

TAHINI MAGIC
October 7, 2010

By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

It may not be much to look at, only a piece of toast, but I am going to share a special secret with you that few know about. I learned this from my wife Margaret, who in our house is the leader in anything connected to healthy eating, and for that matter health and nutrition in general. She won't admit to it, but Margaret is as close to a doctor as I like to get.

And she has given up pointing out to me how to eat healthier. She just does it for herself and I finally (when my body finally tells me I must) follow her example. For all of my good qualities, I seem to insist on trying every bad eating habit until there literally is no alternative but to eat sensibly. I am a slow learner in this department.

Margaret has been eating Tahini and jam toast for years, and for years I have turned up my nose at it and tried to ignore it. I was not about to put tahini on toast with add jam. No way. I like butter on my toast and other stuff, mostly lots of butter. Anyway, what is tahini?

Tahini is ground roasted sesame seeds; we could call it 'tahini butter' because that's really what it is. It is not as 'sweet' as peanut butter and has a teeny tinge of bitterness to it, like hops do to beer. At first I was a little wary of the taste, but after even a few days I liked it, and now I'm loving it.

Yet, when I decided to give up sugar, after some 60+ years of testing it, what I ate began to change. Now I like sugar, in particular I like ice cream. However, as the years rolled by I gradually (and I mean gradually) realized that I could only get away with eating ice cream in the summer, when the weather is hot. In winter, ice cream all too often led me down the road to having a cold. Even I figured this out after several decades of dedicated tests.

And the same goes with eating cookies, even the cookies from the healthy part of the cookie aisle. And snacking on cookies just had to go. So I decided I did not need sugar any more, that is if I want to live halfway healthy... as in 'feel good'. So goodbye cookies, ice cream, and anything sugar. That was some time ago. I still use some honey and maple syrup, however, which is sugar (I know), but is at least a step or two toward being more natural. And now to toast with tahini and jam.

It does not sound like much, but it is. Why? I can't give you any label-like detailed reason. All I know is that even a single slice of toast with tahini stops my hunger dead in its tracks and it lasts for hours. Somehow tahini is one of those few food that stick to your ribs (like oatmeal), and just shuts down the need to snack or eat. It really is something. Perhaps because it has lots of oil in it, it satisfies.

And perhaps my favorite Buddhist saint or guru, the great Mahasiddha Tilopa, spent his life grinding sesame seeds into tahini or tahini oil (something like that), so that for me is just one more sign that I was meant to eat and love tahini.

There are only a very few foods that get into my "Food Hall of Fame," where brown rice, Tamari, omeboshi plums, miso, and a few other ingredients hang out, and tahini has recently been inducted into that special place. I see from the co-ops and health-related stores that there are

many brands of tahini, and they don't all taste or look the same. For what it is worth, we use East-Wind tahini and now buy it a 15-pound tub, which we keep in our refrigerator. From that one put smaller amounts into other containers. So check it out.

And I have one last tahini story before I go to work. Way back in the early 1970s my favorite organic food company, Eden Foods, had a deli at the end of a short alley on Maynard Street in Ann Arbor. Sometime around lunch time they would serve something I have dreamed about ever since. It was a fresh-cooked chapati that was made on the fire of an open stove, so that the shell of the chapati was singed. Then they would cut off about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the chapati, leaving essentially a pocket bread. Into that they would stuff fresh-roasted veggies with the most delicious sauce I had ever tasted.

For years I have dreamed and wondered just what that sauce made from. Recently an old friend from that era contacted me and it turns out he was the guy who made the chapatis and he knew all about that sauce. It was made up of caramelized onions and tahini, with a little water stirred in. It was tahini sauce. So there you have it. Tahini is one of those foods that I would take to the proverbial desert isle with me. See if you like it.

Michael

