Introduction and Guest Welcome

So how does it affect, because I know you mentioned before and I was reading your stuff, listening to interviews, it affects your emotional well-being.

Yeah, yeah, so this is once again playing with that fight or flight versus rest and digest response. Got it. I really think we're just, and I'm glad, vagal nerve tone, sympathetic, parasympathetic, you know, box breathing.

Oh, what do they call that? The intentional sigh. All of these things are starting to gain some popularity because they're all aiming at the same thing.

And that's regulating your autonomic nervous system. When these cups go on, when we increase circulation, and this is a funny thing, box breathing works or the long exhale breathing works because we're slowing down the inhale and the exhale.

We're telling our body that our breathing is slower. Welcome to Take Back My Brain with Lori Hammer, where real healing starts in the brain. I'm Lori, a functional nutritionist and mom who's walked the path from anxiety and burnout to clarity and calm.

Each week, we're going to dive into brain-based tools like amino acid therapy, gut health, fasting, and faith to help you reclaim your energy, emotions, and sense of self.

Hey everyone, welcome back to another episode. I'm Laurie Hammer, your host. And today I have with me Tom Ingenio. And I'm really excited to talk to Tom today because he has a doctorate of acupuncture in Chinese medicine for the last 25 years.

And we're going to talk about cupping today. I was talking about some new holistic modalities that you can incorporate into your life and how they could affect you, your brain health, your overall body health, and so much more.

So I'm excited to learn more about all of these things. So Tom, welcome to the podcast. Thank you so much, Laurie, for having me. I'm excited to be here.

I see you're doing some great work and I'm excited to be a part of it. Thank you so much. I was looking on your website the other day and I'm like, oh, I wish you were close by.

I want to come to your place. It's a labor of love and even the clinic itself, right? We've been, you know, first and foremost, we're an acupuncture clinic.

So all the additional services we do in my head sound a lot like East Asian medicine, even if they're modern, right?

Holistic Medicine and Whole-Body Healing

You know, when we're talking about concepts like the whole body as one unit, not just individual pieces. When we're talking about reducing systematic or systemic inflammation, when we're talking about improving circulation, all of those things have, you know, we can target local areas and say, this is where it is, but have this overall benefit to helping the whole body and the whole being.

Right. Right. Right. And that's where it's all key is where if you're doing something that your whole body is affected by it. Mm-hmm. Yeah. And I mean, very much like nutrition, right?

You know, once it's in our system, we don't get to say where it goes. It goes where it's needed. Right. And that's so key. Can you explain that a little bit more?

Yeah. Yeah, certainly. So, you know, acupuncture, and I'm starting out from there, but acupuncture, as we get treating, we're not just looking at, oh, my shoulder hurts, or, oh, I have IBS, or I'm coming in for or anxiety, the idea is there's this massive cascade effect when we talk about it from Western science.

And what that seems to be triggered by, and this is another buzz term in our fields now, is vagal nerve tone, right? If we can get you out of fight or flight and put you into rest and digest, here's where all the healing happens, right?

So after about 10 or 15 minutes, acupuncture starts that process. It drops you into rest and digest. What happens there? Well, all the blood vessels open up first of all, right?

So now we're getting more blood flowing to the extremities, which may not be getting good circulation. We might be getting more blood flow to that shoulder that feels stiff or more blood flow to that gut that is leaky or that is, you know, full of nutrients that we want to extract.

So that is, that's the first part. And then we see these other waves, right? Oh, we're getting more blood flow to the brain. Well, that's going to help us function better.

Well, while all this is happening and we're in rest and digest, we start normalizing neurotransmitters, serotonin and dopamine. We kick out more oxytocin.

We know now from the nineties, we start making a compound called anandamide, which is part of the endocannabinoid system. Yeah, which looks like cannabis.

But one of the benefits is relaxation. Ananda means bliss in Sanskrit. So we release this bliss chemical. So a lot of people come in for treatment and they're laying on the table and they leave.

You're like, you're okay, we didn't add anything. But oddly enough, the same thing will happen and to varying extents with massage and with cupping therapy, because we're triggering that whole rest and digest response.

So yes, we target everything. We say, okay, we're working on this tissue, we're working on this area, but we're always looking back to the whole being, right?

And that's the mind and spirit too. This is so good because if you don't do that, then you're missing so much. I think that's where our modern medicine is just localized or it's just so compartmentalized.

And that's why people don't get well. And I think that's where a lot of people fall through the cracks, right? They're too busy looking at the toe. They don't see that the whole leg's kind of messed up.

There's no circulation going to the toe, so it won't fix it. This hurts, but where else is affected? And look, I'm not knocking modern medicine. I do think there's like a middle of the road where you need both, right?

I think somebody described it as snakes and eagles. right the snakes are on the ground and they're looking at the smallest little bit and we want to know it's this tiny little thing and if there's a switch to flip that gets rid of that tiny little thing great great we also need to be able to look up high at the whole scenario and say here's what's going on globally And that's why when you come into a practice like mine or any East Asian medicine practice, regardless of whether they're doing cupping or gua sha or acupuncture or body work, they're gonna ask you a lot of questions.

And you're like, well, I just told you I have headaches and you're asking me about my cycle? Yes. Right. I mean, the link isn't that far, but most people go, this is down here.

My head's up here. Right. And it's like, no, no. Well, what's happening with your hormones? What's happening with blood flow throughout your body? We can tell so much from that.

And that's so important. We need to look at everybody globally, regardless of whether or not the problem is right there. Yeah. Yeah, for sure. I have to ask, what got you into Eastern medicine?

So I'm actually originally from Long Island. But I was one of those kids that like, oh, you want to help people?

Tom's Path into Eastern Medicine

You're going to be a doctor when you grow up, right? And my grandfather was a pharmacist. And I just had all of these experiences growing up around Western medical practitioners and things that were like, oh, that's great.

Oddly enough, when I was in my undergrad, I was at a college that was linked to an osteopathic college. The idea was that I was gonna go straight through, right?

And in the intersession, in winter break, I got a postcard in the mail from an acupuncture school. Now in the back of my head, I kind of didn't want to go into Western medicine, right?

I had these experiences where I was like sitting in the doctor's office for two hours waiting for my appointment. I went up front. I'm like the, you know, waiting area is full.

She hasn't called anybody back. Oh, she doesn't get here until 11. Like you told me I had an 8 a.m. appointment. You expect me to sit here for three hours?

Uh-huh. So, you know, little things like that. And when I was in my undergrad, I had a guy teaching me vertebrate morphology. That's everything from, you know, starfish to humans, right?

Right. And this guy, absolute genius by every metric, right? Amazing gastrointestinal surgeon, by the way. I think he worked out of Mercy down here. Okay.

He, he told me a story he met up with me. I'm like, Hey man, I'm not getting this. Can I sit down with you? He's like, well, I don't have office hours.

Let's meet in the quad. Met me, sat with me for three hours on a Sunday, taught me what I needed to know. And at the same time kind of was just rapping with me, just kind of shooting the shit.

Oh, sorry. I don't know if I can curse here. But within that, you know, he told me, you know, I said, so, you know, like we had the same question you just asked, what got you into this?

And he told me this story about him doing surgical rounds and he was in cardiology and they handed him a heart and he passed out in the operating room.

And I think that's when I went, yeah, I'm out. Like, I think that's what I was like, you know, that sounds pretty serious. Maybe that's not for me, but I still wanted to help people.

And this postcard in the mail for an open house came my junior year of college when I was at New York Institute of Technology, 10 minutes from where I grew up.

And I went to the open house and I was like, oh yeah, this is it. And I came home with the paperwork and I signed up. Now, oddly, my parents are like, I think you're a little nuts.

We'll let you sign up, but you still have to finish your undergrad. Sure. Now, it was funny because I'm like, no, they're going to give me a bachelor's of health science as the undergrad because there's no.

undergrad in oriental medicine or east asia medicine so they have to give you something and she goes ah yeah mom and dad not so keen on that and i'm like mom i'm coming out with a master's degree and a bachelor's so my junior year my second semester i started my graduate program i was carrying 32 credits bartending uh two nights a

week and I was loving every minute of it.

I loved everything about the program. I loved the philosophy of balance and this global view. And it was just a joy. We still had Western science classes.

So I got that analytical part of my brain lit up. I got the philosophical part of my brain and I was learning to help people. Right. So, you know, it hit so many of my personal key interests that, like, I never looked back.

Now, the doctorate didn't exist when I started. I got that in 2016 because it really just, you know, no one was getting a doctorate. And at the time I had launched my my biggest clinic, which is, was the one we have now.

And it was like, all right, I can do this. I can get the doctorate now we're ready for it. It was, it was great because that even hit certain interests for me.

It was trying to bridge the gap more between Eastern and Western medicine. So a lot of it was on evidence-based medicine and how do we analyze studies?

So to be able to articulate this in a way, and I feel like East Asian medicine has kind of been this weird thing where we know there's a lot of studies, but it's still that new agey woo woo thing.

And it's like, no, it's not. Asia does not treat it like that. Here's some really great studies. What do you want to look at? You want to look at cardiovascular health?

You want to, we can do it. And we can go round for round. So to be able to articulate that to a more Western minded community, I think is a great asset.

And it's not cause the research wasn't there. It was because it was coming out of China and Japan and Korea and Yeah, some of it wasn't in English and we don't know about that that's foreign to us.

So not to mainstream it and water it down but to actually present it to the audience in a way that is educated that is correct that is doing service to and the expression is China when in China is when drinking water remember the source.

honoring the people that came before me, honoring the people that did the research. Clearly, I'm a big bald Italian American. Chinese medicine is not native to me, but I have to hold it in a high regard and pass it forward in a way that honors everybody that came before me.

And I think in the West here, that evidence-based approach helps quite a bit. We do have studies on this. I'm not just using philosophy. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

I have a friend who's from China and she's been practicing her Chinese medicine for like 68 years. Yeah. It's amazing. Huh? It's amazing. And she like knows stuff that blows my mind.

Those are the people I look up to. I mean, I, I, I'm blessed to have a couple of pieces of calligraphy from a guy that's 82 years old. And he recently, I think five years ago, I haven't even opened it up yet.

And I, I gotta, I'm not trying to plug him here. This is his book, 50 years of practice. He's in his 60s years of practice now, but just that lineage, just the skill that you develop.

Somebody asked me, what do I plan on doing when I retire? And I'm like, no, you don't retire from this. You keep going. Maybe I'm not going to play four or five days a week, but this is when we get real skilled.

This is when we really cultivate ourselves. Yeah. Would you mind if we dove into some, like dispelling some of the myths? Throw them out, ask me and I'll do my best.

Okay. So let's talk Meridians. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So a lot of people, you know, in the United States are like, woo woo, you know, Meridians don't exist.

Very new agey, very this, very that. Could you, could you speak to that? So yeah, I mean, that's a reasonable skepticism, right? This is an interesting thing where the Meridian system actually evolved.

Meridians, Evidence, and Acupuncture Mechanisms

The initial system was using moxibustion. Before we worked with metal, we had an herb that we, several herbs that we would burn on the skin. We found scrolls that predate some of our earliest Chinese acupuncture textbooks that have only nine meridians instead of 12. So the idea was that there's some kind of connection, right?

When they're described pre getting over here, let's say. They're looked at like rivers and pathways, so they're not extremely fixed, but there's areas of communication from one area to another.

Now it's pretty interesting in my clinic, and I'm talking anecdotally, now I know that, but when people come in and they've been with me for a while and they've been getting treatments, I'll put a needle in one spot and they'll go, hey, I feel that up here, I feel that up here.

Sure enough you point to the chart and there's the there's the, the line right right so whether or not these are substantial whether or not they have actual ways of measuring them or mass some people have looked at electromagnetic frequency along there.

Some people are even citing that the. the organelles in the cells line up in a certain way along that pathway. Whether or not that's been proven, I can't say.

What I can say is that we do have studies on point specificity. So not exactly the channels, but we know when we stimulate this point, and this is something that they term now medical acupuncture, right?

You do this point, here's a physiological change, we can measure it, right? So that's how they treat. They're not necessarily using a meridian system, but that's where those points are found on those meridians.

So, you know, well, if the points exist, then don't the meridians exist? You know, is kind of the logic there. So it's a great question. And the answer is after 25 years, I think so.

There seems to be a lot of evidence to support it anecdotally, historically, clinically, whether or not you can cut somebody open and say this is a meridian.

I don't think that's ever happening. Now, I will tell you a story about a channel that we call Sanjiao, triple heater. It's on the outside of the arm, right?

And as it's described, classically, it's a way of communication throughout the organs in the body, right? It's this mystical thing, helps with water, pathways and everything.

doesn't exist, it was taught in school to me as a theoretical way of organizing, right? It's this energetic thing, it doesn't actually exist. Well, God, I don't remember how many years back, I think it was maybe a year or two before COVID, a surgeon discovered this new organ called the interstitium, right?

The interstitium is this thin membrane that surrounds all the organs inside the body. And when they list the functions of that into organ communication, and you put it right up against Chinese medicine's concept of the triple heater, it's line for line.

So stuff like that is extremely like, how the hell? Like these guys didn't have X-rays and blood tests. And it's so amazing to me. I did a lecture for the Department of Defense.

their hospital systems, right? So through Walter Reed. And one of the things that we were kind of talking about, and I just threw it out there, is like, here's some bizarre stuff.

And when they look in quantum physics at two particles spinning, it looks like the symbol that everybody calls a yin yang, right? And you're like, well, actually it's called the Tai Chi's supreme ultimate.

But within that, that yin and yang thing, this three-dimensional spinning two fishes, That's a physics thing. And it's like, well, that was written about six, seven, 8,000 years ago.

That's the diagram. And how do physics, modern day physics explains that like this, this is what it looks like. That's just what those two particles look like.

So these things, and I don't have an explanation for that, right? That's just more me scratching my head going, I have no idea. I don't know how to make sense of that.

There had to be technology that was lost or something that we missed. Something or maybe sitting and doing Qigong for several hours and sitting in meditation for several hours gives you some key insights.

I don't know, I'm not there yet. Ask me in another 25 years. Right. And there's so much about quantum physics that we do not understand. There's so much beyond.

Yeah. Beyond. There's so much beyond. It's such a weird thing because, you know, I've talked to a lot of people that, you know, they want to sell you instruments that are, oh, this is quantum medicine.

And you're like, OK, explain it to me. And they can't. And it's like, but you invented the thing. Like, you know, I can pretend I have a rocket in my backyard that's going to take me to Mars.

I don't have a rocket in my backyard, you know, but like, if you can tell me the science, no, no, no, it's quantum. Okay. You know, and it's like, I want to believe you.

I really do. I do, man. I want to go there with you. I would love that. But can you give me at least a couple of principles, a couple of theories, and you can't say, well, Einstein said, well, he didn't talk about your device.

Yeah, you know, so I'm not trying to knock anybody, but I'm like, you're making some big claims. So, you know, I like the skepticism and that's a long answer for do meridians.

I love it. No, this is perfect. But you know, you should be skeptical. What I can say is whether or not they exist, we do have a body of evidence. And I think at last count, it was over 32,000 systematic reviews in the Cochrane database on acupuncture, right?

So that's not just your, you know, double-blind placebo control, the systematic reviews or collections of all the literature on a certain topic. So 32,000 of them, that's more than, That's a lot.

You know, so like we are truly evidence-based and some of that evidence goes back for thousands of years of individual case studies, but it's there. Yeah, that's amazing.

Could you dive in a little bit into acupuncture and the mechanism behind that and how that changes things in your body? Yeah, so I mentioned earlier, right, this fight or flight, rest and digesting.

Yeah. We know it happens. We don't exactly know how putting a needle into the skin causes that. And that's where we go. That's the cheek. That's the energy smoothing, right?

Right. You know, that's where we can be cheeky and lean back in on that. Now, there are some some mechanical effects that we can talk about. So in Japan, an acupuncture needle is affectionately known as an artificial splinter.

Right? If I penetrate the surface of the skin, it doesn't matter if it's a splinter, a bee sting, a needle, a piece of glass on the beach, your body has a reaction to that.

Hey, that broke my major immune system organ, my skin. Well, we better send some fresh blood there. We better send with white blood cells. We better send it with oxygen, red blood cells, antibodies, whatever's floating around in the blood.

Now, when it gets there and it sees this tiny little needle that barely did any tissue damage, it goes, well, while we're here, let's bathe this tissue, right?

So that explains some of the localized effect. Sure. Now, if we're talking about the systemic effect of like, how does this point down on the arm treat something in the shoulder or treat something in the head?

We have to look at it kind of like, well, this is the sea, right? We even call it the sea. The torso is the sea of chi and blood. Well, it has to get down there somehow.

How does it do that? Well, it opens up. The rivers and then the springs and then the streams and these are actually the terms that we use so from the elbows and the knees down.

We name them in, you know what we name them towards the body, but wells streams or springs streams rivers and then the sea. So the idea is if I want to get something from the sea down, I press here, and then we have this effect all the way from there, right?

And a lot of that is this flow. We're using water terms, but we are talking about blood flow. One line in our classic said, where the chi goes, the blood follows.

So it's kind of, I don't want to call it a cop-out, but yeah, they're intimately connected. They're a yin-yang pair. Sure, sure. No, that makes sense.

What's your craziest story that you've had in acupuncture? Some of them I can't tell. But yeah, I'll tell one about me. And this gets so woo-woo, and I really try not to.

So when I was still in New York, I was practicing in New York for five years, and I had this amazing chiropractor. I was right on the Queens border, and she would come and treat me, and I'd treat her, and we'd barter.

And she goes, look, my mentor's coming to town. Can you not charge her? I'll square up with you. Yeah, sure. No problem, right? We're friends. We got a barter thing going.

That sounds good. She did not tell me her mentor wasn't a chiropractor. Her mentor was a psychic. Oh no. And I was like, okay, you know, and, and I'm, I'm pretty healthy skeptically, you know, like I'll, I'll, I'll kick the tires on it.

And this is in the early days of Google. So let me start by saying that because somebody could look up all of this now and it's a little bit easier to access this, access this knowledge.

So, um, we're in the treatment room and I'm treating her and she looks at me and she goes, uh, a lot of people in this room. I go, okay. What do you say to that?

Just you and me, baby. And she goes, only two of them remind. And I go, all right. And she goes, I know you don't believe me. She goes, but I know the chiropractor said she'd cover this.

Would you be interested in bartering with me? I'll give you a reading. Yeah, sure. Why not? She goes, okay, the rule is when I, I can only do it when I get home.

I have a little area set up in where I, you know, I can go into my, my state and be able to read you better. So we set it up. And she went home, you know, she didn't tell me about any of the people in the room with me or anything like

that.

The Strange Story of the 13 Ghost Points

It was, other than that, that was a really normal treatment. So, you know, I mean, you know, like, look, oh, my shoulder hurts my, okay, great. Let's go.

Yeah. You know, and, and, and first of all, let me say, I'm, I'm saying this with a smile on my face and laughing. Absolutely amazing woman. The chiropractor is an absolutely amazing person.

I I'm not knocking them at all. Right. So, you know, she makes me say my, you know, I call her on the phone, she put your feet flat on the floor, take, you know, take your shoes off, put your feet flat on the floor, say your name three times.

It's like, all right, I got you. Now she's in California. Sure. And I'm in the basement of an apartment in Long Island. And she goes, look, so those people in the room with you are saying you're picking up other people's energy.

which is something like we even talk about that in school, right? You know, like, look, if I'm sitting next to you and I'm like, fuck, everything's horrible, horrible, horrible.

You're like, oh God, my head hurts now too. You know, like it's just kind of like empathetic, whatever you want to call it, right? So she goes, you know, you're not supposed to do that.

And I go, yeah. And I'm like, you know, this is nothing, right? This is like, I, I care about the people I take care of. That makes sense. Yeah. You know.

Um, and then she goes, no, no, no, no. She goes, there's a treatment you need done. And I go, okay. Yeah, sure. And she goes, ah, it's, uh, Oh, they're telling me.

Hey, you know, and pause. Then I was like, is this dramatic effect? And she goes something about ghosts, ghost points, 13 ghost points. Now at the time, you could not find that on the internet.

It is a very esoteric acupuncture treatment from one of like history's legendary acupuncturist physicians, right? And he's so famous that if you were a nobody and you came up with something great, you would actually say he gave it to you.

Whether or not he was anywhere in China living near you, he might've been dead for 500 years. Oh, he came down on a cloud and handed me this scroll and gave it to me.

Why? Because I'm a nobody, nobody's gonna listen to my thing, but if I say this guy gave it to me, now it has some clout. There's also, and I forgot the English word, but this idea that when people are really great, Like we have tall tales like Paul Bunyan, John Henry, those kinds of things.

They would do that with their physicians. They would give them almost these godlike properties. Like this guy can see inside his stomach and when he eats an herb, he can tell where it goes.

Right? And he gave us our first Materia Medica. So he knew something, you know, or another physician supposedly switched to hearts. So Sun Tzu-Miao is the guy that wrote the 13 ghost points, the ode to the 13 ghost points.

And he was somewhat of a god of Chinese medicine. Okay. So she picks out 13, which is like, well, that's a good guess. You know, like this is pretty weird.

So she goes, you only know one person that you trust to do this treatment to you. The points are weird, right? They don't follow any scheme, any theoretical thing that we would use.

They seem pretty random. They're not commonly used points. Some of them are very guarded. And I go, yeah, I know. She goes, the older guy, the British guy.

And I'm like, yeah, my mentor, right? Like immediately I'm like, yeah, Peter, yeah, I got him. So I call him and he goes, well, that's weird. He's very, very quiet about it, right?

And he goes, okay, come over, right? So Peter was treating out of his house. He had like a mother daughter. So I go downstairs and he's got one room, no windows, no lights.

He puts me in that one. Puts all the needles in. And he goes, you cool? Yeah. Okay, cool. Some of them are painful. They're on the palms of the hands.

It's through frenulum, right? They're not happy points. And he leaves. He's got no music in the room. I'm comfortable. I'm warm. But I start feeling things.

And like, God, I sound so crazy when I say this. I start feeling like people are waving their hands over me and patting me on the shoulders. And I hear mumbling.

And I'm like, is that him in the other room? Is that him in the other room? Right? And now a couple of the points. There's one point in the center of the tongue that you prick.

He didn't do that one. There's also a point in the perineum. He didn't do that one either. So I'm, I'm counting the points going, he didn't do 13, right?

No, no. And as I'm thinking of that point, and then I think of the perineum, like something happens. The whole room got loud. I heard rustling. I heard people moving around me.

I heard, I felt people putting things in and out of my hands. 25 minutes must've gone by. He comes in, he goes, how are you doing? I'm like, this is, this is weird, man.

And he goes, yeah. And that was it. And he walks back out. Now, he comes back in in another 15 minutes and he takes all the needles out. And he goes, all right, take a sec, collect yourself, come on out.

Now he's sitting in his back patio. I'm colorblind. I swear the grass was greener. The sky was bluer. And I could hear my sinuses were open. And he goes, how was that?

I'm like, I'm still processing it. And I didn't, now I'm telling it on a podcast. I have not told that story publicly because it's too weird. Too crazy.

Yeah. It's too weird. But there was about a week or two where everything was just brighter, clearer, easier. And then I probably picked up everybody's shit again and I'm back to square one.

And he's passed on, so I can't ask him to treat me. Wow. Have you ever done that to anybody else? Yeah. Yeah. And, and it's, you know, like I warned them.

I'm like, look, this is about as weird as I get. And, uh, we're going to do something weird. I can't tell you what's going to happen. I don't know. Yeah.

Do they have a similar experience? I've heard a lot of crazy stuff, a lot of crazy stuff with it. And it's not something we go to that often, because once again, the points are uncomfortable.

It has a real esoteric use. And it's one of these things where you don't want to freak people out, right? That's so foreign to them. You know, it's like, you know, if somebody said, Hey, you want to go ghost hunting?

I'll be like, yeah, sure. I'll go, but not everybody's going to say that, you know? So you want to meet people where

they're at. Most people are like, Hey, my back hurts, you know?

And like, all right, let's pull some ghosts out. You know, like that sounds so weird. No, no, no. No demonic activity. But Lori, I can't believe you got me to tell that story.

I was really like, Wow. That was by far the weirdest thing. I've had some, some other wacky stuff happen, but nothing. that unexplainable. Huh? Yeah. It's amazing.

Amazing what our body holds and yeah. And I know it could have been all a delusion. It could have been some kind of altered state that I went into. Uh, I'm willing to hear all of that.

Right. Wow. I don't even know what to follow up with the question on that one. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to stump you there. I didn't think it was going to get weird that quick, but it did.

It's fascinating though to me. I mean, it just tells us like our body, there's so many different layers that what I don't even say to be open to, but just like there's so many things we don't know.

Yeah. Yeah. So many things that we don't know. And I think depending on what religion you are, all those kinds of things, like, you know, that stuff sounds kind of scary.

So it is.

Cupping History, Technique, and Benefits

And I, and I think even, even that I, in the early days when I was starting a lot of, uh, uh, I'm not even going to call them good Christians, but some out there Christians were saying like you can't do acupuncture.

It's, you know, it's. Yeah. And I've heard that before. I've heard a lot of different things. Like even I do like muscle testing and I have a laser and I do biofeedback and stuff.

And people are like, well, that's really new agey. Like, why do you do that as a Christian? And I'm like, well, I don't find it new agey at all. Show me in the book.

Show me in the book. Where does it say don't do that in the book? You know, I mean, like, and that's kind of it, right? Because it's from Asia. It has to be.

foreign. Right. And instead, what if there was some amazing knowledge that we lost? And then what if it's something that we need to relearn as a society so that we can actually be in tune with our bodies?

Absolutely. And it's so funny to think that even in the Bible, they don't reference older cultures. They don't reference like the New Testament does it quite a bit, including, guess what, Egypt.

And when we talk about cupping, The book that talks about cupping, the oldest book that we have that talks about cupping, and cupping is older than this book, is the Ebers Papyrus, 1515 BC in Egypt, right?

Guess what else it talks about? Nose reconstruction, and they do it in the same way now granted they're using metal scalpels and they're using anesthesia.

They knew that when they were grafting the skin they had to take it from the forehead, they had to leave it connected at the bridge. fold the skin over so it would graft because it needed blood flow to stay on.

That is an advanced thing. If they took it off their thigh, it died. So they knew this, and we're acting like we were all primitive before modern day.

And it's like they were describing surgery the way that we do it now. Yeah, there's so much evidence of that, very

detailed evidence. Yeah. You know, in that same lecture, I gave the department of defense where I talked about like, look, this quantum physics thing is showing a yin yang.

We were talking about fecal transplants. We were talking about stem cells coming from cord blood. We were talking about maggot therapy. And here I am going, I'm trying to gross these docs out.

They were like, oh yeah, we do that. We do that at the base. I'm like, I can't weird you guys. I'm the weird one here and I can't out weird you guys. You're like, Oh, we did this maggot Debriman after brain surgery.

And they're like, they're all like chiming in. And I'm like, it was my favorite lecture because that's the only time they ever responded. Right. I was like, Oh, you guys are integrated.

Like you're in this one, you know? Yeah. But you know, it's, it's so amazing to me. And the longer I do this, the more I'm looking at other. culture is going like, no, they, they knew things, new things.

They knew a lot of things. Yeah. The more I dive into, you know, ancient medicine and all those kinds of things. And these things are bringing back, you know, opening our minds up too.

So you mentioned cupping just a little bit ago and we have a book on cupping. So tell us about your book. And I don't know much about cupping. So I'm going to And this is one of those ancient things that I really think deserves its time in the limelight.

And so cupping is, like I said, we don't know where it came from. Oh, interesting. Yeah, yeah. So we think, like I mentioned, 1515 BC, the Epirus. But we're not sure.

Hippocrates wrote a ton about it in ancient Greece. We know the Persians were doing it. So somewhere around that Mediterranean area, It happened. We do know that it spread all over the world.

They call it Ventosa in South America and it has a long rich history there. And we don't even know, Aztecs, Incans, Mayans, they were, well, like they did it too.

So we don't know if there was this, You know, information exchange or this kind of co evolution of this concept, but it did make it all over the place.

We know in about 300 ad 300 350 ad in China. a physician said, you guys look down on this, right? This is folk medicine to you, but we really should be using it as physicians.

So he was kind of like, get off your high horse. It's so clinically effective. Don't just leave it to, you know, grandmas. Now that being said, grandmas, the matriarchs of the family used to be the ones that were the caretakers, right?

So this was done by grandmas around the world. When I was teaching in Manhattan at Pacific College of Oriental Medicine, they had a large student body population from outside of the US.

When we got to cupping, that was the number one thing somebody said to me. Grandma used to do this. Now there was always variations, right? They would go like, oh, in Italy, you know, my grandmother would put down a big coin and then she'd soak a little bit of cotton in some brandy and then light that on fire and then put the cup on top.

And then somebody from Syria said, oh, the cups in Syria have a longer neck and they roll up some newspaper and light one end and put it in so you wouldn't get burned but it would still create the suction so I better tell you what cupping is yeah before we get to that part but Cupping is basically applying anything that can hold suction to the skin and pulls the skin up into the cup.

So traditionally, yes, drinking glasses are used all the time. In fact, in Godfather Part 2, Fredo's a baby, he's on the kitchen table, Nona comes over with a little glass and puts it right on his chest.

but pieces of bamboo, clay pots, buffalo horns, they were all some of the first cups and you throw fire in them and get them to stick to the patient because there's a vacuum created as the oxygen burns.

This was so common throughout the ancient world and used for so many things, specifically pain, specifically respiratory infections, arthritis, pneumonia, those kinds of things, digestive disorders.

So it was done so frequently and used by so many people that it kind of fell out of practice when we kind of hit this modern age. Okay. Uh, you know, and you still had shaman doing it.

You still had the local village healers doing, you still had grandma's doing it, but it was kind of looked down on because though that's old and nonsense.

until a bunch of modern studies came out. And then you started seeing people like Gwyneth Paltrow getting it and walking down the red carpet with that in her back.

And the day after she did that, I took the sign off my office, took it to the sign shop and had him put cupping on it. Michael Phelps is from Baltimore.

The day after he showed up on the news, our local news affiliate was in my office talking about cupping. So, you know, it kind of found its way back. But we also have this advantage now.

If you want me to do fire cupping, that's what we do in the office. We use a torch. We use glass cups. The glass cups are easy to sterilize. The fire is the traditional way of doing it.

I like it. I think it feels better. but there are plastic cups with pumps. There are silicone cups. We have battery operated pumps that create a vacuum now.

They're all safe. You don't run the risk of having glass breaking. You don't run the risk of burning yourself or somebody else. So it seemed like the perfect time where technology and research has caught up with this traditional practice to write a book on cupping.

I released it, January of 2024 and we've been having a great time we do great podcasts like this and kind of trying to put this back into people's hands so I literally called the book the cupping book because I wanted it to be as on the nose.

And the book is not written for other practitioners. The book is not written for scholars. The book is, what would grandma have taught you if she was passing this on to you?

Because it's real practical, real quick. So we cover, now I said grandma, but I talked about all the different types of modern cups you can get, the advantages and disadvantages the oils you can use, where to put them, the techniques you use.

It is such a simple thing. I will have a course out at some point in time, but the course is gonna be like a three hour online thing. It doesn't have to take forever once you practice the techniques.

You know, there used to be a commercial and it was a mechanic college, right? And then once you learn how to use the tool, it goes into your toolbox and it's yours to keep.

And maybe that's a Northeastern thing. So I don't know how many people will get that reference. I don't remember that one in Iowa, but that's okay. No, no, no.

It was definitely, it was a guy in a jumpsuit in a garage. Apex Tech. Wow, that's a weird flashback. But within that, like this is it, right? You learn how to use the tools, silicone cups, plastic cups, they're like 20 bucks on Amazon and you have a kit that you can clean and take care of and use for the rest of your life.

Share that with your family, share that with your friends and pass on that knowledge. So that's the real thing. 25 years in practice, I realized I'm not gonna be able to treat billions of people, but if I share information, even if, You don't get it from my book, even if you get it from somebody that read my book and they passed it on and they passed it on, you still have a lasting impact.

So the goal is to help as many people as possible, even if that's not a direct contact with me. Right, so what does cupping do? What's the mechanism? So yeah, this is a pretty straightforward run, right?

So we create this suction. The suction pulls the skin up into the cup. The skin then pulls on the fascia, creates some space between the skin and the fascia.

The fascia then pulls up, creates some space between the fascia and the muscle, and fresh blood infuses that area. It's a relatively closed system. So deep into the body, up to six inches, the blood is increased in that area.

So yes, it does cause a little local inflammation, but in doing so, you're increasing systemic circulation throughout that area, deep into the body. When that cup is pulling on the skin, it does rupture those surface categories.

So those capillaries rupture. So you get this initial huge influx of fresh blood. Yeah. But over the next few days, your body wants to break up that bilirubin, that blood that's sitting at the surface.

So you get this continued increased circulation in that area. Right. So yes, you get those. Hickeys, which is exactly what they are, those perfectly circular bruises, technically ecomosis, not hematoma, but that's nerdy, don't worry about that.

But those bruises do have a healing effect on their own as well. Wow, and then so the goal with that increased blood flow oxygen all of that is repair the tissue underneath increased circulation to that.

So, you know, one of the things that I talked about in the book, they sell these cups that you know are like nesting dolls. Yeah, you get you get 12 in a pack.

and it's about the size of a tennis ball. So throw them in your gym bag when you're foam rolling at the end, stick one on your IT, stick one on your thigh, stick one on your shoulder and do some active recovery or some passive recovery because the cup is doing the work.

But while you're cooling off, while you're still at the gym, so you're not sore the next day or not as sore the next day. So what makes this more effective or more superior than other things that would increase?

I wouldn't even say more effective or superior. I'm going to say it's ease of use. Got it. And long-term case studies. We know this has been used for thousands and thousands of years with great effect.

Right. Right. So how does it affect? Because I know you mentioned before, and I was reading your stuff, listening to interviews, it affects your emotional well-being.

Yeah, yeah, so this is once again playing with that fight or flight versus rest and digest response. Got it. I really think we're just, and I'm glad, vagal nerve tone, sympathetic, parasympathetic, you know, box breathing.

Oh, what do they call that? The intentional sigh. All of these things are starting to gain some popularity because they're all aiming at the same thing.

And that's regulating your autonomic nervous system. When these cups go on, when we increase circulation, and this is a funny thing, box breathing works or the long exhale breathing works because we're slowing down the inhale and the exhale.

We're telling our body that our breathing is slower. our autonomic nervous system kind of goes, oh, you're doing one of those rest and digest functions.

We might as well do them all, right? So when we put the cups on and we start increasing blood flow, especially when we're putting them on the upper back between the shoulder blades or on the upper chest for some chest congestion, we're getting increased circulation.

So our body goes, oh, those blood vessels opened up. We must be relaxed. Now, when they come in clinic and I do the cupping, and especially if I'm doing it for musculoskeletal pain, I put them on a little, I don't wanna say sadistic, but I put them on pretty tight, right?

After a couple of minutes when we get some blood flow into that. they start to relax, you forget they're there. And people fall asleep and they're like, look, that one went on, it was a little pinchy, I thought I wasn't gonna make it.

And then about two minutes into it, everything just relaxed and I passed out. So it doesn't happen all the time, but they normally leave pretty relaxed.

And when that happens, neurotransmitters normalize, we get more blood flow to the brain, all of these things that help us out emotionally. If we're using traditional Chinese medicine theory, that area between the shoulder blades relates to the lungs, the heart and the pericardium.

And that's grief is the lungs. Joy, lack of joy is the heart and pericardium. So we put those cups there and the heart is the ruler of emotions in Chinese medicine.

We can help regulate emotional health. That's amazing. And you can do this at home. So you could do it, you and your spouse.

Gua Sha and Practical Home Use

You probably need a partner if you're going to be putting them on your back. Sure. Fair enough. Fair enough. Are there any precautions that need to be taken with that?

Some simple ones. And I'm going to say this and then say, I've seen photos of people doing it on pregnant women. There is no research on treating pregnant women.

It would be unethical to treat pregnant women with cupping, not knowing whether or not it's going to hurt the baby or the mom. So some people do it. I suggest not doing that.

If somebody is a true hemophiliac, if somebody is on high levels of blood thinners, Probably not the best modality for you. Fair enough. We do not cup over open wounds.

We do not cup over deep vein thrombosis. We go through that in detail. Avoid those areas. But in general, the difference, you know, people often ask the difference between acupuncture and cupping.

I say cupping is horseshoes and hand grenades, right? We don't have to be exact with this. We can be in an area to get the effect we want. So you don't have to sit there and pull out your anatomy and physiology textbook and go, okay, I'm on the head of this muscle.

I need to be a little bit over here. You go, does it hurt there? Yes, okay, put the cup. Fair enough. So if your shoulder hurts, put it on your shoulder.

Yeah, and feel around. You're able to move them around pretty easily. If you only have a couple of cups, it might take a little bit longer. But leave it here for a couple of minutes, move it there, move it there, move it there.

And you can jump around quite a bit. Yeah. Can you do this on animals? Uh, not cupping. No, maybe a hairless cat. I don't know. Anyway, you know, really even, even on, on hairy individuals, even people with a lot of body hair, um, you gotta use oil or, or, or, uh, some, some, some grooming, uh, flippers.

Yeah. You know, look, I mentioned before I'm Italian, I have buzzed my chest to get a cup on here and there. Yeah. Fair enough. Fair enough. One more question.

If we're talking, you know, techniques and, you know, modalities and stuff for the Eastern medicine, tell us about Gua Sha because, you know, the Gua Sha stones, like you buy it on Amazon for like six bucks.

Yeah. Yeah. So I, and I, and honestly, uh, before they became the thing for, for facial stuff, uh, they were much cheaper than six bucks. Uh, maybe that'll be my third book, uh, because that is another traditional technique that, you know, has once again been appropriated and renamed and what do they call it?

Soft tissue instrument assisted soft tissue mobilization. Oh, very fancy. And this is another one that grannies around the world did. Coining is sometimes what it's called because they use a big coin.

Jar lids are another favorite tool, so you don't need to buy the $45 Rose Quartz Goop special. Are you sure? I mean, do what you want. It's your money.

One of my favorite tools, and this is a longtime classic in Chinese medicine, is a Chinese soup spoon. Ceramic Chinese soup spoon. One of the reasons I like it is you can put your thumb in the depth of the spoon and use that to scrape.

So you have a little bit, now gua sha, and it's always funny when I see people doing it on their face because they're doing a face massage with a gua sha tool.

They're not doing gua sha. Gua means to scrape, sha means sand. So sha is, The same as Char, different dialect in Sharpay. Sharpay means sand skin. So the Sharpay dogs have a kind of a rough coat.

When we're doing Gua Sha, There's two ways we tell the presence of this shah, the sand. One, when we scrape, we get these patikia, these little purple dots under the muscle.

So when you scrape, you're supposed to make it look ugly. It looks like you've been hit with a cheese grater. You're not doing that on your face. Do not do that on your face.

I'm gonna say that again. That is not a facial technique. This is for tight muscles. This is for chest congestion. Yeah. That sha, if you move slow across the skin, you will feel little indurations, little hard spots, little grains of sand in the fascia.

So when you slide down the back and you use a little bit of oil, you'll feel like as you go and you hit a real tight spot. And that's the fascia getting all messed up, right?

So what you're doing is literally ironing that out with force. So it can be done heavy or it can be done light and you just do more strokes. You'll still get the same result where the skin looks angry and red.

And if you put your hand over that area, it'll be super hot. And they'll say, we got the shy out. And it's like, it'll look very intense. And if somebody has a chest infection, and this is an interesting thing.

So back in the seventies, huge Chinese population in parts of California. Kid gets sick, grandma puts some oil on the back, does the gua sha, sends them to school.

Teacher sees what looks like a belt mark down the teacher, down the kid's back, calls the family, maybe the English isn't so good, and they hear, well, no, he was sick, so you beat him.

Child services gets called, and it's a cultural, failure because you didn't know this is something that's done it actually doesn't feel bad i mean you could do it very heavy and then it's it's rough but you can do it very light too um you know even even people use uh i don't like vapor rub because it's petroleum based but you can use that You can use tiger bomb, all of these things to kind of get some aromatics and open up the sinuses, open up the chest

while you do it too for chest colds.

But it's great for musculoskeletal soreness. And you can even, even with a soup spoon or some of the smaller angles of the gua sha, get into the smaller muscles between the toes, whatever's kind of tight.

Yeah. Yeah. Oh, that's cool. All right. Yeah, I hope that was a valid explanation. Well, that was a completely valid explanation. I love it because I've got one of those little Gua Sha stones that I bought for this box.

Closing Thoughts and Where to Learn More

You can even get them at the TJ Maxx's. I'm not trying to plug TJ Maxx, but I'm a Maxx in Easter. Yeah, like they're everywhere. But they're everywhere.

They're everywhere. They're everywhere. And it's not just for your face. And if you are doing your face very light, do not bruise yourself. Right. That makes sense.

That makes sense. Everything's about the fascia, right? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. For sure. Awesome. Well, this has been a fascinating conversation. I think I could ask you questions for probably another couple hours, but anything you want to leave our listeners with.

I know. I mean, check out the book. I'm kind of now going from a podcast to more public speaking. If anybody wants me to come out and talk, I'm more than happy to, you know, check out my website for more information.

It's charmcity.com, charmcityintegrative.com, the cuppingbook.com. You can get the book anywhere books are sold. But yeah, I mean, thank you so much, Lori, for having me.

This has been a lot of fun and I got real weird real quick. I hope your audience appreciates that. You know, they're going to love it. You know, I mean, why not have fun?

Get weird. Yeah. I mean, we all have those weird experiences that we can't explain. You know, I don't have an alien abduction story. I got a weird acupuncture treatment story and people take it all they want.

And that's, you know, whatever you want to do with it. Yeah, totally. Oh my gosh. Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you for having me. Sharing with us.

It's been great. I appreciate you. I'm going to go order that book right now because I want to learn more about comping and I appreciate all of your education and what you're doing for the world.

So thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you for having me. And everyone else, thanks for listening. Make sure you like, subscribe, and share this interview with everyone you know, because everybody needs to know these basic techniques that are ancient, that we can integrate into our lives and make everything better on some level or another.

You know what? I would also love if you took a moment to leave a review about this podcast interview. I would love to hear from you and thank each and every one of you.

God bless. See you in the next episode. Thanks for listening to Take Back My Brain. If today's episode helped you connect with hope or direction, I want you to follow the show, leave us a review and share it with someone who needs it.

And if you're ready to start your own healing journey, explore our courses and our coaching programs at lorihammer.com backslash store. So until next time, remember you cannot medicate away a nutrient deficiency and healing your brain isn't just possible, it's powerful.