

Ep #45: Abhyanga



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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 Hately. 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 Hately.

With this episode I want to dig into an Ayurveda concept called Abhyanga. I want to dig into what it is being in a warm oil practice, what it purportedly does or how it works, my own process towards using this as a regular practice in my own life. And then to give you some ideas of the products that I use. And I don't receive any benefit from telling you about these products, but I do want you to know some of the things that I've used in my own process. And then how my kids have come to ask for warm oiling on a very, very regular basis.

What I find so interesting about Abhyanga, which I find so interesting, really, with many of the yoga practices that I have come across is that initially I was super, super skeptical. I thought it was an entirely nutty experience to warm oil oneself and then sit there for 5 to 20 minutes. I thought it was highly indulgent. And I thought it was incredibly messy. And how on earth could warm oiling really be that beneficial?

Now don't get me wrong, I've been to massages, I get the benefits of oil from the perspective of reducing stress, and releasing tension, and improving lymphatic flow and circulation. Like all those very top-level types of things I understand that but I just couldn't fathom, I couldn't get it past my intellectual brain of how my doing this to myself would be of benefit. And so I just left it off to the side.

Then one time back in around 2011, 2010-ish. I went to a Panchakarma. And I loved the entire Panchakarma experience, which is an Ayurvedic practice which involves a series of processes, and one of which is Abhyanga. And I loved the Abhyanga that was provided for me there and I could really feel an impact. But when I came home, I didn't use the Abhyanga because it just seemed way too involved, and again, way too indulgent, too messy and just too much for me to even consider.

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But then one day years later, something triggered me to try it out. And I had traveled to the states from Canada and I was there for a business retreat that I was a participant in. And when I got to the hotel, I was just feeling a little off, a little not quite right. Now, normally when I travel, I take time to get myself grounded and kind of take the edge or the fluff off of air travel. And I just did what I normally would do, but I couldn't quite find my ground.

And so I went to the Whole Foods around the corner from where I was staying and picked up the smallest bottle that I could find, which of course was going to be larger than an airline travel size, it was about five or six ounces of olive oil.

And I went back and gave it a shot. And got the towels out, warmed up the oil and went about oiling from my feet through to my legs, my pelvis, and my back, and my belly, and my rib cage, around my arms through my head and my hair. And there I went, I sat quietly in the bathroom and just let it seep in and absorb. And it was really quite astounding how I felt.

It was one of those aha moments when your intellect just settles out and says, "See, this is kind of crazy." And then some other voice in you says, "See, I told you so." In the happiest, funniest kind of way. But it was really sort of stunning how something so simple, could have such an impact and how nourishing and yummy it felt.

When you look at the word oil and love, they come from a similar word of Sinha. So when you think about it, when you're oiling there is love and there is oil that is being wrapped all over you. Now how much more nourishing can you get? Like how can get you more yummy than loving yourself and oiling?

I know, it sounds so indulgent, doesn't it? And back then I think I had already turned the corner at that point. But it just truly is a really lovely experience. When I came back from that travel I stopped, I didn't continue on. What I will say is when I was there for that weekend because I had the six- or eight-ounce bottle, whatever small bottle I had, I did it morning and

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night and morning and night because I didn't want to waste the oil. And so I did it twice a day and it was heavenly.

When I got back, I was still in that mindset that I didn't have the time or the ability to do something so indulgent. And then it became this ritual I did though when I traveled. Whatever the length of travel was, whether it was getting on an airplane to go somewhere, or whether it was with my husband Stu and we went out to our family cabin that was three hours away, or my parent's cabin which was six hours away.

Whenever we got to where we got to, I had my oil and I would utilize that, and then it became a practice for when we were on vacation. And it just was something I started to do in those blocks of time because I felt like I had the time that I could do it.

Now, I continue to use food grade oil, which is what the Ayurvedic doctor at the Panchakarma at the Himalayan Institute had suggested that I use, is just find a food grade oil. When I was at Panchakarma they'd given me an almond oil, but that was a bit expensive, it was hard to get at the time. And so I stuck with the olive oil. And then I transitioned to using a sesame oil. And a sesame oil that was not roasted.

I made that mistake once and I smelt like a kitchen. You can find, Spectrum brand is the one that I tend to use. And you can also buy sesame-based oil from massage outlets that doesn't have the smell associated with it.

So I started using that more and more and more. I just would bring that bottle wherever I would go, just making sure that if I brought a bottle anywhere, either I would get a small bottle like the olive oil one that I got the very, very first time I did it when I traveled. Or if I was bringing the sesame one, because it doesn't have a screw top lid, I always got a bit nervous about bringing it home not closed, like not locked closed, and spilling, because that would just be a big mess.

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So I always planned that if I brought a bottle with me, I would use the bottle when I was gone. And so I just sort of based the usage of how I did it when I was away. Now some days I would drench myself in oil. If I really felt like I needed more nourishment I would drench myself and maybe sit for longer. But sometimes, it was so interesting, my skin would just suck it up. Like the times when I really felt that I needed it.

I got into a practice, when I would leave my intensives or any of my certification trainings, I started to do a lot more oiling during those trainings because those ones tended to take more energy from me. I would be able to bolster it with doing the oiling. And some days for those I would use a lot of oil and just let it absorb in.

I found that there were certain days or certain times of the year where I liked to go to bed with oil on. Now, that might sound like crazy making because of the mess. But what I found is that it really wasn't that messy.

So I would put on a thin layer of oil, sit there and let it absorb in a bit, and then put on pajamas that I had dedicated to oiling, and socks that were dedicated to oily. And then I would crawl into my sheets. And I never, and still haven't ever messed things up with my sheets or the pillow.

And sometimes it was just nice to keep it on all night long. And then when I'd wake up in the morning, then I would just rinse it off. And most of it was absorbed by that point. My oil in my hair was still there and so I'd just rinse it off or shampoo it out and then carry on with my day.

When the pandemic hit, I shifted up the way that I oiled. I was really starting to crave more cozy about one week into the pandemic. There was a big hard pivot I was doing with my work, there was of course the uncertainty that all of us in the world were facing, and I just needed a little more cozy.

And what I would do is take a sheet and put it into the dryer, let the dryer run for five minutes while I was oiling myself up. And then I would wrap

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myself in the warm sheet, and then wrap myself in a blanket around that. So putting myself into quite a sausage roll.

And then I would just lie there listening to either music, playlist, podcast, or just Shavasana, and just chill out in the early hours of my morning. And it was so, so lovely. Sometimes I would fall asleep and then I would get up I would rinse off. And that was before I would then lead my yoga class that I was doing for Facebook and IGTV, when I was supporting everybody who was following me with just a daily practice.

So it was a really nice process of really taking care of myself in the morning. Getting myself all oiled up, rinsing off, getting ready, and then serving my followers with a yoga practice. And then on with my day I would go with breakfast. And it was a practice that I did for many, many, many months.

And it was one of those practices, A, because the regularity that I did it pretty, much at the same time every day. And I had such an intentionality behind it that it was one of my practices that really helped keep me on track and focused on moving forward as we were pivoting in the business.

And as we were doing what every other business was doing at that time of keeping the wheels in the bus and moving things forward. It was one of those that just helped me stay very, very connected, and very clear to my inner world and to my own kinesthetic sense, and my own intuition to help me take those steps forward.

I'm not doing that so much anymore. Something transitioned closer to the fall of last year where I found myself getting up in the morning and coming back to just doing a short simple Abhyanga massage, rinsing off, and carrying on with my day.

And then days or weeks when I felt that I needed a bit more, say we were having a movie night with the kids. Then I would oil myself up before that movie night and then would watch the movie while I was oiled up and I'd be

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in my pajamas and have a towel on the couch. And my kids all think that's really, really funny. And then I would rinse off and shower off before I went to bed.

What's interesting is in the process, because I don't hide it at all from my family, my kids would kind of look at me and be like, what's that all about? And we just started to do it for them at the end of their day. And we would do the same thing that I had mentioned. We'd have their sheets and their towels, and we'd warm the oil up and put it all over them, and then wrap them up in their sheets and their towels.

And they would be there, I mean they're four years old right now, they're there for about two or three minutes. And then they're like, "Okay, we're all absorbed." That's what they say, "I'm all absorbed now." And then we unravel their sheets, and lo and behold the oil has like totally sucked up into them.

And it's become a practice that they will explicitly ask for us. And it becomes a thing not every day, but when they ask for it, we will provide it because they really quite like it. And they specifically will ask, so I don't typically bring it up to them. They're the ones who come to me. And sometimes it's just one of them who asks for it. Sometimes it's both of them who asked for it.

When they were really little, when they were first born, I actually had Mona, our Ayurvedic trainer, she sent me this baby Abhyanga type of oil that's specifically for little ones. And it was a really fun practice to do with them during some of their diaper changes. And it was one of those really lovely connecting moments between myself and each of them when we did use it.

These days with them I don't use a special oil much of the time, I mostly use a sesame oil. But every so often, they will say to me, "Can I have the purple bottle?" Or "Can I have the orange bottle?" Or can I have the whichever bottle and then we just warm it up and onward we go. So it's quite a lovely connection.

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Now in terms of products that I use, as I mentioned I started off with an olive oil. And then I moved to a sesame oil and the sesame oil was Spectrum brand. The olive oil was whatever the smallest bottle of olive oil was that I could find. And also something that had a screwed cap. Especially if I'm going to be traveling somewhere I want to know that I'm leaving with something that's got a screw cap so that it doesn't spill over everything.

And then I moved to occasionally working with oils from Sewanti. And you can find that in the show notes, that's a Canadian based company out of Vancouver and they are known to be very classic in their Ayurvedic concoctions. And then Solavedi in the states is another one, and Banyan Products is another one.

Banyan no longer ships to Canada; I had been ordering quite a bit from them. They no longer ship to Canada, so that is why I now use Sewanti. And as I mentioned at the beginning, I don't receive any benefit from telling you this, I'm just sharing you the ones that I've really had a lot of benefit from and that I really enjoy as part of my process.

Now sometimes people will ask me, what about the mess? Like really, what about the mess? And in truth, I don't actually find it to be that incredibly messy. My pipes have not clogged because of oil. And maybe it's because I sit long enough that the oil absorbs and there's not a whole lot of excess oil that goes down the drain or that gets onto my towels.

There is a certain bit of smell though to the towels. You can tell which towels have been used because I've used them so much for the oiling. So even though it's a small amount, those particular towels you can tell are oil towels. But they're not gross, there's nothing yucky about it. I just wouldn't use the towels for getting out of a regular shower. I also wouldn't wash my clothes with the ones I wore with oil. So they are a separate washing load of laundry.

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But I wouldn't say that it's super messy. So I'm unsure. And who knows, maybe after all these years there's something I'm not quite doing absolutely by the law or by the rule. But I find that when I put oil on myself, even when I put a lot of it on, that I just take the time to let it all absorb in. And so then when I wash myself there's not a lot going down the drain and there's not a lot getting on the towels.

So those are some ideas around Abhyanga oiling. And if it's something that you've got an interest in exploring, you know, go for it. Maybe you need to start off with being on vacation like the way I did. Or going to another program like I did where you feel like you've got more time and that's the way you start. Or maybe just start to play with it one morning or one evening before bed and just see what it feels like for you and how it has an impact for you, and the coziness, and the nourishment, and the love that it provides you. Enjoy your practice.

If this conversation around Ayurveda really resonates with you and you want to learn more about how to integrate Ayurveda into yoga therapy, into your health profession, into your life, then please send us an email to help@functionalsynergy.com. And we can tell you all about our awesome yoga therapy certification program. Take good care.