

# HEAVEN'S BANQUET

VEGETARIAN COOKING  
FOR LIFELONG HEALTH  
THE AYURVEDA WAY



MIRIAM KASIN HOSPODAR



A PLUME BOOK



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## Praise for *Heaven's Banquet*

“Offers the kind of cooking wisdom and inspirational recipes that even I—a reluctant cook at the best of times—will turn to again and again.”

—Jennifer Hawthorne, co-author of  
*Chicken Soup for the Woman's Soul*

“Hospodar's heartfelt book is robust and bursting with information and zest.”

—Sue Bender, author of *Plain and Simple*  
and *Everyday Sacred*

“*Heaven's Banquet* is packed with an astonishing variety of recipes, placed in a global context of cultures, histories, and literatures, knit together by the author's thoughtful commitment to the Ayurvedic dietary system. Any diet that recommends 'Eating for Bliss' is worth exploring in some detail.”

—Betty Fussell, author of *I Hear America*  
*Cooking and Home Bistro*

MIRIAM KASIN HOSPODAR has worked as a chef in Ayurvedic spas and centers in the United States, France, Switzerland, the Philippines, Taiwan, and India. A certified teacher of the Transcendental Meditation program, she has also served as the director of the Maharishi Ayur-Ved Health Center in St. Louis, Missouri, and the Health Center in Pacific Palisades, California. She lives in Santa Barbara.



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A NOTE TO THE READER

The ideas, procedures, and suggestions contained in this book are not intended as a substitute for medical treatment by a physician. The reader should regularly consult a physician in matters relating to health.

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***To His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi***  
***Founder of the Maharishi Vedic Approach to Health***



---

*Let us be together,  
Let us eat together,  
Let us be vital together,  
Let us be radiating truth, radiating the light of life,  
Never shall we denounce anyone, never entertain negativity.*  
—THE UPANISHADS

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Many people have added their unique ingredients to *Heaven's Banquet*. Knowing them has been deeply nourishing for me. My cup runneth over with their generosity and also with my gratitude for it.

Infinite gratitude to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi for reviving Vedic wisdom and creating the Maharishi Vedic Approach to Health. I hope he feels that I have represented his knowledge well.

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To all of these precious souls, and through them to the whole world, I offer the following Vedic blessing:

*May the good belong to all the people in the world.  
May the rulers go by the path of justice.*

*May the best of men and their source always prove to be a blessing.*

*May all the world rejoice in happiness.*

---

*May rain come in time and plentifulness be on earth.*

*May this world be free from suffering and the noble ones be free from fears.*

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# The Banquet Is Served

*I am obsessed with the relationship between cooking and health. When one goes to the opera, one does not expect to return having gone deaf; one does not expect to go blind as a result of going to the theatre. Why then, must one do oneself a damage by going out to eat? For people who think this way there is, on one hand, the cuisine for pleasure—but full of menace—and on the other, the diet—for the redemption of the body. This separation is odious, and we must find the means of reconciling pleasure and health. I dream of a cuisine that no longer does anyone harm.*

—ALAIN SENDERENS, one of only two chef patrons who have received both three Michelin stars and four Gault-Millau toques

Cooking is a marvelous, enjoyable, and above all, necessary creative act. We could define cooking literally as an act of creation. A cook has a few basic utensils, ingredients, and cooking techniques. By combining them in different ways, he or she can create entirely new dishes or repeat old favorites. A cook is therefore a creator, a magician, the master of a territory of influence. And no matter how humble it may appear, that territory is quite a large one. Though a cook's creation doesn't end up hanging on a wall or resting in a safe-deposit box, it becomes part of something infinitely precious to another living human being. Whenever we cook we are influencing the quality of life of the people we cook for—not to mention of ourselves. Cooking is therefore a precious opportunity to enhance the quality of life.

I have always cherished a deep desire to cook and eat very good food and also to cook and eat very healthy food. These two passions have not always been compatible. Having tested the waters of vegetarianism starting at age seventeen and having worked as a professional chef, I tried, studied, and eventually discarded practically every system of diet and nutrition that I ever came into contact with. I also found myself consistently frustrated and dissatisfied with cookbooks and books on nutrition that address food as an entity in itself: its nutritional value and its sensory impact on the eater—any eater—and how a cook can exploit these features. I was far more curious about the deeper implications of that gloriously soothing and evocative word, nourishment. I was starved for wonderful cooking that would feed the mind, body, and spirit.

In the 1970s I became aware of the first expressions of an art and science of nourishment that were brought to light more fully a decade later: Maharishi Ayur-Veda. Of all the systems of health and nutrition that I have investigated over the years, Maharishi Ayur-Veda is the only one I have found to be holistic, complete, and effective. At last I had found the knowledge I had been looking for all my life—a program of health and healing from a timeless, time-tested source that included, among other things, a simple, joyous, delicious, fulfilling way of cooking and eating. I had the great good fortune



to cook in professional kitchens where Ayurvedic dietary principles were practiced under the supervision of experienced Ayurvedic physicians, and to study Ayurvedic diet and nutrition with the great teachers of Maharishi Ayur-Veda in Europe, India, and the United States.

*Next to eating good dinners, a healthy man with a benevolent turn of mind must like, I think, to read about them.*—WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

In 1975 I began to write the book that I wanted to have on my own kitchen shelf, one that would explain Maharishi Ayur-Veda and offer recipes constructed according to its principles. *Heaven's Banquet* was written on three continents over a twenty-three-year period. The recipes were tested everywhere, from a five-star Swiss hotel kitchen to a charcoal-filled pit in the Philippines. They were sampled by many hundreds of people from around the world who passed through my various and varied kitchens and who kindly—and sometimes not so kindly but always honestly—offered their opinions and suggestions.

In these times, often anything “new” is automatically perceived as an improvement over what has come before. Many people most respect and believe the “amazing new breakthroughs” through the “experts”—frequently self-proclaimed as such—have concocted themselves or have synthesized from a dozen different sources. However, there is another, more traditional method of gaining knowledge that has been practiced over the millennia by thousands of generations of seekers: that of taking guidance from ancient, time-tested sources and from wise people who are living embodiments of the knowledge they teach. As the *Rik Veda* states so simply and elegantly, “He who knows the country tells the direction to him who asks the way.”

Everything I have learned about Maharishi Ayur-Veda comes from the contemporary reviver and supreme teacher of Ayurveda, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, and from the ancient authority of traditional Ayurvedic texts. I have attempted to repeat this knowledge as precisely as I can, without coloring it with my own personal opinions.

However, the principal Ayurvedic texts do not contain much in the way of recipes or instructions for cooking, particularly for a modern kitchen. The recipes, cooking techniques, and opinions about them in *Heaven's Banquet* are my own; I have taken ancient Ayurvedic principles and applied them to the equipment, ingredients, and techniques used in contemporary kitchens.

Therefore you must be discriminating when you evaluate the information in this book. It contains both eternal wisdom that I pass on to you just as it has been taught to me and a culinary application that I have developed from my own life experiences and training as a cook. My recipes and cooking techniques are not necessarily ancient, universal knowledge but an interpretation by one of the many students on the path. You might be able to do it better than I have—or at any rate, in a way that suits your personal tastes more closely. I hope so.

My cherished desire is that *Heaven's Banquet* provides you with tools and ideas to help you fulfill your own culinary aspirations. I wish that your table will ever be filled to overflowing with a heavenly banquet of health, happiness, and wholeness.

*This night I hold an old accustom'd feast,  
Whereto I have invited many a guest,  
Such as I love; and you, among the store,  
One more, most welcome, makes my number more.*  
—WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Enjoy!

## AYURVEDIC SYMBOLS USED IN HEAVEN’S BANQUET



The lotus is a symbol of transcendence, pure consciousness. Lotuses grow in lakes, with their roots in the mud and their flowers on the surface of the water, above and beyond the mud below.



The *Amrit Kalash* is a Vedic symbol of immortality, representing the legendary vessel that contains the nectar of immortality. The Vedas state, “Ayurveda is for immortality.”



The depiction of wind represents Vata dosha, which has air and space as its essential elements.



The sun represents Pitta dosha, which has fire as one of its essential elements.



The moon represents Kapha dosha, which has water as one of its essential elements. The moon regulates the tides and thus has a relationship to water.

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The cornerpieces are the artist's interpretation of the traditional pillars in Vedic temples, decorated here with the symbols used in Heaven's Banquet to denote Vata, Pitta, and Kapha.

# Nourishing the Mind and Body: Maharishi Ayur-Veda for Perfect Health

*But what avail the largest gifts of Heaven,  
When drooping health and spirits go amiss?  
How tasteless then whatever can be given!  
Health is the vital principle of bliss.*

—JAMES THOMSON

The name *Ayurveda* comes from two Sanskrit words, *ayus*, or “life,” and *ved*, meaning “knowledge” or “science.” *Ayurveda* is translated as “the science of life” or, more precisely, “the knowledge of life span.” Maharishi Ayur-Veda creates health by enlivening the body’s own inner intelligence. Instead of focusing primarily on disease, Maharishi Ayur-Veda puts the emphasis on health. It can even be said that the programs of Maharishi Ayur-Veda do not treat disease; rather, they promote health from within. This is an extremely important distinction: Maharishi Ayur Veda states that perfect health is a natural, normal state of life, and anything less than perfect health is abnormal.

## **HEALING FROM WITHIN: ENLIVENING THE BODY’S INNER INTELLIGENCE**

From the perspective of Vedic science, the source of life is a unified field of infinite, pure intelligence. It is the home of all the laws of nature, the underlying, all-pervading principle that governs the entire universe in perfect harmony and without a problem. It keeps the cycle of the seasons flowing in their natural rhythm and sequence, and the planets remaining in their orbits instead of randomly flying through space and colliding with each other. Nature’s intelligence creates order, growth and change, ensuring that kittens always grow up into cats, not elephants, and that when you plant an acorn it will always blossom into an oak tree, not emerge as a cornstalk.

The pure creative intelligence that governs all of creation is found within every human being, permeating every cell of the body. It guides the orderly functioning of all bodily processes perfectly and automatically, without any problems whatsoever. By enlivening the body’s inner intelligence—the same intelligence that governs the entire universe—the physiology is revitalized and renewed, and healing naturally occurs from within. When we enter a dark room and flick on the light switch, the darkness automatically disappears. It is the same fundamental principle at work with healing: to establish health, and dis-ease and dis-order automatically disappear.

### ***A Picture of Health: From the Individual to the Cosmos***

*Revere the healing power of nature.*

What is perfect health? A modern medical definition might be a body free of disease. A holistic health practitioner might call it a balanced body-mind system. Maharishi Ayur Veda takes the expanded view that health not only encompasses the mind, body, emotions, and spirit of the individual but extends to the health of the entire environment. Since the intelligence within everyone is the same intelligence that governs the entire universe, each individual is not an isolated organism but is intimately connected to all of life, from the most infinitesimal subatomic particle to the entire cosmos. We are all threads in the exquisite and intricately woven fabric of creation. Another analogy would be that of a vast, lush forest: for the forest to be green and healthy, the individual trees that comprise it must be green and healthy.

The programs of Maharishi Ayur-Veda form a bridge between mind and body, consciousness and physiology, and between the individual, the environment, and the universe. They serve to help individuals live a long life in the natural state of health and harmony that is their birthright, and to promote a healthy, harmonious world that is the collective birthright of all humankind.

## A TIMELY REVIVAL OF ANCIENT VEDIC WISDOM



In ancient times Ayurvedic doctors, or *vaidyas*, were highly trained and greatly respected. But over centuries of foreign rule in India, Ayurvedic institutions were not supported and Ayurvedic medicine was suppressed, so that much of the ancient knowledge was lost or became distorted. Today *Ayurveda* can mean anything from a *vaidya* trained at an Ayurvedic medical college, to a corner pharmacy in India where a shopkeeper recommends and dispenses generalized formulations, to a Western health-care practitioner who has read a few books on the subject and purports to practice “Ayurvedic medicine.”

All too often, practitioners combine Ayurveda with other systems of health care and self-development, resulting in a mishmash of Ayurvedic information that has been combined and diluted with other more recent and frequently unproven systems. Some pharmaceutical companies are capitalizing on people’s regard for Ayurveda by producing products with isolated “Ayurvedic” herbs that have little to do with traditional Ayurvedic formulas.

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, founder of the transcendental meditation program and Maharishi’s Vedic science, concerned with the widespread disease in the world, recognized the inability of allopathic approaches to health care to stem the tide of illness. He knew that there was an effective, natural, cost-effective approach to health care, Ayurveda, described in the Vedic literature. In the early 1980s he began working with leading Ayurvedic scholars and *vaidyas*, in conjunction with medical doctors, to bring to light the complete knowledge of Ayurveda, offer it in practical programs, and to make such programs widely available. It was a heroic effort, involving identification of which among the many Ayurvedic texts represented the original, authentic authority, making accurate

interpretations of those texts, and correcting the misunderstandings and misinformation that had resulted from the centuries-old suppression of indigenous health care. Vaidyas from the few remaining unbroken traditions of Ayurvedic practice lent their support and their participation to fulfill Maharishi's goal of bringing authentic knowledge of Ayurveda to humankind.

Maharishi also felt that Ayurvedic knowledge could and should be verified by modern medical science. Physicians and researchers from around the world began conducting research studies at universities and research institutions to test the effectiveness of Ayurvedic formulas and treatments. A large body of scientific research documenting the effectiveness of Ayurvedic treatments has already been published, and research is ongoing at major institutions around the world.

Last, Maharishi felt that the knowledge should be verifiable by people's experiences—in other words, people should feel better from Ayurvedic treatments, not just believe in them because they are told to by an “expert.”

The names Maharishi Ayur-Veda and Maharishi Vedic Approach to Health were given to the very specific authentic system of theory and practice of Ayurveda brought to light by Maharishi and the council of vaidyas and physicians working with him.

### ***The Mistake of the Intellect: Source of Imbalance***

Maharishi Ayur-Veda describes the lack of connection with the body's inner intelligence as the primary source of human suffering. In the ancient Ayurvedic texts this condition is referred to as “the mistake of the intellect,” or *pragyaparadh*. *Pragyaparadh* is the mistaken perception that the ever-changing display we experience through our senses is all that there is; we do not perceive the underlying wholeness of life, the home of all the laws of nature. It is as if we sailed out into the sea, looked out over the waves on the surface, and concluded that they comprised the total reality of the ocean—without perceiving that there are unfathomably vast, silent depths beneath from which the waves spring.

Wholeness is a state of perfect balance, invulnerable to disease. When we aren't living with the awareness of this reality of life, the door is opened wide for myriad imbalances at any level of the mind and body. We lack the most basic form of immunity to disease: an anchor to the stable, silent home of all the laws of nature, the source of the body's inner intelligence. We are not established in the state of perfect balance into which no imbalances can enter, the state of perfect orderliness in which no dis-orders can take root.

### ***The Doctor Is In—Within***

A unique feature of Maharishi Ayur-Veda is its nonjudgmental and nondictatorial approach. The bottom line is your own experience. The body's inner intelligence is the ultimate authority, the perfect physician. If you go to a doctor and say, “I don't feel well, I have a pain,” and the doctor tells you “There's nothing wrong with you—it's all in your head”—well, you still don't feel well! A health care practitioner trained in Maharishi Ayur-Veda recognizes that if you are experiencing discomfort, the

something *must* be wrong. He or she does not view a patient in terms of a single symptom, organ, body part that may be causing a problem, but looks at the whole person: your constitutional make-up, attitudes, lifestyle, behavior, and environment.

## AYURVEDIC DIET AND NUTRITION

*Let food be your medicine and medicine be your food.*

—HIPPOCRATES

Most people would agree that a blissful, healthy mind and body require nutritious foods. Ayurvedic texts emphasize wholesome diet as vital for promoting health and happiness. What comprises “wholesome diet”? There is no single formula that applies to all individuals, though there are some universal and unchanging principles that do.

### ***Modern Nutritional Science: What’s Wrong with This Picture?***

From the point of view of Ayurveda, contemporary nutritional science often misses the point by searching for universal prescriptions. Nutritionists tend to identify certain foods as “bad” and others as healthy and beneficial for everyone, yet these foods fall in and out of favor, depending on the latest research “discovery.” The first wave of research is widely acclaimed, sets off a fad, and then is negated by the next wave. “Everyone should drink at least one quart of milk per day.” “Everyone should reduce milk intake.” “Eat margarine instead of butter for a healthy heart.” “Well, maybe margarine isn’t as great as we first thought.” Sometimes we eat a food promoted as having wonderful health-giving properties and feel terrible afterward. Yogurt, for instance, is promoted as being a universally healthy food. However, for each person who feels nourished by it, there is one who gets an acid stomach and another who gets a stuffy nose. The modern approach to nutrition consistently produces partial answers and partial truths. Fragmented observation—seeing only one part of the picture—all too often leads to mistaken conclusions.

Each human physiology is a marvel of exquisitely individual components, relationships, and transformations that are constantly changing yet are based on eternal and unchanging laws of nature. Maharishi Ayur-Veda explains how even subtle differences in individual constitution can make what is good for one individual not necessarily good for another—and recommends how to nourish both.

### ***How Do I Determine the Most Nourishing Foods for Me?***

Ayurvedic texts identify eight overall considerations, each one a world of knowledge in itself, that determine how nourishing any particular food or meal will be for an individual. All are addressed on the following pages:

1. *Nature of the food.* This refers to a food’s natural qualities, such as lightness or heaviness, whether it is heating or cooling, etc.
2. *Method of preparation.* Whether or not the food is cooked, what type of vessel it is cooked in

how it is flavored, how clean it is, etc.

~~3. *Combination*. How different ingredients and dishes are combined.~~

4. *Quantity*. The amount of food needed to thrive on. A highly individual consideration that changes with one's amount of activity, age, environment, etc.

5. *Place or habitat*. The influence of the type of environment one lives in or is eating in.

6. *Time*. Considerations such as the age of the person eating, the season, and whether it is daytime or evening.

7. *Guidelines* for the best way to partake of food.

8. *The eater*. A vital and often overlooked influence. Whether or not a food is nourishing is ultimately dependent upon the person who eats it. One's unique physiology, one's state of consciousness, and general state of health influence any food's effect.

“This sounds overwhelming! How can I figure out all that when I have 30 minutes to get a meal on the table for five hungry people?” You can't intellectually decipher all the different factors that make a particular food healthy for any individual at any given point of time. There is a saying, “Nature knows best how to organize.” Only the infinite organizing power of all the laws of nature can possibly figure out all the thousands of factors that go into making a perfect decision when it comes to choosing foods to eat. When one is living in accord with the laws of nature, one's decisions are spontaneously life-supporting. All the information given here is to help us increasingly enliven our bodies' inner intelligence and from there to do the best we can to create healthy meals, without strain and with tidings of comfort and joy.

### ***Digestion: Key to Good Health***

*Heaven is largely a matter of digestion, and digestion is mostly a matter of mind.*

—ELBERT HUBBARD, *A Thousand and One Epigrams*

Maharishi Ayur-Veda emphasizes the vital importance of good digestion for ideal health. Food is the substance through which we bring Nature's energy and intelligence into our bodies. When we are in balance, food is fully digested; its nutrients are absorbed by the body and what is not needed is eliminated. In fact, we could say the same thing about all our experiences. When we are able to fully process, or “digest,” our experiences, we absorb that which nourishes our mind, body, emotions, and spirit and let go of those experiences that do not.

### ***Digestive Fire, or Agni***

*The Agni which digests food is regarded as the master of all agnis because increase and decrease of other agnis depend on the digestive fire. Hence one should maintain it carefully by taking properly the wholesome food and drinks, because on its maintenance depends the maintenance of life-span and strength.*

—CHARAKA SAMHITA

The physiological processes used to digest food are defined by Ayurveda as *Agni*, or digestive fire. There are various *Agnis* with specific metabolic functions. According to Ayurveda, the digestive process starts from the moment food enters our mouth and we taste it. Digestion is similar to fueling a fire. The food is “cooked” by *Agni*—converted into the forms in which nutrients can be utilized by the



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