Psychedelics: A Role In Neurodegenerative Healing? Transcript

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Introduction to Dr. Maya Shetreat

Welcome back to the Parkinson' Solutions Summit. I am your co-host, Dr. Sandra Scheinbaum, and we have a great interview coming up for you. I am so pleased to introduce Dr. Maya Shetreat.

Not only is she a neurologist, but she is an herbalist, an urban farmer. She wrote The Dirt Cure and the Master Plant Experience The Science, Safety and Sacred Ceremony of Psychedelics, which you're going to be talking about today.

So welcome, Maya. Thank you so much for having me. Thank you for being here. So let's dig right in. And what is this thing called? Cellular memory? Well, so something that I think in our society and certainly in our medical system, we have this idea that, you know, all of the parts of the body are very kind of disconnected.

And they're just these things that we have to mechanically interact with. Right. It's like receptors and neurotransmitters and all these different things.

But what we're actually learning is that we are actually this community and we're a community of cells, each of which is intelligent and has its own memory. And that's a very different idea, right, that all of these individual intelligent cells come together to make a community that's Sandy or Dr.

Maya or anybody. Right. But what happens is that any instigator that may happen and it could be physical, it could be like a stressor, like, you know, being in an accident or something like that.

Cellular Memory and Cell Danger Mode

And it can also be mental emotion or spiritual stressor. Okay. Like a loss of somebody or even a pet. Right. Like something that could happen, let's say, in childhood.

Because often that's where we get these kind of seminal events that our cells really hold in memory. The cells remember it go into something called danger mode, which is a different kind of function.

And I can explain a little more about what it looks like, because it is very relevant to Parkinson's and a lot of other chronic neurological illnesses.

And in that cell danger mode, the cell expresses danger no matter what the instigator was. So then the cell holds this memory until something changes it.

Now, what happens when the cell is in danger mode is it's going to be more inflammatory. It's going to be communicating to the other cells around it that it's in danger.

And those cells are then going to operate differently. It's going to communicate with cells all throughout the body, through neurotransmitters, through cytokines, through other forms of communication that cells use with one another to say, Hey, we're not in a good place.

You should be in a state of protection rather than in a state of growth and evolution. So practically speaking, this is what happens to cause chronic conditions, chronic neurological conditions, chronic autoimmune conditions, even cancer or even depression, even OCD or PTSD.

All of these kinds of conditions are a result of this cellular memory and cell danger. Wow. So there's a whole variety of conditions, whether it's physical or emotional, that can be the end result of this process involved with cellular memory, which is typically trauma.

Would that be fair to say? Trauma of some kind? Yeah. And I mean, cells remember joyful events as much as they remember difficult events. But a lot of a lot of the reason that difficult events are what embed in our cellular memory is because they cause us to be in this place of what we call plasticity, where these window periods open and this is particularly true in childhood, where it is, it is during this window period that then imprints on us.

So it's not impossible to shift those cellular memories. And that's kind of what we're going to be talking about and what my book is about as well. But the key is learning how to reopen these periods of plasticity.

Right? They're called critical periods of plasticity. CP And how to then when these window periods are open to have the best possible shift, an outcome into what we call cell eugenicists, which is kind of the opposite of the danger state.

It's a state of high function, optimal function growth. The connection then between the cellular memory process and neurodegenerative conditions such as Parkinson's.

Can you explain that? This can be potentially a trigger. Would that be fair to say? Absolutely. So what happens in a cell that is in danger mode, I call it?

Well, I call it spaghetti and meatballs. But actually this was coined by mitochondrial researchers. Okay. So when you look, most of us maybe learned about mitochondria, you know, in like high school biology or something.

Right. And we think of it the engine of the cell, right. The energy makers of the cell. And that's true. That is what they do. And they do much, much more than that.

Mitochondria are actually sentinels that are sampling the environment of the cell and around the cell all the time to determine, are we in a state of safety or danger? And and part of what they do is determine, should the cell even live or die, right.

Based on the environment. And so part of what happens when when mitochondria feel that the cell is in danger is they change they change shape. Now, nobody really thinks of mitochondria.

Shapeshifters, right.

Psychedelics, Master Plants, and Their History

Sounds like very magical, but in fact, healthy, happy, optimally functioning mitochondria are in what's called a branched spaghetti structure. And and what that means is they're elongated and they are touching one another in this very beautiful, branched structure where they can exchange nutrients, they can exchange information, they can release waste easily and so on.

When mitochondria are in a state of danger, okay, they're sampling the environment and there's something infectious, you know, stress hormones, something that leads them to feel this is a dangerous environment.

They ball up into what are called meatball structures and and they literally don't touch one another. They don't communicate with one another. Think, you know, the height of quarantine, right?

They are. They're not exchanging nutrients. They're not exchanging information. They're not communal. And they are not able to even release waste as effectively.

Meatball. Mitochondria lead to more buildup of inflammatory cytokines and other kinds of issues that make the cell, the entire cell, more vulnerable to toxins, to infections, to a lot of other instigators.

And, you know, this even happens not just in mitochondria. It also happens in the microbiome, right? The 3 to £5 of microscopic organisms that live in and on our body that we need.

Right. They shift. They change in a state of danger. So when the cells feel the mitochondria are in danger mode, right, they're in meatball mode. The microbiome also shifts in its makeup.

And this is what I talk about in the entire first chapter of my book is what happens in that state of danger and why it puts us at risk for neurodegenerative conditions like Parkinson's.

That is so, so fascinating. So now that we've talked about the underlying mechanism, how it may have all started. Let's turn to Saul. You Genesis, starting with something that I'm really, really curious about, and that is your work with psychedelics.

And so my thinking of psychedelics being a baby boomer is that, you know, you're going to Timothy Leary, you're going to have a bad trip, you'll become schizophrenic.

This is to be avoided. This is like hard drugs. Can you talk about those thoughts or are they misperceive actions? Were we wrong? So as with everything that is powerful and important in our society, it's nuanced.

Okay? And so it's not wrong. And it's not exactly right either. What a lot of people don't know is that in the 1950s and 1960s, before the, you know, height of the hippie movement and all of the kind of, I would say, wild and maybe kind of untamed and unsupported ways that people were engaging with psychedelics.

There was a lot of research going on, very promising research in depression, in OCD. It was actually being used in therapy. Even, you know, some famous people like Cary Grant was actually known to have been gone through many, many, many trips with LSD.

And and at the other end, said, I've become a happy person. I've lost all of these egoic kind of ways that I was operating and things that made me unhappy.

You know, it's interesting. Of course, then there was this sort of, you know, I think of so I wrote about the master plant experience because I really wanted to go back to this very ancient way that indigenous people for millennia have engaged with what we call psychedelics, what they call master plants.

And master plants are flora, fauna, fungi, right? It's not like strictly botanical plants, but what I discovered in writing my book is that we have been engaging, we humanity have been engaging with master plants, with psychedelics since really the beginning of time.

If you look at cave art from tens and tens of thousands of years ago, there are drawings of shamanic practices with cacti, with mushrooms. In some cases, in these caves we found DNA of psychedelic master plants.

This has been a practice not public, not maybe for everybody, but a healing practice, a ceremonial practice that has been used throughout the history of humankind. And these this concept of master plants is really about the idea that they're not good and they're not bad.

They are powerful. And so we have to come with reverence, respect and really and humility. Okay. And what happened in the sixties was was not that right?

It was kind of like, you know, I don't want to say it like this, but it was like a little kids getting their hands on something and being like, whew, you know, getting kind of out of control with something that is powerful.

So now in this iteration, psychedelics have really come back to the forefront. Every major academic institution in the world right now has either research or an entire research center dedicated to psychedelics.

That's how promising the research is.

How Psychedelics Affect the Brain and Body

Weekly We are seeing research coming out on psilocybin, mushrooms, you know, the magic mushrooms, MDMA and ayahuasca and a lot of other well-known and maybe not as well known master plants for all kinds of conditions, from major depression to addiction to neurodegeneration and on.

So for our listeners, and particularly for those baby boomers like me out there, it is important to distinguish this is not counter culture. This is legitimate with good science behind it, and it's used for treating conditions.

Can you, first of all, clarify so that everyone knows what a master plant is versus a psychedelic? Are they one in the same or say more about that? So psychedelics are a newer term really, and master plants are this indigenous term.

So a master plant is really considered any powerful plant. Flora, fauna, fungi, right? That that can have an impact on human consciousness and behavior.

That does not mean it has to be psychedelic. An example of a master plant that's not psychedelic is coffee. The coffee plant. Right. Or Kakao We most of us will go quite a bit out of our way to get our coffee or our chocolate.

Right? Tobacco is another master plant, so it's really, again, about this powerful plant that changes human behavior and alters the way we think and feel psychedelic master plants are they are a category of master plants.

And so any psychedelic would be considered a master plant, but not every master plant is psychedelic. Gotcha. And how do psychedelics specifically work in our body and in our brains particularly plant?

So there's a lot of ways we can tackle this because we can look at it literally all the way down on the receptor here and mitochondrial level on the neuronal level and then on a nervous system, brain structure level.

So on a on a mitochondrial level, what happens is that in the right circumstances and this is a really important distinction also is that every study that's being done right now with psychedelics has has support before, during and after.

In other words, this is not like, you know, go out to go out to the woods and. Right. I mean, and I'm not saying that couldn't be helpful, but every study that that is being done has professional support before, during and after.

And I do think that is important for everybody to know if they're thinking about having the kind of very impressive and beneficial outcomes that we are seeing now with neurodegeneration, with addiction, with OCD, with depression and so on.

But that said, in these studies, what we're seeing is actually that the mitochondria are shifting out of danger mode. We're seeing on a neuronal level.

And this is really important that in cell danger, neurons become less connected to other neurons. They literally become lonely neurons. And when people consume psychedelics in this right setting, okay, with this support, the neurons actually start to have more connectivity.

So they become more social, more friendly, more connected, and on a brain structure level, we actually see that parts of the brain that don't normally speak to one another actually begin to communicate.

So this really opens up the way people think and feel. And it's really important because, you know, we're becoming a lot more fluent in the concept of childhood trauma and how that impacts lifelong health, mental health, neurodegeneration and so on.

And and one of the issues, right, that cellular memory concept is that people can become stuck in these beliefs that come from these trauma events. Right.

Like, I'm not a good person or, you know, I'm flawed or I don't deserve love or these things that we think of as very will we kind of things. But in fact, it turns out that this is part of along with things like toxins and nutrition and sleep

and a lot of the things I know you're addressing in this event, you know, these beliefs actually drive a lot of behavior and a lot of that danger response.

So what happens is that when we have these experiences with psychedelics, it actually shifts us into different ways of thinking, allows us to see what we don't normally see and think about things in a way we don't normally think about them.

That is just fascinating. So if somebody is interested, would they have to so-called trip to benefit from the psychedelic master plan or just how would they go about concert?

What what does it look like in terms of using these plants as the master plant? So we've heard words like Microdosing, for example, can you explain all that?

Yeah, of course. You know, our society tends to like to, you know, go big or go home, right? And like everything has to kind of be like a sledgehammer, whether it's pharmaceuticals or in this case, psychedelics.

Right. Like the big experience. But in fact, what we're learning is. Yes, absolutely. Microdosing. Right. This idea of tripping, it does have benefit, right?

We're seeing just one, one experience. And with support before, during, after can shift people out of chronic, lifelong conditions and perhaps even things like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and so on.

However, what we're now seeing is that Microdosing and I want to explain the difference. So Microdosing being this tripping experience where, you know, classically known as where, you know, you could be out of commission for 5 hours or 7 hours.

And, you know, it's it's a whole kind of surrender experience, right? This ego death and things that that are, it turns out, potentially very beneficial to our bodies and brains.

Microdosing is some psychedelic microdosing is something you take a sub psychedelic dose, meaning you are not altered in or out of commission. Let's say you're not having any visuals right, but you may feel more uplifted.

You may feel even a little euphoric. It's something that you can go to work. You can, you know, parent your kids or your grandkids. You can do life, you can do regular life.

Microdosing, Quantum Dosing, and Safety

And you're still experiencing the neuroplasticity that these, you know, let's say mushrooms, which is commonly what people will use for microdosing that these mushrooms could offer.

So over time, you know, and tiny amounts over weeks, months, you can have these benefits without ever feeling altered or being in that kind of state of loss of control.

And now we're even learning that quantum dosing, which is a vibrational dose. So it's totally legal. It's safe for anybody on medications who's sober, for example, who is sensitive.

Right. Or who just doesn't want to engage with microdosing or microdosing. Even quantum dosing. These vibrational doses seem to have very beneficial effects on plasticity and and physical and mental health.

So I think we're going to learn that actually the smaller doses are going to be the most impactful and the most beneficial. I would assume that this is something one would not strive for the first time by themselves or even ever by themselves.

Are you recommending that they are working with a practitioner or somebody who can guide them through the experience? Would that be safe to say? Yes, I think it's best for people.

Certainly for people who have never engaged in any of this, it's always really best to have someone with you, especially someone trained and prepared for the kinds of eventualities, certainly for big doses.

Right. For the bigger doses. I work with people. I guide them through microdosing experiences. So I coach them, I answer their questions, I help them set a schedule and so on.

Right. And that's very, very beneficial because it's just it's good to have the support as you're going through this process. That makes a lot of sense.

And I train health coaches and I think that this is an area that health coaches can learn about and educate people and help to clarify any myths that are out there, such as the earlier what we talked about in terms of remembering the sixties and the hallucinations that people experienced and we would see it in movies and how scary that would look, for example, or if you were involved in that culture yourself.

So are there contraindications though? Are there people who should avoid microdosing or even microdosing? Well, right now first I will start by saying I do not think that big doses of psychedelics are for everyone at all sometimes, you know, certainly not all at this time, right.

People need to really be tuned in. I don't think it's assured. Right. I should really do that. It's really about like feeling that in yourself and being kind of feeling that call that interest and then looking into it, you know, pick up my book or I have a lot of free resources on my website, right?

So just educate yourself a little bit. But for big doses in particular, people who have a history of psychosis, even a family history of psychosis, right now, it's considered a contraindication to taking a big dose of a psychedelic.

Another issue could be certain medications. So, you know, for people who are on various kinds of medications, especially like SSRI or any kind of serotonin, boosting medication or even supplements, you would really want to get advice about that.

That's where having a psychedelic, informed practitioner or even coach would be a really important step. So and it's why I think, again, microdosing and quantum dosing are such great options because they offer something to people who may have contraindications.

Medical medication, sobriety for some people as well would be considered a contraindication. That makes a lot of sense. So what outcomes can we expect if you know somebody is using a psychedelic master plant, what would be the positive outcomes?

Yeah, I mean, you know, if we're talking about health, mental health, right? I mean, so for some people, it just allows them to, you know, really have these miraculous reversals of lifelong conditions, addiction.

There are people who go, let's say, for iboga therapy, biogas, a particular African, African kind of psychedelic. It has it has the health risks to it.

So it's really important, again, particularly with some, to have the health screening and to know you're going somewhere reputable, etc..

Benefits for Parkinson's, Mood, and End-of-Life Fear

But people who have very significant hand addiction like opioids, for example, just they never touch it again, like profound saving of lives, depression, neurodegeneration.

You know, I've seen people who have had conditions like dementia, where you see just a a really big spike in just more lucidity, better memory, better function, better balance.

It's it's an it's neuroplasticity. It's it's it's creating new connections. This is something when I was in my neurology

training, I was taught that wasn't possible in adults, that it ended with children.

Right? Like maybe if you're lucky when you're 18, you're still having that now we know it is lifelong and there are certain things like psychedelics and other things that enhance plasticity.

And I do think, you know, even just mood, I mean, people who have depression, anxiety, a lot of things that can come along with neurodegeneration, right where it can be absolutely transformative in terms of just feeling more uplifted, more euphoric, even.

You know, to me, this is such an important ally in our healing and when engaged with in a respectful and supported and appropriate way, I think it's going to be incredibly important.

And even I think a little what we would call miraculous for people who are suffering from neurodegeneration. Wow. And speaking of neurodegeneration, I was just speaking with a friend who was finding out that I'm co-hosting the summit.

And she said her dad suffered from Parkinson's and she described the the decline when he was in the late stages and wheelchair bound. And I would assume that using a psychedelic nest or plant that even at an end stage might still have profound impact.

Even if it was just on mood alone, might be worthwhile to pursue this route. Well, absolutely. And one thing that I didn't mention is, you know, it's been looked at in terminal kinds that psychedelics have been looked at in terminal kinds of conditions.

And I say this because fear of losing function, fear of death, which is something that is universal. It is the one thing we all have in common that we will at one point, you know, pass on to whatever it is that comes after this.

Some people have a lot of fear. A lot of people have a lot of fear and anxiety about that. And that is something actually that, again, in a supported environment has been studied with psychedelics and gives people a sense of peace and and freedom around whatever it is that may come.

And to me, like, what a gift we can offer ourselves when we're living with a lot, you know, the potential of our own demise or the loss of people that we love, that, you know, to give us a sense of peace around that is, you know, then we can live our lives what we have of our lives, however long that may be, we can live it more fully and and more joyfully.

That is so beautifully said. This has been just such an eye opening interview. Thank you, Dr. Maya. Where can people find you? I know they're going to want more information.

Well, the best place to find me is at my Website drmaya.com And that's just drmaya.com And, you know, they can find my book, The Master Plant Experience their quantum drops and a lot of free resources.

They can even actually get the first three chapters of my book for free. Fantastic. Well, thank you so much for participating in the Parkinson's Solutions Summit.

It was my absolute pleasure.