Ancient Plant Secrets to Deepen Your Spiritual Practice Transcript

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Introduction and Guest Background

Hey friends, I'm your host Dr. Elizabeth Samana, the intuitive psychiatrist. Today we are exploring a subject that's near and dear to my heart, looking into plants, herbs.

They are amazing in many different ways and often there's so much knowledge within them. And in fact, sometimes they can be a pathway to really connecting with our spirit, our soul.

Our next guest, he is a pioneer in holistic medicine, one of the very few Westerners to be licensed in Chinese medicine. But not only that, He has studied both Ayurvedic and Tibetan medicine and is heavily invested in helping communities cultivate herbs sustainably.

David Crowe, welcome to the show. Thank you, Dr. Elizabeth. So nice that you would invite me. Well, I mean, y'all don't know this, but I got COVID, and he has a year-long course with the Shift Network.

And so if you're interested in learning about herbs, then you should definitely take the course. It was fantastic, great course, highly recommend. But I get COVID and ended up having a consultation with him.

I'm a physician. So I know people in medicine, but just having really weird symptoms. But went to him and he gave me this great, great great regimen. So thoughtful.

And so between him, and another practitioner, like I did so great. There's so many good things I could say about you, but many people don't know you. What led you down this path of really exploring herbal medicine?

Well, I don t really know how it all started, that I always had an interest in other cultures. Ever since I was a kid, maybe that had to do with the fact that my father took the family to live in Greece when I as a child and he was very interested in Greek mythology.

And so I became very, interested early on because some of my childhood memories were like in the, you know, the Greek temples and the Oracle of Delphi ruins and places like that.

So I had kind of an unusual upbringing, you know, being from Southern California, I actually had contact with, ancient cultures. And it gave me an interest in other cultures in general, as I was growing up.

When I was a kid and going through high school, I actually was more intrigued with other places and times than I had been growing up in the United States.

So I went traveling as soon as I could and traveled through Central America and came into contact with the indigenous cultures. I was still a teenager actually and I met shamans and curanderas and was very impacted by actually discovering that ancient knowledge was contemporary times where I thought all this stuff had vanished.

It was still very much alive. So that was the first step was I actually came in contact with the indigenous medicines of Central America. And from that, I became very interested in studying natural medicine.

and this was before any natural medicines was available. This was a long time ago.

Journey Into Herbal Medicine

There was no herbal medicine really available anywhere. I mean, there weren't even computers. There wasn't the internet. And so I was very interested in other cultures and I heard about the first acupuncture college of Chinese medicine that was opening up in 1980 in San Francisco.

And I jumped on that opportunity. I had been studying about Taoism and meditation and alchemy, but I didn't have any actual contact. So when that first College of Chinese Medicine opened in San Francisco.

I went and I graduated a few years later and i was in the first wave of Westerners who became licensed in Chinese medicine and a practitioner of acupuncture and herbal medicine from 1984 on and so it's been 40 years now.

that I've been doing that, but of course it's evolved in many different forms. I had clinical practices in different places for years and years, decades, and I also came in contact with the Tibetan Buddhist community in San Francisco while I was going to school and got very interested in Tibetan medicine because Chinese medicine was not really very substantial then.

It was really superficial Chinese medicine. And I was really interested in the culture and the plants and spiritual traditions and so forth. So I ended up moving after several years of practicing Chinese Medicine in San Francisco.

I closed my clinic and I moved to Kathmandu. When I met my teachers there. Wow! So, I studied Tibetan medicine with an old Tibetan doctor. and then I met a step at a time different Ayurvedic doctors and traveled extensively.

So I spent several years in Nepal and India and actually studied Ayurevedics and Tibetan medicine in a very classical kind of way, which was working in the clinics with the doctors, and In Kathmandu, I worked with the monks.

We harvested herbs and chopped them up and made pills and worked for the Ayurvedic doctors doing these different preparations and work with them, seeing their clients and patients and so forth.

And so I was integrating this a step at a time back into my clinical practice in Southern California during that time. So that's kind of the big picture and along the way there was also a lot of other things you did mention like the sustainable production of herbs and school gardens and all these things kind came out of all of that because my education was so sociological and it was environmental and botanical because plant-based medicine is part of these cultures and plant based medicine has also woven very intimately with spiritual practices.

And so that's kind of what I took out of it, a step at a time, and I learned that, okay, these doctors are losing the medicines, the plants that they make their medicines from.

So I became very interested in sustainability and that became a whole different career. I worked with people all over the world setting up these sustainable cultivation projects and distilleries of essential oils and kind of moved into the agricultural side for many years also.

And now my focus is really on my clinical practice, which is telemedicine consultations. That's where we met in online teaching, and thank you for being in that year-long program.

It was substantial. And that's kind of bringing everything up to date. My deeper interest now, what I'm teaching now is very much about the medical levels of how these herbs can be used for really contemporary problems, detoxification of microplastics and things like that, really, contemporary issues.

But also, you know, the health challenges that I see in my practice are quite serious and diverse. There's cancer patients, there's people with long COVID, There are all kinds of metabolic issues, of course, and mental health issues of, course as you now.

And I'm focusing very much on integrating herbal medicine back into meditation practice because they complement each other very, very well. So that's the big picture of what I've been up to for all this time.

Thank you for asking. No, it's, yeah, I mean, a lot. It's substantial. And we could go down many different routes, but I'd like to really touch on the last point that you made.

You were integrating herbs with meditation. Tell me a little bit about that, about the various benefits you see as as

far as integrating those two things together.

Right. Well, this is a huge subject. And it's something that's universal. It's not just Chinese medicine, Ayurvedic medicine. Actually, herbs have always been used with spiritual practice everywhere in the world, every tradition.

Shamanism in South America, shaman ism in Asia, everywhere. North American, Central American. Everywhere. Plants have been use, they have used, with respect.

And there have always been spiritual practices done with every step of the relationship, prayers, gratitude, reverence when people harvest the plants.

and then prayers and mantras and visualizations and songs and ceremonies when people make medicines. And then more songs, and prayers, mantas and visualization and invocations when the people use the medicines and so it's always been like that everywhere.

You can see that going back thousands of years in every culture. I learned that in my first exposure, actually, to the indigenous traditions in Central America, and then came across it in a very substantial way in studies in Kathmandu, in Tibetan medicine, because in Tibet medicine Tibetan medicine is basically Tibetan Buddhist medicine.

Tibetan, Tibetan Medicine is a branch of Tibetan Buddhism, really, or Tibetan. Buddhism uses Tibetan Madison. And so we see the same thing in yoga and Ayurveda linked to the Vedas.

We see same things in Tantra and Taoist alchemy and qigong and Chinese medicine, they're all woven together. So what I saw with Tibetan medicine actually, some pretty unique things.

I lived next to a monastery. There were monasteries all over actually where I live in the village of Bodanath on the east side of the Kathmandu Valley.

That's where all the Tibetan monasterys were.

Herbs and Meditation Practices

So I witnessed a lot of ceremonies taking place and attended a lots of teachings and retreats in these monasteries. And one really good example of the integration of spirituality and medicine in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition is what's called a Drupchen, which is a seven-day ceremony.

In that ceremony, they make a medicine. The medicine is called dutzi, which is a kind of nectar medicine. And so it's an old formula and they bring all these herbs and then they mix them all together and put them in this big pot.

and bless it, okay. But the blessing goes on for seven days. And it's a remarkable thing because if you walk into the meditation hall and you sit down, you can visualize this, that you are in this Tibetan-style meditation Hall, high ceilings and columns and incense and all this.

Then at the far end of the hall, there is a very large Tanka, Tibetan painting of Buddha and it may be a specific Buddha, but that Buddha is overlooking this big bowl of medicine and then going down the length of the hall on either side there are these parallel meditation tables and all the Monks and nuns are all assembled in these long parallel rows going down.

There may be hundreds of people present. And all of the meditators that are sitting in those rows have a thread connected to their heart. And this is really curious because this thread, all these hundreds of threads go from these hundred of meditators' hearts up to the heart of the Buddha on the wall.

And so they're reciting mantra like all day long. The idea is that the vibration of mantra is going from the hearts center through this network of thread up through the buddha and then all of this blessing this bowl of medicine.

It's a remarkable blessing ceremony, but it's the same basic idea as what you see if you go to an ayahuasca ceremony in the Amazon. Okay, there's song, prayer, intention, visualization, evoking, all of these things, and it is all connected with the medicine.

No, what I've been focused on is the observation that the mind interacts with the plants when the plant are interacting with body. So what we see then is that plants are actually a form of cosmological intelligence.

The plants have intelligence their genetics, how they create the compounds that give them the flavors and the aromas and their therapeutic benefits. And all of that comes out of the biosphere.

So a plant is like a container of intelligence of Earth. and the elements of the earth and sun and moon. So cosmological intelligence is in the plants, but we recognize it physiologically as chemicals when we ingest them.

And so those compounds come in and work on us physiologically, But we can interact with those Compounds and body sensations are producing by either paying attention to them or not.

we can say, to simplify this, is that plants can support our meditation practice. And our mediation practice can potentize the plants. Now this works in a couple very simple, but very mysterious and profound ways.

So, first of all, plant medicine has always been used to support spiritual practice, and we say well, How is that? Well, first of all, longevity. And this is a very big part of Ayurveda, for example, or Chinese alchemy.

Everybody wants to live to 100 years old. Well why? So that traditionally the purpose of longevity was so that you could do spiritual practice. long enough to get enlightened.

And so the herbs were always used as elixirs and nectars and rejuvenative tonics to live a long life. But there was also these applications of the herb for supporting cognitive functions.

and relaxing the nervous system and keeping the immune system strong with the purpose specifically of helping meditation. Okay, so herbs have always been used to support meditation practice.

And this can be as simple as just drinking chamomile tea before you sit down and meditate. You know, it helps you relax. you can meditate more effectively.

stress reduction. And so the two areas where we see that the herbs really enhance meditation is strengthening the nervous system and relaxing the system, basically.

So there are many things that are famous for supporting meditation, like the reishi mushroom was famous in China. We know now that basically it supports brain function, but it also induces deep meditation if you use it with meditation.

We have how the herbs support meditation, first in a general sense of good health and longevity, but also a very specific branch of medicine devoted to how to use herbs to deepen and focus meditative practices.

So herbs have always been used to support mediation, But here's the really intriguing part, is that meditation potentizes herbs. How does meditation potentize the herbs?

Well, herbs produce body sensations. Okay. And if we drink a cup of chamomile tea and we're running around sitting in traffic, it's not going to do much.

But if we sit down and become very mindful and aware of body sensations, we're paying very close attention to the body, and we start sipping that chamomile tea, then we started to notice that as soon as it comes into the mouth, that it has a subtle relaxing effect on our nervous system because it immediately is entering into, the olfactory link to the brain and through the taste buds directly to brain.

Immediately that chamomile tea starts to have an effect in the nervous systems that we don't notice otherwise, but we start to notice it because we're paying attention And attention is energy.

And, attention starts to mingle the energy, the prana, of the life force of our mind begins to, mingle with the light force, or the plant. The pran of, our minds begins, to merge with, pranna of plant, as it comes into the, Prana of body.

So, then we notice that that chamomile tea, has a relaxing effect as, it gets to the stomach. And then we notice that it starts to relax intestines and then, we noticed that our breathing gets deeper.

And so, were actually noticing what the plant is doing. that simple process of noticing, whereas previously we drank that chamomile tea and it didn't do anything for us.

But if we are meeting that plant, being present with that plan, paying attention to that planet and observing what it is doing inside of us, that it creates this vast awareness of all of these physiological reactions that are happening.

And that one cup of chamomile tea can be profoundly relaxing because we are paying attention to it. Now, that process can duplicated with any type of herb.

And we can also learn how to send the power of that herb to specific places. Interesting. So we take some tincture of the reishi mushroom and we actually breathe and do a qigong exercise of focusing energy into the brain.

We can actually feel that reisi mushroom going into Okay. And so what we're doing then is we are using our mind to become very sensitive to the powers of the plants and also using breath and focus to direct the power of plants inside the body.

So it's like doing inner Qigong alchemy with the plant. What this does is it is all based on a much higher level of awareness of body sensations. And so we can ask a basic question, does this really work?

Well, the answer is that if you drink a cup of tea and you don't feel anything, it's not really doing anything. But on the other hand, if your drink your cup a tea, and your really, really feel it, its really something, okay?

And what that means is our mind is potentizing the herbs with our own awareness. And this has been studied by thousands of people because I've been teaching this now for several years and we've done lots of meditation practice with this.

And the typical testimonial is that people say they have never felt the power of the herbs so strongly using only a microdose, just one sip and you can feel the power of the herbs tremendously.

So in the classes, well, I've had several hundred students and we're doing these practices together, but I don't know these people individually as patients.

I do not know what medications they're on or what herb is indicated or not indicated. And so therefore I have to suggest, all right, if we are going to do this herb, it has to be really low dose.

But then people say, wow, I really feel that herb from a micro dose. Well, that has some economic benefit because we don't have to take as much. It doesn't cost us as.

But that's the overview, is that the plants support our meditation practice, but our mediation practice potentizes the herbs and that is how they fit.

individually. That's how they're woven back together again for our own personal benefit. But then we take that and then, we can understand why all of these cultures and all these places understood that when you are harvesting a plant that you're interacting with its own consciousness, when your preparing it, using it.

So herbal medicine then is really about these three forms of prana or chi. life force coming together. The prana and the chi of the plant, the pran and chi the body, and then the Prana in the Chi of mind.

And then we can also expand that further and we say, well, qualities of heart, gratitude, reverence, these are all part of interacting with the plants also.

Then there's the voice, another kind of Pran, chi, mantra, prayers and so forth. There's visualization. All of these are aspects of energy that we can use to interact with the energy and the life force of the plant.

So that's a very quick summation of a really ancient and very, very deep subject. Yes, yes. The way that you describe, the words that come to mind are it's mindful consumption of an herb and just the power of attention and that it is energy.

It's so important. I wonder, are there specific types of meditations that are more amenable to this? The most important aspect of this is mindfulness.

The important subject of mindfulness is body sensations. That's the level at which I introduce it. and where people can practice it on a practical level.

And so the example that I gave is use the herbs with mindfulness, but that means really pay attention to what they taste like and smell like, and then pay intention to body sensations there.

they are producing. So the first part is more of a receptive part, okay, where we're paying attention to the plant and we are feeling what it does. And so this is classical vipassana, it's classical body-based awareness of sensations that are arising and dissolving all the time.

Spiritual Evolution and Collective Healing

And so we feel the body in a state of tension, and then we see how it transforms into a stage of relaxation, a step at a time. And we can use that process to train ourselves.

to move out of chronic tension into being chronically relaxed. So that's the first part is receptive awareness, paying attention to what the herbs are doing in the body.

But then there are other levels that we can use to potentize that experience further. And one of those is voice. And we can use herbs with mantra or prayer or song.

Those are the three major ways that the human voice has always interacted with plants. Song, prayer, And mantra. Mantra is kind of like a song in a prayer.

It's actually like the sound of the deity. Okay. Or it's the Deity in sonic form. That's a best way to say it. These are all aspects of vibration. And vibration affects our physiology also.

Anybody who has done any kind work with entheogenic plants in traditional ceremony, like the ayahuasca ceremony, they know the sound vibration and chanting and prayer is always part of it.

And it changes the experience. The sound of the song actually takes people into trance states, you see. So vibration is something that we can add to this.

Then there is the visualization part. And the simple way that I tell people about this is visualize where the plant medicine is going inside the body.

This follows a real fundamental principle. that is articulated so nicely in Qigong. And the term in Qi Gong is Yi Tao, Qi Tao. What that means is, Yi, mind, flows.

Qi, flow. So where the mind flows, energy flows that, means where our attention is focused. That means energy is going there. Okay. And so when we sip our relaxing tea, we can actually visualize that it is moving into the upper digestive system where we hold all of our attention.

And, so what we're doing then is we are actually meditating. We put our intention on the Upper Digestive System. And by putting our attention on the upper digestive system and following the sensations of the T going into the stomach, we're sending energy to the stem.

It's like internal Qigong, or the example I gave, we visualized a reishi mushroom going to the brain. So we can visualize specific parts of the body, and that sends energy there.

And that's kind of like biofeedback. If you focus on a specific part of a body you can feel a change. You can learn how to relax a migraine headache, turn it off by focusing on that part the of body.

There's the attention, where we put the attentions. another part of all of this. So visualization, flow of energy, and then of course the breathing. And we can incorporate breathing, which is also part our breath and mantra.

But the more deeply we breathe, the open the body becomes and receptive to the influences of the medicines. So these are all things that we can also incorporate into this relationship with the plant.

So I hope that was the answer to the question. Yeah, you described the different ways that could modify our practice as we're doing mindful consumption.

And so I guess for me, I was thinking about, oh, how would I do it? What meditations would do? But you were very specific as far as the difference attributes.

So that was really helpful. What struck me as you were saying this, because I'm in allopathic medicine and I was like, oh, well, this would be great to do with, you know, patients who are taking regular prescription drugs.

You have interacted with many different disciplines, and I feel like there's a lot of potential as far as connecting with and collaborating. And I wanted to get a sense from you, since you've been to all these different cultures, what are some of the ways that we might come together to support humanity as we're going through this next stage of spiritual evolution?

Well, that's a big question. And I think that, well, the way that my mind works with all of this is I would ask, what is spiritual evolution? And what does this phase of spiritual revolution that we're in?

But I can answer that very directly. You're asking several questions all at once, actually. So the first question is, What is the phase spiritual of evolution that were in right now?

and then how can we work together to enhance this? Well, I think that the broader context of spiritual evolution is the reality that we're in. Yeah. Okay.

And the realty that were in is from the planetary biological standpoint, it's dire. And we can make parallels actually between what's happening in the biosphere of the earth and what happening the microcosm of people's bodies.

And that is- And there's truth there. What's that? No, there is a lot of truth here. Well, yes, it is true that the health of an individual is based on the heath of earth, but It's also a metaphor, which is that humanity is very sick right now.

Humanity is sick physically and mentally. And the earth is really sick biologically. The parallel then, in terms of spiritual evolution, the question that arises, is what is the spiritual potential in illness?

What is a spiritual in a critical diagnosis or even a terminal diagnosis? humanity may be getting a terminal diagnosis. I mean, the word extinction is floating around now in scientific circles, you know, and it's not an unrealistic possibility.

If the earth can't maintain its biological balance, then humans aren't going to be here. And so therefore, it is kind of like a collective diagnosis that we are facing and then we move it back to the individual and we say, well, what happens when individual gets a serious diagnosis or a terminal diagnosis?

It becomes a time of great potential for spiritual awakening. Okay. And it's very well known now, lots of studies confirming this and psychological sociological studies that if people use a critical or terminal diagnosis or illness as an opportunity for spiritual growth, then several really positive things happen.

One is, it enhances the immune system. And another is that it transforms what is otherwise meaningless suffering into a path of spiritual growth, and the suffering then has a new context.

And so I have heard, I'm sure you've heard this many times, people say, well cancer was my greatest teacher, you see. So I think that if we're talking about a spiritual evolution, We have to put it in the context of the reality that we are facing biologically, collectively as humanity.

And it's the same kind of thing that, we have an opportunity to transform this into a meaningful process of spiritual growth. Then that raises the question, well, what are all of these forms of meaning?

And I think that the simplest way to describe that is that it gets our priorities straight real fast. And our priority tends to become more human. In other words, we tend to value our time more.

and spend less time with meaningless things that don't matter anymore and enjoy quality relationships and be with our loved ones and say the things we need to say before we're gone.

And all of these kinds of things are deeply spiritual parts of being a human that happen in every individual life that I think we are now going to start to experience collectively as well.

So the collective situation has the possibility then that we may have a kind of epiphany, a collective epiphany, that all this stuff that we're doing is really off track.

And it's really on track because the foundation biologically that gives us life is crumbling. Yeah. Therefore, we all need to work together. That concept that you just presented, how do we work That's a human concept, okay?

That part of being human is cooperation and communication. And we can see that society is breaking down in so many ways because it's become so divisive.

and civility is becoming less frequent, and all of these things are really hurting society and hurting individuals. And that's one direction things could go, is breaking down further.

That leads to more and more chaos and inability to solve the problems, whereas to address the collective problems that we have biologically, it will require cooperation and communication.

And therefore the spiritual potential that I think we right now, the Spiritual Evolution that is possible, is that everything that causes divisiveness will have to be obsolete.

that everything that people are fighting about that is not based on biological unity will become obsolete, okay, because in the case of global climate change, nations don't matter.

It's global, and when it comes to climate catastrophe, boundaries of nations don't matter. It's global. And I think that's the big lesson that the earth is showing us right now is that all of these ideas about race and religion and gender and all the ethnic divisions and of all these things that are very much part of human history going back a long way as we've been fighting about these thing for a very long time, suddenly We are being faced with powers that are greater than we are.

And those powers are hurricanes and fires and microbes. Okay? And so we're now being confronted with power

that is greater that humans, and humans are going to have to learn how to get along.

Yeah. I think that's the spiritual potential to answer your question. I, you know, I see that potential. I'm hopeful for that potentially. And the word that comes to me that there is, the potential for spiritual growth if we really take this seriously and just, if move towards a space of love.

Right.

How to Connect With David Crow

and I know that our listeners are really going to want to connect with you. either through a course or as a consultation. So how can they connect with you?

Well, thank you for asking. People can find me at my website, which is crowconsultations.com. C-R-O-W, my last name, crow, consultations, plural, dot com.

And that's where I offer my consultation services, obviously, but also We do free events, we do meditations, and I give some lectures here and there, talks about these things, And offer courses.

And my courses are also offered through theshiftnetwork.com, the shiftnetwerk. com, which is how we met originally. There's a big archive of past courses there as well.

So that's how people can find me. Thank you for that opportunity to mention that. Yes, yeah, you are. I want to say the word that comes to mind is unicorn because there's I don't know anyone else, right, who has the background in Chinese medicine.

Are you beta? Even we didn't even talk about Western herbalism because you dabble in that too. There are just so many things that you're great at. You're just such a wonderful resource.

And I am in awe of what you're doing and incredibly supportive of, what your doing. Just such a bright light in this world. And, and so thank you, thank so much for being on the show.

Well, Thank you. That's extremely complimentary of you and likewise, think you I mean, we didn't talk about your good work and the challenges you face and You know, the work that you're doing in the trenches of, you know mental health in The United States.

So my compliments to you and gratitude to You for the hard work That you've been doing. Thank you for The invitation. It's been a great pleasure. If you haven't heard it yet today, I appreciate you.

The soul in me honors the soul and you." If you'd like to see more episodes like this, please subscribe or click here. And friends, if this spoke to you, leave a comment below.

We would love to hear from you!