The Accidental Path to Healing: Stories That Shaped Dr. John’s Medicine Transcript

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Introduction to the Balancing Point

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Something like that. So that began my quest in functional medicine, being combined with traditional Chinese medicine. That was in 1999, and I've been teaching and practicing ever since.

Hi, and welcome to The Balancing Point. I'm Dr. John Needers, and I'm here to make traditional Chinese medicine, functional medicine, and integrative health simple, practical, and fun, so you can restore balance, boost vitality, and enjoy a healthier life every single day.

Early Interest in Tai Chi and Healing

Hi, this is Dr. John back with our program. Let's talk about it. And today I think it's going to be a pretty funny show. I've been asked several times to do a little intro about me, about Dr.

John. And so I agreed to do it. And. Really, it's less about me per se than it is about the touchstones, the milestones, the people that I just had the incredible fortune and blessing to have kind of been guideposts along my way.

You know, maybe you've read Gurdjieff's books where he talks about meetings with remarkable men. Well, that's kind of how I feel, although there were certainly plenty of remarkable women on my journey also, but it's really those meetings that really move and transform your life many times.

Some of them I sought out, many of them was just absolute the luck of the draw. So I've been doing Tai Chi and Qigong practices since the 1970s. And those people that I studied with have had an enormous impact.

But my studies with Tai Chi actually go back to while I was still in high school. or the year after I got out of high school, actually in this case. And so I'd been a high school jock, right?

I played four sports in high school, football, baseball, soccer, and basketball. I was no good at basketball or soccer, so I didn't play those all four years of high school.

But anyway, right after I went to Santa Barbara, UC Santa Barbara, and I became a couch potato. I gained about 40 pounds over a period of less than a year.

I did no physical activity. And then one day I got up to play a rousing game of ping pong. Blew out my back, really. Blew out two discs in my back. They had to carry me into student health.

And of course the doctor said, oh my God, you're going to need surgery. I got a second opinion and they said, oh, you're going to need surgery. And I was going to get surgery.

I didn't see any other options. But I happened to visit a friend of mine who was my polar opposite in many ways.

Back Injury and First Acupuncture Treatment

So like I said, I was a jock mostly in high school. I got good grades because they came easily, but certainly not because I studied at that time. But I had a friend named Stuart McClay who absolutely changed my life.

Now, Stuart was the president of the chess club, the president of the physics club. I, total, total opposites, but we're talking. And I told him I was going to have to get back surgeon.

He said, are you sure? I said, well, that's what the doctors say. He said, well, why don't you try acupuncture? And I said, of course, what the heck is acupuncture?

This is the early 1970s. And he said, remember the old Kung Fu TV show where they put needles in people? I said, are you kidding? I'm not going to let someone stick needles in me.

He said, oh, okay. So you're going to let a surgeon take a scalpel and carve up your spine. It's like, huh, maybe I'll try those little needles. And so I looked around and I found a practitioner in Berkeley.

I didn't even know that at that point acupuncture wasn't legal in California. And he did not do acupuncture on me. He examined me, did my pulses, which is a very important part, probably the most important part of diagnosis in Chinese medicine.

Looked at my tongue, asked me about my diet, about all my habits. And he said, oh, you don't need surgery. You just start doing Tai Chi and Qigong with me.

And then he told me dietary changes to do. And then I can still remember And I'm gonna, I apologize, I'm gonna mimic his accent a little bit. He looked at me, he wagged his finger in my face and he said, and no sex, even with yourself for six months.

Now I'm in my twenties, right? So it was like, whoa, I can change my diet, but I was very good. I was very good. I followed all of his recommendations and lo and behold, I became totally functional.

I still had a little discomfort, but I was functional. I could go out and play sports again. But then a really remarkable thing happened. I was working as a janitor.

My father was managing the, at that time, brand new Bank of America world headquarters, and he got me a job as a janitor. And I was the day man, meaning they cleaned the building at night.

And what I did is I just did public relations primarily. But one Saturday I was working with a fellow named Chip Mui. I can still remember Chip. Now this is going back about over 50 years and I can picture him.

Profound influence on my life. And so again, I was a jock. I was in really good shape by this time. You know, I'd gone back and started working out and doing everything.

And here's poor little Chip. Chip was probably five, three. I doubt if he weighed over a hundred pounds, little tiny guy. And we had the job of mopping the entire entrance area to the Bank of America, which was huge.

And it was cobblestone. And we had these gigantic industrial mops, right?

Gut Crisis and Dietary Healing

And I thought, well, okay, I'll do my side and then I'll go help poor little Chip, right? And so I'm sweating and struggling and just fighting with this mop, right?

And I get halfway through my side and here comes a little Chip movie, just kind of smiling, just using his whole body to somehow magically move this mop.

And he did two to three times more of that mezzanine than I did. And that kind of blew me away. And so then Chip, I gave him a ride home that day to his beautiful house up in the Oakland Hills.

Now we were making about $3 an hour, but I went in. And he had all these pictures of these beautiful tugboats and other boats out in Sambay that I didn't recognize.

He said, oh yeah, that's my home in Taiwan. And those are my tugboat fleet. And I said, your tugboat fleet? He says, yes, I own those. And I'm thinking, here's this guy.

Obviously a multimillionaire working for $3 an hour, mopping the floor. It was a great, great study in the importance of keeping busy, of continuing to be active in life.

So anyway, so I… My back was pretty well healed at this point, but then I started to develop gut problems. So classic. So I'd be walking down the street and it literally felt like someone stuck a hot rod, a poker into my belly and I would start perspiring profusely.

And a couple of times it actually took me to my knees. So like, of course I did what every young American would do, especially American men. I ignored it completely.

And then one day, it was the only time my dad ever came to visit me while I was playing poker. I was a professional poker player for a while in my twenties and I was up in Reno and he happened to be there with my aunt and we ate breakfast.

And I started going into anaphylactic shock. And I started swelling and sweating. And so he stuck me in the car, drove me to the emergency room. They said another 10 minutes I would have died.

And they didn't know what caused it. I didn't know what caused it. And so I went to a GI doctor. And he did as many tests as they had at that time. They didn't have as many as they have now.

And he said, well, We're going to do surgery on your small intestine." And I said, oh, thank God you know what's wrong.

Martial Arts Training with Peter Ralston

And he goes, no, it's exploratory. And I said, excuse me? Yeah, we don't know what it is. We think you may have a little tumor in your intestine. I said, you know what?

I'm going to go back to my acupuncturist. And he said, OK, if you want to kill yourself. And so I went back to my acupuncturist, who examined me again.

changed my diet. Now you got to remember, this is in the 70s. He said, and don't ever eat wheat again. It's like, whoa, nobody was talking about wheat problems in the 70s or almost nobody.

But I did, I followed his dietary prescriptions and knock on wood to this day, I've never had that problem with my gut. So that kind of moved me forward.

I studied martial arts with him, but I was not a very good student. But then one day I was, going by a studio on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley. And they were doing some crazy, crazy stuff, which I later found out was Bagua and Xingyi.

And so I stopped. There was a big sign that said World Martial Arts Champion 1978, Peter Ralston. And so I started studying with Peter. And I studied diligently.

I was an apprentice for over 10 years, and then I trained his apprentices for many years. And I did a lot of free fighting, and I taught free fighting.

And it was absolutely remarkable in a way that very few people understand. It was impossible to hit Peter. Now that seems weird. I mean, of course you can hit Peter, right?

No, you can't hit Peter. Uh, when he won the championships. He fought, I believe five times the first guy and Peter was not an imposing fella. He was shorter than I was.

He was smaller, but the. First person he was to fight, now this was in China, it was the World Martial Arts Championship. Now, they have a world championship every weekend now.

At that time, there were very few and typically one per art. And so Peter was there, the first guy, a Korean fellow, looked at him and Peter was just standing in the ring.

And the Korean said, I'm not going to fight that man, he'll kill me. Now this was a guy who had trained his entire life to be a martial artist and he refused to get in the ring with Peter.

And then his next three bouts, nobody touched him. The last guy did touch him. He hit him a few times because he also knew the secrets, I'm going to call them, of wang sheng it's called.

It's the appearance. I won't go into the details, but anyway, it's a very powerful art. And so what happens is there's a great book called the user illusion.

And in that book, the researchers talk about the science that they had perfected. so that they could time how long it took. So if you see something, it's a term we use, so there's light coming to your eyes and then there's a, it hits the retina and then you get a chemical reaction and you get these neural impulses and it goes to a variety of places in your brain so that you can recognize it and then recognize it and then do something about it.

They timed that entire process at one half a second before you could actually respond. Now they said, we don't notice it because we're all running on a tape delay of one half second.

Peter wasn't. So by the time you moved, he was already behind you or beside you or wherever he wanted to be. Now I could do that often, but Peter lived there.

Contemplation and Enlightenment

And so you couldn't hit him. I mean, I practiced with him for years and years and years, never hit him. And he would bring people in, Aikido masters often.

And just to be clear, if I were in their dojo playing their game, they would have kicked my rear end, but I was playing my game. And so they would say, hit John.

And they go, what? Hit him, hit him as hard as you can. They could never hit me because I would go into that space and they couldn't hit me. They would chase me around the studio and we'd laughing.

I'd be laughing. They wouldn't be. And it's important to realize that I could do that with them. But I could never touch Peter. That's how incredible he was.

But his power, he said, came from his contemplation. So I studied contemplation with him for about a dozen years. He was a master contemplator. I spent hundreds of days, thousands and thousands of hours in contemplation.

Eventually in 1985, I had what's commonly called an enlightenment experience, which really then shifted the course of my life. But eventually, I finally got free of my obligations that had been keeping me from it and went back to school to get my master's degree in the 1990s.

Got my degree and then another transformative experience, meetings with remarkable men. One of my associates cajoled me, basically bribed me into going to a weekend lecture in Berkeley.

Functional Medicine and Chinese Medicine Integration

And the lecture was on leaky gut. I didn't know what leaky gut was. Nobody knew what leaky gut was, except for a handful of really bright people. And it was taught by Jake Fratkin, who I still consider a mentor, even though I rarely speak to him anymore.

But in this leaky gut seminar, it blew my mind. When I saw the power the incredible power of combining functional medicine labs and treatments with traditional Chinese medicine, I was dumbfounded because they're working on the same principle.

They're both attempting to get to the roots of your problems. You, not a protocol, not an idea, but specifically you as a patient and creating very specific treatments for you, largely based on lifestyle, diet, some supplements, some herbs perhaps, but really based on you.

And that was what was really significant. You know, I was used to going to doctors for symptomatic medicine. My gut hurts, my knee hurts, my back hurts, right?

Something like that. So that began my quest in functional medicine, being combined with traditional Chinese medicine. That was in 1999. And I've been teaching and practicing ever since.

I was just in Arizona this weekend teaching a class on that, on functional medicine lab reading with traditional Chinese medicine. In the mid 2000s, I started on my doctoral program.

Actually before that, I had done a PhD program in reading the classics. Now it's important to understand I'm not an academician. When I attend a lecture and someone's talking about an herbal compound, I'm not getting as an academic.

I have a pull-down menu of my patients and seeing who this formula could help. So that's how I approached the medicine. But I felt it was important to read the classics.

Then I did my doctoral program. I've spent a fair amount of time in China. So I got my doctorate, I think in 2009, I'm not sure. in gynecological endocrinology.

So, hormones in general, all the hormones, I treat diabetes, adrenal dysfunction, thyroid disorders, et cetera, but with an emphasis on treating women, the gynecological part of it.

And I've been doing that ever since. I received a certificate in diabetes care from Xinhua Hospital in China, where their diabetes care is so far advanced to what we're doing here in the United States.

It's actually mind boggling, the effectiveness. And I received a certificate in gynecology from Zhejiang Hospital, which also I could spend a week telling you stories about how efficient their process is.

Doctoral Studies and Advanced Training

So. That's kind of what got to me to this point. A couple people had asked me, so I thought I'd put things together. Now, along the way, I had meetings with many more incredible people.

I did more than a year-long program with Anthony Robbins in the mid-'80s to become certified in his programs. And again, many of these things seemed just like almost accidents.

I just kept falling into being with these people. I studied with a very famous Ayurvedic physician Maya Tiwari, who was phenomenal. So I've just been very blessed, very, very fortunate.

Now, if you want to see something hilarious, I invite you to go to Vimeo, V-I-M-E-O, and the Forum on Spirituality, Forum on Spirituality, and get my name.

And I did a couple of TV shows a few years ago. And one of them, the interviewer, professional interviewer, said, I looked at your bio and is it okay if I ask you about A, B, and C?

And I said, oh yeah, sure. And so she made the mistake of starting out by asking me, so how did you get here? What is your history leading up to you being a doctor of acupuncture in Oriental medicine?

I only spent the entire show explaining that to her. It was hilarious. So if you want to have fun, I looked it up a while back and I really dislike watching or listening to myself, but I laughed through this entire show.

Closing Remarks and Resources

So form on spirituality, John Needers on Vimeo. So I'll be back in a week for another doctor's talk and until then be happy, be healthy. Bye bye. Thank you for joining me on Real clarity and balance can begin.

Visit AlamedaAcupuncture.com. That's AlamedaAcupuncture.com to learn more, explore our supplements, or book a call. We'd love to hear from you.