

Ep #75: Ayurveda in December



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With Your Host

Susi Hatelty

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Male Announcer: You're listening to *From Pain to Possibility* with Susi Hatley. You will hear Susi's best ideas on how to reduce or even eradicate your pain and learn how to listen to your body when it whispers so you don't have to hear it scream. And now here's your host, Susi Hatley.

Welcome to *From Pain to Possibility*. And we have Mona Warner back again for some Ayurveda conversation. And what I want to dig into today is really kind of playing around with this season of winter.

We are about to enter into December, and here in Canada anyway, we start heading into this long, dark season. Shortest day, longest night of the year comes up at the middle of or the kind of mid to end of December. So we're already feeling this idea of slumber and dormancy.

And sometimes the stillness of the coming season can be oppressive for some. It can be this idea of redirecting energy. And what's also happening is there's this holiday festivity that's also kind of interplane with this.

So what I want to talk about today with Mona is the natural pulse of winter that's coming in with the festive season that many people experience, and how to play with that. Because oftentimes when we're in a festive time, the food choices and the drink choices tend to be something that we indulge in, that we love, but then can have a certain experience on the inside and the outside and the upstairs.

And so I don't want to make this so much of like the latest magazines tips and tricks on how to support yourself and just smear the festive season with that sort of conversation. But I do want to kind of dig in underneath that. Like the conversation under the conversation of how to enable people to really take it on, enjoy it, support themselves, support indulgence, if that's what they want.

And then also this other pulsing reality of the environment that is winter coming. Low light, stillness, perhaps reflection, sometimes oppressive. Where do you want to take it from here?

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Mona: So I love that we're having this conversation, and it's a big conversation. And the first thing that comes up for me is when I think about Vedic astrology, there are the two main luminaries. The two main luminaries; the sun and the moon.

And our inner sun is so connected to our outer sun. And I think culturally, a lot of folks are more connected with that active, fiery, doing energy than they are with the lunar receptive, contemplative, inward, calm, slow, yielding energy.

And so when we move into winter, we're really moving almost into a lunar phase, right? We're moving a little bit more into that lunar energy. And some of us are comfortable with that and some of us aren't. And it's okay either way, right?

We are who we are and we are where we are. And yet, this is another pattern that repeats. It's another pattern that repeats every year. And so really great to know that we have a lifetime worth of this pattern to be with, and to explore, and to get curious about.

I think, as the amount of sun access we get reduces, I think this is part of why we celebrate Christmas holiday, New Year so much. It's because we're trying to bring light. We're trying to bring a light quality, a festive quality, an active engaged quality.

We're trying to get some of that sun energy from each other, because we're not always able to get it from our usual source of fire energy, of light energy, which is the sun. And so we do these beautiful celebrations and we come together and we spend time together. We work that way.

And it's super beautiful. And I'm going to tangent a little bit into the food side of things because with Ayurveda we're constantly thinking about our agni, so our inner sun, and maintaining and taking care of our inner sun.

And so one of the things that can happen in the winter and in the holiday season is we can really put a lot of expectation in terms of foods, and

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sweets, and booze, and all sorts of candies, and chocolates, and baked goods and all that stuff. We can put a lot of expectation on our inner sun, on our agni. And it's fun, and if you're going to do it, enjoy the daylights out of it. See, enjoy the daylights out of, right, get as much sun energy as you can from that.

And to loop back to a previous conversation we had on digestive resetting, if we're going to spend a couple of days really indulging and expecting a lot from our agni, then that's a really great time to do a bit of digestive resetting. Even if it's a half a day before you go for big festivity, or after as a way of allowing your body to balance its sun and moon energy a little bit.

And so being, again, a little bit more nourishing, a little bit more calm, a little bit more restful. And most people know that, we know that if we have the big family gathering on Sunday, we're not really going to schedule anything on Monday.

And so we're already fairly well versed, in a way, of acknowledging our solar energy or more active things that we do, and then trying to bring balance with our more lunar energy, our more resting, rejuvenating, bringing equilibrium to the paradigm or to the context for ourselves.

I feel like you might want to say something, am I correct?

Susi: Well, what I'm actually thinking about is for my American listeners, they have just passed through American Thanksgiving. And so I feel for them at this time because for Canadians, we've had our Thanksgiving and our previous festivity back in October. Which actually corresponded really nicely to the fall reset.

Whereas this is really how I've always heard about it from my American clientele and American friends is that Thanksgiving in the US starts it all off. So here, when this is dropping, is we're at December 2nd, and that's a long haul to go from end of November through to— It's basically an entire month plus if we're going to include New Year's in there. So what are some things that we can help those folks?

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And those around the world that are at least in this hemisphere of the world, the southern hemisphere, it's different because the environment is different. But there's still this long, festive season for many different folks.

And so how is it pacing? Is it tempo? I'm all for indulging, and I'm all for indulging the daylight out of it. I am totally picking up what you're putting down. And there is still this— And what I started off the episode with is that you can open up any fashion magazine or any kind of magazine at the grocery lineup and see all the tips that you should and should not do over the course of this season.

I want to get away from that. Not that that's wrong, it's a way into the process. And how to support oneself as they enjoy the daylights out of it.

Mona: It's my understanding, and it's my experience, and it's my belief that everyone would need to support themselves in a slightly different way because it depends what your starting point is. And more than anything, I think it depends on your knowing yourself.

So we're back to know thyself, right? You knowing yourself, and then being able to respond to the needs that arise. And so in order to really enjoy the daylights out of the indulgence and the celebration, you need fuel in the tank.

Solar energy requires energy. And so we need fuel in the tank. So it is a long haul for our American friends. And I think there's a couple pieces. So one is, it's all about aligning with your rhythm. It's all about aligning with your rhythm.

And so this might be, if as we say that you're like, "What rhythm? I have a rhythm? What's my rhythm?" Well, congratulations, this might be the season where you start to unveil and unwrap the gift that is your natural rhythm.

And so in order for us to be able to take care of ourselves, we have to know what we need and we have to know when we need it. And we also need to

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know, I think, some of the things that maybe we don't need. So medicine of addition, "I need this, how do I bring this to myself?" Medicine of subtraction, "This doesn't work for me, how do I let that go?"

And so it's a really bigger contextual piece. It's not really about don't drink the ice water, make sure you chew on a piece of ginger. It's not that because it really depends. And I think usually the paradigm that I think about the most in this circumstance from an Ayurvedic perspective is how we have certain things, it's all about balancing our qualities.

It's all about working with our Gunas, working with our qualities. Am I feeling light or my feeling heavy? And if I'm feeling light, then mac and cheese and a beer totally makes sense. And if I'm feeling heavy than mac and cheese and a beer might not make sense. And either way is fine.

But if I'm feeling heavy, then I might want to do something else instead. I might want to try a different stimulus. I might have a glass of white wine instead of a beer. Or I might decide, "You know what, I'm going to skip on that for today, I'm going to save it for the next round." Because what we know about holiday season is it's not just one thing, it's rounds. It's rounds of indulgence.

And so I think it comes down to getting to know ourselves. And what a brilliant opportunity and brilliant time to get to know ourselves, is going through this process of doing the things we do and then noticing the effect.

In yoga land, we call this laws of karma. Every action has an effect. And we want to learn when I do this, what's the outcome? What does that do? And then if we're looking for that outcome, we know which stimulus to apply.

And so we can spend our whole holiday season doing that, all while remembering for those whose holiday season includes winter, it is naturally a time of year where our body needs a little bit more in terms of resources. Which is why we tend to crave chilies, and stews, and roasts, and mac and cheese and some of these heavier, denser, thicker foods. Because our body actually is trying to build itself. It's trying to rebuild.

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So to crave mac and cheese in the winter, it's not a bad thing. It's natural. If you have a cold, long, hard winter, you need stamina, you need resource. And so to crave some of those heavier foods totally makes sense. And then Ayurvedically we would say, "And how are you digesting that?" Are you eating things that your body can digest?

And if you are, great. And if you need digestive support, then we just need to find some digestive support. Whether it be in terms of herbs, or whether it be in terms of whatever it is we do to support digestion. It might be taking a little bit more space between big party meals.

So I remember one holiday season, it was like breakfast was at one place with a group, and then lunch was at another place with a group, and then dinner was at another place with a group. And I would have been fine not to eat for a week after that. There was so much eating that happened in that one day.

And so now we try to space it out where we do one family on one day, another family on the other day. And depending where we're going, it might be like, "Yeah, we're going to not have this meal." Because we know that what's going to happen there is probably going to be the equivalent of two meals, and possibly enough food to feed a small army.

And so with that, getting to know ourselves, we've adjusted how we approach. We want to be able to enjoy the indulgence. And so if I know I'm going to be eating a nine course meal, I'm not going to have big meals beforehand.

So there's all sorts of little ways to think about it in terms of how we can explore and the things we can try to still honor the reality of the season, we need a little bit more. But also honor the reality of ourselves. What do I need in this moment? What makes sense for me right now?

Susi: So there's two things that come to mind. The first is really tapping into that inner authority, and really feeling into that inner authority. And what is that inner world, that inner rhythm suggesting?

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And so if you're new this idea of inner rhythm, feel what that nudge is, feel what that hunch is, feel what that kind of tug pull sense is that might be trying to get your attention. The other is, it's interesting to think that a year ago, most people that I knew were not gathering. And there are a lot of people that I heard from who said that was awesome.

So it may even be worthwhile to harken back to last year to think about did you enjoy what was your festive season? And if that was an enjoyment, well, what about it was enjoyable?

Because there's components that make up celebration. Some of it is food, some of it is people, some of it is schedule, some of it is tempo, some of it is pace, some of it's— I'll use the word texture, that's kind of describing all sorts of other nuance-y stuff.

There was something that you actually really enjoyed about it. Can you bring that into the space? Can you make a decision for yourself that actually really serves you this time around now that we are here, as opposed to where we were last year?

Then I also know people who were devastated by last year, by not being able to gather. So then then that's indicative of okay then, what's nourishment in that regard for you?

Mona: Yeah, I heard the same things. I had some people in my world that were devastated that they couldn't gather with family. And then I had other people who were so relieved not to have to pack up the car with the kids and 10,000 presents and be on the road for 17 hours to get to so and so's for two hours and then over here.

And so there was a real, like you say, a rhythm, a tempo, a pacing piece that really got changed, I think, for everybody for the whole of last year. There was quite a bit of pacing shift in a variety of ways. And I think it's so beautiful that that opportunity was had, so that everybody can reflect on which aspects of holidays nourish them. And can they bring that in? And how many nourishing aspects can you put together?

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So if it's not rushing, then how do you schedule in or how do you figure out not rushing. Because rushing drains your resources, not rushing nourishes you. But you still want to see people. Okay, so people are also nourishing. So how do I do people and not rushing?

It's almost like Tetris, or a Rubik's Cube, like how do we put the things together to get the aspects that nourish and feed us, but that also nourish and feed our relationships. Because I think that was a big thing last year, a lot of people felt like they were struggling to nourish their connections with each other.

And again, I think that that's a big way that we get light in dark season, is by maintaining connections that feel nourishing and that bring a sense of lightness and expansiveness. Because that's the whole thing with the sun, right?

So in Vedic astrology, the sun is characterized as a man, as a male. He's the king of all the planets. And he's considered selfless, so he's worthy of being a king because his whole thing is to just shine light, and to just shine light. And that's his only job is shine light, and just shine light.

And so when we lose a connection to that seasonally, we need to make up for that in some other way. And I really feel like this idea of sangha, of really positive, loving, inspiring interaction with other bright, light-hearted folks helps us to, in a way, get some sunlight. Even if it's not from the sun, it's from each other's inner sun.

And so I think it's really interesting how some people need more of that for a sense of nourishment, and other people need actually more time in their own sun. So more time inward, more time with themselves, with their own agni, with their own spirit, with their own inner sun, and they get filled with that.

And so I love how everything is so diversified in the sense that everybody needs something different.

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Susi: So if we were going to give a little bit of how-to here, because there's a number of different aspects that become interesting. Let's first take a look at let's recall last year. And what was last year and what did you love about last year, what did you not love about last year? Maybe that's a starting point of awareness, of focus.

And then the next layer might be, how long is your season? And I think this is where I would distinguish between myself, being a Canadian, and my American friends. Where my Thanksgiving happened in October, their Thanksgiving is happening at the end of November and there's just a longer duration.

Now, for some people, some Canadians, they might not be celebrating Thanksgiving, but their festive season might be starting at the beginning of December anyway given that's their life. And so then we can harken back to that talk when I was talking about what was last year like for you?

And that's merely because there's so many factors in the last year too. But it's just merely to kind of shine the light of what was great, what was not great?

So then once they get to that point, then would it make sense, Mona, to say all right, so when you think about previous festive seasons, or things that you're really looking forward to, what's your desire? What is sort of a want? What's your inner world, your inner authority, perhaps suggesting? What's that tug, that nudge?

And I mean, do you want to party hard? Is that what the desire is? Is it like, I want to be sober the entire time? I don't want to do any sugar. I want to experiment in a vegan, plant-based, low whatever, like, I don't know, whatever. Whatever that is that's pulling you, can you even kind of be conscious about that.

And so what are some other layers that people could start to become interested in? And out of this we're going to have a worksheet that people can download. You're going to find it in the show notes, where you can

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download it and at least just use it as a journaling exercise to explore this inner world for yourself of what would really serve you as you move through this darker time? Or as a means rather of reflection and of enjoyment as opposed to oppressive.

Mona: Yeah, I think within those arcs of awareness, once it's in it I would really ask myself, not just what do I want, but what nourishes me in these experiences? Or what do I think nourishes me in these experiences?

And then as I go into it, how much does it nourish me? Because we sometimes think that things are nourishing us and we might realize through really paying attention to that nourishment, and the quality of that nourishment, and how long that nourishment lasts, so the echo of the nourishment, that things aren't quite as we think they are.

I think back to my 20s and what I thought was nourishing, and I think too now and I'm like, "Whoa, all very, very different." And it's not that it was wrong then and it's right now or vice versa. Part of it is I've changed over time, but part of it is I now have a new standard for nourishment. It's more than just like a one hit wonder. For me nourishment is also about sustaining that.

And so it will be interesting for people to consider and contemplate nourishment. And then I think it will also be interesting to think about— I always think about things in terms of the three pillars. And so how does it affect my digestion? How does it affect my sleep? And then how does it affect my overall energy levels and overall general sense of wellbeing?

And so I like to approach a lot of things and when I'm in it, and then even when it's done, I like to reflect back and think like, so how's my digestion of that experience? Did I enjoy digesting that experience? Did it taste good to my experience body? What worked? What didn't?

And then I like to think of like, and then how did I sleep after that? Was I so elated and I just used up so much groovy energy that I fell into just this awesome, dreamy state? Or was it like I was so stirred up after that I

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couldn't really sleep? And then I like to notice the next day, now how do I feel right? What's the echo? What's the next day impact of the thing?

And to really put forth our best effort to approach ourselves with compassion without judgment. So we're not self-observing to shit on ourselves. That's never the goal. We're self-observing, to notice what we notice, so that we can increase our self-awareness. We can increase our self-awareness.

And so I like to look at the three pillars of health; digestion, sleep, and then energy. How am I feeling? How's my energy level?

And it'll be really interesting to just contemplate your holiday season, whether it's weekend worth of season, or a six week worth of season, what awareness you have and what you learn about yourself, and what you learn about how you want to celebrate. Because I think celebration is really important.

And I think different people celebrate in very different ways. So meaningful celebration, is different for different people.

Susi: And what's also brilliant is that here is a time of November to December, moving in towards January, where we're moving into for in some parts of the world some real winter. Like some cold, dark winter, and that will help move you through that cycle and towards winter.

Mona: Yes. Yes, it will help us. And I think that's part of why there's that sort of Christmas or end of December and then January New Year. And again, I know not all traditions use January 1st as New Year. But this idea of transitioning into the next season.

And again, the qualities change. And are we preparing ourselves in the previous season for the next season? And so are we getting the nourishment we need for the deep winter? Are we getting the light we need from each other before we move into the dark winter? Are we getting what

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we need so that we can sustain those couple months of intense cold and intense dark?

Susi: Really, really great. So I hope that this gave some ideas and considerations for those of you who had a different experience last year, had some insights from last year and you want to incorporate them into this year. At least started to get you thinking about what can be possible for this year and how this season can really serve you and nourish you and take you in toward January.

Now if you want some more help about how to move through the season or any season, Mona, how can people get in touch with you?

Mona: Thank you for asking. I have a website janatiyoga.com, and on the website there's an Ayurveda tab. And so if people are interested in working with me one on one in terms of being able to maybe figure out some logistics around how to support yourself individually, I love working with people and that's part of my practice, is one on one practice.

And I also wrote a book called Ayurveda's three pillars of health, which gives people a lot of food for thought around the seasons and around our digestion, our sleep, our energy management. Lots of different opportunities to explore different ways of supporting yourself and the book is easily available on Amazon.

So that's a nice way for those of you who are a little bit more, you're like maybe I'm interested in Ayurveda, I don't know if I'm interested in Ayurveda. It's a really great introductory Ayurvedic resource, and easy to find and easy to share. So if something and it works for you, then you pass it on to a loved one, and then you can have your community.

Because I think that's another piece that's important as we move through times of change and times of challenge, is to have folks that can lean on us and that we can lean on when that's needed. And so, yeah, so feel free to check the website.

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And if you email through the website, all the emails from the website come to me directly. So you can always reach out that way.

Susi: And just to add that every person that we know who has visited with Mona has always said amazing things about you. So you're in good hands if you want to reach out to Mona.

Mona: Thank you.

Susi: Thank you again, Mona, for joining us and we'll see you another time.

Mona: Bye everyone.

Susi: Take care.