

Aviva: Hello. I am Aviva from Dogwood Studios and I have with me today Carmela Mager and she is a wonderful, one of the oldest Chinese medicine and acupuncturist in Chapel Hill. She has been practicing for over 25 years and is the owner and founder of The Acupuncture Healing Center which has been serving our community since 2007. Carmella is going to walk us through a little bit of what is traditional Chinese medicine as we go back and forth with some questions. Does that sound good, Carmela? To get started with some questions?

Carmela: Yes

Aviva: Wonderful. The first one is: You have a wealth of knowledge on your website. When you go to your website, The Acupuncture Healing Center's website, we see that you write "your body speaks". Can you by any chance explain a little bit about how your body might speak and how traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture work?

Carmela: The moment the client comes into the practice, this is the moment of me connecting with them. When we think about words, the word speak, you think about the voice of somebody or the speech but another way of thinking about it is, the body and how the body is holding its first impression, when I look at the person. Before I became a practitioner of Chinese medicine, I learned Alexander technique. I learned the Feldenkrais Method. I learned some body work, Shiatsu and reflexology. Alexander technique and Feldenkrais works with the body in the mind, it teaches how to connect through movement to the understanding of the body and how the body can hold itself. If we are stressed we see the shoulders being very tight or we see the face being lines in the face that are very showing the person is under some stress. In learning about reflexology and Shiatsu is another type of method that we can look a little bit deeper into the body, which means the body actually gives us a lot of signs and symptoms, one of which we are very familiar with is the pain and this is the one that we relate to it very much. But when we look at the feet sometimes you see the lines changing. And since these lines are actually reflecting an energy field or an organ, we can actually learn a lot about what's going inside of the body. This is what I meant by the body speaks.

This is where I tune in, I zoom in, and look at what is going on. What I do, my first impression, I look at their eyes. Are the eyes happy or the eyes sad? Are they drooping? What is the color of your face? Is the face pale, green, dark, or yellow? Is there laughter or just paleness or grayness? A gray face? I look at the movement. Is there limping? I listen to their voice. Is the voice loud? If it is quiet or frail?

I try to smell to see if he has any interesting smell. Smell can show us if he's anything, we say for example, a very strong smell which most people are very familiar with is bad breath. If there is a bad breath, I know from Chinese Medicine, that means stomach heat. It is coming from the stomach. The stomach is not feeling very well. Sometimes, I think about what is going on with their sinuses? Could it be that the smell is coming from their sinuses? Could it have something to do with issues with their gums or their teeth? So all of this is what I meant by the body speaks. The body is sending me messages.

Aviva: It sounds like you are also a little bit of an investigator. That you take observations.

Carmela: Right. This is truly the right way I call myself. At the first visit, I'm an investigator. I try to bring as much as knowledge as I can, and take from the client as much as they are able to provide. So that I can come to the closest diagnosis of Chinese Medicine. So I can say what is really going on here? Is it an internal condition? Is it an external condition? Is it an excess condition? Is it heat? Cold? So basically all of these systems are teaching me to slowly slowly build up this person. State of Mind. State of health that they are in at the moment. All so I can be with them at the moment and be able to ask the right question so I can guide my treatment based on what the individual, this one, needs.

Aviva: That's wonderful. And going along with asking the right question to find what treatment. You highlight that rather than just address your symptoms, Chinese medicine regards the entire body as a system that needs to be brought into balance. So how do you do that? How do you bring a body into balance and how do you start doing the treatments?

Carmela: Chinese medicine is a complete system. The practitioner learns how to diagnose and then how to provide or execute treatment. And treatments can come from herbals or nutrition suggestions. Could even be movement therapy. Like for you it would be great to do yoga or may it would be great to do Feldenkrais or you need physical therapy. Or you need any of the therapies that I'm familiar with. I am aware this integration can be very very helpful to the client.

And then after I do the first interview, the client lays on the table, which is another old method that has been unfortunately forgotten. When I went to a physician as a young child, he would check my abdomen, check my liver and my stomach. He will look at me. These days we are being seen through the eyes of the computer over the table

and we are not being touched. This is the beauty of this medicine. The person lays down. Usually, covered around the waist wearing underwear. The abdomen has a few regions that are reflecting the internal organs. I check the liver. I check the gallbladder, the stomach, the point of emotion. There are two reasons that I do this. One is to make sure that there is not any swelling, any scar tissue or any discoloration in the abdomen and the body which can show some disease progress the client is not aware of. I don't diagnose if it looks like something for a dermatologist and immediately refer them. But I do look for any discoloration which means something or could be sometimes a type of bloating that doesn't look very healthy so I address this and ask questions. This is the second way of actually building the second level of information. Okay then, when I am done with the abdomen, I check spine and the neck. I check the SCM muscles a lot to make sure that we are not dealing with high blood pressure and heart diseases. If these muscles are very tight and then I can ask them the next question, "how is your blood pressure?" Is your heart ok?

And then the next level is actually, "what is your family's history?" This is very very important information. This is the old DNA information that the practitioner was gathering from the client. If you have a family history with diabetes, it is much more likely you can develop diabetes. And some of your symptoms are prediabetes symptoms or a heart condition or high blood pressure symptoms.

Diseases take a long time to present themselves. Unfortunately, it is not that we get an alarm system when the cancer cell goes crazy or when we are going to become diabetic. It takes years and years for the body to present. By the time the body presents itself, sometimes it is too late or it takes much more effort to fix it.

So then after I'm done with this piece, I go and I checked in the tongue which is divided into sections: the side of the tongue is the liver and gallbladder, the tip of the tongue is the heart, the middle of the tongue if has a very strong crack it's usually says something about the quality of the digestion, and the back of the tongue usually is the kidney and the urinary bladder function. So again, if you turn the tongue over, the farthest away from the tongue is our lower part of the body, the middle is the middle of the body and the front is basically the upper body. So if somebody has a tip that is very red, you start worrying about their heart. Or if something [tip of the tongue] could be very red, you can think about their lung and their lung condition in the heart. And it is not the heart as a function it can be the emotional heart. It can be the emotional manifestation of the heart. If somebody has disturbed sleep, you will find it in the tip of the tongue.

After I'm done with this piece, now I go to the next one. And the next one is the hardest work because most of the clients when they come in, they are what I call "overdue". Overdue means that they already are seeing a physician or have a visit with the specialist. And now they are a little bit nervous. "Okay, what is wrong with me? Why do I have no energy? Why am I always anxious? Why am I always in pain? Why can't I have a good quality of life?" Basically this is what they're looking for when they finally reach out to see me. Here is where I come in and I say, "Who is this person?"

We have two ways of looking at it: is it a yin condition or is it a yang condition? And I would like to explain myself here. The true yin is cold in nature. The true yang is a warm condition. But then there is deficiency to consider. When there is yin deficiency there is dryness, false heat. For example, menopausal women. Menopausal women have a false heat. Deficiency yin we say. They are dry. They are thirsty. They are actually cold but from time to time they get this flash of redness and they feel warm all over the body. This is not true heat. This is a false heat. This is in a way, some of the hormones are going deficient. They call it estrogen. We called it the yin. You need to nourish. There are a group of wonderful herbs that we put together to nourish and reduce and subside this false heat which helps one to sleep better. These women always complain about, "I don't sleep well. I wake up and I'm so hot. And then I'm so cold. And then I need to put my covers back."

When you say yang deficiency, we look at much more as we age and we become frail. Always cold, brittle bones, low voice. Your voice goes down. No energy to speak. Yang gives you energy. It is the fire. It is the sun. This is energy, right, goes down. For some people, it can be due to their constitution. They are born with the deficiency, the gene. They come to the world, the way I described my clients is like a bank account. You come to the world and you have a bank account. It all depends on the way you are being raised. If there is too much abuse, the bank account goes down. If the individual abuses with too much alcohol, cigarettes or drugs, the bank account goes down. If someone unfortunately has a bad car accident or a bad concussion, the account would be declined because it really takes a lot of energy to recover from these injuries.

Then we go and we say, "is the condition internal or is the condition external?" What I have learned from many years of practicing is actually most of the conditions that I see are really external. Is it something that you absorbed into the body like a pathogen? It could be a car accident or it could be emotional distress. Or it could be poor food or someone who lived in polluted areas and were taking in poison for one reason or another. Now we know that paint with lead is very bad for us. It can cause cancer. Many years ago we did not know. And so on.

So a lot of the insult or disbalance in the body comes from the external pathogen, or external distress. It is not just pathogens. It causes distress on the body which changes the terrain of the body. So the body needs to deal with the changes. The body needs a strong constitution or support. The way I asked the question, the better is the support of the individual could be family, the children, it can be the neighbors, whomever you are with. The more you are supported, the more likely they can overcome the insult. If not, sometimes it's much harder.

Then we check if it's a cold or heat condition. Cold condition means that most likely I look into the true cold, like frozen bites or things like this someone has. When you talk about heat, I don't know how many people know that there is toxic heat. The sun is an example of toxic heat, heat that you have been exposed to too much and depletes the body. There are excess conditions or deficient conditions. The excess condition is too much heat. You see people that are red faced, a little bit angry or have a little frustration and the red nose. Now it's okay. If there is too much heat in the body, the question is then, "Is their liver an issue? Is their stomach an issue? Where are they storing the heat? In which organ?"

The other one that I try to understand, that is very important, is the Circadian rhythm. When is the time of the day or at night that some individual doesn't feel right? We know about someone who says, "I always wake up at 3 in the morning." Between 1 and 3 in the morning is the liver time. It's a wonderful time for the liver to recover from the day, from toxicity or whatever the liver needs to process, such as medication. During this time, if somebody wakes up and cannot turn to the right or to the left and get back to sleep, this means they need some help in the liver. If someone wakes up later in the day, around 7, 8 or 9 which is the digestion time and they say, "I don't feel like eating. I think I have a little nausea." This means that their stomach is not healthy, the element earth. Each organ has an element. The element earth is not in balance. I need to think. Is it being insulted by other organs or the individual organ?

What do I mean by insult? If the stomach is insulted by the liver, they can have much more nausea and a bitter taste in the mouth. If the heart is insulting the stomach, the fire, there is too much fire. Again, it is much more of "I don't feel like eating because I'm so anxious. When I'm depressed, I lose my appetite." Okay, so this is where all this puzzle that I need to build during the session in order to be able to understand it.

Then comes this wonderful art of using the 12 meridians or using the pathways. They are superficial in the body, but they, in the end, enter into the organs and they nourish

the individual organs. So when I say stomach channel, it starts at some point in the face and then it will turn all over the body ending in the feet. But in the way it travels, it enters the organ and nourishes it. Ok if I know it is a stomach issue, then I have to figure out if it is excess or deficient. Then I put in the needles.

One of the things that I like to say about the points, to make the points available to the Westerners, they gave them numbers. If someone lives in Australia or Vietnam or anywhere in the world, we all know when we say large intestine four everyone knows what the location is. We all know what to point to. But it's not really how this medicine or the points will be described when we go to all the books. In the ancient books, they actually have names. And more than that. The letters, they don't have ABC letters. Through the letters you can understand the story of this point. They are symbols. Their letters are symbols and when they put them together, they are a full description of why we use them or why the ancient physicians used the point. It requires a lot of study from practitioners. And it's very very difficult. We learn some of them in school. What they did, they actually gave them a number. And then we know basically why we use this point. If I use large intestine 11, it is the major point for someone with constipation or someone who has some intestinal problem. This is a major point. Most of the points are between the finger ending in the elbow. This is the most potent [area of the body]. Let's put it this way, there are 400 points.

There are actually many many points in the ear, which is fascinating. Last year, I went to deepen my knowledge in auricular acupuncture, which I think is fascinating. It's a full map in the ear that I can use with not even one point to put in the body and I do it too many times. When people have, especially with pain, I found it to be very powerful. I found ear acupuncture is very powerful for balancing the brain through much more emotions. If somebody comes in very stressed and with a few points, they immediately start yawning and they just go under. You can see the eyes are rolling in there like okay. Are you ready to sleep? They say, "yes, I am." And so this is the different type of acupuncture points.

And after I make all these diagnoses such as is it liver or spleen? Is the Earth element? Is the metal element weak or is there too much? Then I put in the needles. Usually it's around up to 8 points. They are very fine needles and they go to the sites. What I do, and this is one of my specialties, I go back into the abdomen and I make sure that I clear. If I found an area of the liver in need of help and I opened the liver channel, I go back and ask, "how do you feel now?" Usually they say they feel much better. I don't have the pressure or I don't have the pain or I don't have the discomfort. I would say

this is definitely my speciality; to use the abdomen as a referring or reflex to help me determine if I chose the right point and did the right diagnosis. Ok.

Aviva: Wonderful. You started to highlight this. You have a wealth of knowledge. We are learning so much here. What do you think is what makes the Acupuncture Healing Center so unique?

Carmela: I think what makes us so unique is our commitment to the community. I make sure that I'm always available to take calls, to take the text of clients. And after hours, I always go over their information that they send to me. It could be an x-ray or sometimes it can be a blood test. I don't do it immediately when they come in, I just say to them, "leave this on the table I will take it out later." And this is another wonderful piece of information. I really use this information these days. I know that this information was not available 100 years ago or 1000 years ago, but I think that they have a lot of value. They teach me a lot about the client. It is one more way of looking. What more do I need to know about them? I evaluate the stool or urine analysis or blood. I take the time. If someone wants to talk to me over the phone, I take the time. I explain to them my findings or if they want to know why they need acupuncture or am I the right practitioner for them or we are the right practitioner for them. I take the time. I want to make sure I would be offering the right service for them. It is not just "you can come in". Maybe it is not the right modality. I am checking this out.

We are a team. We work as a team. There is a practitioner by the name of Cholena Erickson and Cathy Kim is another practitioner. We have many many years of experience that we try to pull together. If you see something that maybe we need to pick up somebody's brain, we will do it. It is very much okay to work as a team.

For many years, I keep learning and deepening my knowledge. We have a decade of experience. I do cancer support. We work on fertility, facial rejuvenation and allergy treatments. I specialized in alpha gal. I don't know if you are aware of this. But alpha gal is a big phenomena in our area when people develop an allergy to mammal food. It can even be fatal. Because they can have an anaphylactic shock if they eat any meat, dairy products or even cross contamination. So I decided to help my community again by going and learning this method. I am getting some farmers. So I can help them to be able to eat the foods they like without getting sick. I take a lot of classes. I take classes in acupuncture methods, nutrition, and functional medicine each year.

I think another thing that makes us really unique is that I try to work with and connect with physicians, physical therapists, dentists, naturopath, osteopath, yoga centers or

yoga practitioners, massage therapy, physical therapists, any of these practitioners. I value them a lot. I know that some of my clients might need more of one of these methods than they might need acupuncture. And when someone, if any practitioner, sends me a client I immediately take the time to write them an email and say thank you so much for sending so and so. Here is my finding and I would love to meet you. If I hear their name again and again, I create the roster so when someone comes in and asks, "Do you know someone for knee surgery?" I do. "Do you know a good dentist?" Yes, I do think I can refer you to someone and so on. So I take the time to create a roster for clients.

And for many years actually, before Covid, I did nutrition classes for free. And I teach people how important nutrition is and how good it is to eat certain foods at certain times of the year. You don't crave soups in the summer, but we do in the winter. And the same salad is much more available in the summer but not in the winter. So I teach them about this phenomenon of eating for the season, or eating for your type or eating for the need of your health. Someone might need more meat or protein. It is ok. I didn't take one method and turn it into this is the one way. Just the nutrition or just be a vegetarian or just be a pescatarian. I don't think it is right. I think we need to have a variety of food. And the variety of food needs to be designed to be individual. And I love doing this. This is one of the things I do in this center. This is unique in my center.

And we are so grateful that the Acupuncture Healing Center received the Best in the Triangle last year. We have won it a few other times too.

Aviva: Congratulations.

Carmela: Thank you

Aviva: It is well deserved but also it just highlights all the dedication and commitment that you have to your community and your clients. I have one last question. You started to touch on this with the connection with other healers but how do you see or rather what do you think is the role, the connection, between Yoga, Yoga Therapy and traditional Chinese medicine?

Carmela: Chinese medicine and Ayurvedic medicine sees yoga as part of the ancient wise tradition. It is a very old tradition. Both of these medicines, Ayurveda and Chinese medicine, develop types of therapies. Chinese was much more toward Chi Gong and Tai Chi. And yoga was much more toward the Indian medicine, Ayurvedic medicine. But the necessity of movement is a medicine. It's very clear that the two medicines

understood that movement means you move your Chi. You move your blood. You move your energy. You move your stagnation. Sitting and not moving is basically stagnation. It can be emotional stagnation. It can be body stagnation. When you move and you stretch, you move energy, Chi, stagnation.

Yoga tradition calls it Prana. Chinese culture called it Chi. It is actually the same concept in many ways. The old practitioners or the old medicine doctors understood the uniqueness movement and the need of movement. That is one thing that is in this movement, that it's important to explain to a client. When you stretch the arm in a certain way and you are guiding this movement, which is guiding this channel which is opening the lung. Anyone who needs lung support, whether it is asthma, or if you have shortness of breath, or if you need to open the diaphragm, you are helping the lung with the big breath, will move. If you have any tendency for anxiety and depression. There are certain movements, like when we end a yoga class and people are in a meditation seat, they do this movement. It is done more with meditation yoga. These two points when they meet, they open the pericardium channel. This is the channel that opens the chest. It brings the mind down. Anyone who has a restless mind, I always look into this channel and that it needs to be more open.

Yoga is providing movement into the channels. So this is why they say, since I do yoga, and I do more breathing, my bowels move better or I sleep better. Or even more than that, the person starts walking better. And if you think about the presentation to the world, which is very important, I call it the business card to the world like when you come into an interview or you meet someone, how you hold yourself. Yoga helps you hold yourself with open shoulders, strong shoulders. Then when someone is looking at you, they say, "Wow, look at her posture, she looks great. She probably has wonderful confidence" Yeah it's true. You build confidence when you have a great and strong posture. This is how I see this integration, through the medicine and through the self-esteem of the person.

Aviva: Thank you so much for taking your time out to give us a little insight. It was so informative. We really appreciate it.

Carmela: Thank You.