The Little-Known Noni
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AYURVEDA

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Is this stinky, ugly fruit a Polynesian panacea?

Most people instinctively avoid things that smell like this. But this is supposed to be medicine, and we all know how that tastes. Even so, Diana Fairechild, author of Noni, Aspirin of the Ancients (Flyana Rhyme, Hawaii), says, "It is an acquired taste, like cheese." She takes the fruit daily in one form or another and details in her book her dramatic cure by noni of a crippling case of toxic chemical poisoning. Members of the Hinduism Today staff who were introduced to ripe fruit from our own trees were not the least bit interested in acquiring this taste. But with the onset of an aggressive fall flu, those who had turned their noses away came crawling back, on the off-chance that we may have sniffed out a cure. We administered a recipe from Fairechild's book, and nearly everyone experienced relief from symptoms, some more than others. Several reported significant improvement within minutes of taking the potion.

"Noni" is the native Hawaiian name for the small evergreen tree Morinda citrifolia, and its fruit. The tree grows vigorously from India to Malaysia, up through Fiji and eastern Polynesia. It is known in Vietnam, Africa and the Caribbean--where it is called the "painkiller tree." Australians call it "cheesefruit"--from the overpowering smell. Dyes are

extracted from noni roots and young fruits, and all parts--root, bark, leaf, fruit and flower--are used medicinally. In 1992, Dr. Arthur W. Whistler of the National Botanical Garden, Hong Kong, wrote that noni was the "most widely and commonly used medicinal plant prior to the European era."

Noni interest is ripening in the West, where it is being touted as the nutritive, detoxifying, immuno-building tonic that cures what ails you. Dr. Virender Sodhi of the Ayurvedic and Naturopathic Medical Clinic, Washington, told Hinduism Today that Morinda citrifolia is well known in India, but there is not much about it in ayurvedic texts. Noni grows in tropical climates, and Sodhi speculates that use of noni in India may be most common in siddha medicine, which is largely a Southern system. He also suggests that much more information exists in the oral tradition.

Texts do reveal, however, that ayurveda prescribes noni, with a few exceptions, for the same symptoms and with similar preparations as Polynesian healers. Rita Elkins, M.H., states in her small booklet, Hawaiian Noni (Woodland Publishing, Utah), "Cultures indigenous to the Polynesian islands had a significant understanding of their flora. Native Hawaiians maintained a folk-medicine taxonomy that was considered second to none."

Throughout Polynesia and India, the fruit and leaves are a source of food. Medicinally, fruits are considered tonic, febrifuge, emmenagogue, anti-congestive, blood-purifying and more. Charred unripe fruits mixed with sea-salt relieve diseased gums. This prescription is identical in Polynesian and ayurvedic systems. Leaves are used for infantile diarrhea and

dysentery and to heal wounds, ulcers and the pain of gout. Ayurveda adds that noni is a kapha (water element) stabilizer and helps to remove excess pitta (fire element) from the body. Elkins gives an impressive list of body systems which "have all been effectively influenced by noni: circulatory, digestive, respiratory, integumentary (skin), endocrine, immune, nervous and skeletal."

The Sanskrit name for Morinda citrifolia, Ashyuka, meaning longevity, resonates with Western research findings. Noni is renowned for its unique ability to improve opposite conditions and virtually any ailment from which you suffer. For example, noni has been hailed has a cure for low blood pressure--and also high blood pressure. It exhibits promising anti-cancer and immune system strengthening potential.

Unlike other natural medicines, which rely upon alternative practitioners to sing their praises, the too-good-to-be-true noni has been extolled by members of the scientific community. Noni is said to work at a sub-cellular level through the agent xeronine, which is produced when noni enters the stomach (an empty one). This was first theorized by Dr. R.M. Heinicke in 1985. Elkins elaborates, "Tissues contain cells which possess receptor sites for xeronine. Because the reactions that can occur are so varied, different therapeutic actions can result when xeronine production escalates, explaining why Hawaiian noni is good for many seemingly unrelated disorders. Damnacanthol, another compound contained in noni fruit, has shown the ability to block or inhibit the cellular function of RAS cells, widely considered to be pre-cancerous. Further evaluation has theorized that the unique chemical constituents of Morinda citrifolia initiated enhanced T-cell activity, a

reaction that may explain noni's ability to treat a variety of infections diseases."

Sodhi adds, "Noni contains glycosides and anthraquinones, of which xeronine is one type. Various plant anthraquinones have shown amoebicidal, anti-leukemia, anticancer and immune modulating properties." He speculates that the qualities of noni empower the body to produce whatever it needs in just the right quantities.

Fairechild offers a wide range of technical data in her book, while emphasizing the Hawaiian traditions, relying largely on testimonies of those who have been healed by noni. Her approach is one of a dear friend. After all, noni saved her life (and that is quite a story). She offers, "I believe that the spirit of this plant has the power to heal us emotionally, while its fruits, roots, etc., heal us physically." Fairechild continues to receive wide acclaim for her first book, Jet Smart, and prominence as the director of the Fair Air Coalition. For this work she has been interviewed by Dateline NBC, Reuters, India Today and recently CNN, Consumer Reports, Entrepreneur and Business Week. There is a connection here, for it was the cumulative experiences of her 21 years as a flight attendant which providentially led her to noni (read the book).

For those who have access to fresh noni, Fairechild presents a variety of recipes based upon her own experience and also drawn from Hawaiians with whom noni is a family tradition. For the rest of the world, noni juice, extract and tablets can be readily found in healthfood stores and on the web. The term "juice" here is a misnomer, for noni juice is concentrated and

meant to be taken 1-2 tablespoons at a time, not guzzled. Prices are high--$20 for 12 ounces of "juice" and $56 for a bottle of tablets. But considering that it is an emerging product with great healing potential and no infrastructure, the prices make more sense. After all, what price would you pay to be rid of your life-threatening disease? On the other hand, some may feel it is worth any cost to avoid an encounter with the reeking fruit..

BOOKS CAN BE FOUND AT www.hindu.org/reading AND FLYANA RHYME, P.O. BOX 248, ANAHOLA, HI 96703 USA; www.FLYANA.COM; TEL: (USA) 800?524?8477; (OUTSIDE US) 808?828?1919. WOODLAND PUBLISHING, P.O. BOX 160, PLEASANT GROVE, UTAH 84062 USA.