



Dr. Suneel Dhand, M.D. is board certified in Internal Medicine. He was born in London and grew up in Windsor, England. His parents emigrated from Punjab, India in the 1960s. He studied medicine at Cardiff University, and then came to the United States to pursue residency training. Hence, he completed his internal medicine residency in Maryland, and now works in Massachusetts.

Dr. Dhand developed an interest in preventive medicine, health and well-being, which inspired him to write about the topic. *High Percentage Wellness Steps: Natural, Proven, Everyday Steps to Improve Your Health & Well-being* was his first book, with profits going to a number of health-related causes, involving humanitarian relief, medical research, and other special projects for those suffering from terrible illnesses. Some of these include the *Red Cross*

,  
*Make a Wish Foundation*

, and organizations devoted to cancer, cardiovascular, and neurological research.

Dr. Dhand's first book covers many subjects including the importance of eating a healthy diet, to other diverse health-related aspects of life . For instance, he exposes the consequences (including the economic impact) of lack of sleep, stress, etc. He also wrote about the pros of daily regular sit-down meals with the family daily. In addition, the book gives great advice to encourage people who are not really into physical activities. About mental health, according to his observations, Dr. Dhand thinks that Western culture deals with stress in a more solitary and individual way, strongly relying on medications like anti-depressants. In the East, there is more

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focus on family support systems to help anyone work their way through difficult times in life. Reading Dr. Dhand's first book was like attending a lecture by a physician, it was very informative. It was also interesting to discover the views of a physician who had an Eastern background and a holistic approach which was embraced in the past by thinkers such as Socrates. In fact, the World Health Organization defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being", and not merely as the absence of disease or infirmity.

Dr. Dhand uses a very accessible language for the general public. Readers learn in this book that the psychosocial mechanisms of enhanced social support and engagement, biological, and physiological mechanisms may be roused to create direct cardiovascular benefits. In his first book, he talks about how optimism can be good for our health; more specifically, exposing studies showing the enormous benefits of keeping a positive and optimistic attitude to maintain good health and achieve life goals. He reminds the readers of the advantages of acknowledging the importance to a positive mindset, even when things don't seem to be going well. By this, he is not referring to a naïve and blind optimism that overlooks all the risks and dangers; his positivity doesn't focus on self-defeating thoughts but looks for solutions to problems. He gives interesting examples of how some people were not defeated by setbacks to achieve their goals. For instance, the readers will learn that Mr. President Obama had to renounce attending the Democratic Convention in 2000 because he couldn't get a floor pass. We all know what happened at the 2004 Convention with his famous speech, and the rest was history.

In summary, Dr. Dhand's first book is mainly about health-related prevention and increasing well-being. It covers many themes: food, the benefits of meditation on health, the positivity of pets on mental health, etc. The readers will even find some humor in the book while they will receive precious information. For instance, they will learn how studies demonstrated that elderlies with pets had the tendency to undergo fewer medical visits than those who didn't own domestic animals.

Dr. Dhand is a huge history fan in general and believes that all medical students should be taught a course in history of medicine. He thinks that, in so many various ways, ancient civilizations got many of the basic philosophies of holistic medicine already in place, but didn't have the scientific know-how to put things together. The readers can feel his passion for history in his second book, which is about [Thomas Jefferson](#). It is titled *Thomas Jefferson: Lessons from a Secret Buddha*. This historical novel is set in a series of vignettes, each of which centers around a principle of the Buddhist tradition. The readers will discover Jefferson through his early years. We learn introspectively about his interests in Eastern spirituality and his well-being habits via his correspondence with the mystical Eastern persona of Buddha Bhai. The book arouses curiosity about an unknown facet of [Jefferson](#)

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's life, and it provides a new glimpse of this politician.

Thus, the author has a generally favorable opinion of this former President, despite certain controversial aspects to Jefferson's legacy. In addition, he has a positive assessment of Winston Churchill, which also might spark criticism. Dr. Dhand defended the sins of Jefferson with his article in *The International Business Times* ( <http://www.ibtimes.com/redeeming-racism-forgiving-winston-churchill-thomas-jefferson-933098> ) titled "Redeeming Racism? Forgiving Winston Churchill, Thomas Jefferson".

As mentioned, Dr. Dhand's second book is about the third president of the United States; Thomas Jefferson represented the Democratic-Republican Party. According to historical records, Jefferson owned 607 slaves and sold over 100 in his lifetime. The president benefited from the peculiar and mercantile institution of slavery. He solely freed the Hemings in his will.

Monticello (designed overleaf of the 1953 two-dollar bill) was Thomas Jefferson's principal plantation (near Charlottesville in the Piedmont region, Virginia). After inheriting a large amount of land from his father, Jefferson started building Monticello when he was twenty-six years old. The plantation was originally 5,000 acres (2,000 ha), with a wide cultivation of tobacco (which later became a wheat plantation), and mixed crops maintained by some 150 slaves. Slaves took care of a large vegetable garden for Jefferson, and the main house (in addition to growing flowers for exhibit and cultivating crops for eating, Jefferson used the gardens of Monticello to experiment with various species). It is well-known that Sally Hemings, the household slave who had a 38-year relationship with the widower Jefferson, and gave him six children, four of whom survived to adulthood. Noteworthy, by the 1800s, Virginia's most economic valuable institution was slavery. Circa 1850, Virginia was the state that had the most slaves in the U.S.

By the time of Jefferson's death, some slave families worked and lived for four generations at Monticello. Six families and their descendants were featured in the exhibit, *Slavery at Jefferson's Monticello: Paradox of Liberty* (January to October 2012) at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, which also assessed Jefferson as a slaveholder. Developed as a collaboration between the National Museum of African American History and Culture and Monticello, it represented the first exhibit on the national mall to address these issues. In this regard, there is a continuous debate about whether his motives were social or mercantile. The persona of Jefferson raises many questions among contemporaries such as: Did he live up to its founding ideals of liberty and justice for all?

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It is important to note that the will to maintain that economic oppression was the main reason for the South to become one of the most anti-tax regions of the nation. Before the [Civil War](#), the South regularly blocked national infrastructure projects. These plans, emphasized on Northern and Western states, would have moved non-slave goods into the market quickly and cheaply. The South was concerned that such investments would enhance the power of the free-labor economy and damage their own, which was based on enslavement. Furthermore, the South was strongly opposed to taxes even to benefit the lives of non-slaveholding White citizens. The first public school in the North, Boston Latin, was founded in the mid-1600s. The first public school in the South was created 200 years later. Protecting the status quo of slavery was a top priority in the South, to the detriment of everything else. In this regard, America's first embodiment as a slave republic was the South. This was the situation even during the colonial era. Virginia was its richest colony and George Washington became one of its wealthiest persons mainly because of the institution of slavery. The majority of the presidents of the new nation and Supreme Court judges were from the South.

Saint-Domingue (the actual Haiti) was France's economic backbone, especially in the 18th and early 19th century, until its independence in 1804 and beyond with the 150 million gold francs debt imposed by France (for over a century), after the Haitian Revolution and its loss of the country called erstwhile the Pearl of the Antilles. Thus, Haiti, this ancient French colony, generated high revenues to France from its sugar cane plantations. Haiti was well strategically well-positioned for France because it allowed this empire to be closer to the U.S. One of Napoleon Bonaparte's goals at the time was to expand his territories and gain more presence in the Western hemisphere. Hence, the upcoming loss of the battle in Saint-Domingue forced France to sell Louisiana in 1803 to the United States, which allowed America to double its size. Jefferson, who was the president at the time, oversaw the purchase of Louisiana. Jefferson was a paradoxical figure. On one hand, he was a big advocate of the independence of his own country; but on the other hand, he refused to recognize the new Republic of Haiti, the second in the Americas. Jefferson also imposed an arms and trade embargo against Haiti. Ironically, he died on America's birthday, the 4th of July 1826.

Overall, the historical fiction book *Thomas Jefferson: Lessons from a Secret Buddha*, in which he not only explores the rise of Jefferson but also his revolutionary ideas on health and well-being practices. The book brings a new light on a part of Jefferson's life that is not widely known. In addition, although the novel focuses on a controversial figure, it is nonetheless original because it talks about how the former president had knowledge related to health-related issues. Some parts of the book comprise interesting twists with current, and historical events. Furthermore, the book also intertwines eastern and western philosophies with the spirit of the American Revolution.

As mentioned, Dr. Dhand currently works in Massachusetts as a practicing physician. He has

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published numerous scientific articles in clinical medicine, covering a large range of specialty areas including: pulmonology, cardiology, endocrinology, hematology, and infectious diseases. Moreover, he has authored chapters in the "5-Minute Clinical Consult" medical textbook. His clinical interests comprise healthcare quality improvement, patient safety and the use of technology in healthcare. To Dr. Dhand, prevention in health care is imperative and he covered this theme in his books. He reminds us that our ultimate wealth is our health. The doctor has been featured on WFLO (Virginia), SuperTalk 1570 (Michigan) and WCIT (Ohio) radio talk shows. When he is not working in the hospital or writing, he likes to travel, run and play tennis.

*In the following interview, the physician will share his expertise while providing health information which is partially relevant to his first book. Moreover, he will discuss his second book, focusing on Thomas Jefferson. It was a curious coincidence to speak with Dr. Dhand on April 13th 2013, Jefferson's birthday.*

**P.T. Based on your expertise, how do you think the American health care system can focus more on preventive medicine?**

**Dr. D.** A lot of improvements are required because the whole system has a philosophy of treatment rather than prevention. So, the American health-care system is structured from primary care until the hospitalisation with a main budget that goes to the amount of procedures and interventions done by medical teams. There is scarce financial emphasis on preventing people from ending up in hospital in the first place. The changes need to come from the top, I mean from the government, which has to implement policies that promote the expansion of the primary care sector. This will allow the patients to see their physicians on a regular basis; the doctors, then, will have a more thorough knowledge of their medical history. This approach will favor preventive medicine instead of curative medicine. The health system needs to be perceived differently and not with a business mindset. In the UK, where I grew up, there is a large focus on primary care and this avoids hospitalisations.

**P.T. I don't know if it is still the case, but I read once that there is a limitation in the UK to shop physicians.**

**Dr. D.** Definitely! People can look for more than one physician but there is a limit they cannot exceed compared to the United States, and this definitely costs less to their health-care system. In my first book, I talk about the costs in the health-care system related to preventable conditions such as obesity. This can serve as a guideline for policymakers who are looking for solutions to decrease the expenses on the health-care system.

**P.T. Being a vegetarian is part of the Indian culture. You mention in your first book, *High Percentage Wellness Steps*, that you are a vegetarian. As an Indian male and physician, what do you consider to be the pros and cons of vegetarianism?**

**Dr. D.** I consider the pros in a variety of categories. In the health field, multiple studies have shown that vegetarians obtain better health outcomes compared to non-vegetarians, especially those who eat a lot of red meat. Vegetarians have lower rates of heart diseases, diabetes and cancer. When meat is not part of your diet, your fat intake can be drastically reduced and the same goes with calories. It is important to note that other types of food, such as sugary diets, are unhealthy, and some vegetarians might eat them.

I want to make a distinction between vegetarianism and veganism. Veganism seeks to cut any animal protein out of the diet. For instance, milk (including other dairy products) and eggs are not allowed for vegans. Vegetarians avoid specific meat products including fish. It can be perceived that, as a vegetarian, you are missing on proteins which is true but there are ways to compensate through milk or eggs for example.

In terms of environment, being a vegetarian is ecological. Animal farming utilizes a huge amount of resources. Studies demonstrated that, if the world was to become vegetarian tomorrow, greenhouse emissions would be drastically reduced. This aspect is under discussed but is of course very important.

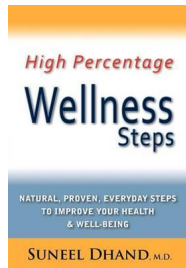
If for some people it is difficult to become vegetarians, they can decrease the amount of meat they are eating. For example, there is a movement called Meatless Mondays. On Mondays, these people won't eat meat. This alone can make a huge difference in terms of health and environment.

Home-cooked eastern cuisine usually contains less fat with a lot of vegetables and a rich quantity of spices, like turmeric. The Indian practice of Ayurveda, which started around 2,500 BC, specifically focused on the importance of nutrition for vitality, fruit, vegetables and spices such as turmeric again. They were considered as healthy kinds of food that could act as natural cures for a variety of ailments. Studies demonstrated that all of these, especially the vegetables (and fruit), have compelling benefits to our health: they raise our immune systems and decrease

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the risks of cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and obesity. For my part, I don't see too many cons in being a vegetarian except for people who have difficulty in not eating meat.



**P.T. You wrote in your first book: “When it comes to healthy eating, we can learn a lot from some other parts of the world. Two areas in particular that are known for their outstanding dietary habits are the *Mediterranean* and *Japan*.” Can you elaborate on that?**

**Dr. D.** If you look at a map of the globe, there are two places where the life expectancy is higher with lower rates of heart disease and cancer: the Mediterranean area and Japan. One of the main reasons is due to the diet consumed in these regions. In the Mediterranean area, people eat a diet low in saturated fat. They tend to utilize polyunsaturated fats such as olive oil. They eat less red meat and more white meat like chicken. They don't eat white bread, they take instead whole wheat, whole grain (with hydration, etc.). Nuts are part of their eating habits, which is good. They also consume a healthy amount of alcohol. Red wine is very popular in the Mediterranean region. People drink it with their meals. I believe it plays a part in their health outcome.

In Japan, people eat more sea food and white meat (chicken, etc.), which include high amounts of polyunsaturated fats. People there also exercise more compared to here. In addition, they are regular on their meal time. In other words, they don't skip meals or eat in a hurry like we do in America. They walk more in Japan and so on. We can learn a lot from their healthy daily habits.

**P.T. How do you explain that Asians who eat a lot of salty food do not tend to develop high blood pressure, as Black-Americans do?**

**Dr. D.** Eastern Asians, like the Japanese, may eat a lot of salty food, but the other food, part of their traditional diet cancels out the effects to a certain extent. However, studies have shown that African-Americans can be racially predisposed to high blood pressure, and eating salty food

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can increase the probabilities of having this pathology.

**P.T. We often hear about the importance of drinking eight glasses of water per day. In your first book, you mention that having one to two glasses per day is fine, especially for dieters; otherwise, there is a serious danger of over-hydrating. Share your thoughts about this.**

**Dr. D.** Absolutely! Eight glasses of water per day are recommended. When I wrote about the two glasses of water, it was about a particular study<sup>1</sup> conducted on dieters who drank two glasses of water before each meal. The study demonstrated that if you drink these two glasses before a meal, this may reduce your appetite. This will lead you to eat less calories which is good for dieters. However, I have heard about cases where patients (who intended to lose weight) drank too much water and there is a danger of over-hydrating if they do not have enough calories in their metabolism. When you have low sodium, it can make you ill enough to require hospitalisation. So, the warning was really for dieters who utilize this technique.

**P.T. In High Percentage Wellness Steps, you wrote that scientists have consistently found that a waist to hip ratio of 0.7 is always seen as the most attractive across different cultures and countries, but does it entail a healthy weight? Do the standards of beauty required by Western society correspond to an adequate body mass index and body-fat percentage? Please explain these notions to our readers.**

**Dr. D.** Sure. These data are from a specific study<sup>2</sup> (conducted by Rozmus-Wrzesinska and Pawlowski) that I referenced in the book. It showed across cultures that this particular ratio is seen as the most attractive. This does not necessarily apply to all cultures, it was just an average. That particular ratio corresponds to a healthy weight and shape. Obviously, the danger can involve (especially in Western countries) females who are pressured to lose too much weight, which can consequently lead to disastrous medical issues such as anorexia and bulimia.

The body mass index (BMI) is the calculation we use based on somebody's height and weight. When the two are divided, we have an equation. We produce a scale (between 15 and 35) where we can see whether the number obtained corresponds or not with obesity and other medical illnesses. We look at the weight in proportion to the height of the individual.



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The body fat percentage is a specific measure. The body fat percentage of a person or animal is the total weight of fat divided by total weight. Body-fat comprises essential body fat and storage body fat. Genders are taken into consideration. Females naturally have a higher fat percentage compared to males. This measure is probably not as useful as the body mass index. Nevertheless, it provides a fair indication if somebody is overweight and more prone to certain pathologies.

**P.T. You wrote in your first book that the ability to lose weight depends partially on gender and age. Males are able to lose more weight than females of a similar size. Can you explain why to our readers?**

**Dr. D.** It basically comes down to natural metabolism. Men have several natural advantages over women. Typically males have a higher metabolic weight <sup>3</sup> and baseline metabolism rate. Men naturally have more muscle mass than women do. As a result, a man's metabolism can be up to 10 percent higher. Females have a higher percentage <sup>4</sup>

of body fat and this is advantageous for child-bearing but not for losing weight. Females have more adipose (tissue) than men, so beginning a diet, will already (on average) be behind a male. Having more fat tissue is believed to be an evolutionary adaptation in preparation for a woman's childbearing role. Remember, these factors represent the average for both genders and of course it does not apply to everybody. I also wanted to use some humor in the book when I mentioned it was harder for women to lose weight.

Overall, losing weight simply depends on how much energy your body is using, and at rest, bodies with more muscle will burn more energy (just to sustain that muscle). Another hypothesis is that males tend to be more physically active than females. Again, this is a generalization (obviously not applicable to everyone these days) --- simply because men are much more likely to hold physically active/manual jobs.

**P.T. In the same book you make this very interesting statement: "Current estimates suggest that less than a third of adults consume fruits two or more times a day, with only around a quarter eating vegetables three or more times per day. That is shocking. Globally, the problem is even greater. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that up to 2.7 million lives could be saved annually with a sufficient fruit and vegetable intake." Can you elaborate on that?**

**Dr. D.** The point I wanted to make in my book is that studies demonstrated that eating more fruits and vegetables is really beneficial for our health, including increased life expectancy with a

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lower rate of debilitating pathologies such as cancer and heart diseases. Several national and international authorities provide clear recommendations about increasing consumption. As a whole, the majority of the conducted surveys showed that people in many parts of the world (including the West) do not meet the requirements related to the daily amount of fruits and vegetables recommended daily by the experts. The World Health Organisation therefore produced calculated statistics based on the report of people who are not taking adequate fruits and vegetables. This is a big issue in the Western lifestyle, where people are often in a hurry and do not necessarily take the time to prepare healthy meals.

**P.T. Is your book *Thomas Jefferson: Lessons from a Secret Buddha* partially based on fiction, or is everything factual? If most information is real, what are the main sources you found to corroborate the authenticity of the different letters exposed in your book and how did you conduct your research (the process, etc.)?**

**Dr. D.** My book is a historical fiction, a mash-up novel. This means that the story is based on the truth behind a real historical character and certain aspects of his life, but with fiction incorporated into the story. For instance, there was an American movie made last year entitled *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* based on the novel with the same name. This book narrated the life of Lincoln but infused it with him being a Vampire-hunter in his spare time. I have done something similar with my book. In this regard, I used real events from Jefferson's early life and the American Revolution intertwining with a mystical Eastern character called Buddha Bhai which means "Enlightened Brother" in Hindi. My book focuses on the formative years of Jefferson, how he meets Buddha Bhai, who then enlightens him with ancient Buddhism knowledge and wisdom via his letters. Jefferson himself was extremely well-read and ahead of his time: few among his contemporaries were interested in vegetarianism. The president had a collection of books around the world. People just have to look at his writings (for instance, *Memoir, Correspondence, And Miscellanies, From the Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Volume 1* ) and habits.

When I was writing my first book, *High Percentage Wellness Steps*, I discovered quotes from Jefferson and his writings that made me realise his thoughts were aligned with many of the modern day movements in terms of him being mainly a vegetarian (this was unheard of in 18th century America). In addition, he exercised regularly, he used his daily walks to meditate, and he believed in the power of discipline to achieve ones' goals. So, the fact that Jefferson practiced Ancient philosophies was an important point in my book. This is my understanding of his character through my Indian background.

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For my research, I found many quotes from Jefferson (during different stages of his life) that I used for my book. I learned a lot about the American Revolution and the events that triggered it. It was easy for me to find valuable information given that I live in Massachusetts, near Boston. I also went to Monticello, Virginia, and I visited Jefferson's home, which he built. This gave me a more thorough and concrete knowledge of the way he lived. I got a better perspective of the physical spaces he occupied and his lifestyle. In addition, I made research at the Boston Public Library, etc. I read many books, including the Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson.

About the part related to the interactions with the sage Buddhist, I already had knowledge about Eastern philosophy. With this philosophical slant, my Hindu background meant that I was imbued with this culture, and I have also read a lot of books about Buddhism. In other words, I knew a lot about the views and beliefs of Buddha and many of his ideas have been incorporated in Buddha Bhai's character.

Overall, my main sources were Jefferson's memoir, his original writings, historical books that detailed his beliefs and habits such as the Thomas Jefferson's Farm Book. I also utilised a variety of religious books related to Buddhism, which I collected over the years. Moreover, I used quotes from a 1785 letter (available in the national archives) addressed to his nephew, Peter Carr. Every single quote from Jefferson that the readers will find in my book are real; it is not fiction.

**P.T. Among all the American Presidents, why was it important for you to write about Thomas Jefferson? In other words, what about him fascinates you?**

**Dr. D.** Firstly, I am fascinated by the fact that he was the only American president of his era who was so ahead of his time in terms of health and well-being practices. He was just so forward in his thinking. Secondly, I am in awe with his writings especially the Declaration of Independence which he drafted in 1776 while he was still in his early thirties. As his career progressed, Jefferson occupied prominent positions such as: United States Minister to France, Delegate to the Congress of the Confederation from Virginia, Delegate to the Second Continental Congress from Virginia, 2nd Governor of Virginia, 1st United States Secretary of State, 2nd Vice President of the U.S and then the 3rd President of the U.S. I would like to point out that while in France, Jefferson, as a U.S. diplomat helped the Marquis de Lafayette to write the preamble to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen 5, approved by the National Assembly in August 1789. This document of the French Revolution was a tribute to the American Declaration of Independence and was heavily influenced by its political philosophy .

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Moreover, Jefferson had so many talents in other fields—from botany to architecture. The house in Monticello that he designed, was based on the neoclassical principles presented in the books of the Italian Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio. Jefferson reworked it through much of his presidency to incorporate design elements popular in late eighteenth-century Europe. It contains many of his own pattern solutions. He was really creative.

I am aware that Jefferson had a controversial side which, I am sure, will be raised shortly in this interview related to slavery. However, I still believe that he is one of the most important characters from early American history. In many American cities, there are schools, buildings and roads named after him. In Washington DC one of the biggest monuments honors him. Finally, as a physician I am drawn to a president who prized healthy habits.

**P.T. In your latest book, you provide information about Jefferson's knowledge of nutrition. Is this based on facts or is it fiction? If the information is factual, what were your sources? More specifically, where did you find the data related to the healthy habits of Jefferson (in which archives, etc.)?**

**Dr. D.** All the information related to Jefferson's eating habits in my book are true. He was primarily vegetarian. He had a large garden with multiple fruits (apples, berries...) and vegetables (olive, cucumbers, potatoes, etc.). He wrote about this extensively. He narrated how he avoided meat as much as possible in his diet. I read a variety of historical books, including  
American Sphinx  
by Joseph J Ellis,  
Thomas Jefferson  
by RB Bernstein,  
The Real Thomas Jefferson  
by Andrew Allison and  
The American Revolution  
by Gordon Wood. Moreover, when I went to Virginia I saw his wide agricultural collection. Jefferson had a garden book titled  
The Thomas Jefferson Garden Book  
. It was a kind of diary where he described his experiments with nature and his agricultural habits.

Overall, my book, again, is based on all of Jefferson's known quotations and letters found in the National Archives. I looked into historical recordings at the Monticello museum in Virginia. To conclude, Jefferson's quotes on eating mainly vegetables were from an 1819 letter.

**P.T. You reveal in your book the late president's lessons relating to well-being. Can you outline the main ones for our readers?**

**Dr. D.** Jefferson seemed very much to believe: you are what you eat. He often said that overeating should be avoided. As mentioned, he really believed in the importance of exercise to have the power to clear minds. He wrote extensively about his walking habits. He walked miles daily. He also believed in the power of knowledge, and thought that this could be a key component to well-being. Furthermore, he esteemed the power of discipline and organisation. To handle stress, he thought that it was important to wait and think before reacting while being calm. He embraced a form of meditation by concentrating and focusing on the present without being diverted by anything else, especially during his walks. He believed in the power of passion, and working hard to accomplish a dream. He knew how to achieve a goal and that was instrumental in creating the United States. He aimed at the pursuit of happiness with his Declaration of Independence. He had a positive mindset, despite many personal setbacks. I alluded in my book that, as a young teenager his father perished and this was a key event in Jefferson's life. In his days, the simplest infection could cost your life. He lost his wife and most of his children (only one survived—when Jefferson died on July 4, 1826, his only surviving daughter was Martha Jefferson Randolph). He had to put up with a lot of personal misery but did his best to inspire others.

**P.T. Without giving too much away about your latest book, what principal elements are historical facts and fiction (which have many components of Eastern culture Buddhism and western ones)? What historical sources did you find which proved that Jefferson was influenced by Buddhism since he was a Christian Deist?**

**Dr. D.** Every aspect of Thomas Jefferson's life and the events surrounding the Revolution are factual, apart from his meetings and correspondence with Buddha Bhai. Thomas Jefferson had several beliefs in common with Unitarians of the time, notwithstanding being raised an Episcopalian.

Each quote in the book is from Jefferson and it's taken chiefly from his memoir. All the events, from his childhood, when he went to school, college, to his rise in politics in Virginia are facts. The events regarding the American Revolution narrated in my book are true. All the letters from Buddha Bhai are historical fiction (using Buddhist beliefs).

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When Buddha Bhai transmits his knowledge related to Ancient Eastern culture, that is fictitious . The idea was to create curiosity on this aspect of the president's life. By presenting how the East meets the West, as an author I wanted to raise awareness about the similarities between both cultures. It is a fact that Jefferson inadvertently practiced Eastern customs. He was open to new ideas and wanted to complement his life with great well-being habits. Jefferson may have executed the ideals of Buddha Bhai at different periods of his life. The meditation practice of Yoga originated in India almost 5,000 years ago and Ancient Chinese mindfulness techniques like Qigong have existed for more than 4,000 years. In this regard, Jefferson was drawn to Eastern approaches that could better his well-being. The president had to find ways to deal with the stress of his era such as wars and infectious diseases, especially when he outlived most of his family members. His healthy habits allowed him to live way beyond the life expectancy of his epoch.

About religion, Jefferson was a Christian Deist as you said. My personal belief is that the majority of world religions are virtually identical at their core. Many people who practice their religion, will come to the same conclusion that there is a universal message. Whether we talk about Buddha Bhai or Jefferson, both strove for the truth regardless of their religion. I wrote a story in my book intertwining the ancient Eastern philosophy with the spirit of the American Revolution. If the readers can find similarities in my book between the Eastern and the Western culture, including the religious dimension, I will have accomplished my goal related to the practice of well-being habits, an under-reported part of Jefferson's life.

**P.T. The book focuses on Jefferson's life mainly before he became governor of Virginia in 1779. As an author, why did you make this choice?**

**Dr. D.** I made that choice merely because this period represented the formative years of Jefferson's life and also the time of the American Revolution. He strongly supported the Colonists' who refused to pay the taxes and to submit to the British Empire which had debts after the end of their war with France in 1763. In June 1775, Jefferson was a delegate from Virginia and was chosen by the Congress to write an explanation of the Colonists reasons for going to war. One year later, on May 15th, Virginia voted for independence . From 1775 till 1783, the American Patriots fought against the British and Jefferson had a pivotal role while using powerful words in the struggle for independence.

**P.T. In your book on Jefferson, we learn that the third president of the U.S., an avid reader, was fascinated by science, above all other subjects. Do you know why he became a politician instead of a scientist?**

**Dr. D.** This is a very interesting question! Back in those days, it was very possible to become an accidental politician [laughs]. People chose politicians on the basis of substance. When they noticed a very knowledgeable individual who came from a prominent family, they would encourage him to be involved in politics. People like Jefferson or Lincoln could become politicians even if they were very shy. Today, it would not be possible because with television and all the other media. Image is highly important and you have to make a much more conscious decision to enter the political fray. Today, we often unfortunately value style and superficiality or triviality over substance. I think that if someone like Jefferson was alive today, he would probably be a scientist because the actual political arena with all its sophistication would not suit him. In addition, at the epoch of Jefferson, people could have a wide range of knowledge in many fields, unlike now when everything is much more specialized. Hence in those days, it was a lot more common to be a farmer, scientist and politician all at the same time!

**P.T.** I think it depends on which angle you see it from. For instance, between the 17 and 19th century, you could more often find aristocrats who spoke almost thirty languages because they had time to learn. They were not exposed to so many distractions unlike our contemporaries.

**Dr. D.** This is another interesting point!

**P.T.** It is widely known and you wrote that Churchill claimed that: "It is alarming and also nauseating to see Mr. Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer of a type well-known in the East, now posing as a fakir, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceregal palace to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor". Churchill strongly favored allowing Gandhi to die in prison during his hunger strike in his old age. The politician is also quoted as having said, "I hate Indians. They are a beastly people with a beastly religion". You added that Churchill's deliberate policies are estimated to have starved millions of Indians during the famine of Bengal. More specifically, a genocide occurred; circa three million Indians perished in the famine of 1943, the majority of whom died in Bengal. Churchill also fought against Gandhi and others to maintain the British control over India. You are of Indian origin and you believe that Churchill should be forgiven for his sins. You have a favorable opinion of this politician. Can you elaborate on your feelings on Churchill? Moreover, please tell us how the Indian community perceives your views and how your people have responded to your assessment of the politician.

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**Dr. D.** My views on Churchill have really evolved throughout the years. I wrote in my article entitled “Redeeming Racism? Forgiving Winston Churchill, Thomas Jefferson” ( <http://www.ibtimes.com/redeeming-racism-forgiving-winston-churchill-thomas-jefferson-933098> ) for the International Business Times that, at first, when I grew up in England, Churchill was presented to me as a hero. Later, I learned about some of his views towards Indians and so on. I was very disappointed and really hurt, almost to the point of rejecting him. Churchill's deliberate policies are estimated to have starved millions of Indians during the famine of Bengal—a loss of life on a terrible scale. Those Indians he was talking about were my grandparents; thoroughly decent, law abiding and hard-working people who just claimed the simple right of self-rule. The more I learned about this side of Churchill, the more dismayed I became.

Later, particularly as a physician, I spoke to older people who were alive during WWII and they held him in high regard toward him . In my opinion, I had to reconcile this entirely understandable Western point of view with the Indian one. At the same time, I do not forget the negative but I also look at the context of his actions.

I can make a parallel with Jefferson. The same debate prevails. He made important contributions to the U.S., but he had an albatross around his neck because he was a slaveholder. In addition, he held very questionable views on race, which makes him unpopular among some people. My opinion on both men is, it does seem unfair to judge historical characters through the lens of today's acceptability standards. Another example that I can give is Abraham Lincoln. His main concern during the Civil War was to preserve the Union. Yet, Lincoln is celebrated. We cannot forget that, back then, their views were more acceptable by the people who benefitted from the system of the time. So, I believe that it is important to put things in perspective. When I use the word “forgiveness”, I employ it by analysing the historical contribution of these men in a broad manner.

About the Indian community, I don't think that we harbor as a whole animosity toward Churchill. I have to say that so far, I haven't heard any major issues. I can speak for what I observed among my friends and family. On the whole, I would say that some think he was controversial and his politics unfortunately created negative consequences in Bengal and elsewhere in India. But at the same time, we are aware of Churchill's accomplishments, such as his fight against Nazism and his famous speech on May 13th 1940. He favored an alliance with the United States during WWII. He also had suspicions toward the communist forces. Moreover, he had one of the longest political careers in the history of Great Britain. He also had other talents: he could paint and write. He even obtained a Literary Nobel Peace Prize in 1953 for his memoir about wars. In this regard, my community has a balanced opinion about him, and I do not overlook his negative views toward Indians, nor am I oblivious of his decisions that cost millions of lives in India. I have to say that, unfortunately, he was a partisan of Mussolini's régime but,



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again, I try to have a balanced view of his politics. I also know that England tried, in 1939, to limit the immigration of [Jews](#) (escaping anti-Semitism) in Palestine with its famous White paper of 1939 (that contained very strict immigration quotas addressed to Jews) and, later, the British government asked the United Nations to rule on the creation of a bi-national state composed of Jews and Arabs. I may have to constantly juggle with all these complexities, including Churchill's views, and his acts against my ancestors. We can learn from his mistakes and see how it is possible to create a more harmonious world where tragedies may be prevented from reoccurring.

Overall, there is little doubt that, had it been left to Churchill's bullish nature, India may have never even gained Independence. I went through a period of disappointment and betrayal, because these aspects of Churchill's life seemed to have been so conveniently forgotten. Yet, over the years, I have become much less angry, and more reasoned in my approach to his legacy. Not only as I read more books about his fearless nature, but also through my job as a medical doctor, I had the privilege of talking to dozens, if not hundreds, of people who lived through the war and constantly reaffirmed what an important leader he was. As hard as it was, I found that I could not ignore Churchill's impressive qualities.

**P.T. Considering that Thomas Jefferson was a slaveholder, how has the African-American community received your book so far?**

**Dr. D.** Generally, I have received positive reviews. I have not got a strong opposition from the African-Americans for my views so far. However, I am aware that it is a delicate subject and there are people who do not particularly admire Jefferson. This is understandable, just like there are individuals who do not necessarily put Churchill on a pedestal, since he was not for the independence of India among other things. In my opinion, despite their flaws, we should not negate every other aspect related to their contributions, and they should not be judged according to contemporary standards. Some people highlighted to me that, since Jefferson was involved with slavery, it was not wise or appropriate to link him to Buddha. There are people who see merely the title of my book and think that I relate Jefferson to Buddha. This is not the case, and I wanted in my book to focus on health and well-being, not politics.

I think that, despite Jefferson's faults, most people recognize his enormous contributions. Again, we cannot forget the context of his time. His contemporaries lived in peril because they were forming a new country, and that was high treason for the British Empire. At one stage, the British army invaded Jefferson's home and he was nearly arrested. Even if Jefferson and his contemporaries were economically dependent on slavery, their priority was to create a new nation. I fully accept that he could have done more to show he was against slavery. However, I

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still think it is important to focus on what he did for the foundation of the new country. In addition, even if Jefferson was not an abolitionist, he knew that slavery would have a chronic ominous impact on the nation as a whole with all the atavism that could be transmitted from generations to generations. He once said: "I tremble for my country when I consider that God is just and that His justice cannot sleep forever."

**P.T. You believe that Jefferson should not be judged by today's standards because he was from another epoch. In human history, there have always been progressive people who have had the courage to stand up for their beliefs, such as the abolitionist John Brown during the era of slavery. Share with us your thoughts about this.**

**Dr. D.** [Silence] You mentioned that there are people who stand up for their beliefs whatever the era. Jefferson stood up against a mighty empire like the British one. He did it with other people, and it took bravura to accomplish this. The king, at the time, issued a death threat against them and said that they should be executed. Again, slavery may not have been his aim and he might have taken a back seat, but he did stand up for what he believed when it came to forming an independent country. He was fighting for his own people and, probably did not perceived Blacks among his own. There are people who might think he was not fighting for justice for all but he was a strong advocate and militant for the nation against an empire.


I believe that Jefferson clearly knew somewhere inside his complex personality that slavery was morally wrong. However, during the Revolutionary War, Jefferson's priority was to fight Britain. He was forced to abandon Monticello as the British armies advanced, and later as President, there was a constant threat that America could disintegrate at any moment. The times he lived in were precarious, and he needed to be strategic to save his country. Thomas Jefferson said himself, "None of us, no, not one, is perfect. And were we to love none who had imperfections, this world would be a desert for our love."

If we assess past presidents by today's standard, even Abraham Lincoln (whom I mentioned earlier) who held very questionable views (incidentally, Lincoln was a huge fan of Jefferson) regarding slavery, and he would be seen through negative lenses. Contrary to popular belief, Lincoln's main concern was to save the Union and did not think that Whites and Blacks were equals. He even pondered making free Blacks leave the nation. In addition, Lincoln in some ways was not killed by one man but his murder came from a wide body of violent bigotry nurtured by the nation.

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To conclude, each generation has to assess Jefferson's dichotomy, but it is nevertheless true, for liberty and slavery are the twin poles of our nation experience, and the late president symbolises them both, in extremis. There is a similitude with Lincoln's actions.

 *THOMAS*  
*JEFFERSON*  
*Lessons from a Secret Buddha*



*SUNEEL*  
*DHAND*  


**P.T. In your book, you wrote that Thomas Jefferson made multiple attempts to bring an end to the practice of enslavement. Can you elaborate in detail with sources on how Jefferson challenged the institution of bondage? In addition, you wrote that one piece of proposed legislation failed by a single vote. Share with our readers what it was all about.**

**Dr. D.** Jefferson was born into the wicked culture of slavery, and his family was economically dependent on it. Based on several of his statements and quotes, he knew that slavery was wrong. When Jefferson was in Monticello, with his quotes we could see he did not approve of the practice of enslavement. However, we will never know if he really spoke up because of philanthropic reasons or because he saw great trouble down the road with the maintenance of slavery (for instance, in 1861, the strife over slavery created a bloody civil war and the rise of two nations—the Union and the Confederacy—instead of one), apart from an important free labor loss with the end of bondage. There was a vote in Virginia. I believe it was about the expansion or the decrease of slavery. It failed by one vote. After this defeat, Jefferson said: "thus we see the fate of millions unborn hanging on the tongue of one man... and heaven was silent in that awful moment! But it is to be hoped it will not always be silent and that the friends to the rights of human nature will, in the end, prevail... no person hereafter coming into this country shall be held within the same in slavery under any pretext whatever... This abomination must have an end. And there is a superior bench reserved in heaven for those who hasten it."

In different periods of Jefferson's life, he got involved with the issue of slavery. When Jefferson was a lawyer in 1770, in his argument for the case of *Howell v. Netherland*, which concerned the freedom or enslavement of a third-generation mulatto, the jurist had pled that "we are all born free" and that slavery was contrary to natural law – the court overruled this argument.

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During the American Revolution era, Jefferson was involved in a type of legislation that he hoped would abolish slavery. In 1778, he wrote the Virginia law of 1778 that forbade the importation of enslaved Africans. In 1782, a bill drafted by Jefferson in 1769 (when he was a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses) became law. It allowed slave-owners to free their slaves. In 1784, Jefferson suggested an ordinance that would prohibit slavery in the Northwest Territories (Jefferson thought that the introduction of crops (for wheat, olive trees, etc.) would be interesting given that it does not require slave labor). Nevertheless, Jefferson always said that the decision to emancipate slaves would have to be part of a democratic process where the majority of slave-owners would agree to free their slaves. It is important to mention that Jefferson prepared two drafts of the Constitution for the State of Virginia, in 1776 and 1783, concerning the limitation of slavery and, to some extent, its abolition. The **Ordinance of 1784** was rejected by a single vote at the U.S. Congress. Jefferson wrote the Land Ordinance of 1784 that was enacted on April 23, 1784 (and was in force for three years) without its fifth clause, which aimed at the prohibition of slavery in the new territories acquired by the U.S.

From the mid-1770s until his death, Jefferson struggled over the question of slavery and wanted to implement a plan of progressive emancipation. Firstly, the transatlantic slave trade would be eradicated. Secondly, slave-owners would better the living conditions of slaves while decreasing the violence on plantations (with this strategy, anti-abolitionists used it as an excuse to say that abolition was unimportant since it was possible to “better” slavery). Thirdly, all those born into bondage after a certain date would be declared free, an act that would have to be followed by total abolition. The reality was that Virginia had more slaves between 1790 and 1830: 292,627 in 1790 and 494,757 in 1830.

**P.T. For young people who are thinking of embracing a medical career and who would like to know more about being an internist, can you elaborate on the role of an internist? In addition, people may confuse the responsibilities of “internists” with the following terms: primary care physicians, family physicians, family practitioners and general practitioners. Can you explain the differences?**

**Dr. D.** I will start first to define the different terms that you just enumerated. A primary care physician (a PCP) is a doctor who gives both the first contact for an individual with an undiagnosed health concern as well as continuing care of multiple medical conditions. Family medicine (FM) is a medical specialty devoted to comprehensive health care for individuals of all ages; the specialist is called a family physician or family doctor. In other words, this field is a division of primary care that provides continuing and comprehensive health care for people. A family practitioner is the former name used for family physicians. A **general practitioner (GP)** is a medical practitioner who treats acute and chronic pathologies and gives preventive care with health education to patients.

I am a general internal medicine hospital doctor. So, I practice adult medicine acute care in a hospital setting. This means that I see patients with a variety of conditions: pathologies of the heart, lung, infections, etc. I work with other specialists as well during the course of the patient's hospital stay. An internist does the same work as family physicians, GPs, primary care doctors and family practitioners, but focuses on adult medicine. The main difference is that an internist practices most of the time in a hospital setting. But there are internists who practice both in hospital and in their private office. Internists also play a major role in teaching and research. In addition, they often have subspecialty expertise in diseases affecting particularly certain organs or organ systems.

Overall, internists are qualified doctors with postgraduate training in internal medicine. According to the American College of Physicians, internists are doctors who specialize in the prevention, detection and treatment of illnesses of patients. The training and career pathways for internists vary a lot across the world.

**P.T. In your first book, you talk about the reasons regarding your motivation that has to be the right ones to achieve goals. The readers learn that studies showed how people who have intrinsic motivations succeed better than those who have extrinsic values, such as prestige, financial rewards, etc. Therefore, what should motivate young people to become a physician?**

**Dr. D.** The number 1 reason should be to help people, with a willingness and dedication to contribute to the welfare of others. Besides that, having a meaningful job must be important. As a physician, you will rarely have the feeling when you go home that you didn't do something important and meaningful during the day.

In terms of the general traits that physicians should have, I would say aside from the medical knowledge base, communication is highly important (but often under-valued). You need communication skills for the patients, families and the staff including interdisciplinary teams. Patients are not solely about diseases, they are a human being with whom you will have to interact.

**P.T. I believe that a physician must have emotional intelligence.**

**Dr. D.** Definitely! Technical abilities are not enough. But of course, to be a doctor you have to be scientifically inclined and be willing to become a lifelong learner because medicine changes constantly. You need to assess situations analytically and objectively. You have to also handle stress appropriately because it is a profession that requires a lot of responsibilities. I believe that being a physician is an honour and a privilege, because people trust you with their lives. It is obviously a very secure job with great financial rewards. I won't deny that. I have been a physician for ten years and I have no regrets for choosing this great profession.

Before applying to medical school, I would recommend that candidates spend enough time directly shadowing physicians to understand the challenges, demands and lifestyle of a medical doctor in primary care and other specialties with direct patient exposures. In addition, the medical profession is strongly oriented to service in the community. So, future physicians should demonstrate an interest and commitment to their community by involving themselves in volunteering projects.

Overall, commitment to community service, ethical behavior and mindset, empathy, leadership and communication skills are primordial characteristics of physicians. It is also an asset to possess research abilities because this will allow you later to contribute in scholarly medical literature.

**P.T.** Thanks for taking the time to share your expertise and to talk about your books. It was interesting to speak to you.

**Dr. D.** You really asked great questions!

**P.T.** Thanks! Your books gave me the material to ask questions with substance.

The official website of Thomas Jefferson: Lessons from a Secret Buddha: [www.jeffersonbuddha.com](http://www.jeffersonbuddha.com) . His books are available on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) or

[www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com)

Visit Dr. Dhand at: [www.suneeldhand.com](http://www.suneeldhand.com)

Also follow him at:

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/#!/SuneelDhand>

### **Dr. Dhand's scientific publications:**

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### **BOOK CHAPTERS**

- *Pulmonary Edema* by Dhand S, Korsunsky G. • 5-Minute Clinical Consult 2011.
- *Pulmonary Embolism* by Dhand S, Barreiro TJ. 5-Minute Clinical Consult 2011.

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The metabolic rate is the amount of energy expended in a given period

According to Wikipedia, the **body fat percentage** of a human or other animal is the total weight of fat divided by total weight; body fat includes essential body fat and storage body fat  
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3 The metabolic rate is the amount of energy expended in a given period

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5 It enumerated the rights in articles such as 1, 2, 6 and 9