

ESSENCE AWAKENED

Sunita Passi makes Ayurveda understandable in the modern context

Writer Kate O'Brien

Sunita Passi is a natural wellness entrepreneur and visionary. A qualified journalist and Ayurvedic health coach, she is founder of UK-based Ayurvedic training provider and product houses, Tri-Dosha and Neem, which supplies authentic Ayurvedic skincare and training to top spas and retreats worldwide, including Kempinski and Four Seasons hotels. Internationally renowned for her knowledge and technical expertise, she demystifies the ancient Indian system, helping it make sense in a modern world. A meditation devotee, she is also co-founder of the Nottingham-based meditation project Unplugged Space.

The granddaughter of an Ayurvedic doctor, Passi was born in London and grew up in Nottingham, qualifying with a master's degree in investigative journalism. She enjoyed a successful business journalistic career, working in Europe, Asia and the Americas. It was while based in India in 2002 – the ninth country she called home over a four-year period – that she first experienced the healing powers of Ayurveda, with a chance massage changing the course of her work and her life. "Lying on a medicinal couch (more of a wooden slab!) in some out-of-the-way side street in Pune, I experienced what I can only describe as an epiphany. I enjoyed the best massage ever, although the therapists hardly touched me, and underwent something of a deep energetic transformation."

As Passi began to settle into the country of her roots, she felt profoundly as if she had returned home. "Although I never lived in India, everything felt so familiar – the sounds, the smells, the tastes. It was as if the daily rhythms were just my 'norm' and ultimately, I found a sense of calm



and peace. After the massage experience, I started learning more about Ayurveda and as the wisdom became a part of my life, I realised just how unbalanced I was, working out twice a day just to cope with my life. I wasn't alone either, as most of my colleagues existed this way too."

Passi took a year out to travel around India, Nepal and Thailand.

One of the first places she visited was the Sivananda Centre in Kerala. "The practices were difficult at first, but as I cultivated a daily rhythm I started to feel better about myself and to let go of the stress and pain. With this came a deep feeling of peace. At an ashram in Pune, I learnt that by simply being more present and mindful in my actions, I developed a deeper connection within myself and ultimately to a calmer state."

The more Passi learnt about Ayurveda, the more convinced she became that these powerfully grounding techniques can help in every aspect of our lives. From stress relief to sleeping more soundly, feeling stronger and ultimately the realisation that life is about celebration, and not just getting through the day, as she had done for so long.

"At the various ashrams I tried desperately to absorb truth. I couldn't pull myself away. I became so detached from mainstream life that coming back to the UK was extremely difficult," says Passi. "In retrospect, I almost felt as if I was being asked to give up everyday life, which was quite scary, but ultimately drew me to authentic teachers who helped me get closer to my truth. And as a result, I now have more to share with others."

Throughout Passi's journey, the memories of her grandfather, Hazari Lal

Passi flooded her being. As a child on holiday in Northern India, she recalls watching him prescribe herbs to patients, while instilling a knowledge of nature and the tools to appreciate life with those he encountered through his work, as well as family.

Being of Indian heritage with the mysteries of nature and spirituality already embedded in her consciousness helped Passi immensely. She says, "It just needed to be awakened through my own journey of self-discovery. I think the intensity of this trip lit a fire in me which then formed the basis of the company I created, one that would serve holistic therapists and practitioners in the UK with expert training, who then radiate

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the techniques out to a wider community."

In 2005, Tri-Dosha, a training provider of accredited massage training/education and a result of Passi's experiences, developed into an award-winning health and beauty manufacturer. She says, "This wasn't intentional, which is the beauty of our story, as everything happened organically. I worked with holistic experts, teachers and formulators, and was importing traditional Indian oils for use in treatments."

Though Passi personally likes the nutty quality of Ayurvedic oils, they were too pungent for the mainstream market. This inspired her to develop a range of oils

to complement the service, combining medicinal herbs sourced from independent farmers her grandfather worked with quality essential oils.

To date, Passi has trained close to 800 therapists in Ayurvedic healing techniques. She says, "When I train therapists, I don't delve deep into Ayurvedic philosophy. I teach techniques that will bring more balance and harmony into their own, and clients', lives. But, Ayurveda is much greater than this. It heals the world and all of us, and it's my life purpose to share profound teachings that can help transport students into a better space."

Her clients are generally highly-strung, ambitious types with pitta (fiery) constitutions and overworked bodies and minds. Passi has learnt that not only do clients resonate with a particular type of methodology, but also a particular type of energy in their teacher. She says, "Even in impossibly tough times, a sense of truth prevails when we see something in a teacher that can link us to transformation. Seeing someone finally get their mojo back, feel more confident in their skin or find the love of their life, simply because their energy flows more freely and they connect more naturally."

Seeing herself as a bridge connecting people, Passi awakens these deep concepts within her students. She says, "There is a lot of intellectual elitism in Ayurveda. If you want to share timeless knowledge, the teachings need to be simplified into everyday language. It's not about dilution, but presenting it in a way that the West will understand – just like what happened with yoga."

Through writing her first book, a practical guide to the Ayurvedic lifestyle, Passi aims to achieve this. She says, "We are living in a precious time as we are challenged in many ways – emotionally and environmentally. Ayurveda takes us back to our basic essence, and with the crazy pace of our lives, there is an emerging acceptance of this ancient wisdom. The real beauty is that we don't need to look any further – with Ayurveda everything we need is already there – it just needs to be awakened."

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