

Summer

Avital Sebbag

To see the beauty of the universe
Between Earth and Heaven
A bud appears
After the rain
Contains the essence of life
So pure and fresh
Seasons go
Seasons come

Understanding and obeying the laws of nature is the magical and wonderful secret of creation, which unfortunately most of us have abandoned for the sake of pursuing material greed. We are created into the universe, and nature is our host for the limited time we are here. I call us “time travelers.”

We are on a magical journey where we learn to experience ourselves and become familiar with our wonderful qualities and with what we would like to give back as a gift to Mother Nature, for the abundance she gave us during our time on Earth.

A person aspires to live a healthy and sound life at any given age, which is possible under a few very important conditions, which we must stop, observe, and contemplate: Did you stop for a moment and ask yourself what

season it is now? Should I change my eating habits accordingly?

When we give awareness its rightful place, the information comes to us naturally.

Our body requires energy that can fuel us, just like a plant requires nourishment, water, and sunlight.

The primary basic energy we get is from healthy food that is organic and free of toxins and pesticides. The farmer chooses which crops are best suited for the season, tills the soil so that the seeds have the best chance of growing, irrigates, prunes, pays attention to changes and takes care of damages. This already teaches us about how the farmer’s intent may affect the quality of the crops that are sown.

In summer, nature presents itself in all its glory. It is a time of expansion and abundance. Breathtaking spectacles of blossoms and fruits express the potential stored in seeds. We are drawn outdoors to spend time with friends in an atmosphere of sharing, joy and freedom. Summer has the following characteristics:

- Color: red
- Taste: bitter
- Foods: cherry, watermelon, plum, peach, olives, celery, lettuce, leaves, all types of sprouts, coffee, green tea

Summer is associated with the element of fire, the dominant flavor of the element is bitter (or burned), like toasted bread or grilling tofu and vegetables on the barbecue. Food is simpler, less cooked, more raw, more cooling. The summer days are hot and accompanied by humidity in some parts of the world. The heat and humidity combined create dense air that makes us feel weary. It’s important to prepare our body for the summer so that we don’t suffer from edema and humidity.

This is a time of vacations and trips, outdoor picnics, spending time in water like the beach, streams, lakes, time for the family to spend together. During the hot summer days, it’s important to eat fresh food. Some people can grow their own food in the garden. I obviously recommend organic food that hasn’t been grown in soil with chemical fertilizers and that hasn’t been sprayed with pesticides. These chemicals harm the nervous system and create inflammation in the body.

Until the invention of the refrigerator, the only way to keep food cold was by snow or ice taken directly from nature. In the past, it was customary to bury food in the ground after covering it with a layer of ice and straw as insulation and as a barrier from the mud. Later, this tech-

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nique was refined and food was stored inside wooden crates along with chopped ice chunks and piles of straw. The ice chunks could be bought from an ice merchant that passed through the town and offered his goods by crying out, "Ice! Ice!" Wealthy people had special huts with an underground cellar. They used this cool cellar to store food on large blocks of ice, enabling them to store food for a prolonged period and enjoy ice even during the hot summer.

Another food preservation method that existed in every region and food culture and tradition was to pickle vegetables. Pickling is a food preparation and preservation process that uses water with the addition of vinegar or salt, with the main purpose of preserving most of the nutritional ingredients while rendering it edible for longer than usual. The process is also accompanied by characteristic changes in flavor and smell, like the famous kimchi that can be found in every traditional household in Korea, sauerkraut in Germany and Austria, pickled cucumbers and vegetables in the Middle East. The pickles were the ultimate solution for sailors who were out at sea for long periods of time without a refrigerator. Pickling can be done during any season of the year.

Joy is the emotional characteristic of summer. When we are balanced, we are joyful. When we are not balanced and are out of sync with the laws of nature, we may suffer from depression.

How can we protect our *joie de vivre* using nutrition? It's important to consume food that provides our cells with as many enzymes, chlorophyll, and antioxidants as possible. I call these three nutrients "nature's triangle." We are constantly surrounded by these nutrients, and all we need to do is to open our awareness to them, like we do when we practice Zen. Opening our awareness is to take responsibility for our physical and mental health. When the body is balanced, the mind can develop and practicing will be more profound.

In the summer we need to eat less and drink a lot of fluids. We can get these fluids through nutrition that is rich in seasonal fruits and vegetables. It's unnecessary to drink a lot when we eat fruits and vegetables that are rich in water, such as watermelon, grapes, melon, leafy greens.

Sprouts

We can find enzymes in sprouts originating from seeds and legumes. When we make sprouts, we want all the enzymes to break out. The body uses these enzymes to enable healing to occur naturally in its cells. Sprouting is a simple, easy, fun process that anyone can do in their own kitchen.

The Chinese have been eating sprouts for thousands of years. The type of Chinese sprout we are most familiar with is *nga choy* (or *nga choy*). Sprouts can differ in length from short to long.

Making sprouts is fun, easy and healthy. During the

sprouting process, the starch (carbohydrate) turns into a sprout, and is more easily digested than seeds. When the seed turns into a sprout, the vitamins, minerals and enzymes in it become more available to the body. The amount of vitamins in the seed increases tenfold during sprouting. Sprouts reach the optimal amount of vitamins usually 50 to 100 hours after sprouting has begun.

The ten commandments for novice sprouters:

1. Only use fresh legumes for sprouting. I recommend starting with mung beans and lentils.
2. The sprout should be at least as long as the seed.
3. It's best to sprout in a dark and shaded area (exposure to light affects the bitterness of the sprout).
4. Some seeds like the pressure method.
5. Those with sensitive stomachs should lightly steam the sprouts before eating them.
6. In the summer and in hot dry regions, the sprouts should be rinsed and refreshed more than twice a day.
7. A foul odor indicates a failed sprouting. If that's the case, discard it.
8. You can keep the sprouts in the fridge for several days.
9. Some legumes are easier to sprout (mung beans) than others (chickpeas).
10. Never ever despair if your first sprouting attempts fail.

To make sprouts, soak the legumes for four hours. Transfer to a colander and rinse every two hours under the tap,



Photo: Michal Lenart

three times a day. It's important that the legume be damp and not soaking wet, otherwise it won't sprout. After 24 hours the sprout should appear, and then it's important to store in a hermetically sealed dry glass container in the fridge. You can add the sprouts to rice, cooked dishes or even a salad.

Chlorophyll

Chlorophyll is found in all leafy greens, as well as freshwater algae such as spirulina and chlorella. Chlorophyll is no less important to us than the sun! There's no life without the sun's light and no life without chlorophyll. Chlorophyll is the liquid form of the sun's energy. Consuming as much chlorophyll as possible is akin to exposing our inner organs to the sun's light. Chlorophyll molecules are surprisingly similar in shape to the iron-rich heme molecules in human blood.

Chlorophyll takes care of our body like a loving and devoted mother. It heals and cleanses our internal organs, and even destroys some of our internal enemies, such as pathogenic bacteria, fungi, cancerous cells and more.

Chlorophyll also regulates the levels of "good" and "bad" bacteria in our gut. In order to enjoy optimal health, we need 80 to 85 percent "good" bacteria. Friendly bacteria generate many nutritional components that are essential for our bodies, including vitamin K, B vitamins, numerous beneficial enzymes and other essential substances. Such aerobic or "good" bacteria proliferate in the presence of oxygen. And if we don't have enough oxygen in our cells, the "bad" bacteria take over our gut and start to multiply there and cause infections and disease. These pathogenic bacteria are anaerobic bacteria that cannot tolerate oxygen. Caring for our intestinal bacteria is extremely important! "Good" bacteria may be easily destroyed by many factors, like antibiotics, poor nutrition, overeating and stress. In such a situation, we may have 80 to 90 percent "bad" bacteria filling our body with acidic and toxic waste. I believe that too many anaerobic bacteria in our intestines is the main cause of all diseases.

Chlorophyll has long been used as a wonder drug. Chlorophyll contains significant amounts of oxygen and therefore fulfills a vital role in supporting aerobic bacteria. Therefore, as long as we consume a large amount of chlorophyll, the balance of our intestinal bacteria will improve and result in overall improved health as well. In light of the fact that leafy greens are an important source of chlorophyll, it's hard to find a better way to consume chlorophyll than drinking green shakes. Chlorophyll has been proven to help prevent and heal many forms of cancer and atherosclerosis. Scientific studies show that chlorophyll may help with most diseases. If I wanted to describe all of chlorophyll's healing properties, I would need to devote an entire book to it. This is only a partial list of this amazing substance's medicinal properties. Let's enjoy it by consuming fresh leafy greens throughout the year, and especially during the summer months.

Antioxidants

Antioxidants can be found in foods year-round, especially in berries, cocoa beans, maca root, algae such as spirulina and chlorella, and in various seasonal fruits and vegetables. Antioxidants help heal the body's cells and to clear them of toxins. The highest concentration of antioxidants is mainly found in superfoods such as berries, cocoa beans, chlorella, spirulina, ginger, and miso—to name a few. In one of my lectures, a client asked me, "Avital, the superfoods that are so popular today—how will I know what's best for me?" I smiled and responded, "Mother Nature is not concerned with trends, time or school of thought. The superfoods have been around for billions of years. We are surrounded by them and they can be found in numerous foods, all we have to do is open our awareness and enjoy the bounty nature provides us with each season."

Guidelines for Awareness in the Kitchen

- In the kitchen, as in life, do not say, "I'm not skilled enough to be in the kitchen" or "I won't succeed."
- The negative has no place in a healthy kitchen and healthy life.
- I will do the best I can for myself and for my surroundings.
- I will enjoy this exact moment, because it won't return.
- I will be present in the moment in every aspect of my life, including in my thoughts on what I will prepare to eat, how I will prepare it so that it will suit this moment with regard to the season and time of day.
- I will approach the recipe and the ingredients with a smile and with a great deal of love, so that the positive energy infuses the food and affects how it tastes.
- While preparing the food I will be fully present in the moment and not conduct any unnecessary conversations. I won't let thoughts take over the creation of the moment.
- I will be focused on the goal and enjoy each stage, simply being present in the moment.
- I will pay attention when using a knife or any other kitchen utensil so that I don't injure myself or others. ♦

Avital Sebbag has practiced in the Kwan Um School of Zen in the Israeli sangha for 12 years and is a dharma teacher at the Hod Hasharon Zen Center in Israel. She has served as a vegan kitchen master for numerous retreats in the Kwan Um School around the world. The author of the cookbook *Five Seasons in the Kitchen: Zen Inspired Vegan Cooking*, Avital is also the mother of five sons and a certified natural therapist, specializing in nutrition and ancient Chinese medicine. You can purchase her book online at <http://www.avitality.co.il/english>. Find Avital on Facebook at FiveSeasonsintheKitchen or on Instagram at avitalsebbag.