

Caspar ([00:00](#)):

Do you feel trapped in the whirlwind of modern life sacrificing your health and happiness for the sake of work? Our guest today will show you how treasured self-care wisdom from Korea, can he help change all of that and have you living a healthier and more fulfilling life. She's an award-winning eco entrepreneur, CEO and author who spent 16 years living in Asia as a Korean American from New York City. This is the Story of Sun & Ssukgat with Michelle Jungmin Bang. Michelle, thank you so much for coming on.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([00:31](#)):

Thanks so much for having me.

Caspar ([00:33](#)):

Listen, the, the book was fascinating and before I even jump into it, I mean, there is a personal journey that kind of led you into this book and a little bit of a health crisis that you experienced. Can we start there even before you started the book, what your journey was to get to here?

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([00:50](#)):

Yeah. and I'll, I'll give a little bit of my background 'cause I think that's important too. Please. I'm a Korean American. I did spend 16 years in Hong Kong, but I'm still splitting my time with my family between Hong Kong and New York. And originally I was born and raised in Brooklyn, so I very much represent east and west world, which lent a lot of perspective in writing the book. I'm also a social impact entrepreneur. I'm a Harvard Business School graduate, and I trained in functional foods and on holistic preventative care, which extends into healthy aging and mother baby care, I'm a mother of two children. But I also, like you, Caspar, I grew up in a world of east west medi medicine. My father is a US based doctor trained at a top medical school in Korea. You know, something like 0.8% acceptance rate.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([01:44](#)):

So I very much take a cue in the way he practices medicine, and I was exposed to a lot of that when I was growing up. So, you know, exposed to the practical and holistic applications of medicine, which are actually deeply embedded within Korean culture. You know, using whole foods and holistic measures to recover from surgeries, from colds and pregnancies and injuries. So this is very much, you know, normalized in our culture. But I, I didn't really think about it until I started my own journey. And then later I married into a traditional Chinese family that really embodied these nourishing traditions passed on generationally. So I kind of took all of that, you know, as I was living in Hong Kong. And at the time that I started my journey before the book, I actually didn't intend to write a book. I kind of went through a personal experience.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([02:37](#)):

I was sick for the first time in my life. I had launched a dream social impact startup that experienced tremendous growth. It was winning a lot of awards and I was really deeply impassioned about, you know, my team, the mission. You know, I was raising a family also and I was working around the clock, you know, sort of, you know, I think I had trained myself over the years just focus on the goal, focus on finishing. You know, I was really too busy to sleep at the time. Too busy to eat, you know, I was running on black coffee, running a team across, you know, the world in different time zones. And in the middle of all that success, I landed in the emergency room for the first time in my life. And it wasn't really that, I mean, it was sort of a brief acute episode, you know, the doctors put a camera down my throat into my stomach.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([03:31](#)):

They did discover that there was very little of my gut lining that remained healthy. But I think that the major impact was that when I returned home from a hospital, I suddenly became ill all, all of the time. And, you know, this is coming from a person who really had a cold. You know, I was really, you know, I sort of prided, prided myself on my strength and my vitality, and I just kept pushing through, you know, a lot of the aches and pains that I normally would experience, you know, when I needed to work. And, you know, seeing that my gut lining was so compromised, I just kind of realized that this health problem had been brewing underneath the surface for a really long time. It was sort of like, you know, if you picture an iceberg, you know, I was sort of the picture of health on the outside, the tip that was exposed above the surface.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([04:26](#)):

But, you know, beneath hidden the roots of my foundations had all fallen, fallen away. And, you know, by the time I landed in the hospital, my body was sort of screaming that I needed to do something to make it better. So a few things happened simultaneously. I came from the hospital. My husband started cooking me things that he had learned from his grandmothers, you know, from grandparents actually. And his parents, healing recovery foods that were, you know, very, I would say basic and classic in his culture. You know, there's things that people really understand and really take they participate in in the Asian culture, especially if you go into Asia. And it started reminding me about a lot of the things that my own family had done for me when I was ill. Especially my father, you know, who liked to cook a very specific chicken soup for me.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([05:20](#)):

I think every culture has their, you know, their chicken soup. But this one was, you know, sort of special the way he, you know, cooked the broth. And I can explain that later. But it started helping me to go down the path of connecting the dots of the wisdom that I had grown up with. And then I started realizing, wow, I actually live on a continent that breeds another way of life that's sort of, you know, presenting me with another narrative of what older age might be. So for example, you know, as I was, you know, ill, and started recovering, I was walking around Hong Kong and realizing just the average person, well over 50, you know, wrinkle free, you know, a lot of energy and doing things, activities that we reserve for the young, like going into the public park and doing chin-ups, you know, and just really a lot stronger than I was.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([06:12](#)):

Or, you know, they'll go exercise with a huge sword or go, you know, dive into the deep ocean, go hiking. And it just reminded me that, you know, I was in a place in time where I could actually go and ask people. So I just started casually interviewing people, asking them, what do you do to stay well? And as I was going down the rabbit hole, you know, it just led to, you know, things that I wanted to explore on my own. So I started realizing that, you know, Asia is a longevity hub. And then I went through China, through Japan, through Korea, all of the different Asian countries, and started, you know, developing my own personal perspective of what, you know, the patterns I was seeing were. And then I also trained, you know, in a formal way to take a look at nutrition and preventive care measures.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([07:05](#)):

So it ended up landing into a book because I started realizing that a lot of this wisdom was fading away in our modern world. I think you know, in modern medicine, sometimes we choose one or the other, which is, you know, there, you know, there's a cohort, you know, that goes straight to the pill, you know, they're very much into some new science. And then there's, you know, sometimes, you know, the holistic part of it, they're sort of, you know, within their old world. But I think I, I kind of think the way forward is really kind of meshing both of them together. It's, you know, embracing the new science, but also preserving the

wisdom. So I really, with this book, I wanted to preserve the wisdom, you know, as we move forward with science. And it was a way for me to kind of, you know, write a little love letter to my Korean heritage, which I felt like I lost.

Michelle Jungmin Bang (07:55):

I lost the identity as I was growing up, you know? My family worked so hard to assimilate into the American culture, very working very hard to, you know, conquer the English language. Even my grandparents were teaching English, you know, in the senior citizens' homes. And so they did a really good job of assimilating into American culture. But I think along the way, I just sort of, you know, forgot about my own heritage. And so even, even know in writing the book, I started using my middle name Jungmin which I hadn't when I was growing up. So it was just a lot of different things that I wanted to achieve in the book. And then, you know, as as always, with all of my work it's very important for me to be part of the social impact fabric of the world, you know, anything that I do.

Michelle Jungmin Bang (08:42):

So there is actually a social impact mission behind the book. The World Health Organization actually estimates that 70% of chronic illnesses can be preventable with lifestyle changes. And I think that's incredible. I think that's something that we can actually all work on, you know, very easily. It's, I I feel like that's sort of the radical transformation. I thought that it used to be really hard, that it was very overwhelming. And the other thing too is that, you know, when we preserve the old wisdom, we can actually be a lot more environmentally friendly in so many ways, you know, stemming, food waste, and also, you know, being plant more plant diverse. You know, we have over 300,000 edible plants in the world that we can benefit from. But you know, we, you know, Americans tend to focus on three major crops, wheat, rice, corn and, you know, as a result, we're actually depleting our soil. You know, these plants are becoming extinct. And so I think there's a lot of things we can do as individuals to make a change for the better. And so the book was born.

Caspar (09:49):

Yeah, no, it really, really resonated with me on multiple levels. Even that fact, you know, I am a first generation born here to be parent son of immigrants that came from Poland. And that too, I, I remember that they wanted to assimilate and have me be a mayor. I was born in New York, myself, on the Upper East Side, Lenox Hill Hospital. And, and I remember that there was this, this challenge of how do I, you know, continue my culture. I was sent to Polish school, but still wanted to, you know, embrace Americanization. And it's very difficult to have that balance and carry, but what I found is that through my parents preserving, allowing me to be Americanized, but preserving still the identity that I had, the connection, I could lean back on it. I find a lot of people can't lean back 'cause they, they don't even know, you know, what it may be that that is back in their culture mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Caspar (10:41):

And to be able to go there to live so long, 16 years in that culture, and take that, I found that was kind of like your, your healing process was actually reconnecting, right? We all say reconnect with nature, but I also say reconnect with your, your heritage, your, your, your history. Right? And that's so important. That's what came out of the book. And you know, in those 16 years, you offer a lot from the Asian culture, especially the Korean culture. And I mean, let's just start with, you know, one of your first chapters is that Buddhist nuns and the microbiome, right? And how, how you, you learned from an ancient way, something that we are, again, bringing forward into science, the understanding of how important your microbiome is in everything from your mood to all types of chronic diseases. So can you start there with what, what did you learn in your journey from Buddhist nuns in correlation to the microbiome?

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([11:34](#)):

Yeah. And I think, you know, what you're saying is correct. The new science is actually catching up with the old wisdom. It is,

Caspar ([11:40](#)):

Yeah.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([11:41](#)):

I think, you know, when you watch the Buddhist nuns and you are learning from them they, you know, they're not, they're, I think it's all now being connected together. I don't think they were sort of living in, you know, akin with the environment. But, you know, I think now we're starting to put the science attached to it. So I started, so after I started observing things, you know, in Hong Kong I, as I was doing some research, I found a cohort of Buddhist nuns that were living in the mountains of Korea. One of them is really famous. She was, she appeared on Netflix Chef's Table, and she does something called Temple Food, which is, you know, cooking a very traditional weighing Korean cuisine. And it's using organic well, really ingredients that she's foraging from the forest are growing in sort of her messy little garden.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([12:41](#)):

And it's using that and also pairing that with fermented condiments. And there's a ton of ferments that they use in their traditional cuisine. The other thing too is that, that it becomes this very, you know, spiritual practice for them. So they really feel like they're growing the plants, and then they're kind of putting it inside them. And that becomes part of the medicine of it all. What they're practicing is something called Yak Sik Dong Won. It's a, you know, sounds like a complicated Korean word, but it means food is medicine, and it's not necessarily really about food. Although food is really important. It's really a philosophy of a more preventative and proactive approach to health. And I think it's, you know, something that we often dismiss or we forget, you know, just like I did when I landed in the hospital as a, as a first step.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([13:35](#)):

And it dates back to ancient times. The Korean Buddhist nuns, actually, a lot of them retired from the royal kitchens. And there was a lot, you know, if you look back into the dossiers of these royal kingdoms, a lot was done to promote the longevity of the kings and their royal families. And so they would have these elaborate feast with hundreds of dishes. And if you look at, you know, Korean punch on punch on his little side dishes, there's tiny little bowls, you know, on a table. And they all contained fruits and different produce and protein. And they're all sort of very seasoned with these fermented condiments, which lends an umami flavor to it. But the, but Yak Sik Dong Won is a fundamental belief that healthcare starts with what you eat with nutritious foods, and then secondarily, with more advanced medical treatments, if there's no improvement.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([14:33](#)):

So you know, in Korea, this is very different than what happens in the us. You know, I have had two children after you have babies, for example, you will spend, you know, you have, it's a very normalized procedure where you are have a dedicated month to have the body recover. You know, especially if you are focused on breastfeeding or, you know, just kind of caring for the baby. They have a lot of different types of dishes that they are providing for the mother, like seaweeds. I mean, I was, I was having a, a seaweed Korean soup straight out of the hospital when I gave birth to my firstborn. So it just really, you know, Yak Sik Dong Won actually don't, one dates back to the ancient times, but it also represents terrain based living. It's about building the resilience of your body. So it, it kind of terrain based living, I feel like

is very much, you know, it's like when you look at that versus germ theory, 'cause I grew up with germ theory. I was really afraid of germs, and I was always kind of washing my hands really antiseptic and afraid of touching dirt, because I always thought that that would cause disease. But terrain based theory is about really what the nuns do. They are going outside being in touch with dirt, you know, they're being in, in touch with nature and eating this way, and they're building the resilience, the soil of their body so that they're stronger when they're exposed to the germs.

Caspar ([16:00](#)):

Yeah. No, I loved seeing that you had terrain theory in the book, because it is so essential that we start to realize and start to move away maybe from a pure pastor look of the world that we have to be over sanitized. And, and you even brought it up when you're talking about zero waste. You know, a lot of the fruits we see in our whole foods and everywhere almost look perfect. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. They look, you know, almost shined up and, you know, they, they have no blemishes. And the ones that do we usually stay away from, right? Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. When in reality, those offer many benefits over the ones that may be so polished. And some of them may be non-organic. That's how they look the way they do, and, you know, have lots of pesticides and other things on them. Can you go into the how the, not just the terrain theory itself helped model that, but this idea of utilizing all fruits, even the ones that have blemishes going more towards a zero waste approach is actually a healthier one for us and the world.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([17:01](#)):

Yeah. I think anyone can go sort of go back into the food data. There's a lot of statistics. You know, you look, you can look at the calories, you can look at, you know, the nutrients that are provided. So even going into the, the US governments they have all these statistics. So if you take a look, compare an apple versus an apple with a peel, and then you can compare them with different types of apples or different types of fruits, you start seeing that you will significantly increase your nutrient load by just eating the peel. So I, you know, that's something that I very much promote now, you know, when I'm eating or, you know, if I'm feeding something to my family, I'm not, you know, taking away the peel because it serves a lot of purposes. One increases the nutrients that you're eating, but two and the fiber.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([17:52](#)):

But it also stems food waste. I think, you know, we produce food and a lot of it's actually thrown away. And 50% of that waste actually happens in our home because we do things like peeling the fruit and throwing that away, but when in fact is actually edible and really good for us. So in Korean culture, they do something what I call the whole plant. So, you know, a long time ago we knew, and we're so far away from food now because when we go into a supermarket, it's packaged, it's very disconnected to, you know, what the actual fruit or food might have looked like. Like a, you know, if you take a look at a ketchup bottle, for example, you know, a lot of kids might not know that that is actually from tomatoes. But a long time ago, you know, they would grow things and know how long it took, and then they would really wanna use the entire plant. So the whole plant is really, you know, using the plant from flower to root, and then also the peel. And it's just so much better for you, so much better for your gut, you know, and also your stemming food waste.

Caspar ([18:58](#)):

Yeah. And, and it's something you see again in traveling and going to different places, because when you go to places like Asia, you're gonna see a lot more markets. You're gonna see things that are seasonal because you can't have everything all year round like we're accustomed to. And you're gonna pick up that there is a lot of the ideas behind cooking, and the cuisine itself is utilizing more of the whole you know, whatever it is that, that you're using, whether it's animal or vegetables and plants. But I think isn't like a big part of that. Also, the relationship in cooking. We're not cooking, we're not preparing foods as much

anymore. So we totally are, you know, we just buy something in a plastic thing, consume it, and go on our day, usually in a stressed environment. Quick, quick, quick. You know, it, you've been the entrepreneur life in New York City. I've been there too. It's just time is money, right? Sort of approach. Why would you cook when you have all these wonderful places in New York City to go to? But if you go back a little bit to the traditional way of doing things in, in Asian culture, in most cultures, cooking is such a big staple of that, and part of what connects you to food and leaves you in a healthier state.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([20:09](#)):

Yeah. And I think, you know, it doesn't have to be complicated too. That was what was so encouraging to me. You know, I went to go visit centenarians, you know, across these Asian countries. It's not this artisanal type plate that you're seeing on Instagram. You know, it's something much more simple than that. And in fact, when you start preparing, I mean, and I always tell, you know, people who I'm talking to about this, you know, even if you don't like cooking, try to prepare it once just to understand what ingredients are needed, what their role is in the dish, but also what is not needed. And then it really informs you when you go into a supermarket, you know, to, to take a look at what the ingredient list is, what is provided. And, you know, there's a lot of things that are, you know, preserving shelf life, things that, food coloring, things that we might not need, you know, we don't need.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([21:00](#)):

I think the, the simple preparation of it all was, you know, was really encouraging for me because, you know, I started out in this process actually not cooking at all, right? It was really my husband who was like more of the gourmet chef. And, you know, I think what I found was that a lot of times, you know, even like, sort of the simple preparation is actually healthier. So, you know, if you think about, like, I used to not cook and just eat like a hundred percent raw diet. And sometimes, you know, for a lot of people that's, you know, not easy to digest. So I kind of mix it now between raw and cooked. So cooking, actually, it helps to break down the plant walls, but you don't wanna cook it so long that, you know, you're actually, you want to retain the nutrients as much as possible. So if you, you're thinking about a quick saute, quick blanching, you know, quick, you know, boiling for a few seconds just to help you break down the wall a little bit to help you digest. That's very, very simple. And then on top of that, if you just add, you know, the Korean foundational ingredients, like the sesame oil, the traditionally brewed soy sauce, you're adding flavor. And then it's, it's as easy as that.

Caspar ([22:14](#)):

Yeah. And one of the things I found really cool about the book is you're introducing people to a lot of these very simple ingredients to add in. One of them I found, you know, that was you know, stuck out a bit was vinegar. You know, there are multiple types of vinegar. 'cause Everyone just used the ACV apple cider vinegar take a shot in the morning or something. That's it. And I don't think many people utilize it more so they think of vinegar as a cleaning product, maybe white vinegar, right? But you were listing, you know, the uses of it in multiple type. I think there was a persimmons type vinegar, you know, and other ones that were like, oh, wow, that's pretty interesting. Talk about that and kind of what you learned about the usage of things, even like vinegar in cooking and helping to stay healthy.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([22:55](#)):

So I grew up with something called naengmyun. It's a cold soup with noodles, and I didn't really think about it. They put vinegar inside the soup with hot mustard. It not only increases flavor, but it helps for you to, you know, the digestibility of the, the noodles. But it also increases your metabolism, helps with weight loss, you know, weight management. And there's a lot of little things that are, you know, have a twofold, it increases the flavor profile, but it's also boosting health. And they were sort of things that I was doing, you know, as a child, but I didn't really think about it, you know? And so apple versus, you

know, persimmon, I feel like a lot more literature has been written about apples, and persimmons, you know, you might not come across as much, but when you start taking a look at it into the data, again, you know, persimmons are, you know, they're actually, they have a lot more antioxidants.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([23:55](#)):

So I started switching my vinegar. And I, I have a lot of different types of vinegars that I use now. I really enjoy them. But I now specifically use persimmon vinegar because I like the flavor. It's very mild, you know, I can put it into like hot water if I wanted to, and that will increase my metabolism in the morning or before a meal. It's a much more mild flavor, and I know it has a lot more antioxidants. I also use black vinegar, which is another, it's very key in Chinese cuisine. And they all have different flavors, but they're all really, you know, increasing your metabolism especially before a meal. I think that has really helped me that including the probiotic, probiotic rich sauerkraut and the kimchi before a meal, I think really helps to prepare my gut before I tuck in.

Caspar ([24:47](#)):

Now let me ask you this, because I, I, everything I read in there seems really like a, a general healthy type of diet, but it is cultural and, you know, I even look at it from a Slavic polish background of, oh wow, I've never heard of this stuff. Would it apply to my type? Because I always like to think of there is no perfect diet out there for everyone, right? You have to understand, you understand some of your genetics and, you know, cultural background and eat accordingly. This is why some people say the Mediterranean diet is very good, but I think that's very good from people in a Mediterranean background. Do you feel that the, the Korean you know, cuisine and, and a lot of the different recipes you're giving are universally accepted regardless of the background?

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([25:34](#)):

I think if you strip it back down to the principles, it really applies to any culture. Yeah. Well, I think it's interesting because, you know, I, when I was living in Asia, you know, some of the ingredients were really easy to access. But then when I was living in New York City, you know, it just became a lot harder. So you know, I think if you wanted to apply and learn about certain ingredients, there's always the dried format, which is such a beauty of a thing because it not only lasts longer, sometimes, you know, you can, they flash freeze it in a way that, you know, is at its perfect state. And I just keep it in the freezer if I wanted to in, you know, use it in a recipe. But I think it's the, i the ideas are there. It's just sort of the idea of trying different kinds of plans that you might find.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([26:22](#)):

Like even if you go to a supermarket, you know, if you kind of liken yourself as a forager or in a supermarket, you know, and start going beyond your palate. Like I used to just have broccoli, which is actually one of the, you know, I think it's still the number one green vegetable in, in America. I think you can go beyond that and try different things, bring one home every week, one different thing, even a fruit. I think a fruits are often taken, you know, removed from diets because of their, you know, sugar content. But in Asian culture, it's very, very important and also revered you know, they're given as gifts. So I think it's just, I think even if you weren't able to find like a lychee fruit, which is, you know, important in Asian culture, like taking the principle and sort of applying it to, let me try a different fruit in the supermarket, you're still employing the same principle.

Caspar ([27:18](#)):

Yeah. And it's unfortunate because I think the more and more we look at these kind of trending diets, let's say carnivore, keto, you start to strip back a lot of the foods there, right? You start to really limit things. And I think there's something to be said about an elimination diet if you truly have GI issues starting to

see and rebuild it. But I also think there's a beauty in diversification and kind of seeing everything nature provides us as positive, net positive, and kind of seeing how we can include it rather than eliminate it.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([27:52](#)):

Yeah, I,

Caspar ([27:53](#)):

Yeah. Talk about that because I just feel like the trends of, you know, carnivore MD and all these are like just steak, no fruits, no this, it's like, that seems incredibly limited for what we see in nature and what I read in your book, which is, you know, robust in different colors and all these things you could incorporate to be healthier.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([28:13](#)):

Yeah. I think you know, the approach I take is a very sort of naturalist approach. Yeah. I, I would, I think about the way they used to live, just sort of, you know, taking from, you know, living symbi symbiotically with the land and what it can provide and kind of giving back as well. I think, you know, going back to the word Yak Sik Dong Won, for me, it's really not about following a single prescriptive eating plan for health. It's not about avoiding certain food groups. I mean, of course, you know, like you said, sometimes you get into a health situation where you do need to, you know, you need to restrict certain things. And I certainly had to do that as well when I was repairing my gut mm-hmm <affirmative>. More from the perspective of was there something that was irritating it.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([29:01](#)):

And I needed to take a break for a little while, but after my gut healed and, you know, I was able to sort of implement them all back and now I can eat everything. But it really isn't about this sort of overwhelming, you know, restrictive health procedure. I, I actually, I'm kind of an example. I used to work out really hard run a lot and I, now that I actually employ a lot of these methods that, you know, are in the book, I've never felt better. And it's so much for me, it's like radically simple. And, and that in it of itself has really transformed my life.

Caspar ([29:38](#)):

Yeah. I do think that you know, we try to make things more complex than they need to be. And I do think sometimes we can look to our history and look behind us a bit to, to understand things better. And that's a big key part of this book. And, you know, when you looked at both Korean and Chinese and Japanese, all these, you know, long living longevity nations, basically, I think you saw also some pieces in there beyond just the diet you know, a culture that walks a lot more, a culture that connects to others. Right? But I wanted to also ask, because it seems that the, the stress is a big part of modern day living, as you say, New York City, you know, entrepreneur type of lifestyle. It's high stress. Did you pick up on that in places like Hong Kong and others where you live? Was the, was the stress not there or was it just balanced better?

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([30:33](#)):

I think that stress is not necessarily bad, to be honest. I think there can use it to kind of, you know, you're using the adrenaline that's coming with it to push to a goal. You know, I think where it becomes sort of really bad for your health is when it becomes really chronic. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. To, you know, inflammation, you know, to disease. What is interesting about, you know, places like Hong Kong, and I'm not saying, you know, every, there's any place that's perfect in the world but in the offices, like you'll see these office buildings, but right next to it. And the same with Korea. There are hiking paths right next to

it. So that's what they're doing during their lunch breaks. So in Seoul, for example, there are all of these red clay paths. You are meant to take off your shoes and have your bare feet on the ground.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([31:27](#)):

It's right next to an office. And, you know, it just encourages you to be outside, you know, take steps and steps is really a big part of it. You know, Stanford actually did a study. They were looking at, you know, the Apple Watch steps, you know, across the world. And they saw that, you know, at that particular time, Hong Kong had the highest number of steps at, you know, close to 7,000 steps per day. I now do that every day, you know, and you can take steps. It, you know, walking outside is great. But you can take steps, you know, anywhere inside the house when you're cleaning, you know, you can take steps like getting out, you know, a stop earlier on the subway or taking the stairs instead instead of an elevator. So, you know, going back to what you're saying, I think it's just sort of ingrained that they're, you know, they're moving all the time. We're like living in this modern culture where we're kind of sitting down in like very focused on computer work, the 24/7 digital culture. And I think that in itself, in and of itself is very stressful. So it's really important that they, that you take breaks and, you know, being out of nature, you know, the way it's embedded in their city, even in their cities is a way that they're managing stress.

Caspar ([32:45](#)):

Yeah. In, in visiting, you know, Seoul and Tokyo and even Shanghai, I noticed that, number one, you don't see many obese people. You see people always walking around, you see them. Also, there was this, I saw this in Tokyo beautifully because I was walking around with like a Starbucks cup. No one, there was no, you know, trash out there. And suddenly I caught myself being the only one <laugh>. They finished their meals inside everything right in the area. So they have dedicated areas for like walking or doing things. They have dedicated areas for eating and they eat in peace, you know, usually not running around checking their phone. I found that fascinating 'cause we blurred those lines completely. People are on the run eating healthy food, right? They think vegan like wrap and everything while they're running to the subway, there's garbage on the floor, which you didn't see in these countries in Asia. And I started to be like, wow, I wonder if we could do this. Do you feel we could bring those types of practices to the u Do you feel like New York City could get there? Because I'd love that <laugh>.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([33:46](#)):

I mean, there's a Korean word called Cheong, and it's a really complex word in Korea. And again, it's deeply embedded in culture. It's actually spawned this entire vocabulary from that base word. But it means a lot of different English words, like love, compassion, you know, generosity of spirit. But it's this whole idea of community and relationships. So, you know, going back to, you know what you were saying, no garbage, the environment, they're, they've gone to zero waste in South Korea. Yeah. And it's because they care so much about each other that they care for their environment. I mean, it's like, it extends even to strangers. So I think there's so many things that we can actually take back and, you know, pretty simply and you know, when, when you look at some of the the research that's actually coming out, there is a long standing one, an 85 year study from Harvard that talks about relationships being, you know, sort of the number one like longevity factor, you know, over any other lifestyle change. And, you know, that actually came through in a lot of the research that I found in Korea as well. But yeah, I think a lot of it's community and, you know, environment is just kind of, you know, I think there's easy things that we can do to take back here to New York City.

Caspar ([35:05](#)):

Yeah. It seems like, you know, when you brought up this idea of self-care, there's self-love where there's self-love, you have love for others, then because you have that capacity to do that and you start building those connections and then you start doing things that are better for everyone, for yourselves, for the

environment, right? So you start looking at things like waste when you have that self-love. I've always said the best eco-warriors out there are the ones that put their health first, because then I will not make the conscious decision to buy more plastic and just throw it away. I will not make that conscious decision. Just throw everything in the garbage, rather compost some things or utilize them, freeze them, whatever it is. So it seems that, you know, in the Asian culture, the Korean culture, there is this pride in themselves and their own care.

Caspar ([35:51](#)):

Correct. That I believe we can try and, and look to and revere in some ways and bring over, because obviously there is some issues in America with that, with our health in general. Just start there even, you know, negating all the pollution and garbage and waste and everything. Maybe we just start with the health factor. Is it your kind of hope and ambition that, you know, some of these principles that you see in Asian countries and Korea especially get brought into the American sphere of things and start to emulate that and then improve our health and therefore improve the environment?

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([36:31](#)):

Yes, absolutely. I mean, I think, you know, one of the biggest things actually, the reason why I wanted to use the word self-care in the subtitle of the book is I think there needs to be a redefining of what self-care is. I think in the modern construct, it's turned so much into external beauty. But it really is about your wellbeing, your internal wellbeing, you know, and that kind of has, you know, external, you know, consequences. You know, you will be healthier and, you know, sometimes the output is your skin is a lot healthier and it looks, you know, more radiant. But I think, you know, we can actually take a much more proactive approach. I mean, I think as individuals, we have so much more power to have a weight into what happens in our future, you know, for ourselves, for our health, and also for the the planet.

Caspar ([37:21](#)):

Yeah. It's a prioritization of kind of health is everything else goes well. And understanding that health isn't that, like you said, self-care treat yourself weekend, where you just go once a year to a spa and spend a lot of money on a massage. It's the daily choices Correct. That we make that are just small individual choices over and over that really reflect in our health and that itself is self-care.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([37:46](#)):

Absolutely.

Caspar ([37:48](#)):

Now, you know, you ended the book on this idea of passing traditions on. Yes. So many of us nowadays kind of look to what's the shiny object in the room as the thing to look forward to, whether it's peptides or new supplements and new drugs and vaccines that'll be anti-cancer. Instead of looking backwards maybe into the culture we've learned in, in passing on how can we cultivate that, especially in a place where I think even in Asia, maybe correct me if I'm wrong, you're starting to lose that with the digital world and younger generation, they're almost rebelling against the wisdom of elders and saying, we know the way with AI, with, you know, our social media with content creation. How'd we start to change that around and truly path traditions on?

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([38:34](#)):

I think think the first step is what the Korean Buddhist nuns do. They're being mindful. Hmm. You know, even just sort of the gratitude that they demonstrate towards the food that's, you know, in front of 'em. So, you know, going back to what you're saying, we are in this 24/7 digital culture where there's things

streaming in front of us all the time, and it makes us mindless. We're not thinking about what we're doing. It's just like, it's pre we're being presented with something all the time. So I think, you know, even just taking sort of the, you know, the intentional break, you know, now, actually one of my biggest practices is 'cause, you know, I I I tend to work a lot. I still do 'cause I, you know, I still wanna achieve a lot of things, but I know I have to take time to, you know, sort of, you know, take care of myself.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([39:27](#)):

So I will step away from the computer probably like every half hour or yeah, probably half hour, and just take a few seconds to breathe. And it kind of like, you're, I breathe in two seconds, you know, I pause, breathe out for, you know, double amount the, the time and it relaxes me. So it's, it kind of de-stresses, you know, provides more oxygen, but it also provides me with that moment of intentionality, what am I gonna do next? And I think if we take that approach for everything that we do throughout the day, 'cause we, we make a million decisions throughout the day I think we'll be so much better for it.

Caspar ([40:07](#)):

Would you recommend people who maybe don't have such a lineage or ability to pass traditions on, meaning they've been Americanized for a long time and, you know, don't really lean back on any different cultures or anything? Would you recommend that people just travel more and observe different cultures then if they can't connect to one themselves?

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([40:29](#)):

I think that there's so much to learn from different cultures. I mean, I, I feel like even just within Asia, you know there's, they're so different. They have different weather patterns, they have different produce, you know, there's different traditions for each of them. There might be things that, you know, overlap, but they're all very special in their own way, and they all have their own wisdom. So I was able to reconnect with my Korean heritage, but every tradition, every culture has their own wisdom as well. And I think traveling and seeing for yourself what, and kind of, you know, wrapping your own mind and perspective around it, I think is really important. I think that, you know, one of the examples is that I had always heard of these stories of people kind of like reversing their chronic illnesses and, you know, you sort of wanna see it for yourself. It's like hearing about the Sistine Chapel, but then not really seeing it. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. You see it for yourself and then it becomes so much more powerful. Like you are actually, you know, I started incorporating a lot of things after seeing it with my own eyes. It just, yeah. It changes you a lot to travel and to see it for yourself.

Caspar ([41:41](#)):

Well, that's the thing. It's like, I think we rely so much on just data and evidence without experience these days, right? We lean into what's on our phones as that has to be the truth of it. Or maybe, you know, instead of actually going out and experiencing now. And that's the one thing I always said, I was blessed to be able to travel when I was young. It just opened my mind up to what else is out there. But it also made me insanely grateful to be where I am in the world. Right. To be able to grow up in America is, is a blessing in itself. When you go to these other places and you see how others live in, in sometimes poverty stricken areas, that you start to have this attitude of gratitude really when you travel. So even if you don't connect with the cultures, and you could always get something out of, you know, anywhere you go. And if anything, it's that attitude of gratitude. Do you feel that the, the Korean culture has that type of gratefulness, you know, embedded in that? Or is that something that it really has to be kind of taught along the way and, and, and held and revere because it's, it's not just something that comes naturally sometimes,

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([42:50](#)):

I think it's definitely embedded in the culture, and it comes back to family, you know, respect for family. You know, there's always, like a lot of people that I know in Korean culture, they go back on their birthdays and they, they're so grateful for their parents, for giving them life. You know? There's actually a soup. It's Miyeokguk soup, and it's a seaweed soup and it's for your birthday. And it's this way, you know, in sort of a tangible form of being grateful for your lineage for, and when you go to Korea, there's actually holidays that are, you know, respecting grandparents, respecting the children and the parents. You know, the family is very much a part of that. And I think that goes back to gratitude and, you know, who gave you life.

Caspar ([43:35](#)):

Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. Yeah. No, it's, it's the nuclear family and just that, that valuing of family is really important. Right. And I think that's what a lot of cultures, you, you can always gain something from in putting that, you know, first. One, one of the stories that that stuck out made me laugh a little bit in there, was your internship at Samsung <laugh>. And, and the fact that when you walk into the office, you take off your shoes and you put on like slippers, right? Or Adidas slide ons. Right? And you have these executives probably in very nice three-piece suits with slippers on in meetings. Yeah. Is that something you, you still utilize wherever you are? The, the idea of taking off your shoes when you enter into a place?

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([44:18](#)):

In my own home, I do take off my shoes. Yeah. It's just something that I grew up with, but I was so taken aback that they actually do that in the office as well. <Laugh>.

Caspar ([44:28](#)):

Right? Yeah. It's, it's one thing in a home, but it's another thing to make that a sacred space also in an office space where you have, you know, your janitors cleaning every day and things like that. But I think it's, it, it is kind of a wonderful practice because, you know, you walk around, you bring a lot of things in with you step in and it is something I influenced myself. Obviously I didn't do that growing up as much you know, as the American way of just run in with your muddy shoes and someone will clean after that. But, but it is something I I, I do look at now and, and kind of value more and more. And those are the kind of things where you're observer of other cultures. You could bring in those. And just question. Yeah, I've been standing out there with all types of stuff, and I'm bringing that into a place where sometimes I lay on the floor, you know, play around and their children and then things like that. Do you feel that, that we, we will see New York City you know offices start lining up slippers very soon when you walk in. Is that something that, that we can bring over here? Is that an Asian practice?

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([45:32](#)):

<Laugh>? It stems from, you know, a traditional, a tradition where, you know, they would eat and sleep on the floor, you know, the, the floors were really, you know, important aspect of the home because it became the source of heat. So they would employ, you know, the heat from the stoves, and then it would run all the way through into the bedrooms. And it was just a really smart way of like, kind of flowing the heat that was already being generated from cooking into, you know, when they were sleeping. And you know, I think we can take a lot of things from different cultures and gain ideas. Like the American architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, he actually, he went to Korea, saw the ondole's, so that's the heated floor that I was talking about. And he started putting that into his own home, you know, taking off his shoes and putting that into his own buildings. And so, yeah, I think we can all sort of think about that. There are a lot of people, you know, when I was working with people in Asia, they would be taking off their shoes. It's, it's pretty, you know, I wouldn't say it's a hundred percent normalized because there are a lot of global corporations that are working in Asia too, but people do take off their shoes often in the office.

Caspar (46:41):

Yeah, no, I, I'm all for it. <Laugh>. I'm like, take off your shoes now. I used to not be, and just be like, what's the point? And you know, you have to wear nice socks now. No holes in them. <Laugh>, but <laugh>, that's part of it too, how you present yourself to the world. But I found that really interesting and it stuck out. Michelle, what, what are three things you are hoping that readers will take away from reading the book?

Michelle Jungmin Bang (47:03):

I think that first to self-care. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. I think we often think about our health, our longevity, you know, when we reach forties, fifties, sixties but I think, you know, we can start today. In Korea, they start, you know, teaching a lot of things really, really early. You know, babies at six months old are eating kimchi. The kimchi is part of their culture. There's 200 varieties, you know, there's 400 different kinds of cabbages. You know, cabbage is really important. So it's the food literacy, it's learning about the different produce, but also eating it too. I think we can start today with little steps. And, you know, the thing, the, the second thing is don't discount any of it. All of it's really important for your mind, body, soul. I think, you know, sometimes we hear about, oh, you know, and I used to do this too, like discounting, oh, take, yeah, don't, don't take the bubble bath or, you know, but if it helps you to de-stress, which now I understand it's so important to manage, then it has made a big difference on your health.

Michelle Jungmin Bang (48:10):

And if you can incorporate that very easily sustainably into your practice every day, it's, it becomes that much more important. I think the other thing, the last thing is preserve the wisdom. You know, I, I think there's so much beauty in new discoveries, you know, new science as we move forward, you know, that's how we advance as a civilization. But don't throw out the old wisdom, you know, I think what I found so amazing is that when you go back into these really old documents, you will see that they started taking, you know, the first medicines were these things that were growing around 'em, and they were taking notes, copious notes about it. And they still hold true today. We, we've just forgotten to use them.

Caspar (48:55):

That's it. And 70% of all the pharmaceutical drugs are just synthetic versions of what we found in nature, right? That's where it all started. Whether it's penicillin or all these others. That's, that's the beauty of it. So we can, we can really look to the past to help drive us into the future without giving up on science and technology. Just melding. It's not an either/or. It can be both.

Michelle Jungmin Bang (49:16):

Exactly.

Caspar (49:18):

Really quick before I let you go, you, you're part of the 5:00 AM Club, I understand you're up at five every morning, <laugh>. Is that something you'd recommend for everyone? I mean, I read Robin Sharma's 5:00 AM and I tried it for like a month, and I'm a 6:00 AM club person myself. But you know, you gotta be pretty dedicated to do 5:00 AM every day, right?

Michelle Jungmin Bang (49:38):

Honestly, I think it's about your own rhythm. You know, I think they're my owls and they start, you know, becoming alive at night. For me it's about, you know, finding that window of energy. So 5:00 AM is when I can have some time for myself to be thoughtful and intentional about how I'm going to start the day. It also allows me to have my yoga practice in the morning. So I do a hot yoga, so I'm sweating, you

know, I'm using weights in there. It's a 30 minute session. And then the only other thing that I do, and I've never felt better are the steps. Truly, it really that simple. So 5:00 AM is my way of, you know, gaining the time and also kind of having an earlier dinner, which has been working for me because I find that if I eat too close to bedtime, and I found this out by journaling and just kind of being more intentional.

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([50:31](#)):

I don't journal every day about my food, you know, it's just that period of time when I was recovering, I noticed a pattern that, you know, if I ate too close to sleeping I was actually using too much energy to digest and not sleeping restfully. So for me, the 5:00 AM is a way to kind of, and I don't, I don't get it done all the time, you know, sometimes I have really late things and, you know, but when I do get that sort of morning practice in, it just really sets me up for the rest of the day.

Caspar ([50:59](#)):

Yeah, no, and I couldn't agree more that people need to look at when they're eating, not just what, right. Because if you're eating very healthy and it's midnight, you're going to sleep right afterwards. It's not a good, healthy thing for digestion. So look at how and what and when you're eating also. So I, I'm totally on board

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([51:18](#)):

To an empty stomach. I think that's one of the key things too.

Caspar ([51:22](#)):

Absolutely. Michelle, where can people pick up the book? Number one, learn more about you, connect with you?

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([51:29](#)):

I've been fortunate to get five book deals across the world, so it's everywhere before launch. So my launch date is on February 25th, and you can find it on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, your favorite independent bookstore. It's been translated to German, Italian, Spanish and I am speaking at organizations like Google and going to Hong Kong next after New York. So where you can find me, I'm most active on Instagram [michelle.jungmin.bang](#), I'm starting to use my middle name, which is very long. It makes my handle very long. But it just, it's a way for me to reconnect with, you know, who I am, what I grew up with.

Caspar ([52:12](#)):

Yeah. Well, thank you so much and congratulations. It really is an amazing book. I resonated with so much. It felt, you know, just like truth was kind of coming through your words, even though I didn't understand many of the Korean words, it's still, it's okay. You don't need to understand. It's the vibration essence of it that I really got that, and you explain it so well. So congratulations. To everyone listening, go out and get that book. It's wonderful Sun & Ssukgat. So thank you so much for coming on and all the best to you. Thank

Michelle Jungmin Bang ([52:40](#)):

You.

Caspar ([52:40](#)):

And again, if you want to check out Michelle's website, that's MichelleBang.com, her Instagram is [michelle.jungmin](https://www.instagram.com/michelle.jungmin)(that's J-U-N-G-M-I-N).bang. And we'll also include all these links in the show notes. Until next time, continue writing your own healing story.