

## **Episode 221: Blending East & West for Mind-Body Alignment: Insights from Dr. Trupti Gokani**

### **Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:**

Hello everyone, and welcome to HeadWise, the weekly podcast and videocast of the National Headache Foundation. I'm Dr. Lindsay Weitzel. I'm the founder of Migraine Nation, and I have a history of chronic and daily migraine that began at the age of four. We have an exciting episode today. I am here with author, certified neurologist, headache specialist, and Ayurvedic practitioner, Dr. Trupti Gokani. Hi Dr. Gokani. How are you?

### **Trupti Gokani, MD:**

Hello, Lindsay. I'm great. How are you?

### **Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:**

I'm good. Dr. Gokani has authored two books in the field of Ayurvedic medicine, stress, and headache. One is soon to be published. Today we are going to ask her to share with us some of her philosophy, which is super interesting, and she's such a fun person. So, I can't wait for all of you to benefit from what she has to say. Dr. Gokani, why don't you begin by sharing with us and everyone that's listening, what made you pursue headache medicine and your other subspecialties?

### **Trupti Gokani, MD:**

Yes. Great. So first, thanks for having me. I'm so excited to be here. The original journey of headache medicine began with being a resident and kind of sitting there, I still remember the chairman doing a presentation on migraine, and I sat back and this is 25, 30 years ago. And I sat back and I thought, wow, that's fascinating. And the way he described the phases of headache and the phases of just how, there was at that phase, mainly vascular, constriction, dilation of blood vessels, understanding serotonin as part of the mechanism, this idea that triptans play this role in migraine.

And I thought, wow, this is really interesting, these different kind of variants of the attacks. And then also how the attack itself unfolded, the peripheral sensitization, central sensitization. I thought it was so fascinating. And then, at that time we weren't talking about inflammatory peptides, yet I felt like there was still more to learn. And that was something that I thought in neurology would be fascinating is to explore more. So, I love the fact that there was this uniqueness to the attacks themselves in this interesting kind of way that they showed up.

And then being a woman, I have to say, that it affected so many women. In the clinical practice when I was a resident my last year, I ended up seeing a lot of the women because people knew that I was interested in headache. And I got to meet so many interesting women with stories and stories and stories about their pain and how the pain got generated and I was just so fascinated with how to really conquer the pain with them.

My mom had severe migraines, so I have to say that played a role. I remember coming home from high school and seeing her laying on the couch and not having the tools. This is before triptans were available. And so that's how I got into the migraine kind of a world and then Ayurveda as a little bit of a different angle. And I'm happy to share that with you.

**Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:**

Can you just explain what Ayurvedic medicine and Ayurveda are?

**Trupti Gokani, MD:**

Sure. Yeah. Because I think people are probably wondering how is she a board-certified neurologist and an Ayurvedic practitioner? Where does that come together? East meets West here. So, the training in neurology and the training in headache was something that was actually, the background to that was my interest in Ayurveda. And interest in Ayurveda came as a first-year medical student.

So even though I'm Indian of origin, I was born in East Africa, and I did not grow up with the typical Indian kind of teachings in terms of, Ayurvedic wisdom is originating from India, but I didn't grow up with Ayurvedic medicine. My dad is a conventional Western doctor, and I learned medicine the Western way, showed up for medical school, first year med school, started having trouble sleeping. And within about a couple months I wasn't sleeping at all. I was going to quit medical school. My dad took me to a psychiatrist and basically within ten minutes he diagnosed me with depression, and he said, here's Prozac. And I said, well, I'm not depressed. If I could sleep, I wouldn't feel this way.

And then I decided to rip up the prescription, go to the bookstore, and found all these interesting books on mind, body, and spiritual healing, came across the works of Deepak Chopra. And it was in that kind of journey that I discovered where my imbalance was with my sleep, and I believed that there was something beneath it at the surface. And I wanted to kind of discover what it was to get myself to restore my sleep again.

Well, I studied Ayurveda on my own in medical school and found myself sleeping again within about 2 or 3 months with following some of the principles. And so, what I loved about Ayurveda was this idea that the mind and the brain and the way we thought influenced how we were. Emotions and the physical were one.

So, when I went through my residency and learned about the different disciplines I can go through, migraine to me was almost like the same interplay: the mind and the thoughts and emotions and pain. And so, Ayurveda was kind of my first love. And then headache, I think, and migraine fit right into that. And I think it kind of allowed me to blend both of these disciplines together.

**Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:**

That is very interesting. And I bet that many of the people in our audience didn't know what Ayurveda was. I'm glad that you have clarified all of that for us. I do want to ask, because the book that's about to come out, this is actually the ten-year anniversary of your first book, which was called *The Mysterious Mind*. The book that is about to come out is called *The Stress Rx*, which I love. It sounds really cool. It rolls off the tongue.

And so we do want to ask, and our topic today is stress. And we're looking at stress, migraine, headache. But I have to be honest. I get a little bit annoyed when I listen to people talk about stress and migraine because they very rarely say why it's a trigger or really give me any input that I haven't heard before on that. Do you have any input onto why stress is a migraine trigger for some people?

**Trupti Gokani, MD:**

Yeah. And I'll step a little further. And I'd like to just delve a little deeper on this Ayurvedic concept. So Ayurveda, Ayur means life and Veda is wisdom. So, it's the wisdom of life. So, here I am stumbling across these books and realizing that I didn't have a lot of wisdom of my life, wisdom of myself.

What Ayurveda does and how it defines stress, and this is why for me this was so powerful in my early 20s and kind of transforming to be honest with you and the way I thought about headaches, pain, disease, is that Ayurveda defines stress as a disconnect from yourself. It's a disconnect from your soul, your bliss state.

And when you get kind of pulled out of that blissful being, that kind of you that's healthy, happy, harmonious and disease free, you get pulled out of that state, that's that degree of separation. Here's bliss, here's an authentic state, and here's where we are. That is what stress is. So, in Ayurveda, we're made up of five elements: air, space, fire, earth, and water. At birth we're more one type.

So, one type would be the air and space type. We call them the Vatas: mover, goer, doer, talks a lot, moves a lot, loves to be into things that are musical or artistic or creative. Vatas are great at selling things. They just love to talk and speak and travel, like different things. Put it this way, you could not put a Vata behind a desk. They'll get bored just sitting in a cubicle. I'm thinking of traditional office spaces that we, you and I, kind of know about, now don't really exist as much anymore. But they're like little cubicles. You couldn't put a Vata sitting in a cubicle doing accounting work. They would be, no thank you, because they're just movement, going, creative.

The Pitta is a little bit more muscular, determined, type A, organized. They're the ones that will plan things, organize, very clear speaking. They will tell you what they're thinking. They have no problem speaking the truth. So, Pittas are more competitive, play a little tennis or pickleball. Pickleball with a Pitta, you're going to know who they are because they're going to be really kind of competitive with you. That's their nature. They have a fire and water type to them.

And then the earthy type, a little bit bigger frame, that's a Kapha, earth and water type. Grounded, calmer, doesn't like the big parties. The Vata loves to be around tons of people, life of the party. Kaphas, let me just sit at home and read a book. I could really not want to be around a million people. And the Kaphas are the homemakers, love to be in the garden, love to be cooking, give you the biggest hugs ever. Kaphas, they are the earth elements.

So, the goal in life when you're born, if you're a Vata, Pitta, Kapha, is to live in alignment with that. Okay. Well, life comes in, things happen, early childhood things happen, things in your teens happen, life happens. And you know what? We get pulled out of alignment. So, in Eastern medicine, in Ayurveda, and this is what was the aha for me, was that my sleep issues, my insomnia was basically a disconnect from who I was.

Now, the challenge is figuring out, well, how do I get back there and how did I get disconnected. And that's where the work begins. So, stress in Eastern medicine to me is really getting a sense of yourself. Who are you at baseline, who are you out of alignment, and what steps, be it with what I eat, who I

spend time with, my career, what steps do I take to get back into me again. What does it take. And that's it.

**Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:**

That was super awesome and super interesting. I love that explanation of stress and I'm not sure how my next question really fits in now, but I'm going to ask you anyway because I'm so curious what your answer is. My next question was going to be, does it matter in the idea of stress and headache or stress and migraine, if the stress is physical, mental, or emotional?

**Trupti Gokani, MD:**

Good question. Yeah. I think there's, so let's talk about stress and migraine. So the question is, and I think you're saying earlier I get kind of annoyed when someone tells me I'm stressed and the stress is triggering my headache. First of all, oh, what do I do about it? What does that even mean?

I'm so tired of hearing yoga, breathe, whatever. Done it before and it's not working. So, this is the idea. And I totally get that. I can appreciate that. So, when you think about stress and you use that word, I think in a way of defining disconnect, disconnect from baseline, any time I do something that pulls me away from my me.

So, let's give an example. Let's say I decided to skip my lunch today. I mentioned earlier, it's a much warmer day here in Chicago. Kind of hot and 80 degrees in Chicago for April is unusual. And I skip lunch. Those two things, hot day and skipping lunch, are going to increase in me, in anyone that does this, more fire energy.

I'm going to just naturally be a little fired up. Because why? My digestive enzymes are kind of building. The heat is building. The sun is kind of heating me. I'm going to be a little fiery. So what could happen this afternoon? I could start getting snappy. I can get irritable. I can start feeling a little burning. I could feel a little right sided, throbbing. Because fire, by the way, goes to right side of the body.

I might feel a little bit of my stomach starting to get queasy and nausea. You see, if I'm in that kind of vulnerable state, let's say I'm a week before my period or I'm perimenopausal or I didn't sleep that great the night before, that is where that stress, that disconnect with self, will then trigger the migraine.

So that's how we can use that word in a way to help us, in doing things that will pull yourself out of alignment are going to create what we call the stress behind the headache. And the stress is really just saying I'm just too fired up. I'm too Pitta, and I need to bring myself down. Maybe I should have some coconut water. Maybe I should go and if I haven't eaten lunch and it's 2:00, sit down, settle in and chew and eat a really nice nutritious meal. And tell myself this is too important. I need to sit down and eat. Maybe I need to put some cooling ice pack around or do something to cool myself down because I'm getting heated.

But you want to catch it as early as you can. You want to do it when you start getting irritable, when you get that throb on the right, when you start feeling the heat, maybe a little nausea. That's the key. And not wait, because then sometimes you wait and then it gets challenging. The meds don't treat as well. So that's kind of an example of that, if that makes sense.

So, I think every migraine, to be frank with you, I think every migraine is due to stress, though I think we need to understand what stress really means. It's doing things that push us more out of alignment of with our self.

**Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:**

Can you talk to us about your view of triggers? Are they emotional activators? Any kind of activator, anything that is it brings us out of alignment? What is your view of them?

**Trupti Gokani, MD:**

So, to kind of tie into the last thing, the triggers and stress. And one thing to really say here is that what was a big aha for me, was that the mind and the body are one. There isn't a separation in Eastern medicine. That how we think, how we feel, dictates how our physical body is. Meaning that if my neck is tight, what might be happening underneath is that I'm anxious. I'm worried. I might be feeling that mind spinning, that Vata windy mind. And that's going to make me kind of go into a little bit of a freeze state. So my neck gets tight. So the physiology directly links to the mind.

And then the trigger is back to kind of what I was alluding to a little earlier. It's that unique activator. And it could be maybe back to this mind spinning. Maybe I got a message from a sibling about something that's worrisome with a family member and I start to go into a spin about it. I'm trying to focus on work, but my mind is really nervous, and wondering is this person okay. And I start moving into a freeze state because I'm worried.

So you see how the neck starts to get activated. And then as we know, the trigeminal branches connect to the cervical, we start to wind up. And then, if I've been skipping the lunch while we're at it, let's say I skip lunch, there goes a CGRP production because that's an inflammatory peptide. So you see how I get wind up, my mind gets activated. I'm emotionally bothered. My neck is getting tight. I'm starting to activate those nerves that activate the migraine pattern that my body knows how to create a migraine. It's learned it really well because I've had them over and over again. And then I skip lunch. You see you got two activators here. You got the call, you got the skipping lunch. And then actually it's hot outside.

So you see how boom, boom, boom, one after another, you start to kind of get activated and then the migraine comes. It didn't come out of nowhere. It never comes out of nowhere. I'm just going to say, I've been doing this for 20 years. There's always a step by step. You can break it down.

And what Ayurveda helps you do is say, is what was the first thing that was your activator. What was your first trigger. First trigger was the phone call. And listen we don't we don't say that we blame it on the trigger. I mean, goodness gracious, I'm going to take a phone call from a sibling who's talking to us about someone. So, we're going to take that phone call. But for us, in our vulnerable state, that became a trigger.

If I didn't skip lunch that day, let's say we have another day where it's a really relaxed morning. It's a Saturday morning. I'm out in the garden. I'm enjoying. It's a beautiful day getting caught up in the gardening and I skipped lunch, but I'm nowhere near my cycle and I slept great the night before. I may not get a headache that day even though I skipped lunch.

But in the scenario I just mentioned, I might get a headache because I got the phone call. It just suddenly turned hot. I was kind of controlling work a little bit. Maybe I was a little bit caught up at work. That whole set of things that all became triggers for the migraine. So, the way we do is we kind of loop it into the state and we tie it into where we are. And that's why the triggers aren't always constant. Sometimes the weather does, sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes a menstrual cycle does, sometimes it doesn't. Because it depends on us. It doesn't depend on the external. It depends on the internal state and how we respond to the triggers.

**Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:**

Right. I love your books, and I love your philosophies and everything. I think that maybe we should stop in case there's people in the audience, who have a migraine diagnosis, might have some other things going on, whether they be anatomical or something, where they've been in pain for 20 years nonstop. And they're wondering, they're like, I don't know, because I have days where I have no triggers. Maybe stop and say a little something to them in case maybe the actual migraine part, they're like, okay, but I'm always in pain. Do you have anything to say to them in case that some of this isn't ringing true for them?

**Trupti Gokani, MD:**

Of course. And my heart goes out to those that are struggling with chronic daily pain, and I was alluding to more of the intermittent episodes of pain. When we're in a chronic daily, that's a different conversation. Because generally what we look at when we look at the brain is that there's almost, I think the easiest way I can think about this is like the brain is already kindled to be on. It's learned to be in a state of activation. And then we look at what can we do if we can't bring that state down to zero.

What can we do just to allow ourselves to bring it a little bit down closer to there and maybe disengage from it a little bit. So what I often do in that situation is a little different. I say what can we do to add in, to bring in a state where your system is a little disconnected from the pain activator.

So easiest example I can give you, and I'll tie it to something a little different. When I was having those sleep issues, and that was a nightly challenge I had for months, what I wanted to do was just kind of really figure out the pain, figure out why I couldn't sleep, get every answer, take the right supplements, change the bed sheets. Do everything to kind of change all of what I believed were the activators of that sleep issue.

And this is actually when I learned, in the Ayurveda textbook, there's a book by Deepak Chopra called *Restful Sleep*, and what he said was that you're going to start to step away from the challenge you're having, whatever it might be, be it sleep issues, headache, and start to number one, be in a state where you just believe you're already sleeping well. You stay in a state of like I'm already pain free.

And I know it's hard because you're like but I'm not. And I remember thinking, I can't do this. I'm not... no... but you tell yourself you are. So this is where I get into the energy, [something] that you typically won't hear about in traditional [Western] textbooks of headache medicine, is you start to actually engage with the subconscious mind.

And I teach people how to do that. You start to engage with a part of you [the subconscious part of you], that isn't the conscious part of you...and you have a conversation with that part of you. You have a

daily conversation with that [subconscious] part of you and let that part of you believe and have trust that you have that blissful, deep, balanced, pain-free soul, that being within you.

What's at the surface isn't who you are. That's your protective nature coming up to defend you from what it believes is danger, and your body is generating a pain signal daily. It believes you're in danger. Your body's just trying to protect you. Your system is just trying to protect you. So, we don't get angry. We don't get angry at that pain body.

We don't get angry at I can't believe I can't sleep. No, you thank it for being there. You give it a little love and then you say, how can I connect with the part of me that's the aspect of my being that is pain free, that sleeps wonderfully well. How about I talk to that part every day. And I start to just already be in belief that I'm already pain free, and that I'm already sleeping well.

So, step one is engaging with that. And I believe breath does help. I believe sometimes some essential oils help. I believe some just very gentle poses to open up the neck. And this is really to kind of drop the shoulders away, open up the hips, open up parts of body that are holding, because our emotions get stored in our physical body.

It's just opening up and releasing where we're holding that stored trauma and that mind that is not working for us, that part of us that's trapped in a state. We just want to because when you're sitting like this or the body is holding in a physical state, we used to say psychosomatic, but there's also somatopsychic, meaning my physical body can trigger my mind.

So, if we can open up the body, we can kind of believe, let the subconscious believe we are okay. And we start to just do some really gentle things, just gentle things. That could be grounding your feet on the grass. It could be saying a gratefulness. I'm grateful and thankful for I'm pain free. If we could just start to bring things in that bring us into a belief that we're okay, that's a start.

And I have seen some chronic-pain patients, by doing this daily, start to bring their pain down. In fact, a coaching client who just graduated, is actually pain free. And part of it was she worked really hard for six months. It is not easy. I'm not going to tell anyone it's easy. Yet it is a daily dedication to self. It's a daily dedication to being well. And I think with the beautiful tools we have, because we have a lot of beautiful Western tools, if you tie these things together, this is where I want to blend East and West. I don't believe in one versus the other. It's and. It's collaborative.

**Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:**

I'm glad I asked. Thank you for that. Your writings discuss things that Western medicine does not really acknowledge, like life force energy and the subtle body. What do these things mean to you and to the person with migraine or other types of chronic headache?

**Trupti Gokani, MD:**

So that was the piece that was missing in book one. I wasn't there yet ten years ago. And I felt as though that was something Ayurveda had given to me. Yet I really wasn't bringing it up in the clinical practice with patients. Just kind of in maybe smaller, intimate conversations with friends and family and then once in a while with patients. And then I was like, I need to write about this because it's just too important.

And the idea of subtle body is that when you think, I think the way you imagine, if you pass a wind turbine, you've all seen those wind turbines, drive through the mountains and I saw those wind turbines which are kind of spinning. They're collecting wind. And then what are they doing? They're taking that air and space, wind, Vata energy, and then eventually moving it into electricity.

So, it happens in a similar way. Our body takes in and actually itself is made up of energy that actually lights us up. That just in a similar way, the wind turbine can convert something you don't see into something that you can see, imagine your system being made up of energy because we're more energetic than we are physical.

If you look at the atom that has a nucleus and a proton and all that. The atom is mainly empty space. So, we have much more empty space than we do physical. And what holds us together is the energy within us. And that energy, we don't think about this, but we carry a certain vibration. From a really high vibe [individual] to low vibe individuals. And when you have high vibe [vibration], it's basically that aspect of us that isn't the physical. It's that aspect of us that's that real kind of light force. And so, when I think of energy and when I learned in Ayurveda about energy, it's beyond the physical.

So, I'll give you an example. If I'm anxious, back to that anxious state, my mind is racing, what happens is energetically when I'm anxious, I go into freeze. Colon gets tight. I get constipated. It had nothing to do with what I ate. It had to do with my mind state because I move into a physiology. So, energy, if I give you an Einstein, energy equals mass times,  $mc^2$ . So, energy and mass are interchangeable. And so, what happens is our energy body dictates our physical body and vice versa.

So, the goal is in Eastern medicine, it's called your life force energy, it's qi or prana. In Eastern medicine, Ayurveda, it's prana and in Chinese medicine it's qi. When you do acupuncture, for example, it's opening up the flow, these meridians. In Ayurveda it's opening up the nadis. It's all about flow of energy. And when we get blocked, it's because we're holding on, holding on, the physical body is holding, the mind is holding, and we get stuck in a state and then we don't light up a room.

So we all have it flowing. The problem is it gets blocked, physically blocked, almost like your lymphatics are being blocked. The energy gets blocked and stuck. And that is a piece that I don't think many of us realize, because we are like solid beings. But the solid being is made from empty space that then creates the physical, and the energy is what holds us together. If that makes sense.

**Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:**

Yeah. No, it does. No, it is something that we aren't used to hearing in Western medicine. But it is interesting the way you write about it in your book. It is interesting to be introduced into the idea of head pain. And so, I do encourage people to read it. And I am someone that is in constant pain. So, that's why I wanted you to go ahead and speak to that group out there.

Let's move on. In your book that is going to be published soon, *Stress Rx*, you discuss a concept termed the stress personality state, which you went into when we started already. And you talk about moving out of alignment. So when it comes to that and these other things like the energy body, etc., do you feel there's a way if we are trying to adopt some of these practices and look at stress in this manner, to discuss this with Western medicine practitioners, for example, so that we can make it part of our plans, part of our treatment plan.



**Trupti Gokani, MD:**

Yeah. I think the beauty is that most practitioners are because of patients being more open and having more conversations and because of social media giving us a lot more I think education around different topics, a lot of patients are going in and speaking to practitioners. And practitioners, kind of by no choice, are opening up to this idea of, for example, the gut brain connection.

Back in the first book I wrote about my daughter with her headaches and how she had food intolerances. And this is back in 2007, 2008, when no one believed gluten was bad or dairy could be a problem. And I was going against medical advice. And I found that, well, wait a second, there's this gluten issue and dairy issue in my daughter and all these people I'm seeing in the clinic. Removing that helped her tremendously with her headaches, and they kind of went away.

Well, now we're at a state where we've kind of gotten the gut brain thing connected. Most doctors know there's a gut brain link and all that. That's not new news anymore. It's very much known for a while. Now we are moving into the emotions and the energy and the fact that all my emotions and my state of mind and this idea of the subconscious mind. That's all in that woo-woo space.

But honestly, that's the space when you look at the ancients and how they viewed health, it was a balance of physical, emotional, and spiritual body. It wasn't just I'm free of disease and my body is strong. It was how was your mind. It's all back to and you think of Descartes and you think about Damasio. And Descartes' error was that he believed the thinking brain controlled everything. Damasio was like, wait a second, there's an emotional part to us too. Thoughts don't regulate us. We have an emotion. That's why he uses three brain model. And I talk about that in the second book. But this idea that we think, we feel, we digest. And each one of these has to be aligned.

So to go back to this, how do you even bring this up with your physician? I think part of it is just saying, hey, listen, I know my labs are fine. I believe I have this diagnosis yet there's more to me. And I feel there's something off and I'm not feeling connected. I'm not feeling vibrant. I'm not feeling even just energetic. A lot of people tell me they don't feel energy. Part of this is cortisol and adrenals being overtaxed.

But there's that subtle sense of just happiness, that contentment, that sense I just feel just kind of not connected to that part of me that's that blissful part of me. I don't even know where that is. I think it's helpful to at least mention it and to let a practitioner know there's a side of me that I don't quite know how to put words into. I just don't feel right.

And they may send you to a therapist. They may send you to a coach. That's okay. At least you got the conversation going. And if they don't respond to it, I think it's important to kind of think about, well, maybe I should choose to seek someone that will help me with that. Please try because I think the more we can all engage. I used to tell this all the time to my patients with a digestive [issue]. I was finding it in my own clinic that they had gut issues. I would say go back and talk to your primary care doctor about this. Tell them you have a gluten issue. Tell them you got off of gluten, how much better you feel. Can you go talk to them about that?

And again, that was 2015 that book was published. Studies go back to 2008. Doctors were like gluten is good for you. It's good. They used to say the whiter the bread, the faster you're dead. So, there was like

dark bread is good for you. And so, these patients were like, no, I don't want to eat Wonder bread. I don't want to eat that. I just think there's something in this grain that's a problem. But I would have my patients go back and talk to their physicians.

So yeah, there may be a little resistance. Be okay with that. If you can change to a physician that's more receptive, fantastic. But I know a lot of people can't. But I think then just know that you've had the dialog and maybe it's something that you can seek out and get some help on. Because there's a lot of people out there that do coaching work and that offer videos and courses and things on this. I know it's a place to explore because I've seen so many people turn around if they explore that space.

**Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:**

Yeah. Let me ask another question sort of related to Western medicine. There's another concept you delve into as an author that I feel is important for us to stay healthy in a stressful world, and it's spirituality. This obviously is not something that we hear, we usually talk about with our providers. How is spirituality helpful for our health and for our headache, etc.?

**Trupti Gokani, MD:**

It's interesting. I was at functional medicine conference, probably around the time when that book was published, first book, probably I'd say 2015 ish. And I remember the provider walking up, and I still remember who it was. He walked up to the stage, and he said, how many of you in the audience ask your patients if they're spiritually connected or follow a spiritual practice?

And I remember thinking, gosh, that's an interesting question. And I believe it was spot on. If you look at studies and just look at the studies, you just Google spirituality and pain. Those that are more spiritual are more likely to recover and have better outcomes with their pain. It doesn't mean that they're pain free. It simply means that their pain processing, they seem to become more resilient and more able to handle challenges, be it pain or life stressors. That is clinically studied. There's data to prove that.

What is really spirituality? It's believing in something bigger than yourself, believing there's some other divine force that's beyond you, that's kind of regulating your being and the world. And sometimes, what happens is when people get spiritual, they get into a state of like, ah, I don't have to. This isn't just me having to fix this situation.

There is a message behind this. There's something, some force. It could be a specific individual that you're kind of visualizing and seeing, or it just could be life force energy. There's something that is here to support me through this challenging life that I'm living. And sometimes that alone is so helpful when you're struggling in your own pain, to know that there's something bigger.

When the pandemic happened, and I'm quite a spiritual person, but when the pandemic happened, I still remember, I supposed to leave my office and go on a flight and go do a speaking thing for a pharmaceutical company. And I remember thinking to myself, wow, that's all been canceled, and I'm going home and we're just going to be in lockdown for two weeks, was what I thought. Wow, this is interesting. Can you believe it's been five years since pandemic. I was thinking about that was like, gosh, it's crazy. It felt like it was yesterday.

I remember my initial response. When you're spiritual, the initial thought was this is happening for us. You don't even go into the blaming, why me. Oh my gosh I was preparing for that talk that I want to go deliver it. But it's the whole not why is this happening to me, it's this is why is this happening for us.

And that was my morning every time I woke up. Universe, will you just share with me why is this happening for us? Why is this happening for us? Why is this happening? If you start to ask yourself about the pain, why is this happening for us? And when I say for us, it's for you, your family, your friends. Why is this pain that you're experiencing happening?

And when you ask the bigger questions, you get the better answers. When you ask the little, kind of like was it the food I ate today. That's actually kind of a low, we call it a disempowering question. It's fine to think about that. We don't obsess down here. We want to think bigger. Start with those questions. Of course, make sure do you have a gluten issue. Do you have anything triggering and you want to take out. Once you kind of answered those or gotten some clarity around those, move up into the more empowering questions.

Why is this happening. So spiritually, what happens is you get to the bigger questions. You start to say, okay, so maybe in this lifetime I was given this for a reason. What's the message behind this? Maybe this journey for me is to help others through their journeys. Maybe this journey is for me is to help my kids become more resilient. Maybe this journey for me is to help. What is that? Just ask and just drop your shoulders and breathe and let that come. And answers will just come in a way that makes sense.

And I think that to me is what spirituality does, is it gives you that framework of being in a space, you don't have to the answers yourself. Just ask the bigger question and then wait and receive. And the beauty is that when you get more intuitive and you start to get more connected to what that answer may be, life becomes so much easier to live.

Challenges, trust me, I've had a lot of challenges myself. I was kicked out of Africa. I was smuggled out of a country when I was six months of age. And then we came over here with no money. We had nothing, cockroach infested apartment. And I was asking those questions as a little kid. But I'm going to tell you, it was a really challenging journey for my parents.

And I grew up with a lot of intensity in the household because of that early trauma. Yet I always just kind of felt like there was a part of me that even when I was given that Prozac, was why is this happening for me? Wait, I'm not going to take a pill. There's something that's bigger than this, so exploring.

And then the stress personality is basically back to the disconnect. So, if I'm in that volatile, excitable state or if I'm in that Pitta fiery state or if I'm in that earthy state, and the quiz is on the website, so people can go there and take the quiz real quick.<sup>1</sup> But the idea with the quiz and the reason I did this is I want everyone to start. It was I believe Socrates that said an unexamined life is not worth living.

**Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:**

Exactly.

**Trupti Gokani, MD:**

An unexamined life is not worth living. So, examine, examine yourself and you'll start to say, oh, maybe I stay in that state because of. And then ask the bigger question, why am I in this state? And that's kind of the start of it. And that's where we get some really interesting answers. And that's where we can make shifts that can dramatically improve the body and the pain.

**Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:**

That was great. Thank you so much. I'm glad I asked that question. I want to ask you another question and I'm going to go ahead and use a word that I learned directly from one of your writings. Can you tell us what 'Ama' is in both the mental and physical sense?

**Trupti Gokani, MD:**

Ama, it's one of my favorite words. Ama, A-M-A, Ama. It's funny, one of the Ayurvedic practitioners used to say against medical advice, Ama. Ama is not that. So, what Ama means, Ama is a toxin. And when we think of toxins, we talk about toxins even in the Western world, it is anything that is interrupting the flow of your being.

It could be an emotional toxin. It could be a physical toxin. We talked about lymphatics. We talked about energy flow. Anything that's blocking you from just being fully flowing and vibrant of mind and body. That's an Ama. That's a toxin. So, the toxin could be, yes, it could be gluten if your body doesn't break it down well. That could create toxicity in the gut. And you could create inflammatory peptides around it. And then unfortunately it could lead to leaky gut and trigger inflammation around the body, if that is something you eat a lot of. So that could be a physical toxin. We know about different toxins like pesticides and things in the environment that we inhale that could be toxic for us. Then hormone disruptors and all those things that could be toxic.

And then we have the emotional toxins and the emotional toxins I don't believe get enough attention. So emotional toxin is something that happened to me ten years ago that I'm still pissed off about. And I'm just going to still be pissed about it today because that just was not fair. And I don't care that it's been ten years, you are going to talk about that story with me, I am going to get really pissed off about it.

That's an emotional toxin. And that actually is going to affect me today, even if it happened ten years ago. So, it takes us away from being present because I'm living in the past. So, anything that's disturbing either my mind or my body and creating that block of flow, that block a vibrance, that's the energy. That's where the energy flows.

It's really energy flows when you don't carry toxins. It's when people walk in, they're just like, ah. Or there's this one Vajra, this one Guru that I was in a room with. And I'm telling you, I was way back in the audience. And I just felt his pleasantness and his beauty and his energy, and I was way back in the room and this guy's way up there, and somehow the whole room was just captivated.

And this is an individual that spent a lot of time clearing out the Ama of the thoughts of the body, eats clean, thinks clean, thinks everyone's good, believes good in others. There's no polarizing thoughts in that man's body. You know what I'm saying? Just everything was love and peace and love and good

energy. And so, when you kind of operate from that, you actually can release a lot of things that are holding you back.

And so, the toxin in Ayurveda we work on, we call panchakarma. It's five systems cleansing. And one of the systems is the colon, but you're cleansing your sweat glands, you're cleansing, it's called virechana, forced emesis. I mean, you think about migraine and vomiting. Think about the CGRP buildup in the gut. That's actually clearing Ama. So, in Eastern medicine you wouldn't give a nausea medicine. [Eastern] would say to throw up. And when I talk to my migraine patients, they say they feel better after they throw up. Because you're clearing the toxins.

Then there's a cleansing of the physical body. And then there is the cleansing of the mind. Who do we need to forgive? Who can be more loving towards? How can we be more compassionate in our words, our language, and our thoughts to ourselves and to others? Very often we're tough on ourselves. The perfectionistic pleasers out there, anybody? We're kind of tough and intense on ourselves.

So, the first part is to be forgiving and loving to yourself, and then to others. And that actually clears that Ama. And forgiveness is probably the toughest thing for a lot of people I've worked with that have chronic symptoms. But that my father did this or this one did that, and I get it. And I am not condoning behavior that was negative, terrible behavior, though it is not helpful for us to carry it because it actually affects our energetic system, which then, energy converts to mass, it then affects our physical bodies.

So that's the piece. If we can start doing some housekeeping there, the physical body will improve. I've seen it time and time again. You can look at Bruce Lipton's work, Candace Pert. There are plenty of bright individuals that have studied the effect of the subconscious mind and the emotional body on the physical. Gabor Mate is another one. A lot of great people out there, and I just have to thank all of them because they opened my eyes to this. Ayurveda and then reading all this work, Louise Hay is another one. You just need to learn about the importance of clearing the mind. And Ayurveda has said this 5000 years ago. It's about time we start listening to some of the teachings and really practicing it.

**Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:**

I think I'll just move on to, that was my last question for you. Is there anything else you'd like to add on this topic of stress and your approach to stress and headache and migraine before we go.

**Trupti Gokani, MD:**

We covered so much. I think, overall, I'd like anyone that's listening to know that there's always, always space for improvement and feeling better. Like I was saying earlier, I manage some incredibly challenged individuals who have been to some of the top centers in the country, who have been on so many pharmaceuticals, who've tried so many Eastern medicine approaches, and then kind of gave up and said, I don't know if there's anything left for me.

There's always space to move forward. And what I do know with my 20 some years of experience, is that a lot of it will be found in more the subtle energy body, the body that you're not seeing physically. And it sounds tricky to explore that, but I'd say start with just simply getting to know if you can learn a little teeny bit about Ayurveda. That's not that challenging. I started learning it in my 20s.

Just learn a little bit about what state. Are you a little excitable, are you a little too fired up, are you a little too earthy. Just start with that and then start to kind of move a little further. And you can look at, book number one, I talk about it more now than I did before.

But a little bit like, how did you get into that state? Is it maybe if you're fired up do you eat too many spicy foods. You're too windy, maybe you're eating too many cold foods. Too earthy, maybe too many heavy foods like the gluten and dairies. Start with some simple things and then kind of keep yourself open and receive and realize there's more to the story. And realize that you can get better and realize there's no individual out there that can't improve their pain body.

I've seen it over and over again. It does take daily dedication though. If you're open to it, why not explore yourself. There's no one more interesting to learn about than yourself, I think. And then you can empower other people, your kids, your family members, your significant others. I feel like it's my goodness, I'm so grateful that that Ayurveda me back in my 20s because I've been able to help so many people, family members included. Hey, have you thought about it this way. And sometimes it's just a few shifts. It's amazing how the body can release, you know? So, I just want to give people hope and faith that they can get better because they can.

**Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:**

Well, thank you so much for joining us today. This has been a wonderful episode. And thank you everyone for listening in. Please join us for the next episode of HeadWise. Bye-bye.

1. URL: <https://truptigokanimd.com/stress-personality-type/> Taking the Personality Quiz.