



Medicine Stories Podcast

Episode 89 - Kami McBride

THE MAGIC OF MUGWORT: UNWRITTEN
WAYS OF HEALING & CHAMBERS OF
ANCIENT MEMORY

Air Date - April 25, 2022

[0:00:00]

(Excerpt from today's show)

Kami: *It opens up our memory of, like, "Oh yeah, there is more to life than what is just right in front of me."*

Amber: *Yeah, it's an invitation to other realms.*

—

[Intro]

(Intro music, "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Siou)

[0:00:20]

Amber reads excerpt from Judith Berger's Herbal Rituals:

Mugwort opens up chambers of ancient memory within the brain, bringing to one's dream life stirring visions of past and future, that overflow with magical imagery.

The symbols that dance through your mugwort-touched dreams, pull out the cobwebs of our forgetfulness, and assist us in remembering old unwritten ways of healing and living that attend to the needs of spirit and soul.

That's a quote from Judith Berger, author of my favorite herb book of all time, [Herbal Rituals](#), and my guest on Episode 59 of this podcast: [Herbal Rituals, Rhythms and Remembrance](#).

I don't know about you — except maybe I kind of do because you listen to this podcast — but remembering old, unwritten ways of healing and living that attend to the needs of spirit and soul is one of the driving forces underlying my life. As a deep craving, a way of feeling whole and a fractured and seemingly ever fracturing world, it's a homing in on your personal Northstar.

I love that Judith uses the word “unwritten.” She's talking about a knowing beyond knowing, ancient and ineffable. Such knowing, and the states of mind needed to access it, are not valued or practiced much by the overculture. It's an invisible knowing, outside the realm of ordinary consciousness and of what we deem possible.

Many people don't even know that it exists, and most of us are brought up to not even entertain the possibility. But those of us attracted to the healing powers of herbs start to sense its existence as we begin, more and more, to get to know the medicinal plants of the earth. And this is why a mugwort is so beloved by herbalists: it's a door opener, a wayfinder, a welcome bridge to the realms of consciousness needed to cultivate a deeper relationship with the natural world.

[0:02:17]

I'm Amber Magnolia Hill, and this is Episode 89, a solo episode with a bonus 20 minute interview with my teacher, Kami McBride. This will be Kami's fourth appearance on the podcast. Y'all know her and love her.

As always, I cannot and will not be sharing every facet of mugwort and the *Artemisia* genus. Its healing on all levels is vast, and it can have powerful, negative effects, too. So listen on and always do your own research. This podcast is meant as a starting point, not the final say.

We will meander in a nonlinear fashion through mugwort's abundant physical, spiritual, and other properties that genus *Artemisia* proliferates across Asia, Europe, North America, and North Africa, and was used by many of our ancestors for a multitude of purposes. Much of what I say applies to most, if not all, members of the *Artemisia* genus, though the species *Artemisia vulgaris* is what many think of when they hear the word “mugwort.” *Vulgaris* is Latin for “of the people”, by the way.

Here in California, *Artemisia douglasiana* is abundant and is referred to as a mugwort, as well. This is why herbalists and other plant people use the Latin binomials, meaning “two names”, genus and species, aka scientific names, because often different species within a genus will go by the same name, or different species from different genera will go by the same name.

I got super attacked online once by a woman who was really mad that I call the mugwort in our herbal medicines “mugwort” because it is the *Artemisia douglasiana* that grows around us. And she thought that only *A. vulgaris* could be called mugwort. And this was on Facebook and a bunch of people jumped in and kind of put her in her place and let her know that this is called mugwort, as well, and many other *Artemisia* species are. So it can be confusing, but there's so many shared medicinal properties across the genus, also.

[0:04:36]

Mugwort is a witch's herb, a stirrer of visions and an opener of portals, too. It heightens our extrasensory perception, while simultaneously dropping us deep into our center; it's just where we want to be. To quote Judith again, "Known to many as an herb of magic, mugwort allows us to live in several worlds at once, expanding and nourishing the habit of drawing our gaze before us to that which is visible, and behind us to that which is invisible."

Mugwort is a gateway herb. This makes it an ideal ally for those just beginning to walk the herbalist path. This is why we incorporate mugwort into two of our body oil blends and our dream elixir, as well. By opening the doors of perception, it allows both beginning and experienced herbalists to shift into a new way of perceiving the world and, therefore, a new way of engaging with plants and with the healing process.

[0:05:39]

I truly think of mugwort as an initiator onto the plant path. Obviously, it's not going to work like that for everyone, and other people have their own initiatory verb that welcomes them. But for me, it was mugwort.

I walked into a used bookstore 13 years ago and found, used, Judith's book, *Herbal Rituals*, just shining at me from a shelf. If you heard my interview with her, you know that it only went through one printing somehow — even though it's the best e-book out there — and is now hard to find and, therefore, pretty expensive, if you can find it listed online. Every now and then I hear from someone who found it at a thrift store or something.

But it was November, and the book, it's laid out one or two herbs per month, and the herb for November was mugwort. And I read the chapter, was absolutely transported, and I just can't even describe the effects that her writing had on me and that learning about mugwort had on me.

I was already in my herbal studies with Kami at the time. My oldest daughter was two, and one day after reading that chapter, I said, "I gotta go find some mugwort," and I got her dressed, and we just started walking from our home. I wasn't even sure where we were going, but we started walking towards a wooded area, outskirts of a park nearby. And I came around the corner, it's about ten minutes after leaving our house, and there was this huge patch of mugwort.

The joy, just the sense of meaning and connection and aliveness in the world and my own conscious participation in it, that coursed through my body at that time and was overwhelming. Like, that was the moment, that was the moment that I knew I would never turn back; that herbalism would not just be a passing interest of mine. I tend to be interested in way too many things all the time, and it has been true ever since that mugwort has walked the path with me, stayed the course, and just been such a profound ally for me and for so many others.

[0:08:09]

Mugwort is a potent healer of the physical, as well as all these amazing spiritual and psychic properties. And you can learn this for yourself instantaneously by placing a leaf in your mouth. That strong, very bitter taste tells you that there is some serious medicine going on here. When the tongue perceives the bitter taste, gastric juices start flowing, and the digestive tract prepares itself to receive and assimilate food. Today most of us avoid the bitter taste, but our ancestors recognized it as highly medicinal and sought it out when foraging for food and medicine.

My guest on [Episode 69, Healing the Bones: Holistic Dental Health Lineage and Being Soft with Yourself](#), 13th generation herbalist, Rupam Henri, writes that:

In cultures that were closely connected to nature, the bitter taste was very prevalent in the daily diet. It has almost disappeared from the average, civilized diet, leaving people open to a host of imbalances.

It is the bitter element which activates, tones, and strengthens the liver, gallbladder, and all digestive organs, making it possible for our metabolism to reestablish its equilibrium.

There are many wonderful bitter products on the market, and I am fond of [Rupam's Swedish bitters](#), and I'll put a link to that in show notes. As always, I link to, literally, everything I speak, that could have a link will be in the show notes, which you can find whichever app you're listening to this or at [mythicmedicine.love](#). And I put a few drops on my tongue before most meals, but you can also simply place a bitter herb onto your mouth to get the same effect, if you happen to have one on hand or out for a walk and come across one.

[0:10:03]

And then, of course, there is mugwort's beautiful affinity with the womb space. In *Herbal Rituals*, Judith writes that she likes to keep mugwort oil on hand for rubbing into the skin of any woman whose pelvic area is distressed due to any reproductive challenge. I think we could remove those last five words, as well. I think that mugwort will help heal the pelvic area, whether or not the issue is reproductive in nature, and I have experienced this firsthand.

In October 2016, I took a fall off a six foot tall, retaining wall on our land, with my five week old baby strapped onto me. Kind of weird because where I'm sitting right now recording this is, literally, the spot I fell off of. We have since put up this workspace. I was tripping out realizing that. In the endless few seconds as we were falling, I twisted my body in such a way that Nixie was totally protected, and I landed flat on my back with my lower back and pelvic area absorbing the brunt of the impact.

Overwhelming pain echoed throughout my body, I could hardly think, and I could not move at all. If my husband Owen hadn't been home, I would have laid there immobile with a screaming baby on my chest for hours. As it was, I had to yell very loud for him to hear me up at the house. The EMTs and hospital staff had to move my body for me over the next few hours. I knew the X-rays would be fine — and they were. This wasn't skeletal, it was everything else. All of the other tissues in my pelvic area, still recovering and tender from having given birth five weeks earlier, had been retraumatized.

For weeks, I was in pain and struggled to take care of my baby when I could hardly walk or turn over in bed on my own. I couldn't carry her at all. And along with the physical trauma, and stronger and much more difficult to deal with, was the spiritual and emotional trauma.

[0:12:13]

There's a legacy of impact injuries and deaths in my family. I grew up adoring my wheelchair bound great aunt, who we called Grandma Jenny, who was in two car accidents as a teenager and was paralyzed by the second one. This was in the 60s before seatbelt laws were enacted or else she probably would have fared much better.

When my now-15-year-old was three, she and I were in a bad car accident when I flipped our truck on a windy road in a snowstorm. And a year before this fall, six and a half years ago now, my beloved mother died in a car accident. In the year since this fall, my father in law has also died in a car accident. You can hear more about these deaths in [Episode 82, What I'd be Without You: My Mother's Life, Death and Legacy of Love](#). And also, in the years since this fall, my sister's husband sustained a life-changing, traumatic brain injury when he fell 80 feet out of the sky right onto a rock while paragliding.

So the point is this fall not only hurt physically, but brought up ancestral and familial trauma, as well. I mean, two of my loved ones' death certificates list blunt force trauma as the cause of death: my mom and my husband's father.

[0:13:35]

So I didn't have time to anticipate my car accident. It happened so fast. When I woke up upside down in our truck, Mycelia, then three years old, was saying, "Mommy, I'm hurt," from the backseat, but in a calm voice. So I immediately, upon regaining consciousness, knew she was alive and okay.

I will link to Instagram posts in the show notes that talk about and have shown photos of both the fall and the car accident. But be aware that the accident photo — it's hard for me to look at. It might not be hard for you, but it's our truck upside down and completely smashed in on top with my little daughter standing in front. I can barely look at it now. It's so hard for me to see.

When her father went to the junkyard to take photos of the car for insurance purposes, they were like, "We're so sorry about your family," and he was like, "Oh, they're fine." And they were like, "That's... what? That's impossible." And you'll have the same thought when you see the photo. I have never, on the drive to the hospital afterwards, I just was overcome by a feeling of gratitude and that we had been somehow protected. It really was miraculous.

And then for my mom, I'd always feared that she would die in a car accident coming home from work. So there was this strange and immediate acceptance when I got the news. And she had also been such a loving and warm person that I felt totally suffused with her love, even in the depths of my grief, and that helped me to get through it. But this fall, off the retaining wall, was totally unexpected, and I knew it was happening.

When it comes to these kinds of traumatic bodily accidents, whether or not the person knows it's happening and has time to feel fear, can play a role in how the trauma is laid down in the nervous system. So the few seconds between the moment I realized we were falling — and I don't even know what happened. I was just walking, like I walked all the time with her, just getting some fall air, gentle walking, recovering from birth, getting my baby outside. And all of a sudden, I knew I was going down.

So in those few moments between when I realized we were falling and the moment of impact, seemed to last forever, super slow motion, and I was terrified that I would hurt her. So to follow that level of fear, immediately, with the level of pain that I felt, ensured that the whole experience would settle in, deeply, into my nervous system. And it did. I had two body workers tell me in the week afterward that they felt like my spirit had left my body. And the third body worker I saw pointed out that that is basically what trauma is. And I sure felt it; I felt broken at my core in more ways than one.

[0:16:37]

One evening, and soon after the fall, Owen was showing me some mugwort seeds he'd harvested. I put the seeds in my mouth. It's almost an unspoken pact I have with this plant. Every time I see it, I pick a leaf and put it on my tongue, you know, even if I don't really want to because the bitter taste is so strong. But I think this is one reason that I have such a deep relationship with mugwort.

One of the surest ways to get to know an herb is to place it on your tongue, and I've been doing that for 15 years now. Knowing the taste and the smell of a plant brings you immediately into intimacy with it, and a primal knowing is awakened and recorded within your cells. And since I fell in love with mugwort so early on in my herbal path, I've spent many an hour with a leaf in my mouth. But I had never tasted the seeds. They tasted just the same as the leaves, and the familiar flavor was immediately comforting, but it was more than comforting. I knew right away that mugwort would help heal me from this fall.

Through the interaction of its medicine on my tastebuds, it was like it was saying to me, "I am exactly what you need right now. Use me." So I did.

I asked Owen to put some seeds and leaves in a tiny bowl like a candy dish to leave out. He did, and I ate some every day. I also made mugwort infusions to both drink and put in the bath, and I rubbed the mugwort infused oil onto my lower back, lower belly, and pelvic area, daily.

Judith writes, "Like the knowing hands of the wise woman, mugwort oil seeps deeply into muscles and joints, permeating the cells with sensation and relief." I was taught the same thing in my herbal apprenticeship with Kami McBride; that mugwort gets into the deepest tissues of the body. And combined with any other herbal oil, it will bring that oil's medicine to depths within the body that it wouldn't get to otherwise. Kami and I talk about this in a few minutes here. So, "Added to St. John's Wort oil," writes Judith, "mugwort helps it to travel deeply to the root of pain and muscular tissue or joint capsules."

[0:18:48]

Mugwort is like the herbal guide to the underworld (*Amber laughs*). And Kami and I talk more about that combo, too, St John's wort and mugwort. Judith also writes that, "Mugwort makes a potent, deep green, belly oil which can be rubbed externally over the womb and ovaries to relieve cramps and help dissolve cysts, and reminds us that famed 16th century herbalist, Culpeper, called it a 'speedy and certain help for sciatica'."

So, as you might imagine, after reading all of this and having that experience with putting the mugwort seeds in my mouth, the mugwort did heal my injury, and did so much more quickly than I'd expected. I was thinking I still had months of pain and recovery time ahead of me, but I was better within a week once I started using the mugwort every day in numerous ways with the intention of healing this injury.

So I use the plant in all the ways I just described, but it was getting a moxibustion treatment with a mugwort that seemed to be the definitive turning point in my healing. Moxibustion, or "moxa", is a TCM practice, Traditional Chinese Medicine, of holding a stick of burning mugwort just above the skin at strategic points along the body and is used to warm, invigorate, and encourage the flow of chi to that point along the meridian lines. Moxa is super magical and, like, so simple to do, and it's used with mugwort leaves. So not only did the pain completely disappear, but I also felt whole again and like I returned to myself.

So in this way, this is how I see mugwort having a bigger use for the entire pelvic area beyond just uterine, which it's commonly used for. And honestly, as you'll hear Kami say, "I think mugwort can be used beyond just the pelvic area. It's a healer. It's a deep healer for all the tissues of the body."

[0:20:52]

So, speaking of the uterus, it's known as an emmenagogue, meaning, it can be useful in starting a late or stagnant period; it brings on the blood. I have to say, I have found this effect to be quite weak, and I've heard the same from other herbalists, but cultures the world over do use it this way, and I'm positive it has worked for many, many, many people. I have personally found Angelica or Dong quai more effective for bringing on a late period. I had this problem for many, many years of my life. Like, it was due, but then it would come up to three days later, and those days were so tense and miserable. But just really since eating better and especially since eating pro-metabolic — see Episode 87 — that's totally stopped, and my periods are on time and no problem now.

So due to this effect on the uterus, many recommend avoiding it during pregnancy. And here, I will remind you that internal and external use are different. And for me, mugwort oil was a beautiful companion for me during pregnancy. It can also dry up breast milk for some women, and so it's often recommended to avoid it during lactation.

Let's stop here and hear my short conversation all about mugwort and its many uses with my teacher Kami McBride, and then we will jump back in to talking about some of the more esoteric, ancient, ancestral uses and beliefs around mugwort.

—
(Transition music, "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Siou)

[Interview Begins]

[0:22:42]

Amber: Kami, please tell me about your relationship with mugwort and how you view this plant and how you use it in your daily life.

Kami: I'm so glad you asked that question! I love this plant. I mean, I love all the herbs but I love this plant (*Kami laughs*). So you know the thing is, is that I started massage school, yoga training, and herb school all at the same time about 30 years ago.

So the oils were the first thing I really went for because, first of all, the stuff people were using in massage was petroleum products. And then I was doing all this prayer and ceremony and ritual, so the oils just, they went straight into my massage practice and straight into my spiritual, my — you know, I was in my early 20s — my very beginning spiritual practice. I started using it. I started using mugwort for anointing and ceremony.

And I just, I went really deep with this herb because not only just because I loved it, the smell, the aroma so much, but in the massage practice that I had for about 25 years I always had an oil bar, you know. So anybody that's doing healing work set up your herbal infused oil bar, it will just... it's a game changer. So I always had like five to ten herbal infused oils, and I would have people smell a few of them before we did our body work. And they would choose, like, three or four of them, I would make a blend for them, and then I would use it on them, and then they could take it home. And that is how a lot of my herbal blends that I use now were discovered, and it's also just such a great way to let someone else's body tell you what they want.

But there was just, you know, the most common combination that people chose was a combination of St. John's wort, lavender, and mugwort. That combination, people were just like, "Oh I want that, that, and that," and so in awe. I, literally, have watched hundreds and hundreds of people and their response to smelling mugwort oil. Like, who has done that, you know (*Kami laughs*)? I would just watch people go into this, like, wow space, like this magical, like entranced enchantment. I just watched people go into this, "Wow, what is that?" and just become enchanted, you know.

So I know the vibration of enchantment by just observing that for so many years, and I watched the mugwort. The way I can kind of describe it is I felt like I was watching just like an instant kind of like awakening, like it would just reawaken something. They would just go, "Oh," you know. It has like a sharpening note to it, you know; like a reawakening, just a sharpening to the moment, you know.

I feel like I watched it call people to attention, call people to their own embodiment, you know, call people like, "Oh, I'm gonna be more present right here right now. This is like watching the stars in the night sky," (*Kami laughs*), you know, or "this is like..." It just brought them to that state of awe and

enchantment. And I, you know, at first I was like, "Oh, that's really cool." But then, over the years, like, I just couldn't deny the response to this oil. Just, it's incredible.

[0:26:22]

Amber: It is, I love that. I love that you just said "the vibration of enchantment." *(both laugh)* Yes, yes. And when it's in oil, it's just... so every time I walk by a mugwort plant, I put a little piece in my mouth. And I've done that for 15 years, since I first studied with you, and I love that. But putting it in your mouth, it's super sharp, it's so bitter, so bitter, and it's amazing, and it opens those chambers of ancient memory, for sure. But there's like a softer, more grounded, sweet invitation when you put it on your skin. And the way that our individual scents that come off of our body, then mingles, as well, with the scent of mugwort when it's applied on the skin oil, is so heavenly.

Kami: Yes, yes. I know we're going into an altered state just talking about it.

Amber: Oh my god, exactly, like I'm losing words, I'm losing words. *(both laugh)*

Kami: I have some here at my desk, but it's just like, talking, just having this dialogue with you, it's like, "Oh, yeah, let's go!" you know? It's like all of our, for some so many people, our aromas are so predictable, you know. We've got the dish soap, the laundry soap, you know. And this aroma, it's like, it's spicy, it's sweet, it's gentle, it's strong. It's unpredictable; it's like an unpredictable aroma. My husband will go, "Whoa, wait a minute. What is that?" you know. It just opens up our memory of, like, oh, yeah, there is more to life than what is just right in front of me?

Amber: Yeah. Yeah, it's an invitation to other realms.

[0:28:11]

Amber: And so, like more physically, medicinally speaking, what does mugwort do in our bodies when we...? Well, let's talk about when we take it internally, I'm curious about that, what you have to say about that. But then, of course, I want to know about when it's oil, applied directly to the skin, as well.

Kami: Yeah, so mugwort, internally, I mean, it's been used for a long time. It has so many uses. It's very, you know, one of the things is it's bitter. You know, you don't have to go buy a big, strong or expensive bottle of bitter tonic, you know, a complicated formula. All you need is like a little quarter piece, you know, a quarter piece, the size of your fingernail, before a meal and boom: bitter tonic.

You are going to absorb that meal better, you're gonna get more nutrition out of it. It is an amazing, bitter tonic in really small amounts. It is contraindicated in pregnancy, and so, you know, it's an emmenagogue, and it can be an abortifacient so it's, yeah, you know. You can do other oils and other things besides the mugwort.

But one of my favorite ways to use mugwort, besides in the oil, is to make a vinegar out of it. I love mugwort vinegar. Mugwort vinegar, you don't make your entire salad dressing out of it because people will be like, "Whoa! That's so bitter!" you know? It's like eating an entire endive salad, you

know, or an entire dandelion leaf salad, so bitter. But you put, you know, like a quarter of the amount of the vinegar that you're going to use in your salad dressing, you use mugwort vinegar. It's got B vitamins and calcium, and, you know, it's that great, bitter tonic.

And also, you can use that vinegar topically as a liniment. The herbal vinegar is really good for sore muscles and sore joints. And so, for me, like, I really love using the vinegar and adding a little bit to the marinades and everything, and get that bitter tonic in.

Amber: I'm just gonna plug your book now [*The Herbal Kitchen*](#), where you have just so many recipes and recipe templates for all sorts of ways to incorporate herbs into your everyday kitchen cooking.

Kami: Yeah, it's so true.

Amber: Best book.

Kami: Let's do it. (*Kami laughs*) But also, as for the oil, you know, it's, again, it's spicy, it's warming. We call it a penetrating herb, a penetrator or a driver or an activator, you know. You add a little bit of mugwort oil to your oil, any other oil you're using, and it's going to help drive that medicine of the other rest of the herbs deeper into the body because it, you know, increases circulation.

It's warm, it's a driving herb, so you can increase the efficacy of your other oils by adding some mugwort to your other oils. I mean, you can use it on its own also, but it is one of these great, driving, activator oils, which I just love that. I have, since you brought up *The Herbal Kitchen* I'll just quote from it real quickly. It says:

Mugwort is truly a massage therapist's ally. It warms and relaxes sore muscles, so you don't have to work as hard. It increases blood circulation, it has a deeply penetrating nature that helps relieve pain. So mugwort makes a luxurious oil that helps with lower back pain, menstrual cramps, and neck stiffness.

So yeah, it's, you know. But you don't have to be a massage therapist to really, you know, just get your oil out and just get it into your body and help with all those aches and pains and spasms.

Amber: I remember you teaching me that 15 years ago and in class, that mugwort drives the other herbs it's combined with deeper into the body. And I've never forgotten that, and it's definitely fundamental to my understanding of just kind of what a deep herb this is (*Amber laughs*), you know. Like, she deep.

Kami: Yeah, so it does. It's warming. I mean, you know, it's, I feel like it's an underused oil. It's one of those underused oils. Like, you know, calendula and there's a lot of oils that have become more popular now, but mugwort, it also helps with coldness and stiffness and spasms and tension and aches and pains.

[0:32:27]

Kami: And you know, it's really renowned for helping with premenstrual stagnation and aches and pains, you know. If you think of your, like your uterus as a muscle, you know, and if you've been cold

or stressed, you know, the muscles, they get cold, dry, tight, and agitated, and they tighten. And when the tighter a muscle gets, the more prone it is to spasming. And that's a lot of what the premenstrual cramping is about. So you know, it's a contraction.

So you use that mugwort oil, you warm it up a little bit, and you put it on your low belly, put it on your low back, and it just opens the space, you know. It brings the circulation and the warmth, and helps to relax and calm that area. It's just, really, an amazing herb for low back pain and menstrual pain.

It's also really good for any kind of repetitive injury, you know. That oil, like, if you work with your hands all day long, doing the same movement, over and over, right, it just gets in there. And it's just, again, it's also just a good old bumps and bruises, aches, and pain oil, you know. Besides all of its magical opening, taking us in between the worlds, it's, like, you know, you've got a bump or bruise ache? Bring mugwort. It's also very practical. A lot of people, I mean, the magic of mugwort is incredible, and there's a lot of focus on that. But it's a very practical oil.

Amber: I'm so glad you brought up menstruation and bleeding time because, yeah, not only is it going to be physically helping any feelings you may be having in the womb space. But, you know, at that time of month we are more, we're in a more relaxed state of mind, we are more perceptive and open to perceiving things that we might not be able to in the other parts of our cycle. So what better aid to also helping you relax and root down into that open, perceptive, listening, receptive space than mugwort?

Kami: Yeah, yeah. I mean, you've got all that blood and all that energy and all that chi focused in one spot in your body, you know, in your womb, just ready to go. And it pulls you down there to be like, "Okay, what is happening? What is going on?" It's like, I always like to say, it's like our life is like we're always on the 11th floor of the elevator, you know. We're always, like, up here; we're producing.

And menstruation says, "Hey, let's just take the elevator down to the basement for a little while, you know." But if you try to stay on the 11th floor, and that's where all the contraction and the pain, and because all that energy in your womb is calling you to just be right there, and pay attention. I mean, that's where your intuition lives.

And so if we can just, oh my gosh, even just a few hours, each menstruation. I mean, it's great if we can take a day. But yes, mugwort pulls us down, the warmth, into that part of our body, and yeah, opens the space for us to really hear what's going on deep. Like, it's the truth serum. Menstruation, menstrual time, is our truth serum time. And so mugwort helps you, you know, ride the elevator down.

Amber: I love that. Now I'm excited to start my period tomorrow (*both laugh*).

Kami: Yes, mugwort helps you love your blood.

[0:36:08]

Amber: Which you really taught me, Kami. You were the first person to say to me, "You can embrace this time. You can slow down, you can flip the overculture's narrative on its head, and learn to love

your moon time,” and thank you so much for that. And we talk more about this, too, in your first ever interview on this podcast, which was number 20.

Gosh, I can't believe... I'm just so grateful for you, as you know. And it's been 15 years now, this year, and that's like an important chunk of time. That's an anniversary worth marking, since I drove a couple hours once a month to sit in your space and learn from you. And I mean, you know, as you know, as I've shared thousands of times on this podcast, it was, I loved everything I learned from you in that 13 months, but the herbal body oiling just absolutely blew my mind, changed my life.

I just put some stories up on Instagram yesterday asking people, you know, what they've learned from me or what they're here for, and, like, half of it was herbal body oiling, herbal body oiling. (*Kami laughs*). And so, it's the time of year again, when we are promoting your amazing online course, [Handcrafted Healing Herbal Oils](#). But you're doing it a couple of months earlier this year than usual, and I really loved your reason why, and I would love for you to share that with people.

Kami: Well, the reason why I'm getting this earlier is because I really want to help people source their St. John's Wort so that everybody in class can make St. John's Wort. So if you're already making St. John's wort, the course is still really great for you because we go into all the oils and all the nuances of making the highest quality oil with all the herbs, but it's sometimes sourcing St. John's wort is can be difficult.

And so, I have growers lined up and ready, and so we can get in before the harvest, and so that I can really help everybody source their St. John's wort, and then mentor them through that exact process. So that's why we're, you know, it's like, yes, let's get started in spring so we can get that part all set up.

Amber: So, you've got, like, a list of people who grow it and ship it to people.

Kami: That's right.

Amber: You want to help the folks who sign up for your class hook up with those people, make sure they get St. John's wort, and are able to make their own oil.

Kami: Yeah, because it goes fast; the freshly ground St. John's Wort goes fast. It only blooms for a short period of time, and it's like one of these herbs that if you don't get it, it's gone, you know (*Kami laughs*). So it's like I'm really trying, I'm really working with the growers so that we get it at the right time, so it's shipped to people, and so that they can make their St. John's Wort oil.

[0:39:01]

Amber: Yes, I think of, you know, St. John's wort as a solar herb. It blooms around the Solstice, it loves the sun, the sunlight pulls that hypericin, up, up, up. And then with mugwort, of course, there's association with the moon. And I just, I love. I always think of that with these two plants. When I think of them, that they kind of carry the solar and the lunar energies, and they are lovely together. I've never added lavender, but I've definitely used mugwort and St. John's Wort oil together, many a time.

Kami: Yeah, they're, that is a great combination. And mugwort, you know, I mean I use it by itself for sure, but it just lends itself to such amazing blends. And again, these are blends that I just discovered over the years, and should I tell you a couple of my favorite mugwort blends? *(both laugh)*

So I love, for menstrual, just that whole menstrual world that we've been talking about, I love a combination of mugwort, St. John's wort, and hops.

Amber: Oh my gosh, I remember that.

Kami: It's such a good blend. It just takes you there, relaxes everything, opens everything up, allows you to bleed with ease. And anyway, that's incredible. I don't know. I just have hundreds of women that love that blend.

And then also, I love mugwort, and, you know, we always think of rosemary as the hair and the scalp oil, but mugwort and rosemary together are amazing for scalp oiling. Just increases circulation and memory, and so those two are really good together. And I just love mugwort and lavender for ceremony; just those two together just takes me there.

Amber: I want to smell that combo now! People think of lavender — like people who don't really work with it very often and maybe are just familiar with, like, hand soap — as being this really sweet smell. But Lavender has that edge to it, kind of similar to what mugwort has.

Kami: It does.

Amber: That, like, camphorous sharpness.

Kami: It does, and it has that same action. You know, people think, "Well, how can you be really awake and alert and relaxed at the same time?" But that's actually the, you know, the ideal state of being, really, for me, because I'm relaxed enough. I'm not, like, you know, passed out. I'm relaxed and calm. My muscles are calm, my mind is calm, but I'm alert.

And lavender and mugwort both do that. They're both nervine. They help calm and open and relax, but they bring awareness and alertness. And so together they just, both together, just is such a wonderful combination that focuses on that.

Amber: Wow. Okay, I'm so excited. Kami, I gotta make hops oil this year. I've never done it. It's one of my favorite plants.

Kami: Yeah, hops and mugwort together. Okay.

Amber: Oh my god! *(both laugh)* And I can imagine the smell.

Kami: So good. So good.

Amber: Yeah. Okay, Kami, I love you. Thank you so much for changing my life, continuing to be a mentor and friend to me, and for changing the lives of thousands upon thousands of your students

and of my audience and my listeners. I feel blessed and honored to be able to be a bridge between you and the rest of the world.

Kami: Oh Amber, I love you and just right back at you. I'm so grateful for all that you do, and for Mythic Medicine and Medicine Stories, and the lives of people that you're reaching. It's so, I just, I get emails all the time, like, "Oh, I found you through Amber Magnolia Hill, and I just I love her, I love you." And I'm very, very grateful for the work that you do in the world and the change that you are, the empowerment, you know. We need to be more empowered in our personal care and our medicine, and you are just such a beautiful bridge for that.

Amber: Thank you. Yeah, I mean, how lucky are we just to have chosen to tune into the plants and this is where it has led us?

Kami: Yeah, yes. Thank you.

Amber: Thank you, Kami.

—

(Transition music, "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Siou)

[Outro]

[0:43:25]

Amber: So I'll tell you more about her [Handcrafted Healing Herbal Oils course](#) later, and the link will be in the show notes. And it's so rad though that she's launching it early this year in order to be able to hook her students up with St. John's Wort growers.

So mugwort, *Artemisia*, grows pretty much everywhere, and it's a long harvesting season, but St. John's Wort only grows around the Summer Solstice, and does not grow as widely as mugwort does. So this is awesome for all of you who love that plant, as well, and would like to make medicine with it.

If you take Kami's course, she'll hook you up with someone who can overnight you, I believe is how it works, a bag, and you can make it fresh — which you have to use fresh St John's Wort when you're making oils. Kami's course is all about making the most shelf stable and potent herbal oils. And differentiating between which herbs are best made dry and fresh is a major part of it.

So mugwort or any herb in the *Artemisia* genus is one of my favorites for burning. So stop buying White Sage — you know all the reasons why — and start collecting your local *Artemisia*. Here in the Sierra foothills, we have *Artemisia douglasiana*, which is lovely, and is what we put in our oils and sleep medicine.

And up in the High Sierra is *Artemisia tridentata*, or sage brush. I like to collect the tridentata leaves each summer when we visit my hometown of South Lake Tahoe and dry them and use them for smoke medicine, you know, like smudging, not inhaling. Although people do smoke mugwort. I do also love the douglasiana for this purpose, the scent of the smoke is incredible, and all of the magical properties of this genus are present in the rising smoke, adding to the purification and whole mind-body-spirit shift that happens when we burn sacred herbs in an intentional way.

Another species of note in this genus is *Artemisia absinthium*. This species is known to have mildly hallucinogenic, and even poisonous, effects. I think both of those are going to come with, like, hardcore, addictive use. As you probably know, this herb is used in a mind-altering, alcoholic beverage, absinthe, which has been, you know, made illegal in many places. Wormwood, *Artemisia absinthium*, is also antiparasitic, hence the name wormwood.

And then there's *Artemisia Annu*, or "Sweet Annie", which has antiviral properties and is used as a medicine for malaria.

And so, these are just some of the species. There are many. And again, *Artemisia* is a really powerful genus, both its physical and spiritual properties can be very strong. So please be aware of this when choosing to ingest any form of its medicine and educate yourself. Again, this podcast is meant to be a starting point and not, like, a thorough reference guide. And yeah, proceed with intention and reverence.

[0:46:47]

So let's talk about names and beer and the moon:

In his book, [*The Herbal Lore of Wise Women and Wortcunners: The Healing Power of Medicinal Plants*](#), Wolf-Dieter Storal, a German cultural anthropologist and ethnobotanist with many wonderful and, in my opinion, underutilized books on herbal magic and medicine, writes:

Artemis, the goddess of the hunt, childbirth, and wild animals, who never marries and can kill or heal with her darts, is associated with the full moon. The genus of wormworts, mugworts, absinthes, Prairie sages, and Southern woods bear her name: Artemisia.

I think my, you know, automatic changing of the spelling change that last word, so I'm not sure what it was supposed to be, but yeah, I've never heard of it or prairie sage. Again, there's so many species in this genus and all their common names. It's a lot.

So when you look at a mugwort leaf, you will notice that it is green on top, but silvery on bottom, and folklore associates the silver underside with the silver glow of the moon, further connecting the moon and the genus *Artemisia*. But again, the Artemis, known as the goddess of the full moon, or her association with the full moon, is possibly why this genus was given that name.

In her book, *A Modern Herbal*, Maude Grieve writes that, "Mugwort was said to have derived its name from having been used to flavor drinks. It was used to a great extent for flavoring beer before the introduction of hops." So mug-wort. "Mort" is the old English word for herb, as discussed in Episode

79, Sunshine Medicine: The Healing Magic of St. John's wort. Mug-wort, mug-herb: the herbs that you are drinking in your mug.

So a really long, really long use in folk medicine, and just daily life, like, beer drinking, and all sorts of magical rituals. I mean, again, I just, this episode was actually really challenging for me to make because there's so many beautiful things to say. My notes are 21 pages long. I highly recommend you jump into a book or blogs or anything else you can get your hands on, because especially when it comes to the lore of mugwort it's just so magical and beautiful. And of course, you've realized by now that the physical healing properties are just multi-dimensional, and I've barely touched on them.

[0:49:40]

Many people are familiar with mugwort's association with the dream space. Whether burned, ingested, rubbed onto the skin, or simply placed under the pillow, countless people have had the experience of mugwort enhancing their dreaming. This is due to the portal-opening effects we've already discussed — or, perhaps, a better way to say it is that mugwort opens the sensory-gating channels. Steven Buhner and I talk more about this concept in Episode 8 of this podcast, entitled [Planetary Intelligence, Ancestral Resonance and The Perception of the Heart](#).

In fact, for some people, the dream-modulating effects are too strong, and bad experiences definitely happen. However, I'd say that most are good, and many are profoundly and deeply healing in this use of opening sensory-gating channels, which you can use a ritual or ceremony during waking life or use, again, to enhance dreaming time. It just is ancient and is used in every indigenous culture that I've read of where any Artemisia grows. So this is a really, deeply human/Artemesian activity, and I don't know. I wouldn't be scared of exploring this. I'm not scared of exploring this. In fact, I had the most powerful dream of my life on a full moon after ingesting a mugwort flower essence at bedtime. I haven't had the same experience using that same essence since then, but that one dream changed my life.

So these sensory-gating, channel-opening properties also make mugwort lovely for ancestral connection. It's perfect to use, again, in any sort of ritual or ceremony, and it need not be complex. Just connecting with mugwort in some way — taking it, putting on your skin, burning it — with the intention to shift your consciousness into a place where you can commune with your ancestors is often enough. And I have had this experience enough times that I formulated one of our herbal oils, specifically, for this purpose.

This oil is called Ancestral Communion. It is made with mugwort and redwood. Redwoods are among the most ancient beings on earth and hold deep caverns of memory. Mugwort has long been used as a visionary herb and an inter-realm gatekeeper. Both plants penetrate deep into the body to relax muscles, reduce inflammation, and nourish body and soul.

This oil is perfect for ritual work, however big and serious, or small and playful, to invoke the wisdom of the ancestors, and invite them into relationship with us here today. Use it for women's gatherings or just to relax and reset your nervous and musculoskeletal systems. And it smells amazing. The mugwort hits your scent receptors first, but over time, as it wipes off the skin, the redwood becomes more perceptible. And I have found that when I rub Redwood oil on myself, I can still smell it, so

subtle and sweet, the next day. In perfumery, we would call this a lingering, base note. It's heaven, and the two of them together are so good.

[0:53:14]

And our other oil that contains mugwort is called [As the Witches Teach](#), and it has mugwort and Yarrow. These two herbs have long been held sacred in the traditions of women, witches, and wise folk. Use it to create a layer of discernment and protection around yourself, as support during your bleeding time or other ceremonial or liminal moments, to relax the muscles and soothe the nerves, and as an invocation to reclaim the old stories and medicine ways.

The name of this medicine, As the Witches Teach, was inspired by a passage from a medieval text that was uncovered by women's historian, Max Dashu, and written about in her phenomenal book [Witches and Pagans: Women in European Folk Religion](#).

So it has the old — I don't know if it's old English words here. It looks like “*swa wiccan taecað*”. I've no idea if that pronunciation is correct; “as the witches teach” is the translation, though.

This was the contextualization provided by an Anglo-Saxon translator to a Frankish, priestly denunciation of people who 'bring their offerings to earth-fast stone, and trees and wellsprings.'

By adding the explanatory phrase, 'as the witches teach,' he demonstrated that, in his time, 'witch' encompassed animists' ceremony at natural sanctuaries; not harmdoers.

In other words — so those are Max's words, but in my words — though the male, Christian conquerors at the time tried to impose their patriarchal, monotheistic view of the world onto Old Europe, religion, and spirituality, their own texts and writings frequently allude to the fact that the people still seek the help of women, witches, and wise folk, whose teachings show a relationship with and reverence for the living Earth. So these dudes were just trying to, you know, drive out these ancient, pagan, folk beliefs. And oftentimes, in their writings when they're trying to admonish and, like, lay down new decrees and laws, they're leaving a trail of crumbs for us now to understand what these people used to do; the people that were trying to stomp out their religions.

[0:55:44]

As herbalist Asia Suhler writes, in her wonderful essay, [Real Witches See Possibility](#):

Witch is a term as shifting and volatile as Mercury. Over time, it has been an accusation, a slur, a fear, a story, a fairy tale, and a costume. But in the beginning, a witch was someone who was recognized as working with healing; a person who had a direct relationship to the medicine of those things we cannot immediately see.

So mugwort and yarrow have a long tradition of use in Europe, and everywhere else they grow. And working with these beautiful, and smelling these beautiful plants evokes in my mind the many, many, ancestral, wise folk throughout the millennia who have done as we still do today: turn to the earth and her medicine plants for ceremony, healing and enchantment.

Now, if you're listening to this in the first month or so, after it comes out, we are actually sold out of both of these oils, there might be a couple witch oils left for half off, but it's April right now, and we're making this year's batch of them using Kami McBride's methods. So, just stay tuned.

You can sign up for our newsletter at [mythicmedicine.love](https://mythicmedicine.com). You can just scroll to the bottom and sign up where you can take our fun quiz, [Which healing herb is your spirit medicine?](#), and that will sign you up. You might even get mugwort as your answer. And then we'll let you know as soon as those oils are back in stock. And if you're listening far into the future, they are probably there, and we put them on sale every spring, early spring. Sell all of last year's oils out before we make the new batch for the new year.

[0:57:37]

We also have mugwort in our sleep medicine called [Bedtime Bear: Into the Dream Forest. Herbal Sleep Elixir](#). Let this herbal sleep elixir be your traveling companion as you enter the mythic forest of the dream realm. These plants and stones have been known to support cozy sleep fullness and evoke visions and symbols meaningful to the soulful wander. The ingredients are California poppy, mugwort, and a tiny amount of osha in vodka, and then there's hops-infused raw honey and stone essences of Labradorite and Herkimer Diamond, and then, spring water

Why the bear? As with all animals, and especially big and powerful animals, who are revered in every culture that knows them, their symbolism is vast. The facet of bear lore that most resonates with me and my experiences is their association with sleep and with dreaming. Bears represent the turning inward, the deep, dark cavern of the unconscious, and the holy necessity of sleep. Some consider them as guardians of, or guides into, the dream realm. The very small amount of ethically-harvested osha root in the dream medicine is here in honor of the bear.

So it also tastes really good, I think. And most people think you've never tasted anything like our Bedtime Bear Sleep Elixir, I can tell you that. It's such a unique combination of all those herbs. It's really, really good. And we have many, many, many repeat customers who come back for more.

After this conversation with Kami, I'm thinking maybe we will, again, start to make a St. John's wort and mugwort oil. Don't hold me to it because we are already so overwhelmed and busy with everything. But that was one of my first oils I ever made and sold 10 years ago when I started selling herbal medicine in my Etsy shop. Yeah, solar and lunar in one and just so, so physically healing.

[1:00:00]

Okay, so I hope that you will get some herbal oil onto your skin soon — some mugwort oil, specifically — and experience it for yourself, work with it in any way. But, like Kami, the oil is absolutely my favorite application.

It's that time of year when Kami's Handcrafted Healing Herbal Oils online course is open for enrollment. I will have the link in my show notes, you've probably heard me talk about it before. Kami taught me this craft, in person, in 2007, and I was so thrilled to reconnect with her years ago and find that she was building an online course. I wish everybody knew how to make their own herbal oils. It would change the culture overnight.

I have a video up on my website of exactly what you get when you sign up for the course. So, it's like I log in to my course portal and show you everything, everything. It's just above and beyond. It's amazing. All your questions will be answered; anything you ever wanted to know is there. So I'll link to that, as well, if you're like, "I need to know exactly what I'll get." And yeah, I love Kami. I love herbal oils. This is my life's work, and thank you so much for being here to listen.

Go outside and put some mugwort on your tongue. Find it in the wild. You can look up which mugwort grows around you. You probably have some sort of Artemisia nearby. If not, you can definitely find some at your health food store or order from a small herbalist online, or however you want to get some. This medicine can be prepared in so many different ways and used in so many different ways. It's just truly, truly a gift.

And I am going to close with one final quote from Judith Berger. This is a lesser known property of mugwort, but it's something that I have found to be true, as well, and I just thought you might want to know it. She writes that:

Mugwort is a wonderful ally for those who feel themselves to be too restrained. Coming to know this plant inevitably causes unpredictable behavior that heals, rather than hurts, coaxing our bodies and attitudes out of stagnation, helping us remember merriment of spirit.

May you use this most memory-evoking herb to enhance your merriment of spirit, take you deeper into the dream space, and heal any trauma in any of the tissues of your body.

Oh! And I do have an awesome Patreon bonus for you over at patreon.com/medicinstories for supporters of this podcast at the \$2 a month level. Thank you. I love you. It's me reading the mugwort passage from four of my favorite herb books, just extra information, things I could not quite fit into this podcast. I read from Stephen Herrod Buhner's [*Sacred Herbal and Healing Beers*](#), some really cool stuff on mugwort from the book *Witchcraft Medicine, Healing Arts, Shamanic Practices, and Forbidden Plants*, which is by Wolf Storl, who I already quoted, and two other European scholars. It's a really incredible book. And we go deeper into Artemis, the mythology, the lore, deeper into all the physical healing properties, again, just things I couldn't get to in this episode.

I read from Pam Montgomery's book, [*Plant Spirit Healing: A guide to working with plant consciousness*](#). It was one of my early books that really got me excited about walking the herbal path. And then Wolf Storl's book, [*The Untold History of Healing Plant Lore and Medicinal Magic from the Stone Age to Present*](#). And I'm really excited to share with you this old Anglo-Saxon, it's called the Nine Herbs Charm. And it just says something very, very beautiful about mugwort. It's from, like, the ninth century or something. It's very old, and what they say about mugwort in this charm has always stuck with me. And so you'll find that over at patreon.com/medicine stories.

—

(Exit music, "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Siou)

[Closing]

[1:04:53]

Amber: Thank you for taking these Medicine Stories in. I hope they inspire you to keep walking the mythic path of your own unfolding self. I love sharing information and will always put any relevant links in the show notes. You can find past episodes, my blog, handmade herbal medicines, and a lot more at MythicMedicine.love. We've got reishi, lion's mane, elderberry, mugwort, yarrow, redwood, body oils, an amazing sleep medicine, heart medicine, earth essences, so much more. More than I can list there. MythicMedicine.love.

While you're there, check out my quiz "[Which Healing Herb is your Spirit Medicine?](#)" It's fun and lighthearted, but the results are really in-depth and designed to bring you into closer alignment with both the medicine you are in need of and the medicine that you already carry that you can bring to others.

If you love this show, please consider supporting my work at patreon.com/medicinstories. It is so worth your while. There are dozens and dozens of killer rewards there, and I've been told by many folks that it's the best Patreon out there. We've got e-books, downloadable PDFs, bonus interviews, guided meditations, giveaways, resource guides, links to online learning, and behind-the-scenes stuff and just so much more. The best of it is available at the two-dollar a month level. Thank you.

And please subscribe, in whatever app you use, just click that little subscribe button and review on iTunes. It's so helpful, and if you do that you just may be featured in a listener spotlight in the future.

The music that opens and closes the show is Mariee Siou. It's from her beautiful song "Wild Eyes." Thank you, Mariee.

And thanks to you all. I look forward to next time!