

Podcast Series: Holistic Nature of Us

Episode # 45: Meet Joan Palmer,

Founder of The Institute of Sustainable Nutrition, TIOSN

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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 Joan Palmer. She is the founder and director of The Institute of Sustainable Nutrition and owner of Real Food Matters, LLC. She has been planting the seeds of real food matters for decades through educational programs presented to schools, businesses, organizations, families and individuals.

Welcome Joan! I'm delighted to have you today.

JOAN: Thank you Judith, I'm delighted to be here.

JUDITH: So, Joan, you're the founder of The Institute of Sustainable Nutrition. Tell us about your school, how you came to create this program. By the way (for our listeners) this is a very unique and very timely program and I'm excited to have you tell us more about it.

JOAN: Thank you. When I finished my Masters Degree in Human Nutrition I started looking around at what I wanted to do with that. I was kind of

hoping to find a program that connected all of the pieces that I didn't get from my formal education. I wanted to maybe teach, but I also wanted to take classes at a place that brought all of these aspects together, and it didn't exist. And so over time I realized it was kind of my vision and my dream and that it was going to have to come from me. So, from that we created TIOSN, with the help of some really amazing students and faculty. And what we did was, we kind of looked at all the pieces of food, not just the didactic piece of it that we get in our formation education but the parts that are really about real food and real food matters. We took the science of nutrition and we looked at all the aspects of inflammation, detoxification, the immune system, all of that sort of thing. We decided to try and pull that together with the parts that were really important for that. And that was the gardening. So, we developed sustainable regenerative gardening practices where we teach how to make you own amendments, how to really kind of understand the soil as a whole and how it kind of knows what to do. How to get out of the way I guess when working with it and yet still be able to feed the soil again and try to replenish what has been taken out over all these years. From that we moved into the kitchen and we teach culinary skills from really basics. We do fermentation. We start with something as simple as soups which I think are some of the best medicines we have, a really great way of incorporating things straight from the garden into the kitchen, extending the harvest, using the herbs. It's just to me a powerhouse of a food, especially here in New England when it starts getting cold. And then we moved into what we call kitchen medicine and that's using food and herbs to create formulas to both prevention and healing formulas that once were part of every household. People always knew what to use when someone got a cold or a fever or the flu, any of those things. They had remedies. And they were quite effective, and they're still used around the world but we seem to have pooh poohed those and they have kind of been lost. It's interesting to watch people who come to this country with their families. First generation comes with all this incredible traditional knowledge and by the next generation it's gone because people are embarrassed and feel that's it's not sophisticated and so those traditions don't get passed down. It's such a shame. I always tell people if they have anyone in their family still alive to sit with them and ask them for the remedies and write them down. It would be a fascinating book. Within all of those things, we do forage. We go out. We teach out students about the weeds in the meadows, in their front yard, in the cracks of the sidewalk and try to teach them to look at things differently. They learn that what's an annoying weed to many is actually a really nutrient dense food or has

medicinal qualities that they should really understand, and I think that simple act is such a wow for people because they see something they've stepped on for ever or battled with and they learn what that can do, and they fall in love.

JUDITH: Yeah, I hear you. I know that. I've done a lot of field walks myself here and there in my own travels and people are always amazed at what's right beneath their feet. My Native Elders always said what you have growing under your feet is probably what you need but we've forgotten how to pay attention to that. And yards are different. I could give you a story about a woman whose husband had a skin issue and she called me up as a colleague and asked what I would recommend, and I said burdock root, which is the first thing that comes to my mind. And she started to laugh. Her whole front yard was filled with burdock root and she had no idea how to use it. Meanwhile his remedy was right there. I bet your students get excited when they go home so they can discover what's in their own yards.

JOAN: Yes. We always tell them that it comes with a cautionary note that they have to keep their eye on the road when they're driving because what ends up happening is you start being able to ID things in the fields that you drive by every day. You get so excited that you turn your head and 'where was I?' So, make sure you keep your eye on the road, or pull over.

JUDITH: Yes, yes those are good wise words. So, tell me more about getting folks into the kitchen. You said that soups, I agree with you, soups are such a great way to get food as our medicine and medicine as our food. We forget that many of our common foods are medicine as well, not just the herbs that we don't want to talk about or the weeds we don't want to talk about.

JOAN: Right, right. This year we actually, we've had a lot of guest speakers in that area. We get a gentleman from up in Massachusetts who has been nominated for the James Beard award for six years running for his incredible locally milled sour dough breads. They are true 24 hour fermented sour doughs. He has a wood-fired oven and he makes just an incredible number of breads. He comes (here) and teaches a class with us and he's kind of one of the favorites. And we have a woman who comes from a farm where she pastures her cows and processes raw milk. And so, she comes and does a talk about the difference between pastured dairy versus non pastured dairy and raw versus processed dairy and some butter making and a cheese

making class. And then we had a guest chef who used to come, who this year we have hired on to be our full-time chef. He works in a lot of the classes. But we do things, like I said earlier, like fermentation. And one of the things that we do with that and with the soups and with some of these other classes is trying to teach students how to close the waste gap. And you know that is a big piece of being sustainable is what do you do with all of those scraps when you're preparing this food. I mean composting is lovely and really important, but you can also throw the stems of the Shitake mushrooms and the ends of your carrots and your onions into a bag that you store in your freezer that you later pull out and make your broth with that, to not waste it. You know when we spend the money and buy expensive organic citrus and you just squeeze the juice out of that it feels really wasteful. And what we do is we first, just all of the citrus peels that we are going to use if we're only using the juice and say that we use that and salt to flavor different things, oils and things like that and that can last quite awhile. You can freeze that or save it in an oil. It's just closing those waste gaps. We take some of these things and we make some nutrient rich products with it, when we get into the unit on minerals. So those are the kinds of things we do in there. Try to get them to use more culinary herbs in their cooking, those types of things.

JUDITH: Hmm. You know years ago I was next to a camp in the northwest hills of Connecticut and some of the instructors came in and they actually had a song, that I can not find, called "Where Is the Way?" We always say 'throw it away' but where is away? You know forget about the packaging, and the plastics and all of that. But I love your suggestion of using it in another form, your kitchen scraps, to make broths out of. That is such a great idea.

JOAN: And that also goes into our gardening practices. We do the same. We use some of these waste products to actually make amendments for the garden. One being egg shells. You know egg shells are so rich in calcium and other minerals and we just throw them out. And yet they're great in the compost again but you know fermented they really extract...and not even fermented, I would say using the vinegars you can extract a lot of those minerals and use them both for human and for the garden.

JUDITH: That's interesting. Do you have any recipes up on your website or is this something that your students get in the program?

JOAN: They get them in the program. We're really fabulous at what we do. We're not really fabulous at the technology end of things with our website. We do have some people who are going to work on that for us this year but yeah, we're busy doing all of these other things and we don't tend to focus on all of that.

JUDITH: Oh, I can imagine. Gardening alone, and to create the gardens that you have with the intention and the mindfulness that you put into it is time consuming. It really is.

JOAN: It is and it's easy to get side-tracked into forgetting what really is important when we're doing a school, when you're doing a business, when you're living your life. There are so many areas you can get side-tracked in and all those sweet simple things do get lost sometimes. And so, you have to make those decisions and I think that going and hunting for the mushrooms and the going and harvesting the wheat and, or just going out and harvesting a couple of leaves from garden and going to make a tea, they seem so much more important than my perfection on my website.

JUDITH: Well I have to agree with you because again that's where your heart is. And anything that makes our heart sing is going to feed us in a different way and I think that's what life is all about too, you know? Balancing is what I'm getting at. So, if we're talking about balance, let's go back to our digestive system, the gut. We know the soil has a digestive system, but we have a digestive system and I wanted to ask you to talk about the gut biome a little bit.

JOAN: Yeah, it's so fascinating. What's really fascinating to me is to look at the research being done in the soil realm, to look at the biology in the soil. And like Nigel had said, the little we know of all the things in there and then to look at the human side of it and it's exactly the same. We really don't know a lot. We are learning rapidly but we don't know a lot about the microbiome in humans and it seems that in modern science it feels so brand new; although, we've been fermenting our foods forever to get the microbes into our body. So, it's really important. We have more DNA from microbes in our bodies than we have our own DNA, which is quite amazing to think about. We're more bacteria than we are us. And they so influence who we are. They actually, some of these microbes can actually help process certain nutrients in the body; Vitamin K for one and B vitamins. And they help us, they actually make those more bio-available to us. Just like adding biology

to your soil makes the nutrients more bio-available to the plants. We're so connected, and then looking at the importance of introducing them regularly. Things that kill it are stress and sugar and processed foods. And so, you want to be eating those (plants, fermented, teas) all the time. They're really important for the immune system and that, having a lot of microbes in the body, along with having adequate levels of Vitamin D are two of the simple best preventions for the flu, and for your immune system in general, to keep yourself healthy from lots of different ailments. They are part of the inflammatory system. You know they help keep inflammation down. There's a big link now with Autism and the gut and you know it really influences, it's very much connected to our serotonin which is what makes us feel good. It's one of our hormones that makes us feel happy and good and when our microbes aren't where they should be, it can add to depression. Well the inflammation goes up which adds to depression. It can add to all kinds of just not feeling well. And so, there's just a huge link in that whole realm. Another interesting thing is there is actually a microbe in the soil that mimics serotonin. By working in the garden, you know when you're out there, you're just weeding, and you've got a big grin and being out there not only are you getting that exposure from the sun that makes us feel really good, but also the microbes are part of us and it influences that also, which I think is a really interesting thought. And it also helps detoxify heavy metals, and they do that in the soil as well as in our human body. So, they are so important.

JUDITH: You're right and what we forget is, in the holistic model is that if one part is weak, the whole suffers. And the dot I'm trying to connect is we have not taken care of the soil. We have not taken care of the invaluable top soil that's our life blood on this planet. We haven't been good stewards and we wonder why we have such suffering going on health wise in many areas of the planet as well. As soon as there's the introduction of, you and I know this, as soon as there's the introduction of white flour and white sugar to any culture their health goes down. And we have lots of scientific studies to prove that. Their teeth suffer, their mood suffers; their biology suffers and yet we still insist on this tremendous input of processed foods which is basically dead food. And that's another concept that's hard for people to understand. Well, how could it be dead if I'm eating it and I'm alive? You know that's the answer that I get. Well yeah, you're getting carbohydrates but you're using up your own minerals in your bank account because you're not adding more to it. And I love what Nigel said on a previous podcast, that he wants to make the soil better than when he started, you know? And

trees do that. I had no idea but when a tree dies in the forest it gives back 5x more than it took in its given life.

JOAN: Hmm, yeah and then when you read that book “The Hidden Life of Trees” and they talk about how they take care of each other, even though they’re competing in some respects, they still realize that they are all interconnected and need each other too and so they will give of themselves to help another by feeding them. It’s just fascinating. Plants are fascinating.

JUDITH: It is. And isn’t it great that we’ve got folks who have done, like in “The Hidden Life of Trees” he’s done 30 years of research in a specific forest. He has first hand experience that he’s relating to us and then he can relate the science to us as well. For some reason we still, we can’t go by the folklore and tradition as much in some ways. And we’re busting through that by the work that you’re doing. You’re marrying the science with the art of cooking and the science of feeling well.

JOAN: Yeah, I love, I love when we know traditional cultures have used certain things and have certain beliefs about foods or herbs or whatever and then Western Science has this great epiphany and uncovers that it’s true. I love when that happens because you know I think of things like astragalus root which has been, the Chinese have used for 2,000 years and they said how it really increases Chi or someone’s life force and Western Science has just started to uncover the fact that it many actually do just that. I don’t want to go into all of the science detail but with the telomeres on our, you know that it actually helps to maybe even grow those telomeres back which is quite fascinating. And how did they know that 2,000 years ago? It’s just, I love when that happens.

JUDITH: I do too. And we forget that what’s been passed down has passed the test of time. We wouldn’t still be using it if it didn’t work.

JOAN: Right.

JUDITH: And we just haven’t married the language together with whatever, with today’s language. And when we look at the old herbals, they used the language of the day. So, they were trying to get rid of “evil spirits”. Well they had no other words for viruses and bacteria and if we, fill the blank with viruses and bacteria they had that property. And as you’ve said, science is starting to put that all together which is exciting.

So, Joan, what I'd like you to do is to give us a couple of tips that we can take home. That my listeners can take home today.

JOAN: Okay. Well I would start with, with have a saying, we have beautiful T-shirts that we made with our logo. I think our logo is really beautiful. And on the back of the T-shirts we have a saying that I put on everything, "You can pay the farmer now, or the doctor later, because food matters." And so, I would say the first thing is **to learn to eat real food**. You know there are a lot of militant ways of eating these days, but even these people who think they're really doing a great service to the environment and to their health and the health of those around them by the way they're eating, it still, a lot of times, can contain a lot of processed foods. And processed foods are not only hard on the human body, but they are extremely difficult for the environment. The packaging. You know when we think about things that are grown in monocultures that have tilled the soil releasing the carbon, killing the microbes, creating crops that require chemicals in order to survive, herbicides, pesticides. The impact on the environment is huge. When you eat real food and as clean as you can afford to eat it, which organic is actually cheaper if all things were equal but with our subsidies it's not necessarily that way in the supermarkets. But to eat real food is the least impact on the environment, to make your food and use real food.

JUDITH: Good tip.

JOAN: Second one – **Learn to cook**. (Laughs) We have cooking. Some people think that it's not glamorous to cook. I think it is so much fun to have people over where everyone brings something they've made or go to someone's house who's making beautiful food for you. I think learning to cook is a very enriching community thing to do. And when you do it, to be able to start incorporating a lot of herbs, our culinary herbs, into the food. Culinary herbs are rich in antioxidants that help fight all of those age causing damaging things from happening in our bodies. In fact, oregano has more antioxidant power than blueberries. Adding those kinds of things to our food is really, really important and also helps your immune system. You know they're very antimicrobial. Which means adding them can help prevent certain illnesses if your body is trying to fight a cough it really aids in that battle against the colds and flues this time of year. And it's fun to do together if you don't know how. I say get some friends together and learn together. It can be quite fun. I think it's a great community building thing.

JUDITH: I agree. I agree with you.

JOAN: That's how we start the school. We start by preparing a meal together and just feeling that bonding and that sense of learning from each other and smelling and it's part of the digestion. It's part of the health of the body is to prepare that together. And the last thing I guess I would say is to learn to drink, especially coming up this time of year, **learn to drink teas**. And I'm not talking just black tea. Although black and green those are beautiful things, coffee is even lovely. It has a lot of medicinal properties to it. But teas are simple. They're a simple introduction into bringing medicine into your food. They remind me of soup. They're the other end of soup for me. You know when we're coming up to the holidays and you tend to overeat, and you get that feeling of indigestion after a meal. Going to other people's homes sometimes can do that when you're eating other people's foods. But there are simple things like fennel seed, mint – and I'm not talking about buying tea bags. Although those are fine they aren't really the best quality and they aren't really the best amount. And there are so many herb shops around and on line that you can buy a little quantity of loose herb and make a tea, either in a small tea pot or in a tea ball and really enjoy those. Mints are really great for digestion along with the fennel. And then the other thing I think of is stress. Stress plays such a key role in most of our diseases. It causes inflammation. It can undo the strongest of people. And so, I like to think of ways of **finding teas that help with that stress** in that really sweet, simple way. And one that comes to mind always is **lemon balm**. People love that plant and it really does have the ability to calm us and settle the stomach. It's in the **mint** family, very easy to grow, beautiful plant. And when you grow it you have lots to dry for the winter. And the other one I think of is **Tulsi** which is really pretty easy to grow in this area also. It's other name is Sacred or Holy Basil and it's got an incredible ability to work with the stress response and bring you back into balance and it's quite delicious. I know most people adore that tea. It's got a real interesting smell and flavor and it's a great one to incorporate in (daily routines). And then the other one that everybody seems to know since childhood of reading Peter Rabbit is Chamomile. And although I can't drink that one, I seem to react to it. It's in the family of the ragweed and so that's a little tough for me, sadly, but it really settles the stomach and helps you to sleep. All three of these actually are great for helping you to sleep.

JUDITH: Those are great. Those are great suggestions. And you're right, Lemon Balm will grow abundantly from one little cutting. So that's a very

easy one to put in your garden. Chamomile is easy to grow and Tulsi is a new one for me. I'm going to have to look into that for next year and see if I can get some growing in my garden. Those are great (suggestions) Joan. I really appreciate it. But before we go, how about giving us your contact information and when does the school start and the dates, etc.

JOAN: The school is one weekend a month and it runs from September through July. It's all day Saturday and Sunday and it's started in September and will end in July. We do have other workshops coming up. They have not been posted onto the website, but we have a really fabulous one coming up in December or January that is called Trees for Teas. People think that everything is dead and gone and you can't get anything outside. We take you out and show you the abundance of the world around us by using some of the most common plants in our area that are nutritious during the winter. Our website is www.tiosn.com, that was the acronym for the school. And the phone number is 860-764-9070.

JUDITH: Wonderful. Well this has been a great discussion, practical tips and again tying everything into the holistic model. Because if a part of us is not well, not up to par, our whole biology suffers. And that's our mental, our spiritual, our emotional bodies don't feel right. The same thing happens out in nature. So, thank you.

I want to thank you again for joining us here at The Holistic Nature of Us. I'm really grateful for your tips and all your practical advice.

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 as well as several distribution arms such as Amazon, Nook, Goodreads and more.

I'd like to remind all of you that a transcript is available for each podcast. And please like and share these podcasts. Let's get the word out and support each other.

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

Enjoy your day.