

## **Podcast Series: Holistic Nature of Us**

### **Episode # 36: Meet Dr. Scott Gerson, Ayurvedic Physician and M.D.**

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Hi I'm Judith Dreyer,

Thank you for joining me for this pod cast series "The Holistic Nature of Us".

My intent is to take us, you and I, into a better understanding of the concepts behind our holistic nature and how that ties directly to the holistic nature of the world around us. How can we connect the dots in practical ways that we are nature and nature is in us?

I will be featuring authors and educators, practitioners and others whose passion for this earth helps us create bridges. We'll see what's trending, what's relevant to our world today, not just for land use, but to connect the dots between nature and ourselves. It's time for practical action and profound inner change so our natural world is valued once again.

Today I'm delighted to introduce you to Dr. Scott Gerson. Dr. Gerson is one of the world's leading Ayurvedic primary care physicians and is a prolific researcher in Ayurvedic Medicine, who is well versed in virtually all modalities of integrative medicine. He is the Medical Director of the Department of Integrative Medicine, Division of Research and Education at Jupiter Medical Center. And, he is the chief physical at the Gerson Institute of Ayurvedic Medicine in Lake Mary Florida where he treats patients through merging authentic Ayurveda, Integrative Medicine and conventional medical approaches.

Good morning Dr. Gerson, I am so happy to have you with us today.

DR. GERSON: Good morning Judith and Namaste.

JUDITH: Namaste. Well this is a rich and deep topic and you're quite an expert in the field of Ayurveda. I just want to let my listeners know that I've met Dr. Gerson personally. I've worked with him personally and I am honored to have him here as a guest on the show today. Dr. Gerson let's

start with the Ayurvedic, the broad view, a little bit of your background, what interested you in Ayurveda and then we can take it from there.

DR. GERSON: Okay, well Judith as long as I can remember, back when I was very, very young I've always had a sense of the energetic interconnectedness of human beings with all of nature. I think a lot of children have this same kind of sense. But for me it kind of never left me. As I later discovered in Ayurveda, mankind is viewed primarily as an energetic being interconnected to and in harmony with all other universal energies in nature. So, I was immediately kind of drawn to explore that discipline more. Because in Ayurveda man, or women, I'm going to probably be using the generic "man" as we go even though I really mean human beings. But human beings are understood to be part of a whole and today modern integrative medicine is being practiced in the United States. However, because it is inconsistent with the basic principles of classical physics and concepts of biology that most people learn, energy medicine has been significantly marginalized, even within the circles of integrative medicine. But despite that, Ayurvedic Medicine is now continuing to thrive in the United States and I'm very happy here in the states to be the representative of authentic Ayurveda.

JUDITH: I am too because when I have looked into Ayurveda myself (some of my listeners know that I taught at WestConn for a number of years) I always included Ayurvedic Medicine in my model. And granted it was just the tip of the iceberg, but it's connected so deeply to the observation of nature. I believe the answers that we need for health and for some of the problems on the planet exist within nature. Tell us more; this is great.

DR. GERSON: Well, okay. There's so much to say. You know I mentioned energetic medicine and that at the end of the day is what Ayurveda is really concerned with. We have actually an appreciation for many energies in the world. These are perceptible energies; detectable energies I guess we could call them. And these are the measurable wave-lengths and frequencies that include sound vibration and electricity and magnetism and I guess thermal energy. So, these are, you know, what I'm calling perceptible energy. But Ayurveda is actually concerned more with the imperceptible energies. Energies which are, at least currently, undetectable. And of course, because it can't be measured, it's a little bit more difficult for people to understand and accept. There have been many names for these energies throughout the ages, even in our life times. It's been called Vital Energy or the Life Force.

In the Vedic tradition we call it prana, which many of our listeners probably recognize. The Chinese use the word Chi. The Egyptian word for it is Ka. And there are even terms in the American Indian Traditions for this same kind of energy. But although called different names in different cultures the underlying concept is the same, right?

JUDITH: Right.

DR. GERSON: In health, energy circulates through the mind/body and in disease there's a blockage, or imbalance or disruption on the flow of that energy.

JUDITH: Yes, yes. We are starting to know that. We're starting to realize that there's a disconnect in some fashion with dis-ease in some way.

That leads me to wonder about our first line of defense, the immune system in this concept of what you're talking about. Could you tell us more?

DR. GERSON: Well that's an interesting question because the concept of immunity in Ayurveda is actually a captivating and many faceted subject. Let's see how far we can get.

The Vyaaphiksamatva is the word in Ayurveda used for the Western concept of immunity. And it literally means "resistance against disease". And of course, resistance against disease is of enormous significance for all living beings, not only humans, because it regulates both the prevention against contracting a disease as well as, and this is perhaps even more important, the rapid recovery from disease. So, there's a few distinctions about the Ayurvedic concept of immunity versus the Western concept. In Ayurveda immunity does not mean immunity against the specific infectious agent, such as polio or rubella, for which western medicine provides "immunizations". Rather the Vyaaphiksamatva or immunity in Ayurveda means resistance against the loss of the integrity and the interrelationship amongst the individuals bioenergies, okay? So, this balance of bioenergies, know as dhaatusaamya, balanced elements. That's the literal translation, balanced elements, is the true meaning of immunity in the Ayurvedic system.

JUDITH: Well that tells me that it's again, if we're looking at a holistic model, we're looking at something that's very comprehensive. In Western Medicine we tend to go after the singular problem or the singular

manifestation of a problem. Whereas, what I'm hearing you say is that by very definition they look at, Ayurveda looks at, the immune system in terms of what is the balance of the system in its totality and how do we support that. Do I have that right?

DR. GERSON: Exactly right. And have you ever observed, here's perhaps an example that will bring home the point that I'm trying to make to our listeners, have you ever noticed that during flu season only some people at your school or in your office will get sick and others are kind of unaffected or affected to a lesser degree? That observation illustrates two important points. Number one, that pathogenic factors require some favorable conditions in order to flourish. And number two, very simply, individuals are susceptible to disease to varying degrees. You know we're not all equally susceptible. So, in fact, in the absence of those sort of disease favorable conditions, or in the absence of an individual's personal susceptibility a person's immune system can protect against disease or very quickly eradicate it. And the analogy that we learn in Ayurveda is that unless a seed is sown in fertile soil it will not propagate. It can not grow. Just like a fire in an air-less place can not exist. Ayurveda takes these favorable conditions needing to be present and an individual's susceptibility needing to be present and has created an approach to increasing immunity and (it's a) very, very affective and simple approach.

JUDITH: And that's something that we don't really understand, do we, in terms of health versus illness. We are approaching a more traditional flu season, if I can characterize that way, going into winter, especially here in the colder states we tend to see more of it. Can you tell us more how the immune system operates in this totality?

DR. GERSON: Sure. Well here's what most people know. We all know that as a general rule those who indulge in an irregular routine, eat unwholesome foods, deprive themselves of sleep, don't get proper exercise tend to suffer ill health. And conversely, it's kind of common wisdom that those who maintain a regular health routine, you know eat well, generally maintain good health, right?

JUDITH: Yes.

DR. GERSON: However, it's also observed that, and I know we all have this observation, some people can tolerate and overcome disease even though

they indulge in an irregular routine, eat really crappy food and yet they manage to live healthfully and happily.

JUDITH: Right.

DR. GERSON: And then the maddening part is some of us, though we follow a regular routine and eat very wholesome foods and get exercise and sleep, we still are susceptible to disease and suffer ill health.

JUDITH: Okay.

DR. GERSON: So many, many centuries ago Ayurveda offered a profound explanation for this phenomenon. It turns out that the intake of wholesome food and a regular healthy routine alone are not enough to prevent disease. Additional factors are at play in human immunity. And they include first and foremost a disregard for the cycles of nature.

JUDITH: Oh, okay.

DR. GERSON: A disregard for a person's individual constitution. And then there are things like poor conduct or immoral conduct and exposure to unsuitable sensory perceptions like always being around very disturbing sounds or irritating contact with the environment, putrid smells, etc. These factors are also responsible for the onset of disease.

JUDITH: Can I ask you a question here? I notice that a lot of our media is very involved in some very gross violent story forms. Are you suggesting that that's also a sensory overload for us if we engage in these types of media stories all the time?

DR. GERSON: Absolutely. The five sense that we have are all organized in order to take in influences and energies from the outside, right?

JUDITH: Right.

DR. GERSON: I mean our eyes take in photons from the sun and our ears taken in vibrations you know from the air in space. And the impressions, the mental impressions that we receive from the media about largely negative kind of things and without stop. It's an onslaught of negativity. Definitely affects the bio-energies of a person in the same way that a rotten smell from the garbage that you walk by in New York City let's say, affects you through

the nose. We have to really be aware of the thoughts that we think and the impressions that we allow ourselves to receive.

JUDITH: Okay, so you've just highlighted several additional factors that come into play with our immune system, in spite of, you know, our personal constitution. So what else is at play here?

DR. GERSON: Well, let's talk a little bit about what Ayurveda sees as the solution to improving immunity and resistance against disease. It falls under the category of recommendations to acquire better immunity and there are three main recommendations that Ayurveda offers. One is rasayana which I will explain in a moment. The second is vyayama which is, simply put, exercise. And the third is Satmya which means suitability. And I will explain all of these three. They are very far reaching, although they're very concise when I just state the words.

So rasayana is the health promoting substances, usually in the form of either single herbs or of compound formulations to improve and maintain immunity. And these include some things that some of your listeners may recognize, or maybe not. But we have substances like ashwagandha and brahmi and amalaki but also things like garlic and licorice root and different types of peppers and a whole host of flowers and different kinds of leaves from other plant-based medicines. And then there are compound formulations which have been shown to offer a great advantage to immunity. The most famous one in Ayurveda is known as chawanprash, which is sort of a fruit-based concoction that contains about 44 different herbs in a very delicious kind of almost like a fruit pudding. And then there are many, many other kinds of compound formulations that include not only plants but also mineral based medicines and, in some cases, even small quantities of properly purified and processed metals. And that's a subject which has actually vilified Ayurveda. The inclusion in Ayurveda of certain metals like gold and silver and sulfur and in some cases iron.

JUDITH: Right, because we automatically think of toxicity and how can we possibly ingest this, and what are they doing it can't be valid? You know we can go on and on about that. But actually, the way, what I've learned, is that the way that they're compounded, the way that they're processed, Ayurveda isn't something that existed 250 years ago. You're talking about what, 5,000 years ago, correct?

DR. GERSON: True.

JUDITH: The system itself has had many, many years of refining the process and I find it fascinating that you have in your bag of goodies, so to speak, formulas that have worked for like 3,000 years. We can not say that about Western Medicine.

DR. GERSON: Absolutely not. And the subject of herbal and mineral immuno-modifiers is, as you know Judith, a vast and fascinating subject, probably beyond the scope of this little conversation. But in reality, really, even a single plant back in Ayurvedic ancient times was known to be a compound formulation. Even though they couldn't analyze it like we can today. They knew that within a single plant there can be components which act as synergists and assimilators and anecdotes and vehicles or taste enhancers. I mean every plant has so many components within it. Ayurvedic addresses the up regulation of our immune systems primarily through the use of the substances called rasayanas.

JUDITH: Okay, you're right. We could probably spend 3 hours just on this one topic. But for the sake of our listeners and the sake of this presentation, I think it's important to know that we are developing the science to actually prove what the ancient ones knew from observation and I think that's the good news, that we can actually say yeah this really is valid. Look at the spectrum we can find in a given plant right now on all these different levels, from vitamins to minerals to biochemical components that cause astringency or maybe mucilaginous, etc. Again, I think we have a more rounded knowledge coming in because of our technology.

DR. GERSON: I wanted to make one distinction about something that you said. It's one of my least favorite words in the English language and I want to pick-up on something that you just said. So, a rasayana in Ayurveda is defined as a natural substance which promotes the optimal strength and vitality of the entire organism, not just the one isolated tissue or biochemical system. Now Western Medicine used to call these preparations tonics, but these kinds of tonics have all but disappeared in the West today and they have been replaced by the reductionist practice of taking vitamins, which is the word that I wanted to pick-up on. Vitamins are sort of the antithesis of Ayurveda. I do not believe that vitamins, in most cases unless there is an actually measured deficiency, vitamins are actually not only not helpful but, in many cases, harmful to be taken in an individual form. So, I get my B

vitamins from grains and I get my vitamin C from fruits and vegetables. Where these vitamin substances, which shouldn't be called vitamins. They should be called what they truly are. They are biochemical cofactors and they're very powerful and they should be taken in the context that they appear in nature. So, Vitamin C in green pepper let's say, or a strawberry, occurs with about 300 other things surrounding it. I mean 40 angstroms away from the Vitamin C molecule (23:43) there's a vitamin B3 molecule and 20 angstroms away at a particular angle there's a magnesium atom that's there and it forms this energetic sort of matrix that only nature can create. What we do in modern medicine in the west is we extract that one thing, the Vitamin C, out of nature and give it to people in an isolated form. And I think that this is something that people need to reconsider doing it. I usually take people off multi-vitamins.

JUDITH: Yes. In my travels I'm beginning to really agree with you from what I've seen in the health food industry and in my own journey. I personally have gotten away from vitamins and I'm trying to grow organic food in my own backyard, buy locally, etc. which gives us...the local environment supports our biology because this is where we live. I don't live in Florida so why would I eat lots of pineapples and kiwis in the middle of winter, you know?

DR. GERSON: Very true.

JUDITH: Alright. Well that's rasayana, right?

DR. GERSON: Ra-say-a-na.

JUDITH: Rasayana. So you have two more. What are the other two?

DR. GERSON: Okay, so the other two, well the second one is vyayama is exercise. And Ayurveda makes a very cogent point that daily exercise is very important, some form of activity. Today you know, if we could say that the American culture suffers from one common disease I think it would be called sedentarism.

JUDITH: That's funny but you're right.

DR. GERSON: We're all on our phones and on our computers or sitting in front of the TV for far too many hours. So Ayurveda says that one should exercise approximately 50% of one's exertion capacity most days of the

week, to get out and walk and just be active in any form. And why that's so important. There's a burgeoning literature to support this even in western scientific research. Exercise enhances digestion, strengthens tissue metabolism and more to our point it increases and improves immunity – daily exercise. And the third thing that I mentioned, which is again not so easily understood as exercise, is called a satmya and that literally means suitability. What we're referring to here is that we need to adapt to wholesome substances and give up unwholesome substances to which our particular physiology is requiring. The things that you need and the things that I need could be vastly different because you and I are so unique.

JUDITH: We are and that's the place that I think Western Medicine is still lagging behind, is to treat us as an individual of a holistic world, so to speak, and address it on that level. And that's what I like about Ayurveda because you do a tongue and pulse diagnosis that's very personal to the individual and then you can create a program based on that part of the observation but other tools that you have to create a program for someone to promote better health.

DR. GERSON: And that's exactly correct. And that's the core of Ayurvedic health approach. The foods and exercises and behaviors that are good for one individual's constitution may not be good for another person's constitution, and in fact could be harmful. For example, a simple example, ghee which is clarified butter is excellent for both Vata and Pitta constitution but not for Kapha constitution.

JUDITH: Hmm. So if you're a Pitta/Kapha for example you have to go a little easier on the ghee, is that correct?

DR. GERSON: That's correct. That's exactly the concept.

JUDITH: Hmm, interesting. Well before we close, these are three great tips right here. I don't know that we need to add much else. Do you have any other comments that you'd like to add before you give us your contact information?

DR. GERSON: Yes, so briefly I'll give a couple of tips. I mean if people are listening and they want to explore Ayurveda here's a couple of things that you can consider right off the bat. So, the idea in Ayurveda is **to live in harmony with the natural cycles, with the cycles of nature**. And one of the easiest ways that we can get started is to simply wake up and go to bed at

the proper times. It may not be possible for some of us but given the profound impact this one change could have on your health, you may really want to try this one. The recommendation is to go to bed before 10 PM and to wake up around sunrise, which in most time zones is somewhere between 6 and 7 AM. Now if you're already close to these times for waking and sleeping it may just require a little tweak and nothing more.

JUDITH: Okay.

DR. GERSON: The second thing that I wanted to mention to the listeners if we have time is regarding the concept of Agni. In Ayurveda we can avoid, we know that we can avoid many of the common digestive issues that so many of us have with a simple ritual which will actually prepare your digestion for the day ahead. And that simple idea is to forgo the coffee in the morning and instead prepare a cup of hot ginger tea. You do that by simply steeping one teaspoon of grated fresh ginger in one cup of hot water for 5-10 minutes and then drinking the tea that you've made. Ginger is anti-inflammatory. It's a mild blood thinner and a circulatory stimulant aroptiprotica.

JUDITH: Do you recommend that people add a sweetener such as honey or maple syrup to that?

DR. GERSON: They could but I would recommend trying just the ginger tea at first and only add the sweetener, maple syrup, agave or raw honey if needed.

JUDITH: Okay.

DR. GERSON: And I will end with this final idea from Ayurveda and it's that simply we should **pause and recognize, take a moment every day to remember your true nature.** Remember what you truly are, satchidananda – consciousness, knowledge and bliss. Recognize and honor that.

JUDITH: That's beautiful. Those are great things to remember. I like that, thank you. Alright, well how about your contact information Dr. Gerson. I know you have your center down in Florida.

DR. GERSON: Oh right, well I do come up to the New York area about four times a year to consult with patients, but my main facility is at the Gerson Institute of Ayurvedic Medicine and as you mentioned it's in Lake Mary

Florida. The simplest way to get my phone numbers and my e-mail addresses is just to go to my website, and that website is [www.gersonayurveda.com](http://www.gersonayurveda.com)

JUDITH: Great. That's helpful and I know it's very easy to get in touch with you through the website. So again, I want to thank you Dr. Gerson for being with us. I'm inspired by your tips. I think they're practical and useful and something that we can start today, and that's the whole point of the podcast is to connect the dots with nature, to understand that our biology is world unto itself and it's unique to us individually but yet there's a system like Ayurveda that knows how to reach in, seek out information about our biology in constructive ways that help get us back into balance. Your discussion about the immune system is I think, key for the holiday season coming up, to stay healthy, to enjoy our family, to have a good time. We don't have to have lots of illness if we are mindful of our own nature.

want to say thank you again. This is Judith Dreyer. I'm the author of "At the Garden's Gate", book and blog. My book is available through my website [www.judithdreyer.com](http://www.judithdreyer.com) as well as several distribution arms such as Amazon, Nook, Goodreads and more.

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And remember, NOW is the time for practical action and profound inner change, so we can value our world again.

Enjoy your day. Judith