Introduction to Dr. Maya Shetreat

Welcome to this episode of the Mycotoxins and Complex Illness Summit. I'm honored today to interview Doctor Maya treat. She's a neurologist, herbalist, urban farmer, and author of The Cure.

She's been featured in The New York Times, the Telegraph, NPR, Sky news, The Doctor, Oz Show, and more. Doctor Maya is the founder of the Terrain Institute, where she teaches terrain medicine, Earth based programs for transformational healing.

She works and studies with indigenous communities and healers from around the world, and is a lifelong student of ethnobotany, plant healing, and the sacred.

Welcome, doctor she treat is such an honor to have you here today. Thank you so much for having me. So tell us about about how you first got into medicine and how you bridge the worlds of sacred medicine with without apothic medicine.

There are two seemingly different worlds, and yet they're not. And I love how you how you bring them together. So tell us about that. Well, you know, I would say, I started out probably thinking the two were much more combined then, they really were.

Early Connection to Nature and Medicine

And then and then it was a journey to finding my way back to it, really, once I entered medicine. So, you know, I was very connected to nature and, exploration and making little altars that I didn't really know were altars with, like, different plants and pictures and things as a child.

And I was an only child, so I guess I had to really keep myself busy. And, it was in the 70s. Nobody was really that interested in, like what the kids were doing during the day.

Right? So, you know, so that was really kind of a basis for me was like being very deeply connected in nature. Doing a lot of sort of meditative practice without even really recognizing it as such.

And, and then, you know, time went on. And of course, these are things you kind of grow through because, you know, you get busy with other things, and that's not really a valued activity.

And, you know, ultimately, I, I actually saw a program, a Bill Moyer special called healing and the mind, which was all about something that really interested me, which was, psycho neuro immunology.

So there was all this discussion, and this was obviously I was, you know, I was probably 20 years old when when this came out or when I watched it. And there was this whole story of this young girl who had lupus, who couldn't take her meds because they caused her to have kidney toxicity.

But when she stopped taking her meds, her lupus would flare. And so they decided to give her castor oil every time she took her meds. And then they stopped giving her meds and continued to just give her castor oil on the same schedule, and she responded as if she was still on meds.

And I was like, great, that's what I want to do. I'm interested in that thing. Psycho neuro immunology. That's what I'm gonna do with my life. And I went to med school, and I really even wrote my essay about it, and they even accepted me.

So I was like, this is what you do. But then you went to medical school, right? Medical school is not about psycho

neuro immunology or anything close to that.

And it was a busy time of life. Right? You know, a lot of I won't I mean, I won't call it brainwashing, but, whatever it is that we do, right? In med school and, and then, you know, I went through my training, I got married, I had children.

It was a busy, busy time. And then as I emerged, my son actually had a health challenge. As I was emerging from my training. And, it kind of took me on a whole journey around really reconnecting to some of those ideas about food and my the microbiome and gut brain health and all these things that at the time were not part of the mainstream conversation.

You didn't see that kind of stuff on the cover of a magazine or, you know, in the New York Times or anything like that. It was something that I had to really dive, do a lot of detective work in the scientific literature to kind of uncover.

And I wrote my book, The Dirt Cure, about that journey. But, ultimately. So I started really marrying these things together for a long time. And ultimately, I kind of came to this crossroads, and I thought the crossroads was when my son got sick.

Right?

Son's Illness and the Mold Exposure Crisis

I had learned about, like, kind of how potent food as medicine is and became an herbalist and started really doing a lot of deep dive into, into nature and medicine and all of that.

But really then years later, he got sick again and he was doing all the, you know, we were doing all the things, and he started to have all these new onset breathing issues that were different than his old ones.

And it turned out that we discovered that, we had mold in our apartment, and it was coming from someone else, like the building wouldn't let us deal with it.

It was it was like running into brick walls at every turn. But he couldn't breathe. And so finally I had to, like, threatened to sue the building. You know, these are the things that people go through when they have mold exposure.

And it's really hard. Usually they're suffering physically and mentally. And then on top of that, have to, you know, go through this kind of, you know, legal sort of piece sometimes just to even be believed or get help.

But anyway, we moved out, we gutted the whole area where there was an issue. I got rid of all of my upholstered furniture. Everything got washed and dry cleaned, and we gave away all the stuffed animals.

I mean, you name it, I was just I had people come in with like, Q-tips to clean, like the door jambs, like, you know, it was intense. Okay, we come back two weeks later and the place is clean.

We've tested it. We know it was gutted. It's clean. Everything's. Everything was gone. New mattresses, you think. You name it, it was done. We come back two weeks later.

My son has a seizure. The same kid. The seizure. When he was going to get into the shower. And at the time, he was, you know, not even seven years old.

And, and it was just a really traumatic moment because. And that was where the epicenter of mold had been. But there was no mold there. I mean, it had been gutted to the studs.

There was no mold there. And, yeah, that was where he had this seizure, thankfully not wood, you know. And it's

been it's been almost a decade now. He had no more after that.

But what I realized in that moment, you know, I was holding him and it was just terrifying. He was locked in the bathroom. So you're banging on the door and like, trying, you know, figuring out how to get in and like, this prewar building where it's not so easy to just, like, you know, pick a lock.

And, eventually he kind of came out and he was groggy and everything, and, I was just holding him, and I knew just deep inside and that moment, just with complete certainty that this was not a physical problem.

I mean, I was the person people would go to, probably one of the only people in the world that was doing integrative pediatric neurology at that time.

Clinical pediatric neurology. Yeah. You have herbal the whole thing mind, body, everything. And I knew I didn't have the tools to help him because I, I understood that this was an energetic issue, writing about his, his body in a way that we had no language to discuss.

But I just knew it and I could see it in that moment. It was so clear. And so that took me on a whole journey into how do you learn, how do you what kind of lexicon can we have?

What language, what vocabulary can we develop around? Really? The spiritual body? And not just to think of a physical body, but to think of even an emotional body and a spiritual body.

And what happens that can make those parts of us unwell or out of balance? And what can we do then to support that? I love that you're bringing all of this, that there's so many pieces here.

You know, I'm just going to first address all all that you had to deal with technically gutting your house, getting rid of the furniture, getting rid of this stuff is our patients go through that every day.

Right. And what a trauma that is on top of whatever it is that has made them sick from the physical to the spiritual. So there's that piece. I'm so happy you talked about this, because a lot of patients, when they're going through mycotoxins, illness, they don't.

It's a very difficult topic, very difficult thing to even think about to consider. Now I have to move. Now I have to get rid of everything. And the second thing I think that's so important you're bringing up, I'm so happy to bring up is about about the spiritual piece.

And I think it's just so overlooked in medicine. And one thing I noticed about my patients, they're, they're like yours and that they have complex chronic illness.

But you work more on the neurological piece than I do because you're a neurologist. But these patients have a sensitivity spiritual, emotional and physical that that isn't common.

And and while they're so physically sensitive, a little bit hypersensitive, even now, the immune system has gone that direction. There's there's a there's a depth of wisdom, a depth of intuition that I see in this group of patients a lot.

And, and, I bet your son is a highly sensitive being, just like you. And and I'd love for you to to share that piece with us. Tell us about about him and and his sensitivity and how you might see that in your patient base as well, because I know one of the things I, I try to do is to, is to, is to help my patients come around so that they, they honor their their emotional and spiritual sensitivity.

And it's truly their superpower. It's their gift. Yeah, yeah. Well, I'll say something.

Sensitivity as a Gift and Spiritual Teacher

You know, even that part about, giving away, you know, or getting rid of all the items in the house, which feels really hard. It does it for us. And thinking about all of that, it's so interesting to me because I think there's a way in which, you know, I think that these experiences, as difficult as they are, and we certainly would never invite them.

We would never ask for them. Right. Often we do need to release certain things, and they're very hard things to release. And sometimes their objects and sometimes their lifestyles and sometimes their relationships and sometimes, you know, they're mementos.

But. Right. I think that there's something really interesting. It's so hard to see it when you're in the moment, when you're releasing all those items.

There's a way in which you are lightning your load, and you're moving things that might have certain kinds of attachments or stories or things that maybe no longer serve you.

So for me, I think at the time, of course, it felt just as difficult as you're saying. But I was determined because, I mean, I didn't feel well either, but, you know, it was like mama bear mode at that point, right?

Right. Anything. I mean, you couldn't breathe like you don't have choices in those situations. So, and that's the way of the universe, like if I say the universe, but we could say God, we could say your guides, whatever you want.

Right? Right. You know, that's the way sometimes you have to do it when you're resistant, right? It's like it's like you don't really have a choice in the, in the situation.

But I do think that that release of things, it's interesting if we can think of it as a release rather than, you know, having to give everything you love away, that kind of thing is, I think, okay, well, maybe, maybe this is something that's going to make space for some other really important thing, and I'm going to create that space.

So I would just say that because I do think that's really relevant to the sensitive people, who experienced this. And I would say my whole practice is really very sensitive people.

And certainly I think I grew up as a very sensitive person, and we learn how to compartmentalize and we learn how to manage it. And, you know, we have to have a lot of coping skills and a lot of compensating skills because the world is not really built very well for sensitive people.

And I agree with you completely. That sense, that sensitivity is our intuition. It's our gut feelings. It's our sensitivity to the electromagnetic fields around us.

It's a way to have these incredible epiphanies and downloads. It's a way that you can really have that kind of insight into your spiritual knowing and your authentic purpose in life.

But we're not really, you know, we're kind of thought, well, don't be a crybaby or like, you know, that that doesn't make any sense or that's not rational.

And so we kind of dismiss those things or they're dismissed. And then we start to internalize that. So I am, you know, and I do think that people who have physical sensitivity, often it's a reflection of their emotional and their spiritual sensitivity, and together that really is a gift.

But it can be hard to navigate physically. And the way I've always thought of my son, my youngest son, and of course all of my children are this way. And I think a lot of people, you know, I call that that particular my youngest son, I call him my cosmic magnet because, like, he's the one that like, everything will be expressed through him for the kind of learning that I need.

I call him also my muse because he was really the inspiration, ultimately, that took me through, through his illness and his journey took me through writing The Dirt Cure, how I changed my practice and then ultimately, again, took me into this whole very deep journey of my own self-discovery, my own transformation again of my practice,

deepening my work, and really doing much more spiritual work that I now do with, patients and clients in my institute and, in coaching and other ways.

So I think, you know, he, I think of him as just a very high level spiritual teacher, actually. And I think so often that's, you know, the people who are the high level spiritual teachers do go through these cycles that are difficult because they, reveal and unveil these gifts, you know, and, and they become teachers in whatever way that might look, which can look a lot of different ways.

I love that, you know, and that our it gives hope for our patients to know that, that as their as they're navigating these what feel like difficult moments in their lives, there's actually there's actually deep, deep gifts in there.

Many of my patients will actually say once they're once they've they've been healed, they say, wow, this was the best thing that happened to me. I'm a better person. I'm a wiser person.

A lot of them have gifts to give back to humanity and to other people who are suffering through the same thing. We see our patients rise truly to their highest potential and, it's it's giving them the tools in the moment where everything seems difficult.

I'd love for you to tell us about the tools you use to help people. Well, you know, one of the big reasons that I created the Turing Institute and my certification program was because there are so many people who either are sensitive themselves, who are going through these kinds of journeys or who serve sensitive people that are their family members or their clients or their patients.

Terrain Medicine and the Terrain Institute

Right. We do need to have tools, first of all, to really cultivate our own sensitivity rather than pushing it away, because that's, I think, a lot of what happens, let's say, in mainstream medicine is there's a lot of carpooling and there's a lot of, you know, discrediting and there's a lot of kind of paternalistic point of view, which really shut down the people's inner knowing.

So sometimes, like one of the things I would say that the tool and I'm sure that you've done this and seen this many times, so many people have come to me and told me their story.

Just the fact that I, I believe them, they will cry just validating their story. I don't I think we really, in medicine and in general underestimate the importance of just holding space and listening and and validating what a person experienced, period.

Absolutely. I fully agree with you. Our patients aren't believe they've been to 20 other doctors before coming to us. Nobody believes them. Their family members often don't believe them.

Or and because they're super sensitive people, sometimes people think they're a little bit crazy or they're not all there, which is not correct. And and it's true.

Just sitting and listening to them, there's a deep relief in the patient or tears come that somebody is listening to me or somebody is giving me a diagnosis.

Now I can go back and tell my family that this isn't all in my head, you know? So, yeah. So tell us more about the Terrain Institute. Sure. Yeah. I mean, again, it's really going to the idea of that we have a physical body, an emotional body, a spiritual body that all need to be maintained, nourished, nurtured, and honored.

And so for example, you know, and, and it's a lot of it is very nature based. So it's about, you know, really learning and building relationship to me.

You know, terrain medicine is all about relationship. So it could be relationship with your self, of course. Relationship with those around you and relationship with the land that you stand on.

And when all of those things are intact and they're all being cultivated, then you're in good relations, you're in alignment, and you're going to be in good health physically, emotionally, spiritually.

So the idea of the Terrain Institute was really to create that vocabulary and different kinds of practices that help people validate their experiences, that give them tools to understand their sensitivity and to, actually also to look at their emotions, even the emotions that are not as accepted, like anger, light, you know, sadness or grief, the things that we kind of push aside because they don't feel as, as, you know, inviting or as, you know, a lot of people really just want to keep things nice, right?

And they push these things in. And you know what? I found a lot about mycotoxins, illness and chronic illness in general is that, very often the way that illness, part of white illness happens and it happens, it's very real.

It's very physical, but a lot of it starts spiritually and emotionally. And then there are these stuck emotions that people don't know. We're stuck memories or stuck traumas or different things that that we we just don't.

You know, as a society, we don't have tools to move or to work with. And so they get stuck and then they manifest physically. And the physical is very real.

It doesn't mean, oh, it's all in your head. It's it's happening on many layers. And so when we start to, honor every single emotion and learn how to move them, how to move through them by experiencing them and understanding, there's no guilt or shame about any emotion.

Being competitive, being jealous, being angry, being strident, being, you know, all of those things. Then we move them and they're not stuck within us.

And so like part of the approach is to really look at our shadow, to understand how to think about these difficult experiences as opportunities to release and to learn, and then to have a lot of spiritual practice with, you know, the physical world, with the invisible world, to stay connected, stay tuned and take care of ourselves on all of those levels, because there are practices that are very ancient practices, and they really do help move and clean a lot of, these energies that we really we we they sound very, you know, esoteric, but in fact, they're very real.

And people feel very, very different with the simplest of, of practices. Thank you for offering that. I think that the what you're offering is very, very important for our patients, especially because they are sensitive.

And it's true about the emotions being stuck and the emotions that are seemingly negative, but they're just part of the spectrum of human emotion. And, and for us to be able to, to feel them, to honor and respect them, but to be able to move through them instead of getting stuck in the loop of those emotions because it's true, being stuck in the loop of emotions then brings us very often to being stuck in a cellular biochemical loop and and and very often cutting that loop at the emotional place is, is the beginning of treatment for beginning the middle, the end, and then forever.

As as they hone in on their own, sensitivity in their own spiritual being and practice from their roots or newly discovered. Absolutely. Very, very exciting because our patients are so sensitive and, more sensitive than most and in connected to the Earth, I think is very important to them as well.

To everybody, to all to every human.

The Dirt Cure and Foundations of Health

We've we've been cut from the planet and that we don't spend enough time in the dirt. Tell us about your book. Well, you know, both in my book, the Dirt Cure and, in the Terrain Institute, it's really based in this concept that we have this inner terrain that is in our it's, as I said, physical, right?

It's all of our organ systems, it's our microbiome, but it's also, you know, our emotions, it's our epigenetics, it's our DNA. It's all of those different layers within us.

And then there's this terrain around us, this eco terrain that is, you know, trees and seeds and wind and water and sky and sun and, you know, all of the living beings around us.

And basically when we are disconnected and out of alignment, our inner terrain with our outer terrain, then we will feel ill and out of balance, essentially.

And it can manifest in a lot of different ways. It can manifest in very physical ways and real, physical illness. It can manifest in emotional ways and where we can feel depressed or anxious or, you know, a lot of people will also talk about some of the and the spiritual ways, right?

Which are we can you can feel lonely even when you're in a crowd of people or and around friends. This sense of of disconnectedness, even even if you aren't technically really disconnected, even if you do go outside and all of that, because it has to do with that relationship and being in relationship and being in alignment.

So, the idea of the dirt cure was really just about these three foundations of being healthy, which is being exposed to germs and microbes. And I know that's controversial right now.

And yet there's a lot of good data. Yeah, eating fresh food from healthy soil and being out in nature. And what I recognized, and this really started with the healing of my son.

And then, you know, thousands of other patients and students, was that those are truly the three foundational pieces to being healthy. And the way it might look could be different for any given person.

But this is how we regulate our bodies. Our bodies want those challenges, and they want those kinds of experiences. Great. Well, thank you so much. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us today about wisdom for the highly sensitive patient?

Well, I think that the number one piece is really that, I think it can be so discouraging where especially if you're physically ill or a family member is physically ill, it can feel really discouraging to move through that period.

And the key for me is really to understand that it's possible in this process to uncover these gifts and to uncover these intuitions and to do the healing, to get to the other side.

It really is very possible and really for people to value that sensitivity. What I what I find so often is the case is that, people feel like they're at war with themselves when they're chronically ill and they try to hate on themselves.

Self-Love, Healing, and Closing Reflections

And, you know, my body doesn't do this or I can't do that and kind of thinking and of course, it's totally understandable and valid to have those feelings, but it's really hard to heal when you feel like you're in a war with anything.

So and certainly with yourself. So for me, a lot of the practices that I teach are really about loving yourself and loving on yourself. How can you love on yourself and practice externally to show your body on the inside how to mirror that you know, on an actual cellular, epigenetic, metabolic level?

So it's sort of like you can demonstrate and things you do in your outer life to set that example for what happens in your inner life. So I think that would be my my big takeaway would be, you know, really to honor, honor your body, even if it's not doing exactly what you want in that moment, even if it feels like it's not functioning in the best way, really, to give that love and honor the body and, and know that you can come out the other side with real gifts that you can offer to yourself and to live your life better, but also you can offer to other people.

Thank you. Thank you for that. I think that's the that's that's the love, the self-love and then the love for your family, your friends, for the planet that comes.

And that's the glue for the healing, really. It's the it's the it's the the substance that the nectar, the holds, the healing. Everything we do for our patients biochemically.

I've been genetically and, so thank you for bringing up the most important piece. Yeah. Yes, yes, it's really important. Yes it is. Thank you for this interview.

It was so wonderful. Well, thank you so much. It was a pleasure. Thank you.