer was virtually gone.

Emily's story is not unusual. Again and again I have seen individuals whose wellness was being compromised in Body, Mind, and Heart because they paid little attention to the dimension of Spirit. In some cases, the person eventually went into a tailspin that led to addictive behaviors, depression, financial ruin, divorce, or even suicide. In other, happier cases, the individual managed to pull out of their descent before it was too late. For most if not all of the second group, the pull-out came when they opened up their spiritual dimension.

How do I know this? Because I have been there. Years ago, I found myself in a terrible tailspin at a time when my spiritual wellness was very low. What brought me out of the turmoil was Spirit working through the love of my family. Later, as I learned more about the fundamental principles of spiritual wellness, I began to soar to new heights of well-being in all dimensions of my life. And that's why I am writing this book—to help others soar.

Throughout humankind's existence, Spirit has been greatly needed, and our time is no exception. Today we face a powerful challenge to our spiritual dimension—unbridled egoism and runaway materialism. As technology brings material comforts and affluence to millions of people, the desire to gain more and more possessions has become ascendant in many societies.

It is not that money and ownership are bad. On the contrary, money can purchase many fine things—a comfortable home, educational opportunities, travel, freedom from drudgery, and much more. In fact, if used wisely, money can help foster Spirit in the world. The problem is the idea that making as much money as possible is the most worthwhile goal in life. When this idea becomes dominant in a person's mind, it often quickly breeds another idea—the belief that it is all right to make money in any way available. And it is these two ideas—that nothing has more value than money and that it is acceptable to make money *at all other costs*—that make up the unhealthy core of runaway materialism.

This extreme materialism has a stranglehold on countless people in our society. For some, it seems to be a death grip. People who already have many things are unhappy because they want more—getting more is the only thing that ever truly motivates them. People who don't have as much are unhappy because others have more. And they remain dissatisfied as long as affluence eludes them.

This constant focus on making money and acquiring possessions amounts to a rejection of Spirit. This is a tragedy on many levels. Spirit is so vast, so deep and important, that it should infuse our lives on a daily basis. It is through Spirit that we perceive the majesty of a mountain, the blessedness in a child's laughter, and the magic in a firefly's tiny light. It is through Spirit that we come to understand that we are unique and have a holy purpose in life. It is through Spirit that we find meaning

in our day-to-day work, our relationships with others, and our perceptions of the world.

Some may think that to embrace Spirit in their lives it is enough to spend an hour a week in a church, temple, or mosque, or a few minutes contemplating nature or the stars. But if they ignore their spiritual dimension for the rest of the week, they are effectively disavowing Spirit.

Those who turn their backs on Spirit fail to recognize it as a critically important dimension of their lives. The idea of spiritual wellness never occurs to them. They also fail to recognize that by ignoring wellness in Spirit, they are sabotaging their wellness in Body, Mind, and Heart. Like Emily, it is essential for each of us to understand who we are within a larger context. The questions that Emily found herself facing are questions we all can ask. Who am I in relation to my family and friends, humanity, and nature? What purpose should I seek in life? How should I approach each day? What should I strive to leave behind when I die? These are questions of Spirit. And the answers we find to those questions will have an immense bearing on our wellness in all dimensions of our being.

In fact, without Spirit, total wellness in any dimension is impossible to achieve. This is most obvious for Heart. Without Spirit, Heart degenerates into cold, uncaring relationships lacking in kindness and respect. For millions of people, such relationships are the norm. Without Spirit, the dimension of Heart has no heart.

This is because Spirit is the wellspring of love.

Consider a mother cradling her baby in her arms, cherishing and protecting the little child. There is nothing more full of Spirit than the mother's actions at that moment. And there is nothing more full of Heart. The two go hand in hand. Spirit infuses the Heart with love, and we carry that love to our relationships with others. Without Spirit, there is no true Heart and no wellness of Heart.

Without Spirit, total wellness also eludes Mind. If we ignore Spirit and get caught in the grip of unrestrained ego-gratification, our thoughts and imaginings revolve around what we can get for ourselves and how to get it. Our emotions are dominated by selfishness and greed. Our motivations are totally self-serving as we consider other people to be mere tools for our use. We are willing to twist the truth like a pretzel to serve our own interests. Those who allow themselves to be dominated by a grasping ego usually believe that their ideas and behavior are in their best interest. But they could not be more wrong. Behavior dominated by such drives does not bring happiness. Instead, it promotes a shallow, self-serving life without depth, without caring relationships, without honor. It eventually fosters anxiety, alienation, loneliness, and depression—the opposite of emotional wellness.

But if we embrace Spirit, nourishing beliefs take root and then blossom in our minds. We come to understand the holiness of the world and every person in it. We begin thinking deeply about the purpose of our lives and what undertakings have greatest value for us. We

develop beliefs about the importance of living in the truth and about being open to the goodness of the world. Such beliefs are the epitome of wellness in the thinking part of Mind. As for the feeling part, Spirit infuses us with positive emotions, attitudes, and motivations that reveal life to us as it truly is and can be. We begin feeling the world as an infinite garden of delight, beauty, and possibility.

Even in the case of Body, total wellness is impossible without Spirit. Emily is a good example of this. The positive values and meanings brought by Spirit help to defuse the anxieties created by modern life. They heal the physiological ravages of stress. A strong spiritual outlook strengthens the immune system and fosters resilience. Spirit also teaches us that Body is holy. This is a powerful motivator for taking care of ourselves physically. If we allow it to do so, Spirit can permeate Body as completely as it does Heart and Mind.

From all of this, it is very clear that Spirit is not something that exists in some metaphysical space totally separate from us. It can infuse our lives deeply right here, right now, if we allow it to do so. It has a profound practical relationship to our well-being in all of our dimensions.

Spirit, simply put, is the *Soul of Wellness*. That is the deep truth that informs this book. In the coming pages you will learn principles and practices of Spirit that can foster wellness in each dimension of your being. Overall, you will learn from this book how to welcome Spirit into your life so that it flows clearly and deeply throughout

your Body, Mind, and Heart.

Each of the following chapters focuses on some key principle that teaches us how Spirit can infuse our lives with greater meaning, direction, and wellness. From the Ayurvedic emphasis on balancing inner nature with outer nature, to the Virtues of Heart and the Blessings of Gratitude, to explaining how Spirit creates a home in each of us, these principles are designed to leap off the page, reverberate within you, and create a space where wellness can prosper. Along the way, you will learn the stories of others who have found the joyous touch of Spirit empowering their lives. At the end of the discussion of each principle you will find two exercises to provide you with an opportunity to delve deeper into the insights or to put them into practice. Think of the exercises as a kind of workbook that accompanies the lessons found in *The Soul of Wellness*.

What I most want you to take from this book is Hope, Healing, and Harmony.

Hope is your belief that you can fulfill your dreams. We all hope for a physically healthy life of accomplishment, rich experience, love, and beauty. But sometimes we may find ourselves in difficult situations when our hopes wane. At such points, renewing our Spirit can make a tremendous difference in our lives, rejuvenating hope, promoting wellness in all four dimensions, and empowering us to move into the future.

Healing is a quality that pertains to all four of our dimensions. To achieve total wellness, we must seek healing in every aspect of our being. This book focuses

on the intimate relationship of our spiritual dimension to Heart, Mind, and Body. Because of this relationship, spiritual principles and practices are able to foster healing and total wellness in all four dimensions.

Finally, these pages are about increasing **Harmony** in your life. Body, Mind, Heart, and Spirit are four aspects of a single infinitely valuable being—you. When you attend to the Soul of Wellness, which is Spirit, you promote balance and harmony in all four of your dimensions. The result is a beautiful music with deep overtones that echo and reverberate throughout your life. That music is the harmony of wellness.

PRINCIPLE 1



Ayurveda

Balance Inner Nature with Outer Nature

“He who knows others is learned; he who knows himself is wise.”

Lao-Tzu

from *Tao Te Ching*

Our human bodies are exquisitely complex and functional. Consider the rapid, delicate adjustments of our eyes while reading a book or of our fingers while tying a ribbon; these and a million other physical actions are far more wondrous than the most up-to-date inventions of technology. Our bodies are also immeasurably more important than any technological gadget. A new camera or printer can be a fine tool, but it is through our physical presence that we live our lives. And if the camera or printer goes wrong, we can purchase a new one. But there are no stores that sell new bodies.

Despite this, countless people provide only lackadaisical care for this most precious instrument. Such neglect is made all too easy by the many temptations we encounter these days. The two

cornerstones of healthy living, diet and exercise, face countless enticements that are contrary to the bodies that have evolved for us humans. Physiologically, we are not meant to eat supersized portions of high-calorie meals, or to sit motionless night after night in front of a television or computer. By giving into such temptations, we overwork our bodies in some ways; for example, by forcing it to digest and assimilate large amounts of fat. In other ways we underwork them by not getting enough cardiovascular or strength exercise. The result is a body out of balance.

This is why it is crucial that we understand what I call “the wisdom of healthy living.” This wisdom is about how to keep our bodily systems in balance. Fortunately, information about how to maintain health is increasingly available from books, the Internet, and other sources. However, most of this information consists only of physiological strategies. It takes little account of the connections among Body, Mind, Heart, and Spirit. But the wisdom of healthy living must pay attention to these other three dimensions of our lives. In a word, it must be *holistic*. In this chapter, I will explain the basic principles of an ancient and revered health and wellness system that takes such a holistic view. It began thousands of years ago in the Far East and continues as the primary wellness resource in present-day India with its one billion people. This wellness system is called *Ayurveda*, a name combining two Sanskrit words—*ayu*, meaning life, and *veda*, meaning knowledge. Thus, the term *Ayurveda* means, literally, the very thing we have been talking

about—the wisdom or knowledge of healthy living. I especially want to explain how the spiritual basis of this ancient wellness system can empower us to live in balance with the natural world. So, after providing a few details about Ayurveda, I will focus on the principles and practices of its spiritual foundations.

The Philosophy of Ayurveda

Ayurveda grew out of a philosophy about human nature. This philosophy holds that we are integral parts of a universe that is not only physical, but also permeated by Mind and Spirit. Because we reflect the universe in our essential nature, we too are composed of Body, Mind, and Spirit. This picture is similar to the four-dimensional view I explained in the introduction. We need only add that we are also social creatures, so Heart is yet another aspect of our being, one that is very human.

Based on this philosophy, Ayurveda began over 5,000 years ago and was passed down by word of mouth for hundreds of years. Eventually, the philosophy and the principles of Ayurveda were set down in four famous texts called the Vedas. Written about 3,500 years ago, the Rig Veda is the oldest religious text aside from certain funeral texts of the ancient Egyptians.

In its wisdom of healthy living, Ayurveda holds that at birth, we are animated by prana, a life force that exists throughout the universe. We are also infused with five basic principles that govern the universe: air, space, fire, water, and earth. These principles are inside of us in the

form of various qualities that we all exhibit. For example, air and space are represented in our bodies and minds by the qualities of lightness and spaciousness. Likewise, fire is represented by the heat within our living body, water by the moisture in our body, and earth by our flesh and bones. These qualities can be combined to form three bio-energetic forces, or patterns of energy, that govern our physical constitution. The three *doshas* are:

Vata – air and space

Pitta – fire and water

Kapha – water and earth

According to Ayurveda, each dosha affects our body, mind, and spirit. In the body, the energy of Vata governs our bodily movement, perception, circulation, and respiration; the energy of Pitta governs metabolism, including digestion and absorption; and the energy of Kapha governs growth and lubrication, including bodily tissues such as muscle and fat. In the mind, Vata relates to the movement from thought to thought, Pitta helps us assimilate our thoughts to gain understanding, and Kapha enhances memory and empathy. In our spiritual aspect, Vata is manifested as the life force, Pitta determines how brilliant the life force is, and Kapha governs our ability to protect our life force, and thus our life, in the face of threats and adversity.

On the Ayurvedic view, each person is born with a unique combination of the three doshas. This combination makes up the individual's specific constitution, including his or her body type (you will learn more about this in the first exercise at the end of

the chapter). Some people are primarily Vata types with fewer qualities of Pitta and Kapha. Others are mostly Pitta or Kapha. Some have two primary doshas, and a few have all three in roughly equal measure. We enter the world with each of our three doshas in perfect equilibrium. But over time, stressful impacts from outside as well as unwise personal decisions may throw our constitution out of balance, making us vulnerable to disease.

The Ayurvedic physician's purpose is first to understand the patient's unique constitution of doshas. The practitioner then determines a precise regimen of diet, sleep, and other activities that will match the patient's constitution and help maintain or restore the correct balance of the doshas. The physician understands how external forces such as herbs and massage, as well as internal forces such as meditation, can help reinstate an equilibrium that has been lost. Since mental and spiritual well-being play such an important part in health and wellness, the Ayurvedic practitioner also learns strategies for evaluating psychological wellness and for helping patients enhance their spiritual well-being. Overall, the goal of Ayurvedic therapies is to help people realize optimum wellness in all aspects of their existence.

The Ayurvedic Approach to Addiction Recovery

For Ayurveda, recovery from addiction to alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs begins with the addicted person being willing to be treated. From there, it proceeds

to understanding the reasons for the addiction and then undertaking several important lifestyle changes. These include an herbal-based detoxification process, practicing meditation and yoga, and going on a nutritious vegetarian diet.

Herbal therapy begins with hot herbal teas and herbal spices in food. These are intended to soothe and balance the battered digestive system. Therapy continues with an herbal detoxification process to purify the body. The original Ayurvedic cleansing process consisted of five therapies to root out deeply embedded stress and toxins and to help balance the doshas. Today, many practitioners reduce this to three therapies: Nasya (nasal cleaning), Basti (enemas), and Virechana (purgation). Ayurveda offers herbs such as Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*), Guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*), Yashtimadhu (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), and Shankhpushpi (*Convolvulus pluricaulis*) to restore memory and cognitive function that may have been impaired by the addiction.

A strict vegetarian diet is imposed on the addicted person. This consists of cooked whole grains, fresh vegetables, and fruits. Such food is highly nutritious and contains all the required vitamins and minerals. The diet should also include ghee (clarified butter), which acts as a lubricant and strengthens the immune system.

While Ayurveda's sister science, Yoga, is widely practiced today in the West, Ayurveda itself is less well known. But this is changing. There is a growing

appreciation for the centuries of knowledge represented by Ayurveda, and an increasing number of Westerners are learning about it as a complementary and alternative medical (CAM) system. Respected medical centers in the United States have begun embracing various aspects of Ayurveda, along with other CAM therapies. The efficacy of Ayurveda is still being evaluated in the West; however, there is growing evidence that it can be effective for many patients, especially those facing chronic illnesses such as arthritis.

Several principles of Ayurveda help explain its increasing acceptance in the West. One of these is its emphasis not on just curing disease, but on preventing it. While the Western medical model focuses on treating illness, Ayurveda gives equal importance to prevention. A second reason for the growing acceptance of Ayurveda is its holistic nature. Thousands of years ago, Ayurvedic physicians understood something that is only starting to be understood in the West—that mental, physical, and spiritual health are intertwined. This means that understanding mental and spiritual deficiencies and restoring proper balance in these areas is as important as treating physical imbalances.

A third reason Ayurveda is taking root in the West is its emphasis on the individual person. Patients of Western medicine often feel that their unique characteristics are overlooked by health practitioners. But Ayurveda insists that each of us has a unique physical and mental constitution and that a physician must understand this constitution in order to provide

effective treatment. As a result, the physician is very focused on the individual. A fourth aspect of Ayurveda that many in the West find attractive is its emphasis on self-understanding and on taking personal responsibility for one's own health and wellness.

The Soul of Wellness in Ayurveda

Apart from its details, Ayurveda presents a profound spiritual vision of wellness. For Ayurveda, the idea of an isolated human being unconnected to anything else is a fiction. Each of us is intimately related to a world with countless beneficial aspects, from the sun that warms us, to the nourishing vegetables and herbs that we eat, to the bacteria that line our gastrointestinal tract and aid in digestion. But the world also includes dangers—hurricanes, poisonous mushrooms, life-threatening viruses, and many more. The wisdom of healthy living requires us to develop strategies for coexisting in harmony with this double-edged universe. We must understand how outer nature affects our inner nature. For example, which foods energize our bodies and which ones clog our arteries? Which herbs and spices sharpen our minds, and which ones dull our senses? Based on this understanding, we must balance inner nature with outer nature.

Over thousands of years Ayurveda and other nature-focused wellness systems developed much wisdom about living in harmony with nature. This was helped by the fact that communities remained small, with most people employed in jobs that involved close contact with nature.

But today the percentage of people who live and work in natural settings has greatly decreased, while jobs in artificial environments have burgeoned. As a result, knowledge about how to live in harmony with nature has been forgotten by many. In this country millions of people drive each morning on clogged freeways to jobs where the natural world is represented by a potted plant or two and a few windows looking out on a smoggy sky. They then return on the same busy freeway to lodgings with very little or no green space. For these millions, nature can seem far away, as if it is in another world.

But despite appearances, even those among us who are surrounded by pavement and concrete are as fully a part of nature as people who lived a hundred or a thousand years ago. Every breath we inhale is of air that has circumvented the globe. The energy in every bite of food we ingest can ultimately be traced to some plant warmed by the sun. And though an office may be graced by only a single fern, countless other unseen denizens of the natural world are close at hand, including bacteria and viruses that can set us low.

Ayurveda's greatest gift is that it brings us back to the natural universe that we are part of. It insists that nature must be respected and embraced because it is the home into which we are born and where we *must* live. For Ayurveda, it is hopeless to seek wellness without learning how to balance our inner nature with outer nature. To try to create physical, mental, and social health without working in harmony with the world around us is like trying to breathe without air.

Mark's Change to a More Spiritual Life in Balance with Nature

This outlook is deeply spiritual in two ways. First, it puts wellness into a broad context, which is one hallmark of spirituality. Second, it holds that the universe to which we are intimately related is spiritual to its core—and therefore, so are we. One way to illustrate the double spirituality that informs Ayurveda is to tell you about a man I will call Mark.

Mark is a very modern man. He works downtown in a concrete jungle and lives in a high-rise building at the edge of the city. Several years back, unhappy with life, Mark became addicted to some of society's worst blandishments. Forty pounds overweight, he spent his evenings watching television, got little exercise, smoked a pack of cigarettes a day, and on many nights drank himself to sleep. His physician warned him that his bodily systems were gradually going haywire and that he needed to go on a diet, join a gym, and give up smoking and drinking to restore his body's natural balance. But Mark considered his addictions to be necessary evils to make his days livable. He convinced himself that as long as he kept taking his cholesterol and high blood pressure medications, everything would work out fine in the end. In reality, he was on the road to disaster.

One day, a business trip took Mark to a city close to the childhood home he had not seen in almost three decades. After his morning meeting, he was free the rest of the day, so he decided to take the hour drive to the small community where he grew up. The town, he learned on arrival, had changed

little. On its outskirts, he found the house where he had been raised. It was empty and up for sale. Mark walked around to the big back yard and discovered that the area where he had grown vegetables as a child was still there. He wandered down to the stream edging the property and sat there on a big rock warmed by the spring sun.

As he listened to the murmur of the water, he thought about the many days he had enjoyed playing by the stream. Back then, it had seemed he was always outside, loving the sun, the rain and snow, and the stars at night. In his little garden he had grown tomatoes, lettuce, and watermelons. How sweet it had been to come out on a hot August day, pick a ripe tomato off the vine, and eat it right there, its juice streaming down his chin. He thought about how things had changed so radically for him since then.

As he sat brooding, he noticed a spider's web in a clump of grass near the rock. He was struck by how perfectly symmetrical it seemed. While he regarded the web, a dragonfly buzzed over his head, then back again as if to show off its iridescent pink and green wings. Then a golden butterfly passed across his line of sight. It hung in the air for a moment, fluttering, as if unsure of where next to go, and then, as if having made a decision, landed on Mark's knee and clung there.

Fascinated by this show, Mark felt that something was being communicated to him. As he watched the butterfly's delicate wings slowly opening and closing, he felt a sense of being very close to nature. The butterfly on his leg seemed to be part of him, or he part of the butterfly, he wasn't sure which. And it wasn't just the butterfly he felt connected to—it

was also the spider web, the dragonfly, and the water rippling past him as it had thirty years before.

He realized that everything around him was in balance—the butterfly with its spread wings balanced on its tiny legs; the delicate yet strong web balanced between blades of grass; and even the water, in dynamic equilibrium as it flowed between its banks. It occurred to him that a great, benevolent intelligence had been at work designing these natural objects. And since he was part of it all, then that same intelligence had designed him as well.

With that thought, he pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket. As he started to light one, something his doctor had said shot through his mind: “You’re going to kill yourself with those.” A picture flashed before his mind of his lungs having to absorb the tiny particles embedded in the smoke. He saw their natural pink color, already dark, turning even blacker. “What am I doing?” he said aloud. “God or whoever or whatever is up there created me perfectly in balance and meant for me to stay that way, in tune with nature. And when I was a kid, I was in tune. And now look at me, dirtying up my body as if I have another one in the closet that I can take out and use.”

He put the cigarettes away and sat contemplating his sense of being connected to a benign universe that he had turned his back on for years. He thought hard about how he had thrown his body far out of balance—the smoke and fatty foods causing his arteries to narrow and become choked with plaque, the alcohol making his liver work overtime, the lack of exercise and extra weight placing an extra burden on his heart. He thought about how for years he had worked against the natural world surrounding him, allowing himself to be seduced by harmful

substances and paying little attention to the healthful bounty that nature could provide. After an hour, the butterfly long gone, he rose and returned to his car.

Once back home, Mark used his epiphany by the stream to power his battle to kick cigarettes and alcohol, to eat better, and to exercise. Though it took effort, he made steady progress in creating a healthier lifestyle. It became easier when he found that his new regimen helped him to sleep better and to feel more energetic, less stressed out, and mentally sharper. What also helped immensely was his decision to get out into nature as much as possible. On Saturdays and Sundays, you could see Mark strolling along a nearby greenbelt or hiking the hills outside the city, taking in the natural world and feeling deeply connected to it. The psychological and social effects of Mark's decision to create a new lifestyle were as dramatic as the physical results. Almost at once, his longstanding dreary outlook began transforming into a positive engagement not only with the natural world, but with his work. His social life also picked up as he joined first a hiking group, then a birding club, making several new friends in both.

Today, Mark has blossomed into a person who is more similar to the child he used to be than to the man who allowed his body to deteriorate for years. He has stopped doing destructive things that go against his inner nature and has replaced them with healthy choices that have the blessing of outer nature. What powered this turnaround was his spiritual awakening, which led him to view the idea of healthy living in a much larger context than before. Previously his frame of reference had been constructed mostly of shoulds: "I should eat better; I should exercise; my doctor says I should quit smoking

...” And as often happens with “shoulds,” although they were true, they failed to motivate Mark to a healthier lifestyle. His epiphany was to start seeing himself as an integral part of a benevolent and intelligent universe that gives birth to life and designs organisms to be balanced and healthy. Based on this fundamentally spiritual way of viewing himself and his health, Mark realized that his previous behaviors were not only contrary to his own nature, but contrary to nature itself.

The simple yet profound ideas that changed Mark’s life are at the heart of Ayurveda, which holds that our inherent state is to be in harmony with nature. We are born in balance, each one of us miraculous in our physical complexity, ability to think, capacity to care, and ability to reach spiritual depth. And though we live in a double-edged universe, nature has given us the means to stay in balance. We do so by partaking of its beneficial gifts and avoiding what we know is harmful. Doing so is only natural, because the life force is strong in each of us. We can feel it in our will to live and to grow. In this way, too, we are in harmony with nature, because the universe itself means for us to grow and flourish.

Like Mark before his transformation, many of us have no broad context in terms of which to think about health and wellness. In an age where artificial environments are the norm, it is easy to forget that we are part of nature. In a world where immediate gratification determines too many actions, it is easy to convince ourselves that it is all right to partake of temptations even if we know they are harming us. But the deep truth is that we remain

nature's children through and through. Illness is a matter of losing our equilibrium in relation to the natural world. Wellness is a matter of balancing our inner constitution—physical, mental, social, and spiritual—with nature's many gifts and demands.

This Ayurvedic outlook is as pertinent today as it was five thousand years ago, and I urge you to ponder how it applies to your own health.

I hope you will take a hint from Mark's story and contemplate the profound idea that Spirit—no matter how you conceive it, whether as a personal God, Brahman, or in some other way—infuses the world. When you go out into nature, realize that you are part of all you see, as natural as the birds, the trees, and the clouds. And like them, you are meant to live your life in balance with the natural world in all dimensions of your being.

EXERCISES FOR PRINCIPLE 1: AYURVEDA

Exercise 1: *Understanding Your Personal Constitution*

Your *Prakriti* is your basic constitution, which can be described in terms of three bio-energetic forces called *doshas*:

Vata – air and space

Pitta – fire and water

Kapha – water and earth

According to Ayurveda you were born with all three doshas mixed into a unique combination, but one or two of the doshas are often prevalent for an individual. There are seven possibilities: it may be that only one—Vata, Pitta, or Kapha—is prevalent; or that two—Vata-Pitta, Vata-Kapha, or Pitta Kapha—are prevalent; or that all three are present in equal measure.

To get a full and accurate evaluation of your *Prakriti*, you should seek out a trained and knowledgeable Ayurvedic practitioner. However, answering the questions beginning on the following page can provide you with an initial idea of which dosha or doshas are predominant for you. For each item, circle the letter or letters that you feel best describes you. Descriptions following the letter “A” correspond to Vata, those following letter “B” correspond to Pitta, and descriptions following letter “C” correspond to the Kapha dosha. When you are finished, add up the number of times you

have put a circle around each letter— A, B, and C—and this will give you a rough idea of the proportion of each dosha that goes to make up your unique constitution, your Prakriti.

1. Build

- A. Small frame, usually thin, prominent joints, tendency to not easily put on weight
- B. Medium build, possibly muscular
- C. Large frame, tendency to be overweight

2. Skin

- A. Dry, rough, cool, chaps easily
- B. Oily, warm, sensitive, reddish or fair
- C. Cool, thick skin, prone to acne

3. Hair

- A. Coarse and dry, curly or frizzy
- B. Fine hair, may have balding or premature graying
- C. Thick hair, wavy, oily

4. Eyes

- A. Small, active, dark eyes
- B. Penetrating eyes, light color
- C. Large, friendly eyes

5. Lips

- A. Thin, dry, chap easily
- B. Soft, medium-sized
- C. Large, full, and smooth

6. Fingernails

- A. Brittle, ridged, or cracked

- B. Soft, flexible
- C. Thick, strong

7. Strength

- A. Little strength
- B. Moderate strength
- C. Strong with good endurance

8. Appetite

- A. Variable appetite
- B. Good appetite, tend to be irritable when hungry
- C. Strong appetite, may overeat

9. Digestion and elimination

- A. Irregular, tendency to have gas
- B. Good digestion, regular to fast evacuation
- C. Slow digestion and bowel movements

10. Amount of activity

- A. Very physically active
- B. Active, like to compete physically, well-paced activities
- C. Good stamina but less active, sometimes lethargic

11. Sleep

- A. Light sleeper, erratic
- B. Sleep well, soundly
- C. Heavy sleeper

12. Cognitive tendencies

- A. Active, creative, talkative, good recent memory, poor long-term memory

- B. Focused, aggressive, sharp, excellent memory
- C. Calm, slow, good long-term memory

13. Dominant positive emotions

- A. Cheerful, adaptive, changeable
- B. Determined, clearheaded, practical, enjoy a challenge, assertive
- C. Calm, patient, serious, compassionate but prone to attachment

14. Dominant emotions in the face of stress

- A. Tend to feel fearful, insecure, and anxious when stressed
- B. Tend to feel frustrated, irritable, impatient when stressed
- C. Tend to withdraw, avoid the situation when stressed

15. Preferred climate and other characteristics

- A. Cold hands and feet, little perspiration, do not tolerate cold well
- B. Good circulation, perspire frequently, like cold food and drinks, prefer a cool, dry climate
- C. Tendency toward respiratory congestion, tiredness, uncomfortable in cool, damp weather

Your Totals

- A. _____ Vata
- B. _____ Pitta
- C. _____ Kapha

Below is a brief interpretation of what it means when

you find that your constitution predominantly reflects one of the three doshas. If two or three of the doshas are equally prevalent for you, then according to Ayurveda your constitution is an approximately equal mixture of those two or three doshas.

People who are primarily **Vata** are generally slender and small-boned. They are cheerful, adaptable, sensitive, and enthusiastic. They like novelty and excitement, and tend to be agile both physically and in their thinking. However, vata people may be unfocused and prone to spread themselves too thinly over too many activities. Their energy level may vary, and they may lack the staying power to follow a difficult project to its completion. When stressed, they are prone to anxiety.

People who are primarily **Pitta** generally have a moderate frame, although they may be muscular and athletic. They tend to be intense, determined, focused, and intelligent. They are also ambitious and goal oriented. They are organized and attack goals and problems with a logical, one-step-at-a-time approach. Stress tends to make them frustrated and irritable.

People who are primarily **Kapha** generally have a large frame, considerable strength, and a tendency to be overweight. They are prone to be caring and compassionate and are calm and patient in temperament. Others may view them as being somewhat slow and plodding in their efforts to fulfill a goal, but they tend to be consistent in those efforts and possess a good deal of stamina. They are prone to be caring individuals, often choosing lives of service. When

stressed, they tend to withdraw and avoid the stressor.

Exercise 2: Three Crucial Areas of Balancing Inner Nature with Outer Nature

Perhaps the main lesson we learn from Ayurveda is that physical health is a matter of balancing our inner biological nature with outer nature. This requires making sure that what we take in from outside agrees with our inner nature, that it does not harm us but instead nurtures and empowers us.

These key ideas lead to another self-evaluation exercise, one with a twofold objective. The first objective is to get you thinking about some main areas where your inner and outer nature may be either in balance or out of balance. The second is to encourage you to take action to restore the proper balance between inner and outer nature in any area where that balance is threatened.

Here are three areas where finding the proper balance between inner and outer nature is crucial for your overall wellness. Your task is to evaluate where you stand with regard to each one and then take action where necessary.

Air

Minute by minute, the single most important substance we take into our body from outside is air. We can go for days, weeks, in some cases even months without food; and we can go for hours or maybe even a day or two without water; but we can only last for a few minutes without air.

Our biological systems evolved to work best with pure, clean air. The problem is that the air most of us breathe is far from pure. Industrial discharges, vehicle emissions, cigarette smoke, household mold, and hundreds of other pollutants load the air with microscopic substances that poison our systems. To balance inner with outer nature in this area requires cleaning up and detoxifying the air you breathe. Here are two ways to help do that.

Activity: If you believe your household air is lacking in purity and healthfulness, set up one or more effective air purifiers in your home. These can help ensure that most air pollutants are scrubbed from your household air before you breathe it. Other benefits include a more restful sleep, reducing allergens in the air, and a sweeter smelling environment.

Activity: If you live in or near a city or any other major source of pollutants, take every opportunity you can to get away from airborne waste chemicals and out into nature. Go to the beach or the mountains where you can give your lungs a breathe-easier vacation. Learn how to access timely information from your local air quality board, the weather service, or other source about the concentration and movement of air pollutants in your area. Sometimes traveling only a few miles in the right direction from the city can bring you to an area with much purer, healthier air.

Water

The water we drink may be the second most

important substance we take into our body from the outside. The pollutant situation is generally not nearly as serious with water as it is with air. Most municipalities and water districts do a good job of treating water for our homes. Nevertheless, there are sometimes trace chemicals in treated water that reduce its purity and healthfulness. Also, household circumstances such as eroding pipes and sediment in hot water tanks may diminish the quality of your water supply.

Activity: Evaluate the quality of your own household drinking water. If you find it lacking, then invest in a water purification system if you have not done so already. If money is an issue, several relatively inexpensive systems are available, either faucet-mounted heads or purification pitchers. As long as you replace filters according to schedule, these simple water purifiers can last for years. Additional benefits include tastier water for you and your family and the knowledge that your inner nature is thanking you with every glass of purified water you drink.

Food

The fact that you have probably many times heard the saying “You are what you eat” is testimony to the profound truth of this old homily. Ayurvedic medicine recognized that truth thousands of years ago. Almost all of us have some understanding of how a healthy diet promotes wellness and a long life; but unfortunately, most of us have too little understanding to make the best food choices to promote wellness of body. That’s the

purpose of this activity—to encourage you to learn more if your nutritional wisdom happens to be a little on the light side.

Activity: Locate some trustworthy sources of nutritional information, such as books, websites, or other guidelines, and learn enough to be able to address the questions on the next page. If, after answering the questions, you find one or more areas for which your actual practice differs from recommended practice, consider taking action to rectify the imbalance.

- What is the recommended number of calories per day for someone of your gender, age, activity level, and ideal weight? _____ What is your actual average number of daily calories?

- How do micronutrients promote wellness?

Which micronutrients do you often have in your diet? _____
- What are three of the best sources of micronutrients that are also readily available in food _____ stores?

- What daily balance of fats, carbohydrates, and protein do qualified nutritionists recommend?
_____ What is your average daily balance?

- How much salt is too much salt? How much salt do you ingest each day on average? _____
What are the risk factors for ingesting too much salt? _____
- How many daily servings of fresh fruit and vegetables do nutritionists recommend? _____
How many daily servings do you have? _____

PRINCIPLE 2



Calmness

Quiet the Turbulence

“If thou art pained by any external thing, it is not the thing that disturbs you, but your own judgment about it. And it is in your power to wipe out this judgment now.”

Marcus Aurelius
from *Meditations*, Book VII

Stress has been called the ailment of our time, with up to seventy percent of doctor visits being related to stress. This is not surprising in a fast-paced world where potentially stressful situations may face us at every turn. The demands of work, finances, relationships, and other issues can seem unending. Some people are able to handle those demands better than others. But for many, such pressures create the ongoing mental, emotional, physiological, and spiritual turbulence that characterizes chronic stress.

It's not that all stress is bad. Suppose that on your lunch break you walk around a corner and find yourself confronted by an African lion. Right away, you experience a state of acute psychological stress: *It's a lion!*

And it's right there in front of me! Your physiology immediately responds to what your eyes are telling you. A host of hormones rush into your blood, readying your body for action. Your senses become super sharp. Your cells pump out extra energy. Your breathing rate increases to provide you more oxygen. Your heart pumps faster so your blood can quickly move the extra energy to your muscles.

This reaction, called *the stress response*, begins within a second or two of your initial perception. It has evolved as a necessary physiological device to help quickly prepare someone—in this case, you—to confront a potentially dangerous situation. It is also called the *fight or flight response*. You can either stand your ground and fight the lion, or you can take flight, perhaps by running inside a building or climbing a telephone pole. That's what your stress response is preparing you to do: one or the other. But once the danger has passed—once you realize the lion lurking there on the sidewalk is actually a realistic-looking, life-sized stuffed animal displayed outside a high-end toy store—your body quickly returns to its normal state. The hormones stop pouring out, your heart slows, your breathing returns to its regular rate, and all your other bodily systems resume their usual activities. And now you'll have a good story to tell on yourself when you get back to work.

We can be thankful that this acute version of stress takes over our physiology when we are confronted by an outside physical threat. The same sort of reaction may also kick into gear and tune us up at times when we need

to give our best performance, such as in presenting a speech or driving on an icy road. But unfortunately, there is another version of stress, one that involves repeated psychologically taxing events over a substantial period of time. This is chronic stress, and it can arise from many sources—difficult life situations such as marital problems, working at a job that makes us unhappy, the day-to-day pressures of living, and much more.

The Ugly Legacy of Chronic Stress

What makes the chronic version of stress so problematic is that the same physiological reactions occur as with acute stress; but because the turbulence is ongoing, our body doesn't return to its normal state. The extra hormones continue circulating in our blood, unbalancing and gradually damaging bodily systems. Research shows that chronic stress promotes cardiovascular disease, diabetes, immune system deterioration, and a host of other ailments. Over time, this can add up to major physical problems. In the final analysis, chronic stress is a potential killer.

And it's not only our physical health that is put at risk by repeated stress. Ongoing turbulence also seriously detracts from our emotional and social well-being. This is because stress causes deep as opposed to shallow turbulence. Shallow turbulence can be represented by a squall out on the ocean. Inside the squall, a great commotion is taking place. The rain is pouring down in buckets while a powerful, swirling wind churns the

ocean's surface into a choppy mess. But ten yards below, the water is calm. Fish, octopi, and dolphins go on their peaceful ways undisturbed by the tempest lashing the waves into a foaming maelstrom directly above. The turbulence goes only a few feet down. Its force is quickly dampened and absorbed by the water below.

It's a different story for deep turbulence. Here too, the action begins with some disturbance at the surface. But the agitation quickly travels to other parts of the system, creating tumultuous and unbalanced conditions everywhere. That's what happens with chronic stress. The discord starts at the surface of our mind with a perception, experience, or idea that causes anxiety or trepidation. Almost instantaneously it transmits itself to deeper parts of our biological and mental structure. In a few blinks of an eye, it has gone all the way down, creating turbulence throughout our bodily systems, profoundly affecting not only our physiology, but also our thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and attitudes.

Stress can also have many indirect impacts. It can prevent us from getting the precious sleep we need to stay healthy and at our best. Instead, we lie in bed wide awake, thoughts racing a mile a minute as we play and replay scenarios related to whatever is preying on our mind. Stress is also a main cause for addictive behaviors such as overeating and alcohol abuse, which can create physiological harm as devastating as the runaway hormones. The combination of direct and indirect physiological impacts makes stress into a double whammy pounding away at our physical health.

Chronic stress also affects the way we get along with family, friends, and others, detracting from our quality of life. Instead of enjoying the movie with our friend or partner, we sit there in a blur, worrying how we'll make the next mortgage payment. At the office picnic we may act like we're having fun, but as we make half-hearted conversation, that difficult issue we've been having with the neighbors or the boss is simmering in the back of our mind. Ironically, when under stress, we sometimes push away family members and friends who might help us relax and forget our perceived troubles.

Mental turbulence also tends to infect other thought processes. Anxiety about one issue may lead us to worry about others. We start seeing trouble everywhere. When we experience the world this way, it becomes even harder to take our mind off what we perceive to be our troubles and find joy in life. Stress narrows our thinking and creates cognitive blind spots. It can hinder us from seeking ways to handle whatever is causing the stress. Our agitated thinking may keep us from seeing a solution right in front of our face.

Given its many harmful effects, it is abundantly clear that learning how to deal effectively with stress is of paramount importance if we are to achieve the deep, energized wellness that we desire.

Methods for Calming the Turbulence

The good news is that there are excellent strategies to calm the turbulence caused by repeated stress. The most obvious may be to *Change the Stressor*, which is the

situation that leads us to feel stressed. For instance, if our job constantly drives us up the wall, one solution would be to find a job that suits us better. Or if we're anxious about contracting cardiovascular disease, a very reasonable strategy to reduce our stress would be to work with our physician to develop a heart-healthy plan, and then enact the plan.

Sometimes, though, it is difficult to change a potential stressor. If we find ourselves fuming about being caught in a traffic jam, there is usually nothing much we can do to change the external situation. We just have to wait it out. That's where a second basic strategy for dealing with stress comes in: *Reframe the Situation*. This strategy is based on the idea that although the things we get stressed about are out in the world, our way of thinking about them is in our mind. And it is our way of thinking about them that determines whether they provoke the stress response.

For example, consider something most of us have experienced—a day on which everything seems to go “wrong.” When a series of minor mishaps occur, we can take a narrow or a broad view. On the narrow view, we assign the events more importance than they deserve. As they pile up, we start feeling overwhelmed and stressed out. On the broader view, we regard the events as no more than minor bumps strung out along our path. We take them in stride, perhaps laughing at our “bad luck” on this particular day. For the most part, we stay calm and stress free. The difference is our attitude. If people would always take the broader perspective when faced

with potential stressors, much of the chronic stress that permeates our society would disappear.

There are many ways to help ourselves to take that broader view. Some are physiologically based. These include getting enough sleep and exercising regularly, both of which strengthen our ability to take a calm, philosophical approach to potential stressors. For example, after a stressful day at work, instead of collapsing in a chair to lose yourself and your troubles temporarily in the television, a wiser course would be to go for a leisurely walk in a nearby park, perhaps with your spouse, significant other, or friend. Certainly, getting absorbed in mindless entertainment may temporarily alleviate stress, but when the TV shows are over, the thought processes that led to the stress may return in full force. On the other hand, while taking a pleasant walk, the physical exercise alone tends to calm down the worried mind and create space for new perspectives that could serve to reduce the stressful feelings.

Other strategies involve our social dimension—Heart. Usually, an effective way to deal with persistent stress is to talk about your feelings with someone, a friend or relative, who cares about your well-being. Unfortunately, many people are hesitant to do this for one reason or another. It may be that they are reluctant to “lay their troubles” on someone else. This stoic attitude may be especially prevalent among men, but it is also a feature of many women’s personalities. Such individuals may think they should shoulder any

perceived trouble solely by themselves, thinking that not to do so would indicate some kind of character flaw. Others may have had unpleasant experiences in sharing with others, feeling they did not find the understanding and caring ear they hoped for. Yet others may simply feel embarrassed to share their perceptions even with friends because of the nature of the trouble, e.g., marital or other family-related issues that they feel must remain private.

However, none of these rationales constitute a good enough reason not to share our perceived stressful burdens by talking about them with someone we trust. It is not a character flaw to tell caring others how we feel about some problem we may be having. And we need not expect the future to necessarily be the same as the past, even if we have been disappointed in the past by the quality of someone's listening. Even for private issues that cause stress, we can always find someone appropriate to talk to—if not a family member or good friend, then a trusted pastor or counselor.

The bottom line is that to share our perceptions, disappointments, and worries with others is almost always helpful for alleviating stress. Even just to joke with a friend at lunch about our “troubles,” whatever they may be, can be therapeutic. The laughter helps put them in perspective and reduce stressful feelings

Reframing Ourselves Spiritually

Our most powerful strategy for defusing stress by reframing the stressful situation arises out of our fourth

dimension of being—Spirit. Because this dimension is about looking at what happens in our lives from a wide, all-encompassing viewpoint, it is perfectly suited for providing the broad perspectives that counteract stress. This is true no matter what our spiritual beliefs may be. For example, countless people find their anxieties greatly assuaged by belief in a fatherly God who has their best interests in mind. Others, of a different spiritual persuasion, may view their relationship with a Higher Reality as being like that of a wave to an ocean. Their sense that they are part of something much larger than themselves is a calming influence. Still others may find that their contemplation of perennial values such as Truth, Love, Family, Beauty, or Art helps provide the larger perspective that makes potential stressors lose their bite.

One basic reason chronic stress is rampant in our society is that so many people have allowed their spiritual dimension to atrophy. Without powerful and enduring spiritual beliefs, we have no larger context in terms of which to view what happens in our lives. When we lack that larger context, events are defined only by whether they promote or hinder the achievement of whatever objectives we are currently pursuing. And these are almost always ego-centered when Spirit is absent. As a result, when a potentially stressful event pops up, it appears to us as a hated enemy threatening our progress. It is difficult to see it in any other way. The result is the stress response, often repeated dozens of times a day.

But we can turn this around. By cultivating our spiritual dimension, we can develop effective tools that enable us to reframe the “mishaps,” large and small, that occur in all of our lives, enabling us to escape the destructive grip of stress. These tools consist of spiritually based principles and truths that enable us to see our lives in terms of broader, more enlightened perspectives. The principles and truths presented in this book can help defuse potentially stressful events.

We have learned about Emily, who was faced with a lot of job-related stress caused by her having assumed new responsibilities. The continued stress was hurting her physiologically, psychologically, and socially—that is, in Body, Mind, and Heart. She started questioning her purpose in life and the value of her work. What began making a difference in Emily’s life was meditation (something we will learn more about below). Meditating enabled Emily to create mental space to re-evaluate her priorities and see more clearly what was most important in her life. She realized that what was most meaningful to her was her family, doing a good job at her work, and the joys and satisfactions that came from embracing these two main aspects of her experience. These are spiritual perspectives because they constituted for Emily a broad, all-encompassing view of the significance of her life.

Why couldn’t Emily have realized these things to begin with? This is because one of the destructive results of chronic stress is that it narrows our vision and over-emphasizes the seriousness of whatever situation gives

rise to the stress, often making it seem worse than it actually is. Meditation helped Emily break through the incessant repetition of thought processes that typically accompany and exacerbate chronic stress. We don't know exactly what thought processes these were for Emily. Perhaps she saw herself as unable to perform her new responsibilities well enough. Maybe she was afraid of being unable to balance her work with her family life. There are any number of stories Emily could have told herself that nagged her and produced stress.

But meditation gave her the space to start breaking through these thought processes and gain some new perspectives. By embracing her spiritual dimension and reflecting on what gave her most meaning in life, Emily reframed her situation in broad strokes. She took a dark drawing in charcoal, which was her stress-saturated view of her situation, and painted it over with new, brighter, more colorful strokes. In doing so, she did not change anything that was actually present *in* her situation; she simply saw it in a new perspective. As we will see repeatedly in future chapters, this is how contemplating basic spiritual principles can effectively change our perceptions of ourselves and the world. If our old perceptions and ways of engaging with the world were leading to chronic stress, our new viewpoint, being more in tune with Spirit, helps defuse the stress.

When you accept these basic spiritual principles both cognitively and emotionally, they can make a profound difference in your life. This includes their ability to serve as an antidote to persistent stress, as Emily discovered.

But if the principles are to do much more than just sit on the page, it is crucial that you understand and reflect on how they can order and empower your daily life. They must become more than theoretical, more than just another set of good ideas, more than something for you to put on the back burner and think about at some later time. If the thesis of this book is correct, you cannot afford to skim over the ideas and principles presented here. Your wellness in all dimensions of your being is intimately affected by your spiritual aspect. If you welcome the principles of Spirit into your daily life, your wellness will benefit not just in your spiritual aspect but in Body, Mind, and Heart.

Spiritual Principles: The Best Reframer

We all face challenges at one time or another, sometimes ones that may threaten to debilitate us. I certainly have.

A few years ago, there was a time when my stress level almost rocketed out of control because of serious health issues. This was the period I called *The Dark Night of the Soul* in the preface to this book. It occurred not long after I had begun the journey into understanding and teaching Mind-Body-Spirit medicine, and it threatened to become a huge roadblock on that journey. For a time, it seemed I was becoming weaker and weaker by the day, and my mind often played catastrophic scenarios about sickness and death that left me feeling almost hopeless. But thankfully, some of the same spiritual