

Therapy Chat Episode 271



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[00:00:00] **Laura Reagan:** Therapy Chat Podcast Episode 271.

[00:00:04] **Announcer:** This is the Therapy Chat podcast with Laura Reagan, LCSW-C. The information shared in this podcast is not a substitute for seeking help from a licensed mental health professional. And now here's your host, Laura Reagan LCSW-C.

[00:00:34] **Laura Reagan:** Hi, welcome back to Therapy Chat. I'm your host, Laura Reagan. And today I'm really thrilled to be bringing you another conversation with a guest who has been on Therapy Chat a few times before, dr. Leslie Korn. Leslie, thanks so much for coming back to Therapy Chat today.

[00:00:51] **Leslie Korn:** Oh, thank you, Laura. Delighted to be here.

[00:00:55] **Laura Reagan:** Coming at us all the way from Mexico. So you've got [00:01:00] your newest book out, it's called Natural Woman: Herbal Remedies for Radiant Health at Every Age and Stage of Life. And I'm really eager to talk with you about that because we've focused on foods and how they can improve your mood in our past discussions and herbs and spices and how they fit in, that's something that I'm really excited to learn about and your book seems like an amazing resource. So before we even really get into it, let's just start off by you telling our audience a little bit about yourself and your work.

[00:01:34] **Leslie Korn:** Oh, well, thank you. Well, I'm originally from Boston and however, at the tender age of 20, I was so lucky to hop on a bus and end up in the jungle of Mexico five days later. And I fell in love with a little village where there were no roads, no electricity, no running water, no doctors, [00:02:00] no nurses. No nada. And I stayed for 10 years. I had been part of the feminist movement in Boston. As a teenager, I was into social justice, I had my copy of Our Bodies Ourselves with me, and I just was really eager to find out who I was and figure out who I was. I dropped out of college and so I spent 10 years there. And during that time I was so lucky to get sick with everything imaginable because that thrust me onto my path of learning about healing and health naturally.

[00:02:41] So I studied with Indigenous Healers and the women helped me get healthy. And at the same time, I talked with them about reproductive rights and all of this evolved into a little health center. After I then I did return the jungle of Boston [00:03:00] I like to say and did graduate school. I then, went back to Mexico and opened up a health center that I ran for 25 years.

[00:03:11] And, I began my training in body- oriented psychotherapy. I trained first in cranial sacral and polarity therapy massage. And that took me to the study of psychotherapy and trained in that. I had studied nutrition and Ayurvedic medicine, yoga, and really practiced all of this myself. I had to, of course, to stay healthy and then began working with people. And as I worked with people, it became very clear that as I touched their bodies, they told the stories of their trauma. And this led to my work as a body- oriented psychotherapist, where I did touch. And really talk at the same time to process

the chronic pain [00:04:00] and physical illness that we so well know is often associated with adverse events.

[00:04:07] So I've been in practice for over 40 years. And of late, my focus has really returned to the role of nutritional mental health and herbal medicine. Most of my work is helping people either reduce or taper off of psychotropic medications and really engage in the kinds of self care activities where we embrace nature, where we study nature, and study all the gifts of nature and how she can help us restore our balance and wellbeing. So that's a little bit about me.

[00:04:46] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah. And you have a fascinating combination of your knowledge base and skills and everything you teach. I have started, but not finished yet one of your certificate [00:05:00] courses in integrative mental health, using nutrition and it's so comprehensive. It's unbelievable.

[00:05:10] **Leslie Korn:** Oh, thank you. Well, you know, I'm so excited because people used to look at me cross eyed when I introduced body work, when I was doing my fellowship at Harvard in the mid eighties, now this is before even mindfulness was on our radar. It was there, but it was, I like to say it was in the closet.

[00:05:30] People were absolutely apocalyptic at the idea that we touch people, that we actually integrate the body into treatment. And I have to say, we just passed the 20,000 mark of professionals in the United States who've taken the certification course. So to me that tells me our time has come. That we value the role of talk and we value the role of many [00:06:00] types of treatment that we think of in psychotherapeutic realm.

[00:06:04] But we also know that we get so much more response and results when we can integrate nutrition and yoga and meditation and hydrotherapy and herbs, and much more. And also recognize the cultural context as well. Not everybody is inclined to talk about their problems. Many people express them physically, and we have to be able to read the body and speak the language of the body to be really culturally competent.

[00:06:36] So for me, it's a never ending source of joy to bridge what I think of as indigenous science, kind of our empirical knowledge and our knowledge as women. I say often to my students who are concerned about their level of knowledge and can they suggest an herbal tea? I said, don't forget. We have been healing [00:07:00] each other for thousands of years before universities gave us the imprimatur and the seal that said we could.

[00:07:08] So don't forget that we are carrying on the traditions of our grandmothers and great grandmothers.

[00:07:15] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah. Yeah. When I was just thinking, I think what you were just saying brought up for me, how it is the like cognitive empirical framework, the medical model, which has value, but it's like, it tells you that it is the D way, the answer and the, and it's logical and it's scientific and tested, and it's not the intuitive knowing and the body oriented learning and understanding that indigenous cultures tend to use and women throughout all cultures have had for as [00:08:00] long as humans have existed. So

[00:08:02] **Leslie Korn:** Mm-hmm,

[00:08:03] **Laura Reagan:** Thinking about how it's like that we diminish that even like that idea, like that's an old wive's tale, or these are women's wisdom remedies and things that are sort of dismissive sounding. But those stories that are passed down through generations of, oh, if you for example, if you have an upset stomach, like using baking soda or something, things that are more natural and more simple, not pharmaceutical, and they work.

[00:08:33] **Leslie Korn:** Oh, absolutely. I guarantee you that as we speak, pharmaceutical companies have sent their agents into all areas of the world, the jungles and the forests scouring for medicinal plants that contain chemicals that are going to alter our consciousness or improve our digestion so that in many ways, [00:09:00] much of our current pharmaceutical repertoire really began with herbal medicine.

[00:09:08] There's a saying you can't patent mother nature. So I think much of the reason we give priority to pharmaceutical approaches or what you describe as the reigning biomedical approach has much do with money and the economy, than it does to do with the actual science of it. And I do think that what I'm appreciative of being trained in both modes

[00:09:38] **Laura Reagan:** mm-hmm

[00:09:38] **Leslie Korn:** When I returned from Mexico, my studies at the School of Public Health was looking at the role of papaya and the enzymes in papaya that would reduce pain in the body. And this is what I just I'm passionate about is understanding the different sciences and how we approach them.

[00:09:59] **Laura Reagan:** Mm-hmm.

[00:09:59] **Leslie Korn:** [00:10:00] And so I think the real key is understanding the rightful place of each approach. I do not want to slap a leaf on my arm if I've broken it. No, I wanna go get it set. If I need pins, I wanna have the benefits of that medicine. But if I can't sleep and I'm stressed, I don't wanna use a benzodiazepine and upset my dream life, or get addicted, or use Ambien, which as women, we don't excrete very efficiently. I want to look to mother nature and the herbs that she's given us that are gonna help me relax.

[00:10:40] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah. Yeah. That's what that's what makes sense to me. It's like, there are some things that we have these pharmaceuticals that don't, they may help, but they may also have a lot of drawbacks. And when there's a natural option, that could be just as effective if not more, without the side effects [00:11:00] that would be my preference too.

[00:11:02] **Leslie Korn:** Yes, absolutely. Because one of the principles of herbs in contrast to pharmaceuticals, I mentioned the agent scouring the jungles is what happens is in our Western approach, we extract what we say is the active substance. This is what's causing the change and therefore we intensify it in a pill or a liquid form. And then we give it to the body or the mind, which we often keep separate anyway and then we say, okay, do your job. But with that often comes side effects because what nature does is give us the whole plant. It gives us an active substance. It might give us a couple of secondary substances and then it gives us some variety of balancing acts.

[00:11:57] Let's take cocaine for example, or [00:12:00] the cocoa leaf. The cocoa leaf is a plant that nature has given us. We find it in high altitudes because it enhances oxygenation and the capacity to withstand these high altitudes. We very rarely see an addiction to the cocoa leaf. It's a gift that nature has given us to withstand physical and mental challenges of altitude.

[00:12:25] But if we extract the active substance, cocaine, and then we even intensify it like crack cocaine. Then, it becomes a drug and a poison that our bodies were never meant to use therapeutically. So what on the one hand could be therapeutic, like the cocoa leaf then becomes poison because we've taken out all of the balancing act that nature has given us in the way that we should use it.

[00:12:57] And I think we can apply this [00:13:00] principle. We can look at sugar cane, very similar. You don't get diabetes from chewing on sugar cane because the cane is rich in fiber, it's rich in B vitamins, and magnesium, all of which balance out that glucose rise. But you start extracting and concentrating that sugar and wow you're in trouble.

[00:13:22] Yeah. Yeah. It's like when we take it of nature and make it into something different, it loses some of the things that make it good.

[00:13:34] mm-hmm

[00:13:34] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah. Yeah. well, before we started recording you and I were chatting a little bit about some of the ways that herbs and spices can be used for women from birth throughout the whole life.

[00:13:48] And one of the things that I was thinking about is I guess, I don't know if you would call it our reproductive systems or, but everything from, in my mind, [00:14:00] like issues during our menstrual cycle to fertility, to menopause, I'm really curious about where herbs fit in there. Do you have anything to say about that?

[00:14:11] **Leslie Korn:** Oh, absolutely. I think we've got lots of herbs, perhaps. We're most careful during pregnancy there are a handful of herbs and I list them in my book about what are the herbs that are safe to use during pregnancy, for example, red raspberry leaf for morning sickness or ginger for morning sickness, but herbs are also very useful for painful periods or even endometriosis or polycystic ovarian syndrome, fungal infections associated with sexual activity, fibroids, on through, menopause. As a matter of fact, I, in my book, I've got a wonderful combination [00:15:00] of, uh, a [inaudible] which we make during menopause, as we celebrate our wise old chroness with other women in a ritual where we share really what coming into menopause means to us.

[00:15:22] And as we sip on a wonderful [inaudible] that I give instructions for making and I've got this fun saying a friend of mine shared with me once she said estrogen is the hormone of accomodation and I don't any left.

[00:15:41] **Laura Reagan:** Oh yeah.

[00:15:44] **Leslie Korn:** So I think at each stage whether we're celebrating herbs that can reduce pain of early adolescent periods and relax the uterus, for example, black current [00:16:00] leaf tea and black current oil. And whether we have a ritual to celebrate the coming of the first flow, or if we're celebrating fertility, we can draw on a number of different herbs to bring us into balance.

[00:16:18] **Laura Reagan:** I love what you mentioned there about rituals too. Rituals are an important part of what's included in your book.

[00:16:26] **Leslie Korn:** I believe that in some ways rituals that bring us together is one of the missing pieces of our modern lives. Yes, we've got the rituals of 12- step programs. We've got the rituals of psychotherapy, even and group therapy. Maybe if we go and worship. At a church or a temple or an ashram, those are rituals in which we come together. I've been very concerned with the death of rituals for our teens and I've [00:17:00] come to understand, in some ways, if we look at indigenous societies, there's always a ritual to celebrate the transition into adulthood, a ritual in which the teen tests his or her or their medal where they may go off into the jungle on their own or off into the forest, or they have a fast there's something. We call it in psychology stress inoculation, where we test ourselves and we stress ourselves with positive stress in order to strengthen our sense of self, our identity, and our capacity to cope.

[00:17:43] And we come back from that experience often having chewed on bark or leaves or whatever, we found during that period of time in the forest to eat and sustain ourselves. And we come back transformed. We [00:18:00] have become now an adult ready to face the challenges of adult life. And when I work with a lot of teens, I see that this is the missing piece that they are reenacting however, in limited ways, the need, that kind of drive for rituals.

[00:18:21] So what are they doing? They're binge drinking. Yeah, that's a ritual at college, but is it adaptive or maladaptive? Or they're doing lots of caffeine with their friends or the ritual of excess tattooing. And if we, again, look at ritual in traditional societies, a tattoo, marking the body in some way, marks an important moment in one one's life that we commemorate.

[00:18:53] But what we see when that whole gestalt of a ritual is missing with [00:19:00] this social piece of it, then we just see you go to the tattoo parlor and we see this is very dominant among survivors of adverse childhood events, where you just burn or cut or whatever it is, you ink the whole body. So we've got these truncated rituals and my goal is to certainly in this book and in clinical practice is to reinstall and find the rituals that make sense to us, that we can co-create together that make meaning and purpose out of our lives at every stage of our development.

[00:19:42] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah. So do you, in the book, do you talk about why rituals are important and how to develop them? Or is it more just about why they're important? And what's missing.

[00:19:54] **Leslie Korn:** I talk about, I give examples of rituals. So I've got [00:20:00] a coming of age ritual for young girls. And then for adolescent girls,

and everything is infused with herbs and different kinds of herbs and spices and rituals that they can go through that are age appropriate.

[00:20:17] I've got rituals for grief and for loss. I've got a ritual for welcoming a new animal companion into your home, where we come together. And certainly it's so true that in this time period of the pandemic we've really been hampered in our gatherings and our rituals. And we've often turned to turn to our zoom rituals.

[00:20:42] I've got rituals for death and for understanding and bringing awareness to how important it is to celebrate life and to celebrate the passing as well. So each ritual is a [00:21:00] guide and when I've written it up and incorporated different approaches to use of herbs, for example, rosemary is a very traditional herb that's used to really share grief. And so I walk you through a grief ritual that has meaning.

[00:21:22] I don't know about you, Laura, but when I was growing up, I went through a lot of rituals, but they seemed meaningless. They seemed empty. They seemed like we walked through them. We went to the funeral, we said our prayers, but I didn't feel like there was a true meaning and purpose behind them.

[00:21:42] And so I think we're in the process of reclaiming and re-infusing, meaning and purpose in our rituals and doing them with herbs.

[00:21:52] **Laura Reagan:** That's beautiful. And it makes me think of how this all started after your book came out. [00:22:00] But as you know, with COVID, so many people have lost someone and they barely had a chance to adapt to the idea that this was happening because you know how it is with COVID that you maybe feel really bad one day feel fine the next day and then suddenly you're in the hospital and next thing you know, you're on a ventilator and then maybe you can't be with the person. It's really taking away from our process of saying goodbye to someone and then people not being able to gather for funerals because not more than a certain number can be together in one place or postponing them for a long time so that everyone can be there.

[00:22:40] So I'm wondering if you have any thoughts about that, of how people can incorporate that kind of ritual, even when they can't do the things that they would normally have been able to do?

[00:22:52] **Leslie Korn:** Yes. It's almost like a meta loss, it's on top of the loss. It's a whole other layer [00:23:00] of loss. And I I've been doing rituals with people over Zoom.

[00:23:06] It's the only way we can gather right now and we've been constructing them in different ways. For example, we share a section out of the book let's say, if we're going to do a particular ritual, I did a grief ritual not long ago, and each person got his or her or their own kind of herbal assignment where they were going to prepare something that normally we would share with each other, but at least we could create it in our kitchen.

[00:23:40] We could make a tea. In this case, it was Rosemary infused ginger cookies, no sugar, by the way, along with a ginger tea and people then could gather together and we could share what we'd made and what we learned in the process and then [00:24:00] we each went around and as we ate and we drank, we talked about what we so loved about the person that we had lost and what they reminded us and what we were reminded of about them.

[00:24:17] And one of the other rituals that I just love is we did a ritual with some young women. One of the women was being batmitvah'ed and she wasn't able to really have her party. And so we gathered all of the elder women along with the young woman and some of her closest friends, and we created food together, meaning we bought it together via zoom and shared it.

[00:24:49] And then the elder women went around each one at a time sharing one piece of wisdom that they wanted to share [00:25:00] with the girl of honor and her friends about what they had learned about being a woman. And then after all of the elder women went around, then each of the of the girl of honor and her friends got to ask each woman a question about being a woman and what they thought was the most important thing they should know. And it was a very profound moment of sharing, of passage of knowledge and exchange. And one of the benefits that we go through and experience with ritual is that we entrain each other. It's not just verbal, it's of the heart, it's of the synchrony of the brain, coming together in a ritual rhythm, it could be facilitated with music or drumming or movement or just by being together and breathing together. [00:26:00] And this is really how we are meant to experience ritual through really and entraining and synchronizing together to help us all self regulate.

[00:26:11] **Laura Reagan:** That makes so much sense because there is more to it than the words there's something about the shared experience that takes on more than words when you share a ritual together like this, that, that sounds beautiful. Both the grief ritual and the coming of age ritual for the girl. And, I know a bat mitzvah and a bar mitzvah or Benet mitzvah is they're very meaningful, important rights of passage, but somehow I know I've been to my nieces bat mitzvah, and there was no passing on of knowledge from the elder of women that wasn't part of it. So I think that in a way, what you're talking about

has a richness that's even missing from the party, [00:27:00] even though, traditional bat mitzvahs are wonderful, but that's a really beautiful thing that she got to take away from that experience that she may not have even had if she had her bat mitzvah party as normally is done.

[00:27:13] **Leslie Korn:** Mm-hmm I agree.

[00:27:15] **Laura Reagan:** So, can you talk, another thing that I was really curious to ask you about is if you can talk about the idea of spirit plants.

[00:27:24] **Leslie Korn:** Well, yes, indeed. I can. The idea of spirit plants or the plants that nature has given us that alter our consciousness. And I think this, again goes back to this idea of ritual. And if you look at traditional societies, there's many, many societies use what we call spirit plants. We might in medicine today called these psychedelic medicine or hallucinogenic plants. Another term of reference is entheogenic [00:28:00] plants. Plants that help us see the God or goddess within. I know where you are at Johns Hopkins they've just opened up a whole new research center. So I think again, we're bridging both biomedical science and indigenous science. So I think that some Researchers believed that religion began because of spirit plants that our cave ancestors never would've had a thought of God, had they not chewed on a psychedelic mushroom and saw the visions.

[00:28:39] So where I live in Mexico, I don't live too far from the Mercuri people also known as the Wecho people. These are the guardians of the peyote. And peyote was shared with Indians of Mexico, up with Indians across the really what's our artificial border in this [00:29:00] hemisphere with American Indians, Native Peoples, particularly in the Southwest.

[00:29:06] And now we've got, what's called the peyote ceremony for recovery from substance abuse. So in many ways, what I think we've lost in some of these ritual experiences of, for whatever reason, whether it's coming of age, or if it's a vision quest, or seeing more deeply into the unknown and ineffable nature of reality.

[00:29:33] Sometimes that's when we go to the other end of the spectrum and self medicate unthinkingly, just to alter our consciousness and put ourselves out of our misery. And I think that's one of the benefits I think that we're beginning to recognize that indigenous peoples have long known that many of these spirit plants open us up, restore consciousness, purpose, hope, an awareness of [00:30:00] something greater than ourselves. What we think of in psychology as

transpersonal psychology, psychology that takes us out of ourselves into the bigger questions of life.

[00:30:12] So peyote is certainly considered a spirit plant and it's used in the Native American church, which is a legally ordained church that supplies peyote ceremony for people who are in recovery or seeking recovery from particularly alcohol or drug abuse. There's a lot going on with the mushroom, not technically a plant, more fungi. The psilocybin mushroom it's been studied for many years for death anxiety, anxiety associated with cancer. Again, the mushroom called The Little Beings by Maria Sabina a Mazatec shaman who has passed on since a number of years and in the mountains of Mexico, [00:31:00] almost every culture has access to these different plants that alter our consciousness, and some of them are legal and some of them are illegal.

[00:31:10] Dr. Rich Straussman has studied iowaska and it's, derivative DMT and calls it the spirit molecule. He's a psychiatrist who's been exploring the value of these treatments for healing, from depression and anxiety and unremitting PTSD. I think that's where we see many of the benefits, if I'm, if I think of myself as someone with a foot in both worlds, I think that one of the nodal experiences of trauma is often the loss of hope and meaning and connection, the utter betrayal, particularly of interpersonal trauma.

[00:31:53] And so some people seem to benefit from an experience that returns [00:32:00] them to themselves in many ways. It's the shamanic journey of soul retrieval. So I think we've got lots of pathways to understanding again, how nature has given us healing plants to heal the physical, to heal our menstrual cycle or to heal our spirit.

[00:32:21] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah. That makes sense because as humans, we would've had all those problems before the pharmaceutical industry existed or before, the scientific method existed, or was known. But I like what you're doing, because it's the blend of both, rather than that it has to be like a dichotomy.

[00:32:42] **Leslie Korn:** Mm-hmm

[00:32:42] **Laura Reagan:** So, Leslie, I know it's time for us to wrap up, but I wanna give you a chance to tell people how they can get deeper into this kind of work that you're doing and what you offer.

[00:32:54] **Leslie Korn:** Well, thank you. I am so passionate about educating [00:33:00] others. I've got really two streams that I follow. One is I work with

clients who are wanting to use integrative approaches, nutritional herbal medicine for mental health and physical health. But I also am passionate about training other clinicians in any aspect of this that they want to apply in their work. What I find is that every clinician who has studied with me or taken my courses begins because they want to improve their own health and indeed, I think that's a good driving force. How do I stay healthy, get healthy. And how do I help my family? And you know what, I'm eating better. I'm using herbs. How do I help my clients or my patients use this. And how, what do I need to know? And how do how can I be assured that I [00:34:00] know enough that I'm practicing ethically in the scope of practice.

[00:34:04] And so what I did is I developed two distinct certification programs, one nutrition and integrative medicine for mental health, which is a CE program for clinical professionals in both physical and mental health. And it's also accessible to nonprofessionals. And it really takes you step by step through answering all those questions and you get to pick and choose, there may be some things you wanna work in, or some things you wanna put, later in your process.

[00:34:36] And I've got another program that's just come out which is about diabetes type two and cognitive decline and Alzheimer's because most people don't realize how closely related both are. Meaning if you've got diabetes, you're at risk for memory loss and development of Alzheimer's. And sometimes you may just be at risk [00:35:00] for cognitive decline in Alzheimer's, particularly with a history of depression and PTSD.

[00:35:06] And so this program also is about step by step what do we need to do to help ourselves and or our clients navigate this world based on evidence based work along with indigenous sciences so that we can actually apply it in the clinical setting safely. So those are a couple of my latest passion projects.

[00:35:30] And then I've got several books out that you can find on my website as well in around this whole area of topics.

[00:35:39] **Laura Reagan:** And your website. I know I will list it in the show notes. Can you say it for people?

[00:35:45] **Leslie Korn:** Yes, it's quite simple. It's my name: drlesliekorn.com.

[00:35:57] **Laura Reagan:** Awesome. Leslie, thank you so [00:36:00] much for coming back to Therapy Chat today. I always love talking with you and you're so positive and uplifting to, to speak with. Thank you so much.

[00:36:09] **Leslie Korn:** Oh, Laura. My pleasure. I so always look forward to our connection. I'm so appreciative of you and all that you do.

[00:36:17] **Announcer:** Thank you for listening to Therapy, Chat with your host, Laura Reagan, LCSW-C. For more information, please visit therapychatpodcast.com.