

THE MODEL **HEALTH** **SHOW**

EPISODE 581

How To Use Movement To Transform Your Health And Mindset

With Guest Jaja Vankova

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SHAWN STEVENSON: Welcome to the Model Health Show. This is fitness and nutrition expert, Shawn Stevenson, and I'm so grateful for you tuning in with me today. On this episode we're going to be breaking down some of the most overlooked, valuable tools for health and longevity, for emotional wellness, for our mental health, and so much more. And you have access to it all the time, you might not realize it, but you have access to this wonderful tool all of the time. Now, to give you a little hint, right now, we're dealing with a situation where there's a lot of emotional turmoil. We're dealing with a situation where a lot of folks are not really tapped into high levels of emotional intelligence. And this leans back into the work from Dr. Daniel Goleman, which I'm grateful to say we had on the Model Health Show and a wonderful teacher in this field and understanding how our emotional intelligence is a major guiding light for how we show up in the world, how we interact with ourselves, and how we interact with others.

Because our emotions really provide valuable feedback, valuable data, but oftentimes we can be so associated with our emotions, that we become those emotions. And we think that those emotions are the only thing that exist, and the truth is, humans have this remarkable capacity and this vast array of emotional states that we have access to. Now we do, as an individual in the real world, we tend to have emotions that we lean on, that we revert to more often than others. And during this time, we've experienced... What tends to happen is, the emotions that we tend to cultivate the most are the ones that are going to show up, right? So, it's very much like the scenario of when you squeeze an orange. When you squeeze an orange, what comes out? OJ. Alright, now I'm not talking about... OJ, orange juice, is going to come out of the orange, because that's what's in the orange. What's going to come out is what's in there. So, when you squeeze it, what's going to come out is orange juice. Very much like ourselves, when life squeezes you, what's going to come out is what's already in there. When life squeezes you, is it going to be anger that comes out?

Is it going to be patience? Is going to be creativity? What's going to come out is what's already in there, what you've cultivated. Because as a statement says, when you're under pressure, you're not going to rise to the level of your expectation, you're going to fall to the level of your training. Alright, you're not going to rise to the level of your expectations, you're going to fall to the level of your training. So, what have we been practicing in our lives? What are the emotional states that we tend to revert to, that we tend to exist in the most? That we've cultivated, that we've taken time and habituated within our own psyche. And this gets back to this conversation about emotional intelligence. Which is, at its heart, understanding these vast emotions and our access to them, and then having the ability to choose how we want to respond. Or having ability to see our emotions for what they are, which are temporary states

that we can tend to try to latch on to, but in reality, our emotions are very fleeting and flexible and fluid. And so, it's a really beautiful thing, but it can also be a situation where it's pretty terrifying and where it has a lot of control over our lives.

Now, we don't have to dissect the mental construct in how we associate with our emotions, we can utilize very proven... Things that have been utilized for thousands and thousands of years to shift and alter our emotional states to things that are more advantageous for us. We don't need to know the ins and outs of it, we can know the practices. And if you look at the word emotion, what's contained within that word is another word that is very, very powerful. Within the word emotion, is the word motion. Our emotions are heavily influenced by motion itself, alright? The way that we are moving our bodies, our state, has a tremendous impact on the emotions that we express. And also, our emotions impact our motion, and how our bodies are expressing, and how they're showing up. What happens when we are in a state of sadness? What does the body do?

What do your shoulders do? They tend to move forward; head tends to go down. Right? Our bodies become more cathodic, right? So, we know what a depressed state looks like, but our physiology, our nervous system can't help but make an alteration. If we are in a state of sadness and we open up our shoulders and we lift our heads up and we breathe deep, it immediately changes our state. It changes our nervous system, it doesn't mean that the sadness is suddenly just disintegrated, but that physical change, the change in our motion changes our emotional state as well. And so today I want to provide some really practical tools and some practical insights into what I feel to be a really overlooked resource for us today, when we're experiencing so much divisiveness, and there's a situation where we have this very strange...

If we're talking about motion, this twisted version of Footloose taken place. Sans Kevin Bacon, where there are certain conversations that are outlawed... Are frowned upon. There's... There's this dissection taking place with people who believe this thing and believe that thing, people who do these things and don't do these things. And there's not a lot of crosstalk taking place. And one of these unifiers, funny enough, even in that movie the town came together under the umbrella. Under the disco globe of movement and of dance. And the truth is, throughout human evolution, every culture... A big part of culture is dance and movement. And there is so much to be said for all of the mental health benefits, all of the remarkable community benefits that take place with human connection. Wow. Is dancing one of the most remarkable ways of connecting with other people. Wow. Even people that you don't know, there is this universal language with dance. And if anybody's been to a conventional dance party club type vibe... That's one of those things where you don't have to know the person to connect.

Asking somebody to dance or today is different. Back in the day, of course, the person will come out, "Hey, you want to dance with me". Today in a lot of time you just go and start

twerking up on a person, a fellow lady, the vibes might be different but people... I'm sure people are still asking for dance or, you know there's different types of dances and how we intersect, but if you just think about this evolution throughout history, again, humans have always had this connection, and even a celebration or the expression of story, there are even traditions that have their stories in the history of their people passed on from generation to generation through dance. I can go on and on and on, and we're going to talk about some of these benefits and why this might be another tool to add to your superhero utility belt right now.

More intentionally, through this facet movement for healing, for connection, for mental health, for emotional health, the list goes on and on. And also learning about this from one of the leading experts in the world, but not just that, not only does a special guest have elite status when it comes to this art form, in this form of expression and motion and therapy, but also she's brought together this movement practice, this movement phenomenon, and it has imbued with many other aspects of health and wellness intentionally into what she teaches and to what she is... Because it's really a... It isn't just one thing.

And I always like to refer back to that here with the Model Health Show, we want to address and provide solutions and tools and insights for all levels of health for all the different domains, because health isn't just one thing, it isn't just nutrition, it's a huge part... It isn't just exercise. Huge part. It isn't just sleep, huge part. It isn't just relationships. Huge part. But it's not the thing. All of these things create a human life, a healthy, sovereign, resilient human life, and so I want to provide more and more resources and tools and voices in this one today is no exception. It's going to be really special. Now, when our special guest arrived, she brought a gift for me... Alright, she brought a gift from me and I brought a gift for her as well, so we exchange bags... I was like, little impromptu, Christmas vibes, alright.

And so, we exchanged our bags and in the bag, she gave me, guess what it was? Tea... She gave me a gift of tea. In the bag, I gave her... Guess what it was? Tea. I gave her a gift of Tea. I also gave her a little really cool mug as well. But I gave her one of my favorite Teas, and it is the Pu-erh from Pique Tea, and Pu-erh is a fermented tea that is just skyrocketing in popularity right now, I've known about Pu-erh for many, many years, but it's been around for centuries, of course, but it has a long history of use within regions in and around China, and Pu-erh is well respected for its profound benefits on metabolism and overall health, according to a study published in the Journal Phytonutrient Research.

Pu-erh is one of the rare nutrient sources that has a direct, significant influence on the enzyme that unlocks fat from our fat cells, called Hormone-sensitive lipase or HSL. Pu-erh is also noted to be effective as an adjunct to intermittent fasting because of its ability to support fat loss while protecting muscle mass as documented in a recent study featured in Clinical Interventions in Aging. Now, I can go on and on about the remarkable benefits, we've talked

about the benefits with the microbiome, bottom line is Pu-erh is incredible, it's one of my favorite Teas, and here's the key, the quality is always the most important factor, especially when it comes to our Teas. Now, there are so many remarkable benefits with a variety of different teas, but a lot of folks don't realize how contaminated these products can be with heavy metals and pesticides and moles and microplastics... The list goes on and on and all the craziness, but the Pu-erh that I utilize and really all my teas, whether it's green tea, Pu-erh, Hibiscus... The list goes on and on.

It's from Pique Tea and Pique Tea uses a patented cold extraction technology. Now, the Pu-erh from Pique is wild harvested, and also it has this deep concentration because of their extraction method, where it's very dense and additional phytonutrients and antioxidants that you're simply not going to get from other Tea sources. And it's triple toxin screened for one of the highest levels of purity, go to Piquelife.com/model, and use the code Model at check out, you get an exclusive 10% off with every purchase, and this is exclusive with the Model Health Show. Right. This is Pique only does this with the Model Health Show. So again, go to Piquelife.com/model, that's P-I-Q-U-E-L-I-F-E.com/model, given this Pique spell P-I-Q-U-E-L-I-F-E. Piquelife.com/model, use a code model for 10% off, and now let's get to the Apple Podcast review of the week.

ITUNES REVIEW: Another five-star review titled “nerd heaven plus practical application Equal success” from bebland 1522. “I'm such a nerd when it comes to all things body, mind and spirit, I could... And do listen to Sean's voice for hours along with the practicality of his content.”

SHAWN STEVENSON: Thank you so much for sharing your voice over on Apple Podcast, I appreciate it so much. And if you get to do so, please pop over to Apple Podcast, leave a review for the Model Health Show. And on that note, let's get to our special guest and topic of the day. Our guest today is Jaja Vankova, and she's an artist, choreographer, teacher, and health and wellness advocate. And coming to the US from her home in the Czech Republic, she's blown the doors off the hinges with her impact on dance. A lot of people might recognize her from America's Best Dance Crew, being the champion, her, and her crew, and also from there, she's had the opportunity to Choreograph for Justin Bieber for dancing with Taylor Swift and Selena Gomez and Lura. The list goes on and on and on, and she's also appeared in films like Step-Up, some iconic dance movies as well.

She is well noted for her expertise in very specific movements and being somebody who's teaching and coaching body control, and today's conversation is just blew me away, I had so many aha moments myself and talking with Jaja, so definitely filled with Insights, tools and more strategies for us to utilize in our day-to-day lives and that's what it's really all about. So, let's jump into this conversation with the amazing Jaja Vankova, when you moved here to the US, did you come right to a LA.

JAJA VANKOVA: No, so when I moved here my crew originally I aM mE we were called I aM mE and now they are from Houston. And so, when I moved here, I came to Houston for three months, and we were practicing there every day for 12-hour practice every day for America's Best Dance Crew at that time. And so, at the time, I didn't know like if I'm moving here yet or no, it was kind of like, "Hey come do this TV show with us?" And I was like, Yeah, no English, no, no nothing. I was just like, Yeah, I'm coming. No visa, No nothing. So...

SHAWN STEVENSON: How was that like... Was it a lot to take in.

JAJA VANKOVA: It was a lot, honestly like a whole culture change, it's kind of strips you off of your identity, everything that you ever believe in, or your perspectives, your language, the way you eat, like the way you dress, the way you think, everything is different. And so, yet it was definitely like... Really challenging for the first couple of years, I was kind of just lost, like, where is my identity at and then that lasted for four, five years, and then I started to realize, okay, I need to adapt to this new culture. My language started to get a little bit better, and I think it took about seven years, there's a saying that you really don't know a person until your friendship lasts for seven years, or your relationship last for seven years, so I think it took about seven years before I started to finally feel like comfortable with communication or I knew how people think here, it's very different than in my country. So yeah, Houston was the first stop and then we went on the show... We won, so thanks to that, I was able to stay in America, and we moved to LA with the whole crew, we rented the house in Norwich, and we moved there.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So, I would imagine though, that... If you could, can you talk about because you've been to so many different countries, and in so many different cultures, have you seen that dance itself is like a unifier, of people like a language that is as beyond language.

JAJA VANKOVA: 100% because dance is a language and it's a universal language because even us, people that don't dance, they are still moving, they still have a body language, and body language is like the hidden language of every person, the way we sit, the way we cross our arms, the way we open our arms, So the way we open our chest or if we touch our neck, all of these movements says a lot about how the person is feeling or what kind of doubts or insecurities he might or she might have, or what kind of emotions he might have, or Is she hiding something? Or is she wanting to say something. So, all of these gestures are used in dance as well too, so it's really interesting of how...

Yes, I've been traveling to so many different, cultures and countries, and again, the languages are different, and sometimes I teach people that don't speak English at all, and I teach them for three hours and I have to explain it, okay, we are doing this, we're doing that. But because movement is such a universal language, I can see... Let's say if somebody touches their neck...

It's the same in every country. It's just feeling like, vulnerable or it's feeling like nervous, or it's feeling like lost, so I can see even on the students... I can see like, oh, do you guys have any questions? But the students don't want to say anything 'cause they're nervous, but they would be standing there like... "No, we don't," but I really know don't that... They do. So, dance and movement is really universal language that we all speak in every day, we all communicate with our hands, we all are walking, we all are moving every day, that's all movement, it's all says a lot about ourselves.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That is powerful. So, have you found that...? And I know this, of course, like everybody might see movies about this or just see in their day-to-day lives, if they've ever embarked on going to a dance or we're going to hang out with friends. Have you found that dance has been a bridge to friendships and relationships?

JAJA VANKOVA: 100%. Yeah, so what is beautiful about this it is... As we were traveling so many countries and cultures, I see a lot of my friends that are non-dancers, they would like, "Oh, let's go party and let's get drunk", but us dancers, it's like, Okay, let's go session and session is just dancers getting together and creating a circle and we just dance and exchange, and the beautiful thing about this is that we can do this with people that don't speak our language, and we can do this in every country. And sometimes we would do it, we would be dancing all day in workshops or in studios or at a dance camp, and then at night we would just meet up and we would just dance for hours at night, and there would be no alcohol, there would be no drugs involved, there would be nothing like that. And.

That's... That was... It's very powerful because then there's these moments that are created. Sometimes the session gets really spiritual, sometimes the session gets really on a peaceful and joy frequency, and sometimes you can see the love. Maybe there is a person that is going through a lot internally either if it's in school or at work or with parents or anything like that, and this is going to give him a space to really express and to really show what he's feeling through the movement and because... What I love about the session is it's not just energy out its energy in as well too. And so, there is this exchange that is happening energetically. And so, it really gives a safe space for people to express their emotions without even talking and I see this a lot. I teach a lot of people that never danced before, I teach a lot of athletes, or I teach psychotherapist as a release, or I teach psychologist and... Or even a person who was doing... What is it called? Juggling?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Juggling yeah.

JAJA VANKOVA: Yeah, juggling, like circus people, or even a policewoman, and they would come to me and they're just like, "I see you dance, and I just see the release and I want to find out more about this, help me with it." So, I teach these people that don't have dance

experience, but even after a one class they are able to express and they're like, "Wow, I feel so much lighter." So, in a way it is therapy, it is very therapeutical.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. And I know that consistently, even somebody on my team my guy Connor, just mentioned this yesterday. He was dancing just like it's cathartic, it's so much healing potential there and... But for you... And this is why I'm so grateful to have you, is that dance is really holistic for you. And you've been dancing and performing for over 20 years which is bananas, but in 2017, you were inspired to get even more focused on health and wellness. So, can you talk about what sparked that inspiration for you?

JAJA VANKOVA: So, it was really interesting because sometimes people come into your life and they try to sparkle ideas on you, like, "Oh, maybe you should try this kind of food, it would be better for you, or you should try watch this person, maybe this person would inspire you." But it really doesn't... A lot of times it really doesn't bring forth the person until they find it themselves more internally. And usually, it has to be like an event that something happens to you, and then it's like, "Okay, I need to change things." And so... Well, first actually, the first thought I had was when I moved from Europe to America, the quality of the food is very different over here.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You could say it.

JAJA VANKOVA: Yeah, it's very different. I remember I was at a diner with friends one time. This was like 2011, so I was still very Czech at a time, very Czech republic mindset and I was eating, it was like a restaurant it was mashed potatoes with some pork... I don't know. And I was like, "Yeah, the food just tastes fake, I can't." Yeah, it's okay.

SHAWN STEVENSON: There it is, the f-word there it is, yeah.

JAJA VANKOVA: And they got offended. And so already at that time I started to look into a little bit of why does the food here taste so much different than in Europe? And slowly I started to learn like there are chemicals used here that are completely illegal in Europe. And then naturally, I just stopped eating chicken because... By the way, before I was eating all kinds of stuff, I mean like fried pork fat and baked pork knees with mustard, I would eat all kinds of crazy stuff like that, that was like... That's like the Czech republic way, meat, meat, meat, meat. And so naturally, at the time I already stopped eating chicken because for me, it just didn't taste the way I was always used to.

And then in 2017, it was actually the first time I was always going for regular check-ups to my doctor, and my doctor was the first time she did a regular check-up and some tests on me, she was like, "Okay, there is something wrong, we need to do more testing on you." So that's when

I went for a biopsy and so they found out... Long story short, it was like a process of a year, one year before I even found out what is going on. They told me that I am in the transition... Which is called Cancer Institute, and I was in the transition from the pre-cancer into cancer, so it was like a stage, almost each one cancer. And it was a cervical cancer. And they were sending me for a surgery, and at the time, I wasn't plant-based, I wasn't eating healthy yet, and they were sending me into surgery, and I was like, "Wow." I was shocked at the time that something like that could actually... Something like that actually exists now, exist in my body.

You always hear about this stuff and heart disease, and cancer, and stroke, and stuff like that. You hear about it, but then when it happens to you, it's like, "Woah." And I was extremely lucky because they found it really early because I am good with like, "Okay, I want to do a prevention, like check-up." I always go for check-ups and stuff like that, just to make sure everything is good. And that's when I really dive deep and just from one day to another, I cut everything out. I cut all processed foods, all sugar, all meat, all dairy. I went completely plant based.

And I even went... For a couple of months, I went completely raw vegan as well, which by the way, I don't do it on daily basis right now, but it is my favorite way of eating, 'cause it just feels so enlightening, it feels so fresh, so much clarity in mind, and I just felt so powerful and my dance felt so much better than when I was eating that way as well too. But so much travel that I had; it wasn't that sustainable. That's why I started to introduce cooked food back as well into the diet, and that's actually when I had my first surgery at the time, and after that surgery, they did another check-up like six or eight months later, and they said that it's still there, and I have to do a second surgery, and I didn't want to do it because with the second surgery, it's a high chance of either in the future miscarriage or not being able to get pregnant or have babies. And I knew I want to start a family 100%. And that's when I decided to start to do the fasting and I went on the seven-day water fast where I just consumed water, nothing else for seven days, and it was distilled water as well too.

I know there's a lot of people that are not fans of distilled water. But I'm a big fan of distilled water, so no minerals neither and that it completely flushed everything out of the body, I continued the raw vegan diet for a couple more months, and then next time when I went on the check-up after I denied the second surgery, when I went on the check-up, it was completely gone at the time. And the doctor was like, "Oh, okay". Yeah, so of course they still... They still had me go for more check-ups like after that, because they thought, it will come back and stuff. And...

SHAWN STEVENSON: You was like, yeah, no, thank you. That chapter's done.

JAJA VANKOVA: No, no thank you, no thank you yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That's a powerful story.

JAJA VANKOVA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And this is the thing too. We were talking a little bit before we got together, of your experience is the most powerful degree that you could ever have, and you become a walking representation of what's possible. People might not necessarily understand the technical stuff, but there's something about you that is just going to resonate, and I didn't share this with you, but part of the reason I'm sitting here right now is because of a story, not exactly, but very, very similar to yours, with my wife, this was... We'll just say, 17 years ago, and she went in for a routine exam and they found these pre-cancerous two stage one cancer cells, and of course it's just all hands-on deck. You got to do this, you got to do that. And she was obviously very upset hearing that term, and she's just like, what do I do, what did I do wrong? All these things, and fortunately, we had a guide, we had my mother-in-law, 'cause I didn't know. I had no idea, I was working at the university gym, I was still trying to finish my degree.

And I knew how to... I knew about the a fitness side, and I also knew about, I got myself healthy, but I didn't know these big diseases, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, that there was a solution. And so, she told my mother-in-law, who was the guide and my teacher, my greatest teacher, and she's actually coming into town today, which is bonus, like yeah she is coming, and so anyway, so we went and told my mother-in-law and my wife at the time, she's my girlfriend, and she was just obviously... She was very upset hearing that this was the thing that was going on with her, and my mother-in-law was just... She's kind of very stern. And cool and she was like, "What are you crying for? All you need to do is this, this, and this". And so immediately she put her on to this fasting protocol and juicing and wheat grass and all these different things, and specific herbs and all this, and 22 days later, she went back and got checked or maybe it was within 30 days. They couldn't find anything. Alright?

JAJA VANKOVA: Only 30 days.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I didn't know that that was possible, right? And so, the same thing happened with you is just like you were like, "Oh no, no, no, actually let me do this", and then I go back, and I can't find anything, but here's the part two that I want to steer you towards and everybody... They're going to keep trying to find something.

JAJA VANKOVA: Exactly.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And that's part of, in a sense, their job, but seek and you shall find something if you look hard enough and invasive enough and you go and snip this or test this,

instead of just like when they saw that and just like, what the hell? I can't find anything. Why didn't they ask you...? Have you ever thought about this? They didn't ask you what you did?

JAJA VANKOVA: No, they didn't at all. Yeah, at all, I didn't even mention anything to them because and they didn't ask anything, it was... Yeah, it was the... I know something inside of me, like at the time was like, I don't think this should be the answer, I don't think surgery and cutting something should be the answer and something like inside just told me like, there has to be another way of healing ourselves and I am really grateful for that experience to happen. Because it just opened a whole world of possibilities. And now I'm capable of... I have inner circle of my friends and sometimes, they... I've been having cough for the past eight months, or I've been having itchiness right here for the past two months, and there are the simple remedies that you can recommend to your close circle and friends or people that ask that completely work for them, and it's just incredible. And yeah, as you said, you go for a check-up, and they test you and...

Sometimes they find stuff that is it really there? Or are you just trying to find something, and then they throw at a bunch of words you don't know, and it scares you and then the fear might actually start something in your body.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Absolutely, yeah. And also, the tools like, okay, so I have this thing expressing potentially, the tools are... I'm going to cut you; I'm going to poison. Right maybe burn you... We've got burning, radiation as well. And it's just like, where is the health in any of those things? And also... And then this is a fundamental question I want to implore everyone to just always have in their mental bank account ready to ask is, what caused this?

JAJA VANKOVA: Exactly.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Because there is never... And this is a strange phenomenon too, because it is supposed to be a system based on science, there's this idea that things just happen, right? But that is against principles of physics, it is against the principles of the universe, there's nothing that just happens. There's a cause and effect, something caused this expression, and so let's address what caused it so that we don't have a re-occurrence, but that's just not how things work, and so being able to become sovereign and an authority on your own health and your own body, and then being the expression and teaching it to other people, it's really remarkable. I want to ask you about movement, but I'm going to do something a little bit different because there's so many different things that it affects, so I want to ask you this. I want to ask you about how it affects essentially different areas of our lives, so I'll start with this one, why is movement such a valuable tool for improving our mental health?

JAJA VANKOVA: Because movement is us. We start with movement when we are a little fetus, we were created by movement, so that is... We are developing inside of a moving body already, even when we are sleeping, there is the movement of the heart, there is the movement of the organs inside of the body, and all of these aspects have effect on the baby that is inside of the woman, the baby is feeling and hearing the breathing and the heart, the heart is already a rhythm, so that already is a dance in itself, because dance is a movement to the rhythm, and so when we are born, it's not like we are a clean sheet of paper anymore, we were bathing in a bath of emotions, we're bathing in bath of sadness, in bath of happiness, we're bathing in bath of all of these hormones. We already took on the rhythm of the heartbeat of the mother, we were already hearing the breathing, now we are going to take on the breathing patterns as well too, so even such a simple thing as really making sure we are breathing correctly, if you're breathing deeply, we take time to take breathes in during today or conscious breathes, because all of these things are going to affect the next generation, the babies that are about to be born. Now, even when we are born, we are so taught to take our baby and put it in the crib or put it in the car seat.

Where you breath air, but really like what our ancestors did, they were carrying their babies at all times because the baby's nervous system and the development... It's not fully developed. Nothing's fully developed yet. So when we carry the baby, they are still learning how to breathe, they are still learning the movement, they are, even just by us carrying them, they are strengthening their different muscles in their necks and backs, and ultimately, they're not just learning by watching from the floor, but they are learning by us washing dishes or us cooking something with them, or us dancing with them, and so that is so essential because movement and sound is the creation of our life, that is the two elements. Movement and sound. Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That's powerful. That's facts. I didn't even know he's going to go there to like to the root. The origin, that's so powerful. And to lean into that a little bit more, I'm asking you this specifically, because obviously we're living in a very strange time where there's a lot of divisiveness, there's a lot of struggles with mental health epidemics, multiple epidemics that we've never seen before. The greatest rates of mental health challenges ranging from depression, anxiety, suicide, ADHD, schizophrenia, the list goes on and on and on, there's basically disorders for everything, everything gets a name today. But what we're really seeing a consistent thread of that is a disconnection from ourselves and a disconnection in a sense from peace and stillness, and life is movement as well, for sure, there's a lot going on. There's a lot to take in. And today, more than ever, there's so much coming at us, and our brains and our bodies were not really wired up to handle all of this turbulence, so I'm asking this because I want to provide solutions in every form or fashion that I could come up with, but also things that have a thread of truth and also humanity, we've been dancing forever.

JAJA VANKOVA: Yes, forever since the beginning of time.

SHAWN STEVENSON: To lean into this a little bit more with all of the divisiveness, I've already asked you about this and how dancing can create connectivity, not just to others, but to ourselves as well. And so, what about encouraging people like you said you've taught a lot of people who don't dance. What would you say about people utilizing this, intentionally utilizing movement and dance as a tool to improve their mental health and improve their emotional well-being?

JAJA VANKOVA: Yes, yes, because ultimately, if we think of it in a very simplistic way, all we need to do is to just put on the music and move our body. There doesn't need to be anybody in the room, there doesn't need to be a teacher that is teaching us, it can be our self-expression that is for free, putting on music and just dance and move, it's for free. And just this kind of act can be so meditative for our body and mind that it can help us to improve the mental health in such a tremendous way because music has the power to actually raise our vibrations and raise our frequency as well too, and... Because there was actually scientific research where they were looking how music affects water and music can completely change the structure, the molecular structure of water, if you play mastered or classical music or I don't know music that has a high frequency. The molecular structure turns really beautiful, it looks like snowflakes, really beautiful structures. And if you play music that has a low frequency, the music has ugly structure. No, it's just not nice. Now, our body is made out of 65, 70, 80% water, so if music can change the structure of water, it can change our structure as well too, right?

Now, if we don't, not just play the music, but we are moving with it as well too. Same with water there is movement in water as well too, right? So, if we are moving with it as well too it actually is raising our vibrations and our frequency, which is literally repairing the nervous system, it's repairing the thinking and it's raising the thoughts itself. Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That's powerful...

JAJA VANKOVA: Just putting on music and expressing.

SHAWN STEVENSON: This is one of my favorite books back in the day when I was venturing into the different areas of nutrition and water and hydration, all that stuff, and it's Dr. Masaru Emoto's book hidden messages of water. I still have that audio book, but this is back when you actually bought discs, so this was the audio book, and it's really fascinating to think about that, and water has this really... Of course, it's like the reason... One of the core reasons we have life on the planet. So, I always think about that, that synchronicity with humans and with the planet itself, the planet is maybe around 75%, 80% water, it's just like... That's a funny coincidence it's the same ratio in us, and water has this intelligence, so you're talking about these water crystals, the crystals that it forms. And water has this ability also to change, it never disappears,

its changing form, going from a solid to a liquid to a gas, it's one of its very unique qualities. It's adaptable, but the greatest thing about water that I don't think we really get... We have to sit with it. Is that water is intelligent enough to become us, it becomes us, human tissue.

So fascinating how smart water is, yes. And so, I love that That analogy as well. And so, to stack on this a little bit, and actually you know what, I'm going to ask you about this because I don't want to glance over it. It's such a powerful thing. We even talked about it before we started the show, and a big part of the reason if people are thinking like how the... What was it like she fasted and her body got better, the so-called condition was able to resolve itself a lot of times is simply getting out of the way, like your body knows what to do, and it's stacking conditions in your favor?

JAJA VANKOVA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So, for you, you even mentioned that you've created more of a habitual thing where you employ and put it a little bit of fasting in your life right now, you've got a new baby that you're taking care of and that you're feeding, but this has been a tool that you've been able to tell in your back on... So, what have been some of the other benefits you've seen with fasting.

JAJA VANKOVA: Before I got pregnant, I was fasting every week for 24 hours. Usually, I started 8 PM on Saturday and ended 8 PM the next day, right? To me, super easy, it's not hard to fast, and what I've seen at that time I was consuming only distilled water, no added mineral, no tea, no juice, no lemon in the water Nothing like that. And what I saw was just, I saw clarity, more clarity, I saw more focus. So even on my practice when I was practicing dance, I was able to focus more, because right now nowadays, all our work is on our phone, so the focus is sometimes... It's just so much going on. And so I've really used it as a tool to be in the moment, and what the fasting actually promotes a lot as well, is a flow state as being in the zone, being in the moment, and besides that, I also saw a bigger stamina, better stamina in my body as well to better metabolism as well too, and just overall was like the appreciation for everything was higher, so the appreciation for.

The practice or for the music or for just the day was just very different appreciation for actually having the time, the next hour is just for this practice, and the joy in it, one of the main things is when you are dancing for over 20 years is to just still keep it fun, not just practicing because I have to practice, but I get to practice right. So even the fun of it, raised its vibration as well too, so definitely fasting is a wonderful tool, and it doesn't need to be long, it doesn't need to be four or five, six, seven days, it can literally be even if it's an eight hour fast... If it's a 12 hour fast a one day first and that's enough... Just to try it out. Yeah, definitely. I think one of the best benefits from it is promoting the flow state, which is for us dancers so important because what

we are always striving for is to be one with the music, and we can be one with the music, only if we are in a complete state of the flow. It's a very deep...

SHAWN STEVENSON: That is a powerful word, fluidity, even transitioning from the water to this... I just did, it was pretty much a four-day fast this week, and one of the things that I saw... Which you pick things up, I've been doing this for almost 20 years now, so about 17 years, so I was getting there. But one of the things that I really noticed this time was the fluidity in my body, so just like little movements, it just seemed like there wasn't any restriction that I would notice if I'm doing this or that, or reaching for this, or just these little movements where my body might feel a little bit more tense or wired up, and so that's kind of relaxed, and of course, there's going to be an inflammatory element with food, even if we're eating the best diet, but that's what I've really seen this time around, is this fluidity that's present and I want that, I want to keep that, but I also want some delicious-ness in my life, and so it was just...

I want to implore everybody to keep this as a tool and a resource, our ancestors been utilizing it for thousands of years, there have been conditions, of course, where it wasn't planned, people weren't wanting to fast, but it's just like season change and availability, but many of the great religions and many of the great civilizations have implemented this for a reason, and a big part of that is that mental clarity, because like you said, even just if you're somebody who's been eating five meals a day or four meals a day for years, and suddenly you're like, I'm going to do an eight-hour fast, just your brain is going to be like talking to you crazy you know what I mean like...

JAJA VANKOVA: Yeah, what's going on.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And using some of those key words, that are just crazy, like I'm starving, I'm going to die. For real? You've got millions of calories stored in your body; you know what I mean? You're not going to die.

JAJA VANKOVA: People skip one lunch and...

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, it's like, I'm starving to death, I'm so hungry I could eat a cow or whatever, you know. But the thing is, it's just like that. If you can have the awareness, and this is why I always encourage folks to have somebody to model or to learn these things from, because you can have somebody to point it to you like, this is going to happen. This crazy voice is going to come up and you can actually see it, like who the hell said that... Was that in me? Where is that coming from? And the last thing we talked about was the joy of eating, when you do eat, it takes things up a notch.

JAJA VANKOVA: Oh yes, it's just a completely different pallet of flavors in the food that you're eating and suddenly, which that is one of the benefits of fasting too, because you can get rid of some habits that might be so hard for you to get rid of otherwise, the fasting might completely change your habits that... As I was mentioning, I completely got rid of my addiction to coffee, I could do six, eight espresso shots a day before, it was bad, and with the fast... Suddenly after that, I was like, I'm not crying, coffee, I don't need it anymore. And since then, it hasn't come back, and it also cures a lot of... What can help with also if people have fidgeting or scratching, some people might be scratching themselves, scratching face or why I'm saying it is because I had a really bad habit of biting skin around my nails, which is also a mental condition... Right, it was really bad. And after the seven-day fast, that completely went away as well too, for the first time in my life, and so it can really clear the body physically, mentally, it clears the soul. And yeah, as you said, if you are not used to fasting and suddenly you're going to fast for a day, your brain is going to talk to you crazy, so it's really important to also have good people around to support you and motivate you to keep you going, and one of the other things that I also realized is every time I was fasting, even if it was for those 24 hours, every time I had a very different experience.

And it's always important to listen to your body, that's another thing that it promotes is to connect, really do connection with your internal intuition as well too. And I remember that when I was doing the 24-hour fast, always, I felt good. No problem. I was in a good mood. And then one day, I went on the fast, and suddenly this huge headache came. It was massive. And my body started to be achy, and I was like, "What's going on?" I was really, really confused. Five days later, I found out that I was pregnant already. So, I was only three weeks pregnant at that time, and five days later I found it out. So, my body wasn't literally telling me like, "Hey, it's time to cut this out. No more fasting." So, it's really important. Actually, I even remember, that day, I cut the fast earlier. So, it's... As I said, it's really important to listen to the internal voice as well, if there is something come up, and your internal voice is saying like, "Hey, it's enough. Let's continue next time." It's important to listen to that as well too.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, that fluidity applies to that too, to be able to be fluid.

JAJA VANKOVA: Exactly.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That's something... And this is another great... But first, actually, before I even get to that, I want to just hammer on a couple of points like why fasting could have these potential benefits, whether it's for improving our immune system, resolving psychological issues, and things of that nature. So, one of the big benefits that we see pretty quickly is a boost in anabolic hormone production like HGH. So, your recovery improves. Your... It's muscle sparing. So, it actually helps your body to retain your lean muscle while going and utilizing

some of that stored excess. Also, this process is one of the really interesting things that's helping to resolve issues with blood sugar normalization.

JAJA VANKOVA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Because... But also, why your body is figuring that out, because of our addiction and dependency on food, we could have some symptoms of our blood sugar being a little bit wonky, and so this could have the side effects that you be in more irritable or what the case might be, which nobody told me about that. And I had a girlfriend, we're both doing 21-day fast, and we were arguing about the stupidest sh*t, and I remember this... I remember a specific place we were at, and we were arguing I'm just like... During the argument, I always had an out-of-body experience like, "This is dumb. I'm not even mad. What is... Why am I so angry?" And you get to see that voice. So, improving... Resolving blood sugar, balancing blood sugar issues. So, improving your insulin sensitivity, blood sugar normalization, HGH production. If we look at leptin, satiety hormones, getting back on track, and we've got some great data on that as well. Just the list goes on and on and on.

JAJA VANKOVA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But also, if we're talking about improvement with our immune system as well, because our immune system... One of the craziest things about this life is this duality with our need for food in order to build our vessel, and also the metabolic energy that it requires for you to turn that food into something. It's the most energy-intensive thing that you and body undertakes by far.

JAJA VANKOVA: 100%. Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And so, when you are able to pull away a little bit from that energy siphoning, more energy gets directed into fixing stuff you didn't even know was wrong.

JAJA VANKOVA: Exactly.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Because your body is like there's a lot going on. And so, one of the things, the big drain that happens is our immune system function, which is largely located in our gut. So, in comes this meal. There's like... They have to be front line. Your immune system has to be there to handle this. And so, you see this really interesting shift take place with cancer issues resolving, for example, when... And this is something, again, we've got sound clinical data on this now, with this being utilized in cancer treatments, fasting in different modalities. And so yeah, it's just super fascinating. I can go on and on and on.

JAJA VANKOVA: Yes, 100%.

SHAWN STEVENSON: We've got a quick break coming up. We'll be right back. Very often is the small things that can make the greatest impact. Archimedes said, "If you give me a lever and a place to stand, I can move the world." It's all about leverage. It's all about positionality. And the same thing holds true when it comes to human health and performance. It is truly honoring the things that give us the greatest leverage. No process can happen in the human body without this remarkable Sodium-Potassium pump. This exchange helps our mitochondria to create fuel. This exchange helps our heart to beat. This exchange helps all of our brain cells to communicate. Nothing is taking place without electrolytes. Electrolytes are minerals that carry an electric charge. And also, we've got mountains of pure good evidence as to their efficacy with every single area human health. For example, our cognitive ability depends mightily on the function of electrolytes.

Take Sodium, for example. Not only is Sodium required to help to maintain fluid balance in your brain itself, a study conducted by researchers at McGill University found that Sodium functions as a literal on off switch in the brain for specific neurotransmitters that support optimal function and protect the brain against numerous diseases like epilepsy, like neuropathic pain. How simple, how foundational, how much leverage we can get from making sure that we're getting adequate amounts of the right type of Sodium. Fascinating new study published in The Journal of Neuron found that another remarkable electrolyte, central electrolyte, magnesium, is able to restore critical brain plasticity and improve cognitive function. Truly, we can fight so hard, so mightily to find nutrients specific foods that can help to bolster our cognitive performance. But it really boils down, first and foremost, to leverage.

And our electrolytes are that leverage now, What about the immune system? This is something that is on a lot of people's minds today, the meta-analysis publishing the annuals of clinical biochemistry titled electrolyte imbalances. In patients with severe Coronavirus disease, COVID 19, it analyzed five studies with nearly 1500 patients with COVID 19 and found that both sodium and potassium another critical electrolyte were significantly lower in patients with severe COVID 19.

Now, this should raise a lot of flags, this should raise up our antennas to understand, hey, what's going on here with our electrolytes? Is electrolyte deficiency leading to worse health outcomes, severity with COVID 19 or, is COVID 19 and any infectious disease requiring electrolyte for the healing process for an appropriate immune response to be mounted. The answer is as follow, and the answer is, we got to ensure that we're getting high quality electrolytes in the right ratios. This is why myself, my family utilizes LMNT, L-M-N-T go to drinklmnt.com/model, and you're going to get to try LMNT for free, they're going to send it right to your door, just pay a little bit in shipping, you get to try a variety pack of LMNT, this

remarkable electrolyte is not coming along with any binders and fillers, and artificial colors and flavors, no sugar, any of that stuff, just the high quality electrolytes that you need to thrive, alright so check them out. Again, it's getting shipped, right to your door, go to drinkmnt.com/model. Get your electrolytes optimized today. Now, back to the show.

I wanted to circle back now and talk more about... Because a part of this detoxification, even his movement, so it can assist in this process. And so, I asked you before about why is movement such a valuable tool for improving mental health. I'm going to ask you next, why is movement such a viable tool for our physical health specifically.

JAJA VANKOVA: So you know there is this image in our society nowadays that people, when they go to the gym or they sign up for fitness classes or when they are running, they are doing it mainly, for again, the outside look, the six pack and you know the lean muscles and just for the look from the outside, but instead looking really what the movement physically is also doing on the inner side on the inside of our body too, so what I love to look at more is when I'm thinking of movement and the physical aspect of it is, am I doing any good to my heart and cardiovascular system today? So instead of when I'm going on a run or a jog or when I'm doing my dance practice, I'm thinking of actually improving the health of my heart instead of necessarily always thinking about getting my muscles leaner. Right, So the reason why I think we are not so focused on it because we can see what is going on the outside of our body, we can physically see that with our eyes, but we actually cannot see our lungs and cannot see our heart, and we cannot see our gut and you know our organs and all of that, but that is what is running everything.

Our gut is running everything our heart, and so it's even just the intention and the thought and the energy of having behind our physical movement, actually having this energy more internally, we can actually have a better result externally as well too, and... So it's like a gym, it's like a gym for your heart, a gym for your gut, and also you already know there's so much research on it that when we are physically active, then it is improving our gut our digestion and that is so, as you were spoken, one of the greatest benefits of fasting also is that you are seeing how much food takes place in our daily life, how food is everywhere, you walk out on the street and you see billboard with food, you see food on your phone, you hear friends talking about having lunch, and so food is absolutely everywhere, and you are not perceiving this when you are eating, but once you stop eating, you suddenly find out how that is actually running our lives all day, every day.

And that is the social thing to do, you know you go over to friends to sit down, have a coffee and a snack, and you go with family to have a dinner every day, it's food, and suddenly when there is none of that in our body, our performance can go up so much higher, and so movement in the physical way, it actually jump-start our whole metabolism, it is improving the immune

system, and not only that, I also want to encourage people because I see this a lot, and I see this a lot, people would... And this is not a bad or good or correct or incorrect, but it's a beautiful day outside, and people go into their garage and run-on treadmill in their garage, right. And they.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It sounds funny the way you say it.

JAJA VANKOVA: And they open the garage door just so they can see outside, but they're in the garage running on a treadmill instead going actually outside on the road and running on the road. On the treadmill, you are just giving energy out, out, out, out. On the road, when you're actually jogging, or running, there's also energy coming into you, it's very different when we as dancers are dancing inside or outside, it's a whole different skill because the energy inside, you are just giving out to actually... Inside, you don't even need so much stamina physically, but when you're outside suddenly you feel the energy coming on to you and you are trying to work and figure it out on how to actually give and receive, give and receive, give and receive. But when you are inside, you just give give, give, give give, give, but there's only so much you can give. So that's another thing I would love to encourage people to close the garage, put the treadmill somewhere else and just go take the jog outside because it is going to have so much more benefit, not only the energy, but sunlight, air, and all of that. It has a really huge effect on the physical health as well too.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Wow! That imagery like it seems like we are in prison, we put ourselves in prison...

JAJA VANKOVA: I see it every day in our neighborhood.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I could see outside and all the life it is just like... We put ourselves, we bind ourselves, but of course, there's a big part of that is habit, because of conditions, especially if people live where it's not always nice, it's just like, well, I got my treadmill, but when you have the opportunity, actually get out. That's such a powerful... You just said it just like, you're also taking in, you are absorbing when you're out in "reality" versus the little confinements that we put ourselves into, and also not to villainize, I love you set up just like... It's not that it's anything wrong, but if you think about it again, it is a new thing, it is a very new invention to run on a thing, and the thing is moving, that's the big key, it's not that you are moving yourself, the ground is moving under you, so it's taking away a natural input, it's like a deficient nutrient, like it's a deficient food, it's missing this huge thing that you should be getting, which is your ability to plant and push off the ground, and so again, not to say good or bad, but kind of it's a little deficient, it's missing the step.

So, I love that. And so, when we have the opportunity, and also, like you said, you're going to feel very different, like pay attention how these different inputs feel. And not to say that this can't be a supplement your treadmill, but the more that we can enjoy reality and interact with the world, I would imagine it's going to be better for us.

JAJA VANKOVA: 100%. 100%, yeah. So even one more thing I wanted to mention is gyms are great. I would say social gathering as well too, because even with dance, like there is a big difference as I was mentioning, dancing inside and dancing outside, but if you're dancing inside or moving inside, working out inside such as gym, you still have people around that might give you also energy, even if you don't know about it, you're still getting the input there, so that is also a really big difference, if you are by yourself or if you're actually... We are social humans, we need people. So even if you are in a gym and you have people around you, their energy also is affecting your physical performance in the gym as well. If you were dancing or if you're in the gym by yourself, there was nobody around, you probably might not have such a big physical performance as if there's people around, so the energy from the outside is always so important.

Always so important, that's why I also love this analogy is the physical aspect it has the effect, it has like our phone on us, because we give so much energy and movement as well, even if it's more movement to our phone, but our phone is not giving anything back, and that's why a lot of times technology is so draining for us because it's like... I love this analogy that I heard that it's like a dancing with a partner that is not dancing back, so you're trying to move the arms around and stuff like... But there are not dancing back, so it's like that with like technology, electronics, our phone as well too, so even... I always recommend people, because a lot of people that also train with me and take classes from me, they have work that requires sitting by the computer or being on the phone, so I always recommend them if your work requires that, always make sure to take breaks in between, and move a little bit around, get on the ground or jump or see people and move a little bit with them, play some music, and so because we are not getting any energy back and it's the aspect of the give, give, give that makes us feel so overwhelmed and so anxious and so stressed. Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So good, so true. And again, it's just, it's about habits, it's about creating intentional places for this, so nine times out of 10, whenever I get on the phone, I start moving. I get on the call... My wife knows this, I go out in the back yard and walk around or I'm on the front, in the neighborhood just walking around and that's what when I take my calls. And it's just something that one day I just decided that's what I'm going to do, and it just happened over time. And so obviously, we can't... In this society, it's difficult to run from technology, it's everywhere, just like food, it's everywhere, but it's also choosing how we associate with these things. And I love this so much where we can actually take something, 'cause guess what, when I go outside and I start moving, I'm pulling in from the environment. I'm pulling in some

sunlight, some fresh air, the list goes on and on and on, and of course, the movement inputs as well. So, I love that so much.

And by the way, I wanted to add a little bit of fun science nuggets here, when we talked about movement improving gut health. So, a recent meta-analysis, this was published in Oxidative Medicine and Cellular Longevity, found that exercise can positively enhance the number of our beneficial microbial species, enrich our micro-flora diversity, and improve the development of commensal bacteria, so bacteria that's hanging out, working together, having a good session, session-ing together, and this benefit takes place when we move our bodies, when we exercise. So again, these are inputs that our bodies expect from us, and so when we're talking about this stuff, we're not talking to just to talk, we're talking because it's facts.

JAJA VANKOVA: It's facts, 100 percent.

SHAWN STEVENSON: With Jaja... Alright, so I'm going to ask you about this one now, because again, I mentioned our really alarming state of divisiveness, which is the craziest, it's extreme irony because on paper, we appear to be the most connected society in the history of humanity, but at the same time, there's so much apparent divisiveness. I don't... It's definitely not as much as it's framed, to be, there's a lot more humanity, but at the same time, there is some big concerns where people are going so polar opposite and not being able to connect and to have this communal commensal experience. So why is movements such a valuable tool for connection and for community?

JAJA VANKOVA: Again, it's the foundation of life. Sound and movement, it's so valuable for us because that is the foundation. And when somebody decides to, at night turn on the TV and sit on the couch for a couple of hours, you're literally taking away the foundation that you are meant to do, or you are meant to be. So, with the movement, whatever it is, if it's working out, if it's dance, if it's any kind of sports, it is also creating the social aspects of it, social gatherings of it, and that is also creating the communication that is so valuable for us too. Communication itself is movement. When we communicate, we are moving our hands, we are moving our body, we are gesturing, when we are sitting, when we are standing, we might be moving even our legs. Or like taking a walk and having a conversation, it's a certain dance that we have with the universe, but with the other person as well too, because it's always an exchange.

So, it's so valuable for us and for the community because again, we are not only giving, but we are getting back, we are getting the energy back that is enhancing our immune system, enhancing our metabolism. So, it's so important to get social and get moving with other people. I always encourage people that maybe they come to me and they want to express more and they don't really have a community, so the first thing is, I see like what city they live at and where they can find a community that can help them to get out there, and get socialized, and

get moving because that is going to have such a tremendous effect on their mental and their physical health. So, we are social animals, and we are moving animals, so it is just so valuable for us.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, life is movement. Everything moves. I just was walking this morning, I saw this snail rolling up, he got... The other day I saw a snail with no shell, by the way. I'm just like, "What happened? Who stole your home." or whatever, but then anyways, so I saw one today and he's moving slowly, but he's still moving? And this is something even... It's invisible to us, we only see a certain spectrum of light and of reality, we look like this very solid thing, but we're a bunch of atoms just like constant...

JAJA VANKOVA: Living in run, constantly moving.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Just vibration and throughout... And it hit me several times as you've been speaking about vibration and about this conductivity of things, everything really is this... We use this term music, but becomes so... It puts it into a box that it doesn't do it justice, because everything is music, every, literally everything, even silence. There's music to it.

JAJA VANKOVA: Yes, there's music.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And so, our bodies are in this symphony and also the synchronicity. And oftentimes when we experience pain or problems, it's when there's disharmony, right?

JAJA VANKOVA: 100%.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And so, things happen for sure. And so, being able to have movement as an expressive tool and a healing tool and I want to ask you about this because something happened to you, in 2019 you had an injury, right? Sacrum injury. What was that experience like? And yes, first talk about that.

JAJA VANKOVA: That one was bad. Yeah. I went through so many injuries throughout dance and the beautiful part is that each injury brought something special into my movement. So, I was just telling my students yesterday. I was... One of the styles that I do is robot. And I was teaching a robot class and one of the main reasons why I got so good at it, because I used to have tremendous inflammation in my lower back and in my neck. And so, I used to have pinched nerves and so much inflammation in both and I couldn't move. So, I couldn't move this way, like in my torso or I couldn't move this way. And so, my body was just moving like this, and that was the only thing that I was able to practice. And because I was so committed to still move and practice, that's why I got so good in robot.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Wow. Holy moly!

JAJA VANKOVA: I was tapping into this style already, but I was never practicing it consistently. And then when these issues come up, which by the way, I had these issues for 10 years of my career in dance. And so sometimes there was months where all I could just practice was this, that's all I could practice. I couldn't do anything else. So, I love turning negative into positive. There is always an opportunity to find... Because again, it's the balance. And again, it's the give out, give in, right? It's the balance. If there is big success, there will be a big problem. If there is a lot of joy, there will be a lot of sadness. It needs to always balance.

SHAWN STEVENSON: People don't want to hear that, Jaja.

JAJA VANKOVA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: They don't want to hear that.

JAJA VANKOVA: If there is a lot of pain, there is possibility for a lot of success as well, too. It goes both ways because people think if they have a lot of pain or a huge injury, that's just what it is, but they can always turn it because there's always a balance, so it goes both ways. And so that was actually my biggest... I don't even can... I cannot even say if the inflammation could be classified as injury, it was just inflammation in the body, probably from all the stuff that I was eating. It's all connected. And once actually I went plant-based that's when all of this stuff went away as well too. And then in 2019, I had a huge injury with my sacrum and that one as well, because I had a... I couldn't really move my lower body.

It was just my upper body. And so that was another opportunity to practice different stuff with my arms, with my head, with my chest. Because if there is no injury like that, we might not find all of these possibilities that are there. We might not perceive it. So anytime something like that happens, I see it as like, "Okay, the universe is giving me opportunity to find and pursue something else." So, this is just an invitation for people that might be struggling with this kind of mindset. Yeah. So, injuries are my lifelong friends.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That's powerful.

JAJA VANKOVA: So many, so many of those. Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So, I want to encourage everybody who's listening, make sure you check out the video of this episode so you can see Jaja dancing. We'll put up some clips of her and you've got... It's just something you have to see in this lifetime. You're amazing. And this is... An injury like that, where it's like hard for you. You are in an intense amount of pain and when

it's difficult to do much of anything, you'll do just about anything to get out of pain. And so, I know that some new tools are going to surface, so not only new skill sets, shifts with your mindset, but new tools for healing and recovery are going to come about. So, did you pick up anything from that? Like what did you learn from that? Like what were some of the tools that you picked up from that experience?

JAJA VANKOVA: So, I want to talk about a little bit of like the tools for body recovery and stuff like that, too. From this particular injury, actually, what I found very beneficial for body recovery for any injury is a functional range conditioning, which is actually not that widely known. And there is this amazing, amazing guy who does functional range conditioning here in LA, his name is Mark Holzum and he was actually coaching me kind of like... Not kind of, but he was coaching me out of this injury. So, I was working with him a lot and he completely in four months he recovered me completely out of that. So, it was really amazing. So again, what I learned from that... Because functional range conditioning is using, and I don't know if I will say this correctly because I'm not very knowledgeable in that topic, but it uses the stretch but strengthen at the same time.

So instead of you just stretching your arm this way, you would be stretching it, but then also strengthening it and pulling again. So, with any kind of body part, they are stretching and strengthening, stretching and strengthening. And he would just find such angles and positions where he would be stretching and strengthening, and I could see and feel the differences that it had on my joints, even my hips, my shoulders. That suddenly I had bigger range in my joints than I could ever have before, and my body was capable of withstanding more risky angles than I was capable before. So, since I've been doing the body recovery with him, I do functional-range conditioning almost every day, even if it's just a wrist kind of thing or something like that, so I do that. Other ways of body recovery I love is definitely different breathing techniques. My favorite one is Wim Hof, or I know a lot of people, it goes by fire breathing technique as well too. But I love Wim Hof, I love ice baths, I love cold showers, and cryotherapy. So those are some of my favorite techniques for body recovery as well. And then of course fruit and fasting, yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Powerful, powerful. What about massage therapy? Do you do any of that?

JAJA VANKOVA: Yes, I actually was working with a neurosomatic Massage Therapist and... For three years, every week. But she has a baby now too, she's my good friend now. Her name is Roxana. And she really has magical hands, what she does. I have worked with so many different massage therapists, and for some reason, the techniques particularly that she was doing... Again, it's called a neurosomatic massage therapy. That was definitely my favorite.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Awesome, awesome. Now, another one of these tools that you picked up along the way... And I would imagine it's been beneficial for dance or creating a space. I used to do this thing I called the imagination station, where I would visualize my life. But it would be a part of my meditation practice, I'd do some type of meditation at the front and then I would end it with the visualization. So, meditation... So that's... I've heard you talk about that as well as being a really important tool for all manner, not just with dance but just overall health and well-being.

JAJA VANKOVA: So, visualization is a huge part of my practice, probably a bigger part of my practice than actually physical practice. Visualization is something that I remember doing since I was a little kid and since I was a little kid, I had a really imaginative mind. That's just what I remember, and I would always imagine myself... It's really funny but since I was a little kid, I was visualizing myself dancing even before I was dancing. And so, I remember there is even scientific research where they took basketball team for six weeks and they had them practice physically every day, and then they take... Took a basketball team for six weeks as well, and they had them practice only visualization every day. And the team that actually was practicing visualization had just a little better result than the team that was practicing only physically.

And the reason why visualization is such a huge part of my day is because I don't always have time to practice physically, I don't always have time to go to the studio or outside and dance for an hour or two. But I always have time to practice visualization. Even if I'm washing dishes or if I'm with my daughter, with my husband. It's any time I hear music, if I hear music in the airplane or in the car, or in the grocery store or at the farmers market or anything like that. So, I always visualize right away when the music is on. And we are what we are thinking. Whatever we do it's a choice, right? So ultimately if you are practicing visualization in whatever is this. Even if it's sports or you're practicing and visualizing for Math exam or anything like that, you are actually creating... It's called myelination you are creating the myelin around your nerves. And it's like this isolation around your nerves and the more you visualize it. Visualize it? Do I say that?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, you've been nailing it throughout like better they get that.

JAJA VANKOVA: I mean I'm trying; I'm trying. All the more you practice it physically or mentally, the myelin is just getting thicker and thicker and thicker, and then it's hard for that information to escape. The fatter the Myelin is the better the information is going to be locked in there. So, visualization is something that I do a lot with my students and always remind them about it, because it can be just about anything from performance to a competition, to the timing and musicality on the music, to the techniques, to everything. And it can be getting better all the time, not just when I have them in the studio. Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That's dope.

JAJA VANKOVA: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So, I want folks to be able to be a student of yours. Even if just like having some little mental nuggets on like what they can do to improve their movement or to take advantage of movement to improve their health, their mental health, what are some tips that you can share for folks to improve their movement and or to connect with their bodies?

JAJA VANKOVA: So just simple one, a very simple one, when you hear music or even if the music is not there, if you connect with yourself and you hear your heartbeat, you hear rhythm, right? Rhythm is in everybody, it's all inside of us. Just nodding your head to the rhythm. Yeah. Just a little bounce. Anytime you hear music, just a little nod, nod and just a simple thing like this can actually bring you into the flow state. And that's actually, that's another huge topic that I would love to talk about is, we are so far away now from the zone, from this flow state that we have such a capability of being in it. Being completely connected. And again, it starts when we are babies, right? There is actually this method I don't know if you ever heard of it. Is a Montessori method? With babies and it actually promotes the flow state in the babies, which means, for example, the toys that they're going to get, they will be natural wooden toys, or they will be from materials that are found on the earth, in nature, right?

Or the surroundings that are around them is not going to be like cluttered. And it's going to... It's very minimalistic and very simplistic way of raising a child and all these little things. It's so simple and so little, so minimalistic, are creating the flow state inside of us. So, what the Montessori method is actually doing is, it's creating the flow state inside of the child. And so, what a child then is capable of doing is for example, focusing on playing with one toy and finding different possibilities with it, even for an hour or two. So, what I see nowadays a lot is, the parents play the baby music and then they give it bunch of plastic toys that also make a lot of noise and stuff like that. And all of that is so much distraction, right?

It's like with water, when you throw a bunch of things inside of water, as we are talking, because our body is mainly made out of water. When you throw a bunch of things in the water, it creates like this tsunami, right? It just, it creates this chaos. But instead, if you have just like one simple wooden boat floating on the water, it can create a balance over there. Right? So, even just a bounce or a little two step, even a little two step can promote the flow state inside of a person and then can bring more of a connection with the body and with the mental aspect, with the physical aspect and connecting with the sound and with the music.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That's fire.

JAJA VANKOVA: And we can do a two-step when we wash dishes, you know?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. Facts. I love it. I love it. One of the things that was, I was just like, "That's it, I have to talk to her." was seeing, and it was so obvious once I saw it, but I never thought that someone would do it, which was, you were utilizing weights when you were training, when you were doing your dance training and working on techniques, you utilize weights?

JAJA VANKOVA: Mm-hmm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Can you talk a little bit about that?

JAJA VANKOVA: Yes. 100%. This is a practice that I started to do maybe 12 years ago. 10 years ago? 12 years ago. And because my, in dance, my specialty is not a certain style, and my specialty is body control and body control can be applied to anything. It can be applied to any style. It can be applied to any sport, right? Different sports, have different control that you need to use for, for example, throwing a ball, right? It requires different kind of speed. It requires different kind of tension. So that actually what I specialize in is how much intensity, how much tension, what is the hold? Is it a soft hold? Is it a strong hold? Right? And that I utilize in every style. So, in the dance world, what I'm known for is actually being able to switch in so many styles, but stay really high level in each style.

And it's because of the body control that I am studying, mainly I was studying on my own body and then applying it and applying with my students, right? So, what I do is, for example, for a movement to be let's say if I want like a stop motion kind of movement, or if I want really, slow speed control and stop, it requires a different weight for it. It requires different intensity. So, I add weight either. I do just weights in my hands. I don't really use ankle weights or weights on legs because it creates, it creates imbalance with knees and stuff like that. But I do use weight vests as well too. Well now I use my baby.

That's enough and so I would've... What I would do is when I am holding the weight, then I would be doing the stop motion, with the weight in my hand, and that is actually creating, again, more of the myelin... I'm locking in the information. And it's so much harder to do the stop motion with the hand, with the arm, with the weight, but then when I practice it over and over and I let go of the weight, the information is locked in there now. And so that's how I utilize it. I have different exercises where I used the weight vest or the... Do they have names? These things?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Dumbbells?

JAJA VANKOVA: Huh?

SHAWN STEVENSON: The dumbbells?

JAJA VANKOVA: Dumbbells, yeah, yeah, yeah. And with different...

SHAWN STEVENSON: Which is the dumbest name ever by the way, that they are called dumbbells.

JAJA VANKOVA: Yes. It's a strange name, right? So also different... What do you call it? Different weight like depending on how much they weighed if it's like three kilos, or six kilos, or nine kilos, it will give you different body control as well too. Yeah. So, this has been definitely a training that I haven't seen in the dance world or anybody else doing, and it's been really working well for the techniques that we are looking for in different styles. Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. When I saw I was just like, "Oh, that's how she's so good at this." It's just one extra level or layer of input for your body, and I love that you're bringing it back to myelin, it's something we've talked about many times over the years.

JAJA VANKOVA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's fascinating. So, man this has been so dope and so insightful, could you let everybody know where they can follow you, like get into your universe?

JAJA VANKOVA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And you're also teaching too, where can people come to a class or be able to learn from you?

JAJA VANKOVA: So, you can find me, of course, on Instagram @jajavankova or you can also find me on my website jajavankova.com. I am teaching regular classes every Tuesday, 5:00 PM, my husband is teaching, also regular classes, every Friday, 8:00 PM, but we are also teaching private classes, we're also teaching online. Yeah, so just connect, if you're... Anybody is interested just connect and we can get it going.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Awesome. So...

JAJA VANKOVA: Get the movement going.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yes. So, your website would have information for your classes?

JAJA VANKOVA: 100%, yes. There is...

SHAWN STEVENSON: Sweet.

JAJA VANKOVA: All the information for the classes, my Instagram also has a link where you can find information for all the classes as well too.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Dope. This has been one of the funniest visual experiences, because watching you talk and move while you talk is just like... Is so graceful and just cool, it's like... You bring these things to life, and I appreciate that, and also, thank you so much for sharing your story and the work that you've done on yourself to become a better teacher, to put you in a space to be the mom that you are today, and even... That's a whole other conversation that we could talk about in the future.

JAJA VANKOVA: 100%, yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Of course, it's just that component. And it's just so inspiring. And right now, I think that I've said this statement many times, that life is movement, but this is one of the... Like we... If you have a body, you have movement potential...

JAJA VANKOVA: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Like you can do something, and our bodies are like a bridge to a new reality, like this is so close, you can literally... You're in... You can't help but be a part of it. And so having you here today has been very special and another encouragement, I think for everybody to move more. So, thank you.

JAJA VANKOVA: Thank you so much for having me. This was outstanding, incredible. Really thank you so much.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Awesome, you got it. You got it.

JAJA VANKOVA: Your work is much appreciated. Always.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Thank you. Thank you, it's an honor. Jaja everybody, make sure to check her out on IG, hit her website up. Come and dance with her, let's go.

JAJA VANKOVA: Let's do it.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Thank you so much for tuning in to the show today, I hope you got a lot of value out of this. This is one to share out with your friends and family, and a tool for us to implement, to take advantage of. Whatever form of movement moves you, that's what it's about right now, being able to access and activate that. For a lot of people, it's giving themselves permission to just move your body, to get your groove on, we don't want to fall into a scenario like Footloose where dancing is outlawed, you got to do this behind closed doors, and there's got to be all these certain conditions, but to be free and to be free in our bodies and to move and to express ourselves and to tap into that cathartic aspect and the creative aspect. And so many wonderful insights that I've picked up today, and just being able to share a space and hold a space for others and how this unsaid, unwritten language of movement has allowed for connection and for healing to take place in her, different groups that she's been a part of, for example, and it's just all so miraculous, but not actually that surprising if you look at how humans evolved and how much dance has been a part of our species, has been a part of our culture.

Every culture has vibes, and so right now it's a lot of intersecting vibes, and we need that more than ever, but also we have this very strange phenomenon where people are becoming more cut off and more rigid and not expressing themselves through movement and having that joy of expression, because I believe that that ability to express joy through movement is going to help to make deeper connections, better connections to people that we might not even agree with. There's this whole phenomenon of a dance battle, what if we solved our conflicts that way? Man, that would be incredible. But most importantly, of course, is that battle inside and for us to be able to reach within and to express ourselves outwardly in a creative and constructive way. So again, I hope you got a lot of value out of this. Share this out with your friends and family, you could tag me, I'm @shawnmodel on Instagram, and you could tag Jaja, she's @jajavankova, it's J-A-J-A-V-A-N-K-O-V-A. Let her know, share some love, send her some good energy right now, and thank her for coming on to the show, let her know what you thought about this episode.

And of course, you could send this directly from the podcast app that you're listening on. And listen if you... Do check out the audio version, this is one to see the video of, for sure. To see Jaja in action, and even when she's speaking here on the show, to see the movements and how... It's just really cool to be able to witness, and for that, of course, pop over to YouTube, make sure you subscribe to The Model Health Show on YouTube as well, you got exclusive content there for you every single week. I appreciate you so much for tuning into the show today. Take care. Have an amazing day and I'll talk with you soon?

And for more after the show, make sure to head over to themodelhealthshow.com, that's where you can find all of the show notes, you could find transcriptions, videos for each episode, and if you got a comment, you can leave me a comment there as well. And please make sure

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