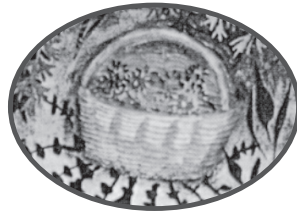


FROM
Saint
HILDEGARD'S



* KITCHEN *

Foods OF Health
Foods OF Joy

JANY FOURNIER-ROSSET

TRANSLATED BY VICTORIA HÉBERT AND DENIS SABOURIN


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INTRODUCTION



How wonderful it is to discover the secret of joy in the enlightened revelations of a twelfth-century Benedictine Abbess! Nine hundred years ago, in the Middle Ages, Hildegard of Bingen was granted, by means of heavenly visions, precious knowledge about human nutrition: while the “foods of sadness” sap our health and vitality, the “foods of joy” revitalize us and help preserve good health in every sphere: physical, spiritual, and psychological.

How can a simple dietary regimen succeed in preventing illness and producing radiant health? It does so by eliminating the foods that result in the “black bile” of sadness, as Saint Hildegard calls it, and eating those that prevent its accumulation. On the other hand, foods of joy chase sadness away and bring happiness and balm to our hearts.

The author, Jany Fournier-Rosset, is a lay oblate of Saint Benedict, married, a mother, and well known for her talents as an accomplished chef. She offers us an original selection of healthy and flavorful recipes, based upon the writings and teachings of Saint Hildegard.

SAINT HILDEGARD: A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1098 in Bockelheim, Germany, of noble parents, Hildegard was the youngest of ten children. As custom dictated, she was dedicated to God at the age of eight. Her training and education



was entrusted to Mother Jutta Von Spannheim, superior of the cloistered religious of Disidodenberg. She taught Hildegard to read, write, and even instructed her in Latin, educating her as well about the Benedictine rule.

It is said that Hildegard learned little from humans. Her complete and encompassing knowledge was said to come to her through visions, given to her directly from heaven.

Hildegard pronounced her vows with the cloistered Benedictines at the age of eighteen and later became the mistress of novices. A biographer said about her: “Hildegard was the first of the great German mystics; she was a prophet, a poet, a physician, and a political moralist who reprimanded popes, crowned heads, bishops, and laypersons alike; she was totally honest and demonstrated an infallible sense of justice.”

Identified as a mystical visionary from the age of three, Hildegard astonished everyone when she described the markings of a calf while it was still inside its mother’s womb: it was born with the exact markings the young Hildegard had indicated! Her visions were prophetic and, above all, mysterious.

Hildegard’s visions increased in frequency, and she was asked by her superiors to write down what she saw. At first, she was afraid of this task, and she demurred. Her already shaky health worsened, and she saw this decline as a sign from God, a punishment for her initial refusal. She agreed to record her visions, first as a means to uplift her fellow religious, but later (at the age of forty-three), she received a directive from God to “write and tell” about her visions. With the support of her confessor, Father Volmar, a monk who later became her secretary, she began writing the *Scivias*, a book of visions that took more than ten years to complete. As soon as she began to write, her health improved. From then on, her life followed a pattern: sickness followed by the task of committing her visions to writing, followed by a return to health.

The first pages of the *Scivias* were then submitted to the Bishop



of Mayence (some twenty-five kilometers north of the convent and the episcopal seat). An investigatory commission was set up to examine the documents and the visions they recorded. The commission later declared Hildegard's prophecies to be authentic directives from God.

Saint Bernard, the Abbot of Clairvaux, begged Pope Eugene III not to keep such a great source of enlightenment a secret. He recognized the validity of Hildegard's writings only after he read them in public to the cardinals, bishops, and theologians gathered at a Council in Trèves.

The books, songs, and guidelines written by Hildegard increased. She touched on many topics: theology, ethics, herbalism, medicine, physiology, biographies, poetry, and even music. She was in great demand as a teacher and sought after as an advisor by both lay and spiritual leaders.

All of her advice and writings came to her as messages, given to her directly from God. It is amazing to realize the scope of her knowledge, especially in the medical arena, when current practices of the time were far behind her enlightened "cures." She was the first woman in Europe to write books, to preach in public, to compose and distribute music, and also the first woman to gather and publish information with respect to the human body. This is incredible when we consider she lived in a society and in an era of total male dominance.

A woman of generally poor health (by all reports, including her own), she was of small stature, yet she was powerful in her impact on the people of her time. Her astounding gifts and power were truly amazing, and still are to this day.

At this point in her life (at the end of the year 1140), Hildegard sought to break away from the constraints of the traditional monastery. Having been named abbess of her Benedictine community at the age of thirty-six, upon the death of Mother Jutta, she sought to establish a fully devotional convent. After much opposition, she



finally left, in 1150, and moved the entire convent out from under the auspices of the abbey into some deserted buildings across the river at Rupertsberg. In time, a mixed monastery, comprised of both nuns and monks and built by their very own hands, was established. She counted three of her siblings among her flock.

Little is known directly about the later years of Hildegard's life. What is known is that she was a prolific writer, a devoted religious, and a true mystic.

At her jubilee in 1998, Pope John Paul II said of Hildegard:

"...blessed early in her childhood with celestial gifts, she acquired profound knowledge of the mysteries of theology, medicine, music, and other arts. She wrote numerous books and brought a special enlightenment upon the relationship between redemption and creation..."

SAINT HILDEGARD'S SPIRITUALITY AS IT RELATES TO HER TEACHINGS ABOUT A HEALTHY DIET

Above all, in spite of the variety of subjects she touched, Hildegard was firm in one major point of view—God is first in everything. All of her writings were a reflection of this fact and this fact alone. God is the source of all life; He was and is without beginning. He made the world and placed humanity at its center as an "exquisite jewel."

Hildegard held that as a result of sin, human beings become weak and fragile, as well as mortal. Inner conflicts were a result of human beings severing ties with nature and God. Disease resulted from this dichotomy, allowing sadness to produce, according to Hildegard, "black bile."

St. Isidore of Seville (ca. 560-636 A.D.) drew the link (first devised by Hippocrates) between the four elements and the four humors: "All diseases arise from the four humors, namely, blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm..." As long as these mixtures



were kept in harmony with the four elements—air, water, fire, and earth—humankind remained healthy. Hildegard espoused this theory and stated that God alone blessed humankind with good health and balance. The four elements determine the constitution of the humors and, therefore, the state of health or illness. Everything works in harmony. Hildegard further stated that Adam’s fall from grace into sin caused the ultimate upheaval in human physiology. “If black bile is stronger than the others...the person will tend to become angry, and illness and melancholy will set in,” she said in her book *Causes and Cures*.

In the Middle Ages, people viewed the healing arts as being “in God’s hands.” The means to gain salvation were frequently indistinguishable from those used by the medicine of the time to return a person to health. All nature (and natural products and substances) came from God. It was he who healed the sick: Hildegard was only his medical and spiritual instrument.

Hildegard taught that the healing strength of plants was a function of their greenness, or *viriditas*, which is a gift from God. All of God’s gifts are green, and from them flow the power to give or restore good health. This greenness is, in itself, a powerful life-force from God.

But a caution must be issued here: this greenness created by God can only benefit human beings when used according to strict guidelines, reasonably and only when necessary, and with the cooperation of the person being treated. This said, Hildegard and her writings became an essential link between God and good health.

Saint Paul tells us: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:19). We must neglect nothing to welcome our Creator, and, advises Hildegard, “...rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race,” and we must purify our bodies by consuming pure, wholesome foods.



The greatest founders of religious orders emphasized the value of good food, fasting as a purification of the body, and the observance of specific dietary guidelines. These practices played an essential role in spiritual health and illumination.

In his rule, Saint Benedict dedicated three of his seventy-two chapters to nutritional concerns: Chapter 39, “The Measure of Food;” Chapter 40, “The Measure of Drink;” and Chapter 43, “At What Time the Brothers Must Take Their Meals.” He further discussed nutritional needs by outlining special diets for children, the sick, and elderly monks. Among his numerous works, one can find one entitled, *The Book of the Divine Subtleties of Divine Creatures*, which is an additional basis for the present book of recipes by Hildegard.

Hildegard taught that the Blessed Virgin Mary was the “mother of medicine.” Mary, having been given the ultimate gift of mercy (the best medicine imaginable) was, according to Hildegard, “an exceedingly sweet plant in the air and dew and all green freshness.” Whoever was weighed down by vices and illness should seek God’s mercy through confession and penitence. In this way, sins and all “foulness” would be eliminated, in the same way as is digested food and drink.

Penitence is the refreshing green power of healing. Hildegard’s works cite it as the “light of the soul” and as a remedy in itself. It is truly an all-powerful force. Tears of repentance cause an influx of greenness—that refreshing and rejuvenating creative green life force whose radiance rises to the Divine Light—so that *viriditas* once again wells up in the human soul.

Hildegard viewed life as the continuation of God’s creation, and she saw health as a constant regeneration through God, an ongoing process that embraced and enjoined all areas of nature and spirituality.

Hildegard was also a proponent of moderation and discretion in all things, as expressed in the rule of Saint Benedict. As well,



she took a systematic approach to religious and spiritual life based upon hygiene and proper nutrition.

God created all of humankind and gave them the whole world so they could work with nature (which lives in, yet transcends, all human beings). Our human obedience to God and to nature leads to salvation and good health. We then become partners with God in the ways of creation, a collaboration that leads to salvation.

Hildegard sang in the spirit of Song of Solomon 5:1: “Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with love.” In her own words, “Eat in faith from the body of God, who is the true medicine, drink in hope from the wine which is the cup of salvation, and be inebriated with love for Our Lord.”

TIPS ABOUT HILDEGARD’S SPIRITUAL DIET AND THE PREPARATION OF FOOD

Hildegard makes us appreciate the virtues as well as the dangers of our surroundings. She classified foods and spices by their “character:” hot or cold, dry or humid and moist. The vital force is the greenness of foods.

It is quite a challenge to adapt teachings that were written in the Middle Ages to modern times. However, the recipes contained in this book conform to Hildegard’s writings, as found in her book *Physica*. The recipes have been thoroughly tested and are comprised solely of those foods, spices, and herbs which possess the virtues of greenness, lightness, and digestibility; in other words, the “foods of joy” that Hildegard prefers for their subtle values. On the other hand, one must avoid consuming those foods which may be detrimental to human beings, unless one is willing to risk “disorder.” Hence, the reader will not find any of the following foods in this book (as they may cause “disorder”): prepared meats, pork, leeks, raw onions, strawberries, plums, ginger on its own, or an excessive use of honey.





“Everywhere in creation,
trees, plants, animals, and gems,
there are mysterious healing forces,
which no person can know,
unless they are revealed to him by God.”

St. Hildegard of Bingen

Foods That Bring Joy



Among the cereal grains usually used in Saint Hildegard's recipes, we find spelt and oats:

SPELT

(Triticum spelta)

Hildegard says the following about spelt: "Spelt is an excellent cereal grain, of a warm nature, big and full of strength, and gentler than all of the other cereal grains: those who eat it find that they have better skin and blood. It gives one a happy outlook and a sense of exhilaration. It is good no matter what form of the grain we choose to use, whether as a bread or as an ingredient in any recipe."

The origins of spelt go back over nine thousand years. Currently, it is especially useful for those who are sensitive to wheat. It may be readily substituted for wheat in any recipe, and vice versa, and adds a subtle nutlike flavor. It is high in the ratio of complex versus simple carbohydrates and in vitamin B (useful to reduce stress and increase levels of energy). It is reported to help minimize muscle pain and facilitate quicker healing. High in protein (including the eight essential amino acids), it is an essential element in a diet to promote adequate cell maintenance.

OATS

(Avena sativa)

ALSO KNOWN AS COMMON OATS, GROATS

Although not suitable for those who are ill, oats are equally important as an excellent cereal grain that brings joy: "It constitutes a healthy food for those people in good health: it gives them a



joyful soul; a clear head, good color, and healthy skin,” says Saint Hildegard.

In the Middle Ages, oats were seen as a good source of nutrition. Medicinally, they were often given as a treatment for loss of appetite, exhaustion, sleeplessness, and loss of strength after an illness. Oat grains were sometimes roasted to make a drink that relieved constipation. Mattresses made of oats (along with straw) were thought to ease arthritic pains.

Saint Hildegard recommends oats as part of a steaming sauna bath for those whose thoughts need calming. One should pour the water in which oats have been prepared over hot rocks. This treatment will help the person whose mind is racing and who is preoccupied with crazy thoughts.

Oats were sometimes made into a poultice that helped to relieve lumbago, skin problems, and sciatica. Even today, a poultice made of oats and applied to the face is thought to stave off wrinkles.

As a cereal grain, oats are popular ingredients in pastries, porridge, gruel, and pancakes.

FENNEL

(Foeniculum vulgare)

ALSO KNOWN AS SWEET FENNEL, WILD FENNEL

When speaking about vegetables, Saint Hildegard gives a special place to fennel: “Fennel contains a gentle warmth, its nature being neither dry nor cold. Eaten raw, it is not harmful. And, no matter what way we choose to eat it, it makes our hearts joyful; it gives mankind a gentle warmth of nature, a good ‘sweat,’ and ensures good digestion. Its seeds are equally good for health if added to other plants in medications.

“Whoever eats fennel on a daily basis, first thing in the morning on an empty stomach, will find that it reduces phlegm and freshens the breath as well as ensuring good eyesight, thanks to its warm nature and good basic properties.”

