



Medicine Stories Podcast

Episode 62 with Sajah Popham

Called to the Plant Path: Herbal Myths, Healing Forward, & Human Ecology

January 28, 2020

[0:00:00]

(Excerpt from today's show by Sajah Popham)

The herbalist is first and foremost and forever a student of nature.

(Intro Music: acoustic guitar folk song "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Sioux)

[Intro]

[0:00:07]

Amber: There is no right way to be an herbalist. There is no wrong way to be an herbalist.

Each person's plant path is unique.

No one practices herbalism the way another person does.

From the home herbalist to the clinical practitioner to everything in between, plant medicine is truly the people's medicine.

Herbalism is your ancestral birthright. It is only in the last few generations that technocratic medicine and grocery stores have replaced people's need to know and work with the green-blooded beings that have been in symbiotic relationship with humans since the dawn of time. That you are here today is proof of your ancestors' plant knowledge and medicine ways. They were able to keep themselves and their children alive long enough, generation after generation, to get to **you** today.

If you're feeling called to work with plants, that's because your bones remember this.

I've given this a lot of thought in my 15 years of herbal wanderings. I've also thought a lot about the myriad and profound ways that walking the plant path has bettered my life. Out of that

thought process, I've recorded a special outro for this episode about the main five ways that herbalism has bettered my life - my top five reasons to be an herbalist - so be sure to stick around after the interview for that short and fun list.

[0:01:37]

Amber: I am Amber Magnolia Hill, and this is Episode 62 of Medicine Stories, where we are remembering what it is to be human upon the earth.

Today I am sharing my second interview with Sajah Popham. The first one came out years ago, Episode 17? Sajah shares my life mission of welcoming people onto the plant path. He has helped thousands of people find their unique place along this plant path and has been one of my most important teachers, so I'm really honored and happy to have him back and to share this with you.

Sajah and his wife, Whitney, have generously donated a really awesome bonus for the Patreon supporters of this podcast at Patreon.com/MedicineStories. This is, of course, available for only two dollars, and in the spirit of encouraging people who are stepping into herbalism, or maybe who have been in the herbal world for a long time, I found this really helpful. It's called *Pathways to Herbal Mastery*.

So, it's an hour-plus video, plus a PDF download to help guide you towards optimizing your herbal studies. Among the many things included in the PDF are some questions for reflection to help you gauge where you're at on your plant path, and, therefore, show you what to focus on to move forward most effectively. I really loved those questions.

And another thing that this includes is a very long list of book recommendations, and I'm just going to read the categories of books, and there's tons of books under each category, 'cause I thought these were so cool:

- The Intelligence of Nature and Plant Consciousness
- Holistic Herbal Theory and Practice
- Holistic Evaluation
- Assessment and Seeing Clients
- Herbal Medicine Making
- Plant Constituents and Pharmacology
- Materia Medica
- Herbal Formulation
- Other interesting books about plants
- Alchemy, Spagyrics, Hermetics, and Astrology, and Medical Astrology

You know I love providing resources and resource lists for people. You know I want you all reading more books, so I was stoked to read Sajah's list of most recommended herb books. It's pretty epic.

While you're there on Patreon, you can go back to the first Patreon offering from Sajah and Whitney on the multi-dimensional medicine of calendula. Calendula is a staple herb used in folk medicine all around the world and its uses are many. This beautiful 26-page PDF download is a treasure trove that covers a vast amount of both practical and esoteric information about one of herbalisms brightest stars.

So you can find that if you go back, or there's, like, category lists, you know, tags, you can find "Sajah Popham" or "Herbalism", and you'll be able to find that.

[0:04:57]

Amber: So, Sajah Popham, founder of Organic Unity and The School of Evolutionary Herbalism, is the student of the universal truths found within both ancient and modern herbal traditions from around the world. The focus of his work is on integrating ancient teachings for a new paradigm of plant medicine, one that is truly holistic in its honoring of the spirit, energetics, and body of both people and plants. His unique synthesis bridges herbalism not only East and West, but both North and South, above and below, into universal philosophy that encompasses indigenous folk medicine, Ayurveda, Western alchemy and spagyrics, astrology, clinical herbalism, and modern pharmacology.

Sajah's vitalist approach utilizes plants not only for physiological healing and rejuvenation but for the evolution of consciousness for a truly holistic practice of plant medicine. Sajah's teachings embody a heartfelt respect honor and reverence for the vast intelligence of plants in a way that empowers us to look deeper into the nature of our medicine and ourselves.

So remember to listen all the way to the end to get my top five reasons to be an herbalist, and before we jump in, if you have never heard the word "allopathic" before, which Sajah uses a number of times here, it just means "conventional". Allopathic medicine is conventional medicine.

So, I'm so excited to share this. Y'all are going to **love** it. Sajah is a genius, basically. So let's get into this interview with Sajah Popham.

(Transitional Music: acoustic guitar folk song "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Sioux)

[Interview Begins]

[0:06:37]

Amber: Okay. Hi Sajah, welcome back to Medicine Stories!

Sajah: Hey, thanks for having me again, Amber.

Amber: Yeah, our first conversation was just so rich and potent and people really loved it, and I love having you back on.

I think of you as really, like, the leader in my generation of herbalists; the most, I don't know, intelligent, accomplished person in this generation, and really, especially, appreciate the way you synthesize such big ideas in herbalism and bring them all together for people in such an easily understandable way.

So, thank you for your work, and I'm really glad to have you back.

Sajah: Aw, well, thank you very much, Amber. I really appreciate the kind words like that.

Amber: Yeah! They're true! (*Amber laughs*)

I think, as you know, there's just so many people called to the plant path right now. It really has just exploded in the last 10 years or so. I remember sitting in class with Matthew Wood, who I know is your main teacher and a friend of yours, and he was talking about the evolution of herbalism in America over the last 50 years or something, and how it was just so underground and radical for so long, and now it's just everywhere, and people are really feeling pulled to re-engage with the plants.

So, I'm curious what you think that's all about. What is it that's happening in the collective and humanity right now that's calling people back to this ancient way of life?

Sajah: Yeah. Oh, that's a really great question.

I feel like there's so many factors involved there, you know? I think from more of a, I guess, more of a cultural orientation and practical aspect of herbal medicine, I think a lot of people are starting to realize that conventional, allopathic medicine doesn't always have the answers. It's kind of seen as this glorious achievement of humanity, modern medicine, and it is amazing. We're doing amazing things in modern medicine in the way technology has allowed us to improve health in a lot of ways, but I think when it comes to the pharmaceutical side of things and the over-the-counter drug's side of things, there's a lot lacking there. I think a lot of people are realizing that their health is not necessarily improving with the drugs that they're taking.

So I think one aspect of the movement to herbal medicine is the realization that there is a healthier alternative to over-the-counter and pharmaceutical medication; that, ultimately, those medications are derived from plants, but the plants are much more compatible with the human organism and have an intelligence there that we don't see in a lot of chemically-produced medicines.

And I say that, too, from a place of non-judgment, as well. I'm saying this from a place of **my** life that has been saved by conventional medicine. My family's lives have been saved by conventional medicine, so I don't say that in a way that's judgemental. Sometimes people need to be on certain medications for their health, and I think that's totally fine, but I think there's a lot of ways that there can be middle ground achieved between conventional drug therapies and things like that with plant medicine as well.

So I think there's that side of it, and then I think there's a little bit more of an esoteric side of why people are being drawn to plant medicine these days, and I think it's an aspect of, I think it's something more of the soul. I think it's something more of the striving within the human being to feel connected to the earth, the need that we have to have a relationship to life other than human, and how we see our world has become so disconnected from the earth. And I think we're seeing the repercussions of that on the health of the ecosystem, the health of the planet as a whole, as well as our own health.

I think a lot more, many more people are being called to plant medicine to re-establish that relationship and connection to the earth, to non-human life, to the ecosystem where we live, and how all those things come together to really influence our health, not just physiologically, but psychologically, emotionally, spiritually. And there's this reconnection that's happening that I think

is really important for us as a species, really, to be able to not just survive but to thrive during some pretty huge times that we're living in right now.

So those are some of the few reasons why people are being called to the path of herbal medicine these days.

[0:11:56]

Amber: Yeah, agreed. There is the failure of modern medicine to address many health issues, and then I recently heard this idea that the people alive today, none of our ancestors lived on the same earth or in the same culture that we're living in. Like, we don't have the capacity to fully understand the times that we're living in. It's very discombobulating being alive right now. Things are changing so rapidly in ways that we can't understand because we didn't evolve with the technology and with overpopulation and everything else that's facing us today. So, I'm kind of seeing, like, this call to the plants as this way to ground, literally, to ground back into what it means to be human upon the earth.

Sajah: Absolutely.

Amber: Yeah, and it's just such a simple thing to do, right? I think we can almost over-spiritualize the earth, you know? (*Amber laughs*) But, like, it's just the earth.

(*Sajah laughs*)

Just the ground beneath your feet. And it's really not hard to come into relationship with the earth or with the plants.

Sajah: Mhmm. Yeah.

Amber: It's not some endeavor that's beyond you. It's very much within you to do this.

I know that so many of my listeners are **just** being called to herbalism, just starting to figure out how to relieve that connection, and what their individual plant path is going to look like.

[0:13:29]

Amber: So I'm curious what you see as the biggest myth in herbalism, the biggest mistake that newcomers are likely to make?

Sajah: Yeah, it's a great question, and it's a question that I'm actually really passionate about because it's something that I have found myself doing as well on my plant path, and I think there's a lot of things that herbalists maybe don't realize that they're doing in terms of their overall kinda mindset and approach to herbs.

I think one of the biggest things here is this concept that I refer to as "allopathic herbalism". I think one of the biggest myths out there is people think, you know, "I am using a plant; therefore, I am holistic." Right?

We think that there is this difference between allopathic medicine, and holistic medicine is based on what type of remedy you use. "Oh, you're allopathic if you take a drug, and you're holistic if you

take an herb, or a homeopathic remedy,” or something like that, but that’s really not true. (*Sajah laughs*)

Really, the difference between an allopathic approach and a holistic approach isn’t *what* type of medicine you use, but *how* you use that type of medicine, right?

Most people have heard of — I think one of the biggest traps here is — the “use this herb for that symptom” kind of mindset. It’s easy to approach herbs in the same way that we approach drugs, right? Of “Oh, I have this symptom, and if I take this drug it will take that symptom away,” and then we apply that type of thinking to plants, and unfortunately, that just doesn’t work, right? I mean, you can have five people that all have joint pain, and you give them all turmeric, and some people it’s gonna really help them, and some people it’s not really gonna do anything, and some people it actually might make it a little worse.

Why is it?

[0:15:49]

Sajah: Well, it’s because plants aren’t just working on symptoms. Plants aren’t just vehicles for biochemical constituents. Plants have a whole way of acting upon the human organism that is not just chemical it’s what herbal traditions would refer to as “energetic” or “ecological”, right?

As a human being we have our body. It’s not just a machine. It’s not a whole bunch of gears working together; it’s not mechanistic. It’s a vital ecology. The human being is a reflection of nature, and what is nature? Well, nature is ecosystems. Nature is the weather, and those same aspects of ecosystems and weather and seasons all determine the state of our body.

And if we think of plants, well, plants grow in nature, right? They grow in ecosystems. They grow, and they thrive, and they leaf, and they flower, and they fruit, and they root, all according to the seasons and the sun and the moon and the stars and the way the earth is turning. That’s what generates the life of these plants, and so the way a plant heals us isn’t just through curcumin or saponins or alkaloids, there’s much more to the plant than in the chemical.

From more traditional approaches to herbal medicine, before they even had a concept of plant chemistry or pharmacology or things like that, people have been using plants to heal people. I think it’s really important to understand that those traditions have been around a lot longer than science, a lot longer than modern pharmacology, and people have successfully used plants to heal people through more of this ecological or energetic approach to understanding a plant.

[0:17:57]

Sajah: Thinking of that turmeric: you think of turmeric, well, you eat that root. It’s very spicy. It’s pungent. It has a lot of the volatile oils, and they’re very warming and it kind of heats up your stomach, and it moves your blood. It’s also really astringent, you know?

If anyone’s ever taken, like, turmeric powder in some water or something like, it dries your mouth out. You can get really dry from it. And so they say that’s kind of the energetics of that turmeric; it’s very warming, and it’s very drying. And so, you get someone that’s got arthritis, that joint pain, that inflammation. Maybe they’re really cold. They’ve got really pale skin, and they’re really cold,

and their joint pain flares up when it gets really cloudy and rainy and wet and damp outside. You'd say they have a damp pattern in their system, a cold, damp pattern in their system.

And you take that turmeric, but yes, biochemically lower inflammation, but *ecologically*, the ecosystem in the body and the ecosystem of the plant works together in a way that it balances that constitutional factor within a person. Whereas you get someone who maybe they also have joint pain, but they're super hot and inflamed and dry, and their tissues are agitated and irritated and all dried out, and you take that hot, dry turmeric, and boy, it just agitates that constitutional pattern, right?

So, I know I'm giving a really long answer to this question, but there's a lot to it because it's a whole... The thing is that we have to approach herbal medicine from a totally different orientation than we approach, oftentimes, just symptom-management or symptom treatment the way a doctor looks at us. We go to the doctor, and we say, "Hey, I got a headache!" and they're like, "Alright, here's this pill for this headache or just take some aspirin." It's, like, that doesn't work as an herbalist. We have to... For the most part, I would say most herbalists don't want to just put bandaids on symptoms. If we do want to put bandaids on symptoms, we can just go to the drugstore.

[0:20:15]

Sajah: For most of us, as herbalists, we want to work with plants in a way that is going to heal people; that's going to get into the root cause of that symptom. Like, what's behind the symptom? The symptom is just a superficial expression of something deeper going on in the body.

So from a holistic, or vitalist, perspective on healing, we want to see beyond the symptom. We want to see what is the root cause of that, and then we want to administer not just our plant, but our whole therapeutic protocol with diet and nutrition, and lifestyle, and using our minds and different types of techniques to heal ourselves. We want to orient all those to that root cause so that we're not suppressing the symptom, but we're cutting it at its root, and thereby, bringing about a deeper level of healing that I think is the level of healing people out there want, and that level of healing is beyond just our body; it's beyond just "Oh, I've got this annoying symptom or this really severe symptom."

I think that level of healing gets into the emotional side of our life, our psychological side of our life, even into the spiritual side of our life because we're a whole person; that you can't separate our mind from our body from our emotions from our spirit because we're just one being; a whole unto who we are. I think a "whole-istic" approach to herbal medicine should approach the whole person, not just the physical side.

So anyway, that's just a little bit on what I see as kind of being some of the core, maybe myths or approaches to herbalism that I think are really important for people to catch early on, so you can change your orientation and how you think about a plant, and how you think about a person into more of a holistic orientation and not so much in an allopathic orientation.

[0:22:32]

Amber: Yes, it's such an important paradigm shift. It, really, it's so much more intelligent and all-encompassing to look at it in that way rather than, like, as you said so much of modern

medicine is, just symptom management. It's just band-aids. It's not long-term healing or helping in any way.

I definitely, when I started, I was working at the Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op in the wellness section just because I felt called to learn about ways of healing the body and plants. I was definitely just like, "What's this pill good for?" You know? "What's this herb good for?" "I have this symptom, what should I take for that?" And it took years and years for me to understand how limiting that approach and that viewpoint was and your work has certainly helped me to make that shift.

And I really like in your book, *Evolutionary Herbalism*, this great breakdown of phases that herbalism has gone through throughout history: indigenous, vitalist, molecular, and evolutionary.

Would you mind just breaking down those four phases briefly?

Sajah: Yeah, totally. So, from my perspective, I was really thinking about what is herbalism? (*Sajah laughs*) Just really kinda stepping back and looking at what is this thing that we call herbalism?

And I was like, oh, well, this is a specific way in which human beings relate to the plant kingdom in the context of healing. When I was really thinking about, well, where did it all start? Well, it all starts in that relationship between people and plants, and wow, that relationship between people and plants has changed a lot throughout time.

So I kind of see these different stages in terms of how herbal medicine unto itself has transformed throughout history, and it all kind of begins at what I refer to as maybe indigenous herbalism, or maybe folk methods of herbalism. These are typically very regional-specific approaches to working with plants. Obviously, if we think of the very first human interaction with a plant, they didn't have books (*Sajah laughs*), or colleges to go to, or Google, or anything like that, right? What did they have? They had their senses. They had their heart. They had their sensory faculties, really, in order to decipher the properties of those plants.

So that initial phase in the evolution of herbalism was really focused on our direct relationship to the plants themselves, and that we could learn about the plants from the plants themselves, and I think this is a critically important aspect of herbal medicine that we have to bring back; that we let go of our reliance upon Google and the internet and book, or even what people say, what I say, even what all the experts say, even what every book in our library says. That's all good. I'm not saying to throw it all out, but we don't want it to replace us having an actual relationship with the living medicines that we rely on.

[0:26:06]

Sajah: So I think that's an important teaching from that first phase of herbal medicine. I don't have as much time as I'd like to, but there's a whole lot that can be said about each one of these phases but just for the sake of time, I'll move forward.

There we shift into what I consider more vitalist developments in herbal medicine or what we might refer to as "energetic" systems of herbalism. So, this is where we kind of see these very

regional-specific more possibly spiritual orientations toward herbs, while also being very practical at the same time. We see that more systems being developed. We see that whereas that first system is orientated around the direct perceptions of the heart to people and plants and how the whole orientation of herbalism is, here, in the vitalist space, we see this alignment between the heart and the mind, where more refined systems are created or schools or approaches to how medicine is practiced.

These are really what we tend to consider the traditions of herbal medicine that we can actually learn about in this modern world from the Gaelic-Greek model to the Unani-Tibetan system of the Middle East, to Chinese medicine, Ayurvedic medicine, Tibetan medicine, eclecticism, physiomedicalism, etcetera. These are all systematized approaches on how to work with plants in the healing context. Here we see and approach that understanding that plants don't just necessarily heal through a spirit as many of that first phase sees. Now, obviously, I'm making a lot of generalizations. There's a lot of different approaches in that first evolution of herbal medicine, but for the most part, we see here in the vitalist phase, we see that there's a vital intelligence within the body, and there is a vital intelligence within the plant.

And it is that vital intelligence, the ecology of the plant that shifts the ecology within the person that brings about its healing properties. Here we see in these traditions the focus on treating the whole person. We see a need to understand the whole person, not just their symptom, and addressing that person through our therapeutic model.

[0:29:00]

Sajah: Overtime, especially in the Western world, as our intellect is further refined and developed, and we see a gradual — what I consider— desecralization of a lot of traditional approaches that were spiritual in nature. We see alchemy turn into chemistry. We see astrology turn into astronomy. We see herbal medicine turn into drugs. We see this gradual, linear, reductionistic, scientific model take hold of the world.

And, you know, there's a period of time where herbal medicine essentially kind of disappeared in the early 1900s during the fall of some of the North American systems, physiomedicalism, eclecticism, homeopathy; all that became really unpopular and more conventional approaches, drug therapies coming out. Everyone's getting really excited about drugs and we see this kind of biomedical model take root. So that's what I see as that third phase in the evolution of herbalism is biomedical herbalism, right, which is really what you see as more dominant today. Obviously, there's people from all phases in this evolution working with plants, but what we see is more the standard orientation these days is, well, plants have chemicals. Humans are made of chemicals, and if you take these plants with these certain chemicals they'll help your symptoms is the simplified orientation of it.

I say that from the perspective of someone who studied a lot of pharmacology. I have a degree in herbal sciences from Bastyr University, so I really love and appreciate that biochemical approach; understanding the pharmacodynamics pharmacokinetics of how plants function in the human organism is **fascinating**. It's amazing to know how a plant travels through the body and binds to different receptors and adjust through the physiological mechanisms within us.

[0:31:22]

Sajah: It's incredible, but I think, while that can be very useful and fascinating information, I think it can also be very limiting from a clinical perspective because no one's going to come to you and say, "Hey! I feel like I need these certain enzyme levels to be increased in my body," or "I feel like my cyclooxygenase is really imbalanced, or..." (*Sajah laughs*) You know? No one's going to talk that way, and, like, most people don't think that way!

So the biomedical model I think is helpful for us to understand how plants work, but as far as a clinical, therapeutic model, I'm not sure it's the most helpful for the herbalist that wants to be helping other people with plants.

So then we move into the final phase which is what I refer to as "evolutionary herbalism" which isn't really anything new. It's just taking all three of those phases and seeing them not as being separate. That they're just different approaches to the same thing; different lenses of seeing the world from a scientific world to an energetic lens, to a spiritual lens.

We're all looking at the same thing, just using different language.

So from my perspective and my approach to plant medicine, you know, we can equally talk about biochemical constituents and in the next sentence we can talk about how a plant can facilitate in our spiritual growth and development, and in the next sentence, we can talk about how Ayurveda understands that plant; how Chinese medicine sees that plant; how medical astrology sees that plant and sees that there's a universality in terms of how we look at and approach a human being, how we look at and approach a medicinal plant, and that no matter what lens we're looking at them through, that there is a universal truth that's present there that we can draw upon so that we understand the true nature of a person, the true nature of a disease, the true nature of a plant, the true nature of how it heals us, and not get too stuck on the means we get to that truth.

So that's what I think, what I see, evolutionary herbalism as being an important orientation because it helps to dissolve the boundaries and the barriers, and the, "Well, this is the right way of looking at it, and this is the wrong way of looking at it." It's like, well, no, they're all good! (*Sajah laughs*)

[0:34:05]

Sajah: We just need to get beyond the language barriers that I think human beings naturally put up. Not to mention that in the evolutionary model that these plants are equally powerful in their healing virtues to heal our body, our organ system, our tissues, while at the same time helping us to move through that deeper level of healing that I think we're all put here on this earth to do. The traumas that we have; the struggles that we experience in our hearts and in our minds; the ways that we need to grow as a human on this earth, on this path that we're on, that the plants can be supportive to us in that process for us.

I think you see that a lot, too, in herbalism. You'll get people over here, herbalists over here, that are really scientific or they're really clinical and they just work with symptoms in the body, and on the other end of the spectrum, you get people that are maybe more I guess, for lack of a better

term, a little more “woo-woo” in their herbalism, right? And I don’t say that in an offensive way ‘cause I’m “woo” to the max, but I’m also scientific to the max. (*Sajah laughs*)

But we’re they’re more helping people with their minds and their emotions and maybe they’re working with more subtle forms of herbal medicine, like flower essences. I see that those two can come together, and that’s the way I see the evolutionary herbalist is that we can strike a balance between all these seemingly different perspectives and orientations.

So that’s kinda how I see a little bit of those phases in the evolution of herbal medicine itself.

Amber: That’s so brilliant. I love big picture, historical thinking, and again, this just really speaks to your incredible ability to synthesize big ideas and bring them together, and that’s what you’re doing in evolutionary herbalism.

And I just could not agree more for what I have found for myself is that when I really truly start to heal something, it is because I am coming at it from a number of different angles, and oftentimes they’re unexpected and there is the mythic-mindedness, the emotions, the physical stuff, the movement, such big things.

I often say that healing is open-ended and endless. So, it’s open-ended in that we don’t really... we can’t be sure where it’s gonna come from, and it comes from unexpected ways, and we have to stay open to what comes up on the path. And it’s endless because we never heal back into who or what we were. We’re constantly healing into newer versions of ourselves, hopefully, wiser versions of ourselves.

[0:36:57]

Amber: And it reminds me of something that you say, which is “To study healing is to study life itself.”

So can you expand on that and in that, too, with the word “life” in there, flush out more what vitalism is?

Sajah: Yeah. I just want to — before I get it into that— I really like how you just said that; that healing is endless, right? And it’s that we’re healing into better versions of who we are, new versions of ourselves.

I think one thing about that that comes to mind is that it’s really easy for us to think in terms of “our past” or like, “Oh, I’m this way because this horrible shitty thing happened in my childhood, and I have to regress back there. I gotta relive that” or “I gotta process that” or I gotta... going back, going back, going back.

And that can be good to an extent. It’s important for us to acknowledge the areas of our life where we’ve experienced trauma, where we need to forgive ourselves, where we need to forgive other people, where we need to come to terms with what’s happened, and not let it adversely affect us. But I think there also comes a time where we don’t **have** to go back there anymore. We just need to move forward. We need to vision forward into “Well, who and how do I want to be in my life from here on out?”

So, anyways, that's just kind of — what you said — is really making me think about that, and I really agree with that, and I think I really like how you said that. It was really clever.

[0:38:36]

Sajah: So anyways.

Yes, life. Yes, healing...

So, to me, the herbalism — one thing I always like to tell my students — is that the herbalist is first and foremost forever a student of nature because to me, as an herbalist, we're working with life. We are working with the life of a person when someone is sitting in front of us and asking us for help, they're talking about their life. They're talking about their struggles. They're talking about the things they deal with that maybe make them suffer and struggle in their life, and they want to feel better. They want things to be better, and so we're working with that person's life on the big-picture level, but on a deeper level, we're working with the individual life of an organ system.

Say they have a certain health problem in their stomach. Well, there's a life force in that stomach. There's an intelligence in that stomach. There's an ecosystem there. There's an archetype in that organ system that's an expression of life that wants to find its own balance, too, within the greater ecosystem of the body.

And so, that's one way I like to think about the human being, too, is that yes, we have our life, but we're also composed of all these organs, and systems, and tissues that have **their** own life that wants to be healed as well.

[0:40:10]

Sajah: And then we're looking at: what are we using as our medicine? We're working with these plants, these living — I always like to think of plants as the living, healing intelligence of the earth; that the earth is alive, and the earth is intelligent, and it generates these plants grow up out of the soil and they have this life, right?

And they're drawing in the life from the water. They're drawing in the life from the soil in the earth. They're drawing in the life and light from the sun and the moon and the stars. The wind is blowing through them. They're taking in all of this life around them, and they're transforming it into this new form that just so happens to have this very profound effect on us as people when we put it into our body.

So there's a transference of that life intelligence from nature into the plant, and then from plant into the person. To me, this is all life. To me, the student of healing is a student of life itself. The way in which the human organism is put together is a reflection of that life. Like I said earlier, I think in more of that biochemical, biomedical model, we kind of see the human being as a gear or a machine.

Whereas in more vitalist approaches to life and to healing in the medicine, we see that the human organism is like a garden or like an ecosystem, or like a reflection of nature. It's like our kidneys are

like vast lakes, and our lymphatics are like the oceans, and our bones are like the Rocky Mountains and our lungs are like that wind that's moving. All the different... the way our blood flows through our bodies are like the rivers. Every aspect of who we are is reflected in the natural world.

So we can understand health and disease simply by understanding nature. That example I was giving earlier about how turmeric is working, and you give people with different types of joint pain, but maybe they all have joint pain, but underneath it, there's a different root cause that we, in Traditional Western Herbalism, typically refer to as like a "tissue state." It's like the constitution of the tissue in terms of how we oftentimes describe the weather: is it hot or is it cold? Is it wet or is it dry? These are very traditional ways of understanding the human being and their relative excesses and deficiencies.

[0:43:27]

Sajah: I love constitutional systems because it really is just kind of how we describe nature and the weather and the seasons. It's like what people small talk about, right? "Eh it's really rainy out today and it's cold. And it's really hot today!" (*Sajah laughs*)

And you know it's kind of this joke. Everybody small talks about the weather and I'm like, right, because that's so much of our experience of life, right? It's how does it feel? How does that weather impact us?

For myself, when it's really hot and dry outside, I start to feel really pissed off. (*Sajah laughs*)

It's like here we are in Northwest Washington, and they talk about seasonal affective disorder because it's cloudy and grey and it's cold and it's wet, and that affects people's minds. It's because these energetic concepts of temperature and moisture are immediately impacting not just our consciousness and our mind, but our bodies. So this is where studying life, studying ecosystems is one of the best ways how a medicinal plant works, because plants grow in those ecosystems, but also, how a human organism can become imbalanced.

So I think a really great example of this is looking at water. If we look at how water moves on the earth, we think of what makes that good, healthy water, where it's flowing. It's contained, and it's flowing where it's supposed to be flowing, but sometimes there's situations where that water maybe it starts to slow down and stagnate. What happens to water when it stops moving? Well, it slows, and it stagnates, and it becomes more prone to accumulating bacteria. You think of a swamp, and there's mosquitoes, and flies, and algae growing, and it sometimes has that smell to it.

Well, that can happen in the body. We call it in Ayurveda they call it Kapha. In Chinese medicine they call it "dampness". In Western herbalism, they call it "damp stagnation" where the fluids have become stagnant and putrify, and become much more prone to infection and swelling, and from an herbal perspective, it requires the type of plants we refer to as alteratives or blood-purifying plants to remove that stagnation and that toxicity from the system.

Or you look at a desert. You get that really, cracked earth in the desert, and how everything kind of shrivels up. You take a plump fruit and you dry it. What happens? Well, it shrivels and it tightens,

and it wrinkles and it loses its plumpness, and it gets weak. Well, that happens in our system, too. We get too dried out, and the tissues begin to shrivel and weaken, and in Western herbalism what we refer to as atrophy. Because that water delivers nutrients and carries away waste products and it's what hydrates and gives life to that tissue when it gets really dry it starts to become weak and deficient.

So I'm just trying to paint the picture of how nature reflects what's going on within our body, and this is, to me, one of the most important things for a holistic herbalist to do is to really be able to not just say, "Oh this person has a cough" but what kind of cough is it? Why do they have that cough? Is it a really phlegmy, mucousy cough? Is it a really dry, hard, harsh cough? Because that's going to inform you what types of plants you want to use.

If someone's really phlegmy and mucousy, and damp, well, you don't really want to give them a bunch of marshmallow root or licorice root 'cause those are really wet herbs. Damp producing herbs. You want to use more of a drying, kind of stimulating plant, like lomatium or horehoun, or different, more stimulant, expectorant type remedies.

[0:47:54]

Sajah: So the ecosystem of the tissue becomes the central orientation for a vitalist practitioner of not just herbalism, but just a vitalist practitioner of healing. We have to understand what's the ecosystem behind the system, and as soon as we can decipher what the ecosystem behind the symptom is, the choosing what plant is going to be remedial for that person becomes much more refined. It's not just, "Oh they have a cough! Well, pick an herb that's good for the lungs." It's like, well, that's a LOT of different plants, right?

But when you understand, "Oh, this is a hot, dry cough," well, all of a sudden we just whittled down that list of plants to maybe twenty or ten. So this is a way of getting more precise and specific in what herbs we will find to be effective for a person, and that's really what gets us to work through some of those issues of "Oh, well, I tried this herb, and it didn't work."

Oftentimes, the reason behind the "oh, I have this symptom, tried this herb, didn't work" thing is that wasn't the right herb for you, or that herb wasn't appropriately matched to the constitution of that person or the specific tissue state behind that symptom. So this is one of the main approaches for how we get much more specific in finding the right remedy for the right person, not just groping in the dark or picking herbs at random, or just basing it off of, well, "Oh, these are good for this symptom."

[0:49:36]

Amber: They say herbalism is vast, and I love that about it, as, like, an endlessly curious person, there's just so many things you can learn, so many places you can go, so many ways to be an herbalist. I think that maybe some beginners might be overwhelmed by the vastness and hearing you talk...

Sajah: — Oh for sure! (*Sajah laughs*) --

Amber: ... I'm sure a lot of people are like, "I'll never be as smart as Sajah or know everything he does!" but that is what is so, just, beautiful about the framework that you share with people is that

these correspondences between nature, between/in the bodies and the plants, and everything, and you have lots of visuals for this in your online course and in your books. Your book makes it simple. It really does simplify something that seems so complicated and complex at first and just puts it in a language and in a framework that we know and that we've known since childhood and you can really start to drop the imposter syndrome around "I'll never learn all this stuff." Like, no, you will never learn all this stuff. Sajah does not know everything there is to know about herbalism.

Sajah: For sure!

(both laugh)

Far from it!

Amber: No one does! *(both laugh)*

Sajah: Yeah, it's endless, right? It's as endless as nature is, and I think that's the thing: it's easy for people to get super overwhelmed with all this because, yeah, there is a lot to learn. To me, it's like there needs to be a balance between your intellectual studies and your direct experience. I think there's a really unique phrase in the English language where we talk about knowing something by heart, and I think that's a really interesting phrase.

We've all heard that "Oh, we know it by heart," but on the other side of that you have, "Oh, do you memorize something." They're kind of similar, right? But what's the difference between memorizing something and knowing something by heart?

When you know something by heart it's integrated into who you are. It's a way of experiencing something when you "know it by heart." It's one thing to memorize that Oregon grape root, and dandelion, and gentian, and mugwort are all bitter, but that's fleeting. You can forget that when you memorize it.

But when you dig up dandelion root, you dig up gentian root, you dig up Oregon grape root, you pick some mugwort leaf, and you put those all in your mouth and you experience it, **now** you know it by heart. You'll never forget that.

[0:52:22]

Sajah: And I think one of the reasons that I think people get overwhelmed by herbalism is that A) they just focus on the intellectual studies. They read books basically, go to workshops; go to conferences, which is great, but I think our intellectual knowledge needs to be balanced with our experiential understanding.

For myself, like, I don't want just knowledge of plants. Like knowledge is great. I want **understanding** because understanding, when worked with over time, turns into wisdom, and I would much rather be a wise herbalist than a knowledgeable herbalist, and so I think there's a need for the intellectual knowledge, the experiential understanding.

I think one of the reasons a lot of people get overwhelmed when it comes to studying herbalism is because they don't understand — they don't have a framework. They don't have a pathway for study. They don't know what the different stages of development are. Like, how do you know

when you've moved beyond just a beginner-level to more of an intermediate level? And what are the things that you need to learn and understand in order to move from one phase of development to another phase of development? Most people don't talk about that. They don't take a step back and look at the overarching progression of the stages of development of an herbalist — and this is something I've thought of a lot and really strived to incorporate into my teachings — so that we can know where we are, and then know what we need to do, and learn and understand and integrate in order to move to that next level on our plant path.

So that's something I've really thought about a lot. I think really it just comes down to frameworks, right? What are the things, like, okay, here are the things that you need to understand and experience in order to be solid and stable in this level of development? So then, you're ready to take on that next level of challenge, basically, to get to that point where... And you know, like you said, there's a lot of different kinds of herbalists.

My approach is generally wanting to teach people how to help other people with plants. I think that always starts with helping yourself and healing yourself so that you can have that experience yourself and then, therefore, cultivate trust in the plants and have an unshakeable faith and belief in the power of the plants. But ultimately, my goal is to teach people how to be able to work with the plants to help out their friends, their family, their community, their clinic so that just more and more people are getting healed through the plants.

[0:55:28]

Amber: Yeah, my brand of herbalism is more just of a home herbalist. I use plants for myself and my family every day and then as someone who brings different minds together to talk about this on this podcast and someone who shares resources around herbalism.

So, I'm not a clinical herbalist. I don't help people one-on-one. My friends call me, and sometimes I can help them a little bit, but I just never felt called to that. And yet, I have gained so much from your teachings and your frameworks, as you've said, because yeah, we can memorize these long lists of things, but that's a lot of effort and it takes a lot of time, and it usually doesn't stick very well, but when we have the right framework in place for taking in information, suddenly everything can just fall into place.

Like that knowing of the heart you write about this in your book "gnosis cardiaca", just as you were saying, the frameworks can shift things in such a way that suddenly information that before seemed unknowable or too much is just right there and is living in your very cells. So, thank you for helping people to learn in that way.

Sajah: You're welcome. Thank you for taking it in! (*Sajah laughs*)

Amber: Yeah, so on that note, let's share about — so you've got your book, *Evolutionary Herbalism: Science, Spirituality, and Medicine from the Heart of Nature*. So if you guys are into what Sajah talked about today, I mean, this is so thorough. I really feel like this is a reference book. (*Sajah laughs*)

This is something I come back to again and again and again. There's images and these tables of correspondence and there's so much to this book! (*Amber laughs*) And then you have numerous online courses, too, but the one that I have taken, and again, I feel like this online course which is

available to people forever. It drives me crazy when people have online courses that they only give you limited access to because I feel like your course is, like, I swear. I was just looking at one this morning, and I was like, “What?! I lose access after a year? Why would you do that to me?!”

Sajah: Right.

Amber: (*Amber laughs*) I return to your course again and again as a reference. Like, “Oh what was that thing he shared there? What was that resource he shared there?” And even though, again, the course, *The Vitalist Practitioner Program*, is not focused, or, is **more** focused on people helping other people in a clinical setting or however they’re doing it, for me, it’s like a personal health reference library. (*Amber laughs*)

Whenever anything comes up for me or my family, I’m digging right into your section on that organ system.

Sajah: Mhmm. Yeah.

Yeah, and that’s really the way I designed it to be; as kind of a digital video/audio reference book that it’s just easy to find everything that you need. Oh, this thing comes up. Oh, you got a client that’s got this going on or you, yourself have this going on, you can go right to that section, go to that area, and learn everything that you need to know in order to help yourself, your friends, your family.

[0:58:56]

Sajah: That’s the thing. To me, if you’re helping someone with herbs, that, to me, is clinical. It doesn’t mean you gotta lab coat on or you got an office in town. If someone says, “Hey, I’ve got this health problem. Can you help me out?” And you’re like, “Oh yeah, here’s let’s talk for a little bit,” then you’re in a clinical setting in that moment.

So, I know the word clinical freaks a lot of people out, but I just see it as, eh, if you’re helping someone out with a plant, that, to me, is clinical.

Amber: Totally.

Yeah, it feels like having this amazing mentor right at my fingertips at all times. So I absolutely love the course. It’s coming up soon. I’ll have the link in the show notes, but maybe you can tell folks about the free mini-course that you and your wife, Whitney, give away to people as sort of a preview to the larger course. This is just, again, so relevant to anyone wondering, “What’s my next step on the plant path?”

I just... you were talking earlier, too, when someone’s sitting in front of you, and the whole cough dynamics. The second video on that is just so brilliant. So yeah, please tell us about these three videos.

Sajah: Yeah, totally.

Well, you know, for us at Evolutionary School of Herbalism, me and my wife, we really believe that herbal medicine should be accessible to anyone and everyone, regardless of just where they're at, culturally, financially, etcetera. So we put a lot of effort into spreading as much information out there as we can for free. So that's why we have our blog and our podcast, and every so often we do these a little bit more in-depth free mini-courses around a particular subject.

So this one that you're referring to, we call it *The Vitalist Herbalism Mini-Course*, and it touches upon some of these core dynamics that we've been talking about through our discussion today in terms of what does a holistic vitalist approach to herbal medicine look like. Really addressing some of those core (I think) myths people carry and how to shift their perspective and orientation of herbal medicine so they don't fall into what I refer to as the "allopathic herbalism" trap, which is really a mindset thing.

In the mini-course, too, I lay out a pretty solid framework for how to work with people. Again, that could just be a way of thinking about your own health concerns or maybe someone, maybe a family member or friend, start really thinking through:

- How do you work with a person?
- What are the questions you need to ask?
- How do you not get lost in the intake process?
- What's the information that you need to know about a person in order to determine what are the right remedies to give them?

And also, in the third video, we really dig into the process of formulation. A lot of herbalists wonder about:

- How do you combine herbs together?
- What are the layers of a formula?
- How do you think through customizing an herbal protocol for a person?

So that third lesson in there really goes into the pillars of strategic formulation and how to go about doing that in a way that goes beyond just throwing a bunch of random herbs in a bottle and hoping that it's gonna work, but really, combining and blending plants together in a way that has a deeper level of strategy behind it.

So this is something that we offer to the herbal community for free. We generally do these mini-courses annually, and it's just something that we're really passionate about and we really love to support people on their plant path with these mini-courses. I'm really proud, too, that we've also created a workbook that goes along with it that people can download and print off some pretty in-depth notes and activities and things like that to help you work through some of the concepts and practices that you learn throughout the mini-course.

Amber: Yeah, I find that so helpful to take in information through different vehicles.

So there's your videos — which are long by the way (*Amber laughs*). Mini-course doesn't mean these are 10-minute videos, they are REALLY long and in-depth, and then to also have the visual of the handouts there and especially with, like, the pillars of strategic formulation, the third lesson, you have a beautiful graphic that really, just, immediately **hits** like, "Oh! Okay, I see now. I see what he's talking about. I see the smartest way to formulate my medicines."

And I've personally found that lesson so extremely helpful in formulating my own medicines.

Sajah: Good. Nice! That's the goal. We really like these to be in-depth, right? It's called a mini-**course**. We really like you to be able to get some solid takeaways and good teachings that you can put into use now and not just a little teaser that makes you just want more, but not enough that you can't do anything with. We really like to provide some solid content that you can put into use and action right after you're done watching the video.

[1:04:30]

Amber: Yeah, exactly. You guys, you do give away so much good information to people. Sometimes I really stop and think about how many hours you must have sat behind a computer...

(Sajah laughs)

... Building everything you've built, writing everything you've written, writing your book! It's really amazing, and it truly is a gift to the herbal community.

Sajah: Thank you!

Amber: And the name of the podcast is [The Plant Path](#), and yeah, where else can people find you?

Sajah: Well, our main website there is [Evolutionary Herbalism](#) and as you mentioned our podcast, [The Plant Path](#), and we've also got our YouTube channel, Facebook, Instagram, etcetera. Just search us @EvolutionaryHerbalism, and yeah, lots of free materials up all over there on the interwebs.

And of course, our book (or my book) can be found on Amazon or on the North Atlantic book website if you want to buy it directly from the publisher. I'm super excited to announce that an audiobook is going to be hopefully coming out this year, 2020, for Evolutionary Herbalism. So it's a pretty exciting piece of news I just got the other day! So I'm looking forward to that.

Amber: That's great!

Sajah: I'm a big audiobook guy.

Amber: Are you going to be narrating?

Sajah: I'm not. You know, they tend to like to get professional narrators. I kind of wanted to, but then I was like, "You know, honestly, *(Sajah laughs)*, I've read this book so many times." I mean, that book was a **serious** undertaking. *(Amber laughs)*

I've read that book 10-12 times already. I'm like, I don't really wanna read it anymore. I'm just going to be midway through and see, like, OH there's that sentence I couldn't figure out how to write better, you know? *(Sajah laughs)*

Amber: Yep. Oh, totally.

Sajah: Probably better for someone with a little bit of a nicer voice to listen to than mine, too. So yeah, I'm looking forward to that.

Amber: That is really exciting. Yeah, 'cause sometimes you just gotta take that information in through your ears, if you're driving in the car or whatever, you know. It's... I love audiobooks and podcasts.

Speaking of, thank you so much, Sajah, for being on my podcast twice now!

Sajah: Oh, you're welcome. It's a real honor to be here, and I just really appreciate all that you're sharing. We listen to your podcast quite a bit in our household here, and it's just really cool hearing all the different knowledge and wisdom that you share through this channel and all of the incredible hearts and minds that you connect people to through your work.

So it's really, really incredible, and I just am really appreciative of that, and thanks for having me as a guest. It's a real honor to be here.

--

[1:07:20]

[Outro]

Amber: Okay. I hope you are feeling deeply inspired and excited and ready to move forward without any imposter syndrome, any old, untrue story that the plant path is not for you.

So as promised, here are my top five reasons to be an herbalist:

1. **You always have a skill or a medicine to gift or trade.** This is huge. Whenever you meet a special new person or see something you'd like to acquire or find yourself in a situation where someone is in need, you have something both magical and useful to offer. A bottle of medicine offered as a gift or a trade, and/or knowledge of healing ways are always welcome and appreciated by others
2. **You get to live out the mythic archetype of the healer or the medicine person,** or whatever you want to call it. Okay, maybe you haven't always been intrigued by the old witch in the forest, or the great wizard in the castle, but I sure have been. From Baba Yaga with her mortar and pestle to Aragorn, a mere mortal, using athelas to heal Frodo's wound, this is an ancient human archetype that resonates for many of us and getting to embody it brings pure joy. Forgive my poorly pronounced elvish, there, y'all.
3. **So much money saved on healthcare.** I've been able to take care of every single issue my daughters have had at home for 13 years now. To be clear, we've gotten diagnosis and misdiagnosis once or twice, and I will happily take them in if something is ever beyond my scope, but so far, every illness, ailment, and injury has been easy for me to tend to with some basic home herbalism. Not to mention, the preventative money-saving aspects of living an herbal lifestyle.
4. **Being outside, getting your hands dirty, and communing with flowers is scientifically proven to make you happy.** This is one of those modern science proofs of common sense kind of thing. Humans evolved being outdoors in direct communion with nature most of

their days. We are biologically identical to those ancestral humans and still benefit enormously from having the sun on our face, and the dirt under our fingernails, and the scent of plant volatile oils in our nostrils. The herbal life is an antidote to modern common ailments such as depression, anxiety, chronic pain, and so much more.

5. **It's a growth industry.** Interest in herbalism and natural medicine is **exploding** right now, and that is not going to stop anytime soon. The Western medicine model, while incredibly useful for some things: diagnosis, surgery, emergency care, has failed massively when it comes to actually keeping people healthy in our daily lives. Herbalism, especially vitalist herbalism, is feeding the hunger that increasing numbers of folks feel to return to a truly vibrant state of health and well-being.

[1:10:34]

Amber: And there's so much more I could say, y'all. Every time I think about this, or just reading it now, I'm like, "OH, plus this, plus that." There's just endless reasons why it's just lovely to be in communion and relationship with plants.

So the world needs more herbalists. The world needs you. These are troubled times, and troubled times call for potent healers.

So, you know if you're being called or not. This path isn't for everyone, but if your heart says it's for you, be sure to check out the free videos if you hear this before some time in early February 2020, the Vitalist Herbalism Mini-Course. You will learn so much and just benefit so much from this framework that Sajah has laid out.

And if it's past that period, then check out the Vitalist Herbal Practitioner program, and I will have the correct link in the show notes here, depending on what time of year it is, what program is available, and of course, we'll have links to all of Sajah and Whitney's stuff, so you can take it all in and benefit so much.

When I first decided to pursue herbalism it was such a leap. I had a baby. I was broke. Everyone thought I was crazy. I borrowed money. I drove two and a half hours with my baby in the car one way to get to class, but I just felt the call. I just trusted it. I just couldn't not follow this pathway that was singing to me, and I'm so glad I did, and I am going to leave you with maybe my favorite quote ever. Of course, it's Rumi. So cliché but of course, amazing and good, and there's a reason we all love him.

*Let yourself be silently drawn by the strange pool of what you really love. It will **not** lead you astray.*

- Rumi

(Exit Music: acoustic guitar folk song "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Sioux)

[Closing]

[1:12:51]

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 a fun and lighthearted quiz, but the results are really in-depth and designed to bring you into closer alignment with 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/MedicineStories. 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 Sioux. It's from her beautiful song "Wild Eyes." Thank you, Mariee.

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