



Episode 207: Santa Sold Shrooms? The Untold Story of St. Nick (& How to Stay Healthy Over the Holidays) With Tero Isokauppila

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Katie: Hello and welcome to the Wellness Mama Podcast. I'm Katie from [wellnessmama.com](http://wellnessmama.com) and this is gonna be a super fun episode and a little bit of a deviation from all of the deep science that I've been airing lately. I am joined by my friend Tero Isokauppila who I still hope I'm not butchering his last name, who is the founder and president of Four Sigmatic, a company that you of course know that I love. They make natural superfoods, especially mushroom based drink powders.

I interviewed Tero before about the many benefits of medicinal mushrooms like chaga and cordyceps, lion's mane and reishi and today I get to talk to him again about a different type of mushroom and the legend surrounding it, especially relating to the Finnish interpretation of the story of Santa Claus. Tero grew up in Finland on a family farm where his relatives had been farming and foraging for generations. He also holds a degree in chemistry and a certificate in plant-based nutrition from Cornell and he's widely regarded as an expert on all things pertaining to mushrooms, superfoods and natural health.

He's the author of two books. The first is a favorite of mine already. It's called "Healing Mushrooms, Practical and Culinary Guide to Using Adaptogenic Mushrooms for Whole Body Health." I highly recommend it. And today we're gonna be talking about his new book called "Santa Sold Shrooms." So welcome, Tero and thanks for being here.

Tero: Thanks for having me on again. I'm excited to chat.

Katie: It's always fun to chat. And I can't wait to jump into this story because I'm a big believer that we can learn so much from every person and every culture that we encounter, and I've of course already learned so much from you. And when I heard that you were publishing a book about the tradition of Santa Claus from your culture, I knew that I had to have you on and to learn more, because I would guess that many people listening are more familiar with the American interpretation of Santa dating back to for instance Saint Nicholas.

And it's funny. I've been podcasting long enough that I also wanna start by saying that I know, even in America, the topic of Santa can be controversial because people disagree on whether or not they do Santa with their kids and my goal in this episode is not of course to challenge anyone's family tradition or how anyone celebrates Christmas, but to learn a beautiful story from your culture. And I think this episode is actually gonna answer a lot of questions I actually wondered as a kid, like how did Saint Nick go from being a bishop, like I was told, to driving a sleigh with reindeer. So, I'm curious. Let's jump in here. Like how does the legend of Santa differ in Finnish culture?

Tero: Yeah. It's actually funny that Santa Claus is, you know, arguably the world's most famous person or a character. It's celebrated by many cultures of many religions and many, you know, countries around the world. And it is definitely a blend of a lot of stuff. It's like a good cross kitchen meal that has drawn influence from a lot of places. And one of these original influences is from this indigenous group of people called the Sami or the Reindeer People that inhabit Northern Finland, Norway, Sweden. But I think it's almost better to kind of go back in time chronologically.

So, a lot of the U.S. traditions...as we know the soda Santa or the Coca Cola Santa or it started in New York area by the Dutch immigrants. They called Santa Claus Sinterklaas and it was brought to the U.S. mostly by the Dutch. And obviously, New York used to be called New Amsterdam and so on and so forth. And the Dutch got the tradition from the Germans and I think...I meet a lot of people, I don't know about you, that still think that Santa Claus is German. Have you heard this thing from people saying that Santa Claus is German?

Katie: I have. I've heard German, I've heard from Turkey, I've heard Italian. I've heard from different cultures...

Tero: Yeah. I think a lot of peoples think he's German but it's actually...he's never...that is not even close but maybe the Saint Nicholas and the name Saint...and the people think...but it's actually from Turkey. You're correct. And he was a Turkish bishop. So, Saint Nicholas was a Turkish bishop, and the Italians stole his grave and took his tradition. So, they argue that he's Italian, but all evidence points that he was from Turkey. And Saint Bishop was this character who would give people gifts and so on and so forth. And that happened around the same time as the church had also divided from the catholic and the orthodox, and Turkey or Constantinople, Istanbul was the home of more of the orthodox and then Italy was obviously home for the Catholic church at that point. And the Orthodox Church drew a lot of influence from the Slavic culture and the Russian obviously. If you ever go to Russia, you see how prevalent that is.

And much longer than the Saint Nicholas existed, the Slavic have celebrated during exact same Christmas time this character called Ded Moroz. Ded Moroz is like a wizard of winter. So, if you have Russian or Ukrainian or whatever relatives, they might not even today celebrate Santa Claus. They'd celebrate Ded Moroz. So, in the Slavic culture even still today, they celebrate this character who looks very similar. Also have a sleigh, has a magic wand, dresses up in a cape, has a beard, a pointy hat. There's a lot of similarities with Santa Claus and Ded Moroz. And it's said to be that even this history is multiple thousands of years old, that Ded Moroz came from the Sami people. That makes sense because they're in northern kind of Slavic culture. The Sami were semi nomadic reindeer herders so there was a lot of influence there. And the Sami had been around at least 5,000 years.

So, the Sami tradition of Santa Claus that we're talking today is at least 5,000 years old. And along the way, probably every culture from the Slavic to the Turkish, to the Italians, the Germans, to the Dutch and obviously clearly the Americans have added their own spice to the story, but a lot of the original influences of Santa Claus come from the Sami people. And so, it's quite a fascinating story actually.

Katie: That is fascinating. And so, the Sami, I'm wondering, I've seen pictures in like National Geographic and different publications of these like amazing people and these gorgeous reindeer and even like kids would be riding reindeer. Am I thinking of the right tribe?

Tero: Yes. Obviously, like any indigenous culture or tribe, the tribes had slightly different traditions, but all of them have these beautiful outfits. Reindeer is their key animal, so they make anything from reindeer from boots, to hats, to coats, to using the bones for tools and stuff. So, they're very crafty and the outfits are something I think of like Ana and Elsa in "Frozen." So that's what the kids would probably imagine is how's the world of Ana and Elsa in "Frozen" is very similar to the world of Sami people.

And they live in this area called Lapland. And Lapland is in Northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and parts of like northwestern part of Russia and it is beyond the Arctic Circle and that is also...makes sense. That's one of the only areas where these reindeers live in this domesticated reindeer. So, there's no reindeers on the North Pole. So, the North Pole theory is...it's a good story but practically it doesn't really make sense because North Pole is really a space of ever shifting ice and it's hard to live there and there's definitely no reindeers. There are some polar bears there, but the reindeers live in this extremely northern area of Scandinavia and Northern Europe. So that's where the Sami people mostly live and the reindeer actually is a key part of this whole Santa Claus story from the beginning.

Katie: That's fascinating. I'd always wondered where the reindeer came into play because that never seemed to line up with the whole just Saint Nicholas being a bishop. I always wondered even as a kid where did he get the reindeer. So that makes a lot more sense. And so basically the original character of Saint Nicholas or Santa Claus was from that area?

Tero: Yes. And yeah, so there is no reindeers in Turkey unless there is a zoo somewhere. So, the story actually is that the original Santa Claus...there was many of them. The Santa Claus was a healer, a shaman, an elderly person who had wisdom, who would go from village to village to heal a common ailment. So, if you broke your knee and it was hurting, he would come with various herbs to heal the knee. If you had a flu or a cough, he will come to heal. So that's why a lot of people think that Santa Claus has lived forever because there were so many of them and he would go from a generation to generation.

But in every area, there was this healer, an elder wise person who would have this beard and had this knowledge, and would come and tell stories. And two times a year is a very special moment for almost all indigenous cultures, and those are the summer solstice and the winter solstice, so when the day is the longest and when the day is the shortest. And in Lapland, this is particularly important because in the summer there's no nights. There's absolutely...pretty much 24 hours of sunlight and winter, there's almost no sun. There's only a very small glimpse of sun kind of coming up a little bit in the horizon and then soon after going down again. So, it's a very magical time of the year. Everything is white.

There's the aurora borealis so the Northern Lights. So, the only light you really get is from the stars, and the Moon, and the aurora borealis reflecting from the snow. And there is this guy using these domesticated mammals, i.e. reindeers, to travel from a village to village to heal people and during this winter holiday, winter solstice, they would have this ceremony of chanting. Again, very common in indigenous cultures of chanting, drumming, singing, and setting intentions for the New Year. So, in the old Julian calendar, now we're mostly in the Gregorian calendar, the winter solstice lines exactly with the Christmas. So, a lot of the Christmas traditions are actually also winter solstice traditions from various cultures. So, Christmas is basically a celebration of the New Year. We think of New Year as in our calendar but in a way from the amount of light at the end or the start to the New Year starts at the winter solstice. So that's kind of also a funny thing about Christmas is that in a way Christmas is the New Year.

Katie: Interesting. Okay, cool. So, I'm curious, are there other parts of the Christmas story that can be explained through the tradition in Lapland with the Sami people. What about like for instance other things we think of with Santa whether it be hanging stockings or having a Christmas tree, do these things also trace back?

Tero: Yeah. And here's where it kinda starts to get crazy. So basically, for the Sami people, they believe that a pineal tree, so the pine and the spruce tree, spruce tree is part of the pine family, are holy and they are like the World Tree. And funny enough, that is now our Christmas tree. And the red ornaments, the red balls are actually this particular mushroom called amanita muscaria. And amanita muscaria is actually the world's most famous mushroom, second to none. But nobody really knows it. But it is the mushroom emoji, so if you ever put emoji on your phone or computer, that is amanita muscaria.

Kids play Super Mario and they jump and get that red mushroom, that is amanita muscaria. It's also in multiple pop culture references from Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit" to Disney to "Alice in the Wonderland." It comes up multiple, multiple times and if you go to the old photos even from the German time of Christmas time or as they called it, Yuletide, it's still visible that the thing hanging from the tree was not a red bulb, but it was this mushroom or...and kids would be holding this mushroom. So, if you look at old Christmas images, this mushroom is everywhere.

And it grows under the spruce tree. So, it grows under this pine family tree. And then, in order to dry it because it's fresh and you kind of collect it during the summer and early fall, you have to sun dry it. So, what the shaman would do is take all these mushrooms from the ground under the trees and put it on the tree branches, so sun would dry it. And sun-dry any mushroom actually increases vitamin D as well. So, mushrooms can build vitamin D from when they're sun dried but, in this case, they also...it makes them easier to store because you remove the water and dried mushrooms can last a long time versus fresh mushrooms can last a very little time.

So that's how we got our red ornaments on the Christmas tree. And the star on top of the Christmas tree is related to the Polaris which is the brightest star and it's the constellation. It's almost the GPS and the navigation system for the Sami people. So that's why there's a star on the top. It serves as a very ceremonial, very sacred reason for this particular star. My favorite part about the story is the chimney, because that's I think also something that doesn't really make sense. Like why would Santa come from the chimney? Like Santa doesn't fit through the chimney but it's such a key part of the story, isn't it?

So actually, the Sami people live in these massive teepees, semi-permanent teepees made out of moss and cloth and whatnot. And think of them like a yurt almost but not made out of wood necessarily. And they live in these teepees and, because it's extremely cold there, there's a fire in the center. So, the teepee is open from the top, so the smoke can go away. And during the winter solstice time, it's not rare at all that there will be suddenly many inches, if not many feet of snow, suddenly come and the small entrance to the teepee gets blocked by snow. So, the secondary exit or an entrance was always through the roof of the teepee or as the Sami call it Kota.

And so, it was just normal that during that time of the year, you would enter and exit sometimes through the roof or the chimney so to say. So, Santa Claus or this healer, shaman would come and would travel with these reindeers to hold this ceremony of chanting and sitting and setting intentions. He would enter through the chimney, exit through the chimney and that all is kind of like roots back to those reasons. There is really no other explanation today why the Santa Claus would come from the chimney.

Katie: Wow. That is so interesting. What about things like for instance elves and stockings? Are those just part of the current lore that we've created the legend or was there...did that exist as well?

Tero: Yeah. The elves are actually a funny one. It's actually a mix of few different traditions. So, in the Finnish and Swedish culture, we have these tomte, these little elves. Kind of almost separate from the Santa Claus story. And these elves observe people and they live in people's saunas and barns, and they look at people, and they help people with need if people are nice. So, there's this even still today in Finnish for example these tomte are called Christmas elves and they basically live with the families. And of course, how does the Santa know who is on the nice and naughty list? It's with the help of these little elves.

But funny enough, over time these traditions are always added. Like I said, Christmas and Santa Claus is a blend of so many traditions throughout the way. But for example, in the Roman times, one day of the year the slaves could become masters and masters become slaves. And the person who was the master could be recognized...the slave or the person helping, assisting would be recognized by this pointy hat. So, along the way, there's also the other cultures that have added to the elf story that was not originally exactly part of the Sami part, but it was part of the Nordic culture of having these elves and they just blended together.

And then the Dutch added their own flavor. They have their own story of the same thing, but the elves come from these mystical creatures. So many indigenous cultures including mostly Nordic cultures also beyond the Sami believed in various elves and fairies and things like that. And this is just one of those things that we believed that there were elves that were watching us and helping us if we behave well, and over time it just blended with the Santa story.

Katie: I love that. We never did the elf on the shelf, but I love the idea of like a little elf that could live in our sauna. That's a great plan. So, I'm curious what does the modern day...isn't it there's such a rich culture and tradition? What is the modern-day celebration of this time of year and of Christmas look like in Finland?

Tero: Yeah, so I think that's the beauty. I think there is a dark side to Christmas today as how it's been so commercialized and how things are fed that we have to always buy this cheaply and fast produced toys for our kids and spend money on commercial purposes. And that kinda loses the magic, the original real magic of Christmas. But if you go back to almost any of these original traditions and how it's still today celebrated in Finland, some of the themes are very similar. So, it doesn't matter if you're in Turkey or in Germany or in Finland. Traditions are to quiet down.

So, Christmas is very much...and Santa Claus is very much a time of peaceful, quiet reflection. So, it's more of a family celebration than maybe the summer solstice which is mid-summer party in Finland and Sweden is very much a celebration of friends as well. So, in the summer time, everybody comes together, the whole village celebrates together versus in the winter solstice time, it's more just within the family. So, it's a time of being quiet. There are various hot beverages that are consumed partly because it's cold outside and people get sick easily. There is Santa Claus who lives in the North Pole but actually doesn't. There's a mountain in Finland they say that he's actually originally from on the border of Russia and Finland. And he brings gifts to the kids and you can write to him. He has his own village in Lapland that you can visit throughout the year.

But I think the real magic of Christmas is definitely quieting down, kind of reflecting on the past year, taking candles to graves. So also, the Sami, what was important about the winter solstice tradition was to...the shaman would sometimes do a chanting and communicating with relatives who already died. And in Finland today, that's celebrated mostly by taking candles to the graves of your relatives or, like for example, I would take a candle to my grandmother's grave and kinda celebrate her memory through that time of the year particularly. And it looks kinda beautiful. You go to a cemetery and it's full of little candles everywhere.

So that's the still part of the Christmas tradition and obviously Finland like any culture has been slowly and slowly commercializing so some of those old traditions are slowly moving away. But at best time...it's a time with the family, the sauna. There's hot beverages. There's time to remember passed relatives and kinda setting your intentions for the next year and possibly gifting other people and the gifts are under the Christmas tree. So, for us, we put the gifts under the Christmas tree because that's where the original...the mushroom also grew. But in more of the Anglo-Saxon culture, it's often on the stockings because that was another place...how you could dry these mushrooms is that you would take them back to your hut and you would dry them by the fire. So that's the other way how you can dry these mushrooms as well.

Katie: That's so, so interesting and I love that you have written this down, this story that's so fun to read. It's a fun one to read with kids and I feel like it's a beautiful thing to add to Christmas tradition, just to learn from other cultures and from history. And so, just remind me real quick the name of the book and where people can find it if they're listening and they actually wanna read the full story and get into the details.

Tero: Sure. So, I wrote the book called "Santa Sold Shrooms" and it tells a story about a 10-year-old little girl whose father tells her a bedtime story and the girl is super curious or nosey and starts asking a lot of questions about like exactly around these themes and then the story goes deeper. And it has these beautiful illustrations. So, it's almost like a children's book that is also very suited for adults and tells a story through the eyes of this little girl. And you can buy it for example on Amazon. That's probably one of the easiest places to buy it or on our website at this point and few select retailers. But yeah, it's available this season and it's a great gift for your friends and family, and it's also really funny.

I think it's just something that everybody should know about, not just with Christmas particularly because it's such a major holiday and Santa Claus is such a notable character, but I think in general for your children and for yourself it's sometimes good to remind why we celebrate what we celebrate, be it Cinco de Mayo. A lot of people think it's a Mexican independence day or talk about Thanksgiving or Easter or whatever may be. It's just good to educate yourself and your children on the history. And if you end up celebrating it or not, that's definitely your decision. But at least, the knowledge of that...it's hard to believe that any kid would grow up without knowing about Santa. So maybe it's better that they grew up knowing about Santa's history and roots a little deeper. And this book is a fun story way to learn about the different elements of Santa in the eyes of a young child like themselves.

Katie: Absolutely. And I'll make sure those links are in the show notes for anybody who's driving or running right now. But I think there's something else that is amazing to learn from the Finnish culture and their traditions over the winter, which is how to stay healthy and how to keep the immune system strong. Because as you were talking about how they have almost no sunlight, and it's so cold, I just think like they had probably more of an uphill battle of just staying healthy in such cold and dark conditions.

So, I'd love if you could speak to that from having grown up there and having learned from that culture. What are some things we can then take and implement even in America to help stay healthy through the holidays? Because all too often we hear of people being sick over the holidays or a cold and flu season. So, what can we learn from your culture about that?

Tero: Yeah. That's a great one because I think this also relates to not just the immunity season and the holidays, but we can often learn from people who grow up in extreme conditions or who live extreme lives and pick up some of the wisdom that they've had to accumulate just to survive. And for example, you can learn a lot from professional athletes on how to fuel your body and energize. Doesn't mean that we who are not professional athletes need to exactly copy, but since there are requirements in their own work/passion are so demanding, they had to figure out some stuff.

So, in this case, Finnish people who live in an environment where there is extreme cold and there's almost no sun, so we've had to figure out some fundamentals that I think also work really well. I now live in California and even though there's a lot of sun, a lot of people are still...actually, the majority of people are still vitamin D deficient. So, vitamin D is one of those easy answers. You can get it obviously as a supplement. In Finnish culture, it's a lot...I mentioned mushrooms, but mushrooms share a lot of DNA with animals and humans, and they can also create vitamin D2 on their skin the same way as we can generate vitamin D through our skin. So, having sun dried mushrooms is a really great way also to supplement vitamin D during the season. But vitamin D in general is quite, quite important.

Then having the right minerals, be it using various broths or other mineral sources. Salt is a big part of salty fish or whatever. But sea salt and bone broths, other things like that that really provide us with the minerals. So, the minerals being, I don't know, zinc and other things like that really keep your body healthy during that season.

The other thing that we really love to do is, obviously I kind of mentioned it already, sauna. And then the sauna is combined by a dip, a polar bear dip into the frozen lake or ocean, or rolling in the snow depending where you are. But the hot-cold therapy, and I know you've experimented with this and you've talked about it, there is quite compelling evidence on the health benefits of sauna both for cardiovascular health but also, you know, protecting for immunity as well. So obviously, like if you're sick at that moment, sauna might not be the best idea at that point. But in the Finnish culture even kids are born in a sauna because it's the most hygienic place back in the day because you have to give birth and you couldn't go to a hospital. Where would you do it? Well, a sauna doesn't have any bacteria so that would be the spot.

The sauna and washing yourself, and cleansing, and sweating is really good for you. And then combine that with the cold part where your body will really build these, you know, immune system with the shock from the cold therapy. Brown fat for example, there's quite interesting research on just the brown fat. A lot of kids have excess brown fat and they thought that adults can't build it, but now they know that with this like cold plunges and cold therapy, you can actually build brown fat. And brown fat is the fat that protects your body from various ailments as well. So, it's the good kind of fat, brown fat.

And so, that's obviously something to be mindful. And then, I think various herbal teas and decoctions, and mushroom teas as well. Like the chaga mushroom that is very high in antioxidants, particularly SOD can keep you healthy. Nettle is another very prominent Nordic superfood. Rhodiola rosea which is adaptogenic root also great for energy during the winter time. And then a lot of the berries and the polyphenols that can be found in berries such as bilberries which are a wild blueberry, sea buckthorn. But there's a lot of these polyphenols and color pigments found in both mushrooms and berries. They really seem to protect the body from various issues that could also get kind of highlighted during the immunity season when your kids go to school, and everybody gets sick and whatnot.

I've been lucky enough not to be sick one day for almost, in next month, 11 years so it's kind of a magical thing. But it takes a lot of work but also a lot of these immunity protecting routines also help with your general energy and well-being. So, sauna doesn't just help with immunity or the cold plunges, but it also helps...the cold plunge can help burn fat and provide cognitive function and other things like that. So, there's a lot of reasons why...and take a leaf from the book of Sami and the Finns just for general wellness as well.

Katie: Absolutely. And you're so right. I'm a huge fan of the sauna. In fact, I am headed there as soon as we wrap up this episode. But I also love that you highlighted the different warm beverages because it makes total sense when you're living in a snowy culture that would be something you would turn to often. I don't live in a very cold culture but it's something I really implement more and more in the winter especially with kids,

because with six of them, if one gets sick it just kind of spreads and it's a multi-week thing to get everybody then back to being healthy.

And if I'm remembering from our first episode, you explained how for instance like chaga mushrooms, I believe are the most antioxidant rich source on the planet if I'm remembering correctly, and they have more antioxidants than chocolate or blueberries or carrots. They're very immune supporting. Am I remembering that right though?

Tero: Yeah. Obviously, that's gram per gram chaga is the highest source of antioxidants. So, it's a great base for broths or coffee or just drinking by itself in the winter time. There are also other mushrooms that are incredibly high in antioxidants. I think it was Pen State's, their microbiology department made a study and figured out that the most antioxidant rich food they found was a mushroom. So, there's a lot of antioxidants in these mushrooms and also, like I said, a lot in berries, but chaga is one of the highest. Generally speaking, a lot of these black foods so coffee, chaga, black olives, cacao, those are really good for like longevity and immunity. So black colored pigments are usually tends to be exceptionally good and chaga is extremely black, black food.

Katie: Yeah, I love that. I don't think we often think of black foods as being one of the colors we should consume, but every time we talk about, like the colors in foods, I'm reminded of my great grandmother who lived to be well into her 90s and that was pretty much the only rule she followed, in what she ate or drank or consumed is that she wanted a lot of different colors on her plate which back then of course they weren't into processed foods. So, she wasn't talking about blue food dye. She was talking about beets and turmeric, like things that were brightly colored. I think it had a big impact on her health just the variety, but also those foods in general, like things that have bold pigments typically have benefits that are associated with them, right?

Tero: A 100%. So, you know, all antioxidants are color pigments but not all color pigments are antioxidants, but generally speaking, like eating a lot of color is good for you. So, I would highly recommend adding various colors and even that's a great way, if you look at within a food group how nutrient-dense it is. Let's take dark leafy greens, and when you get those really dark green, almost purple salads, they tend to be a lot more nutrient dense than the iceberg lettuce that is more or less white. Sure, there's exceptions of foods that are incredibly nutrient dense that are not as brightly-colored but it is definitely a good indicator of possible nutrient density.

Katie: For sure. And I'd love if you could speak a little bit too just the different types of mushrooms and their role in immunity and how they can be used especially with children, because I think kids seem the most likely to get sick this time of year. And I know just on a practical level, my kids love like the chaga for instance or they love the hot chocolate with reishi at night which helps them sleep. But are there other ones that can be beneficial for children as well?

Tero: Yeah. Mushrooms actually do serve a big part in immunity of the forest and the nature as well. So what mushrooms do is they really are the immune system of the forest. And a lot of these top mushrooms, note not all mushrooms are good for you, but the top mushrooms tend to grow on trees and they really serve this immunomodulating benefit. So, immunomodulation is when something helps support the balance of the immunity. So, there are immunostimulants like let's say garlic and those things. And those things are good if you're sick, that they stimulate system. Unfortunately, now more and more people have an overly stimulated immune system, and that kind of is a root for let's say autoimmune disorders and whatnot is when your immune system is hyperactive.

But things that mushrooms are, they're immunomodulator, so if your immune system is low it's gonna boost it. If it's hyperactive, it's gonna calm it down. And kids, when they're super young, obviously, you want them to get sick and build their own immune system, but really once they're toddlers or older, they really should start building these tools or nutrients to build their own immune system. So, mushrooms kind of support nutrition for your cytokines and macrophages and your internal immune system. And out of the mushrooms, what I recommend for kids is, you already kind of called it out, but the reishi mushroom, the queen of mushrooms is really the best mushroom for both adults and children to start with.

We, for example, make like a healthy hot cocoa with it, cinnamon hot coco, and reishi is more grounding and calming so besides just helping with immunity, it can also help with occasional stress and calm down if the kids are hyper in the evening. Hopefully, they'll go to sleep sooner or sleep deeper and wake up more energized and be more focused the next day. So that's a great one.

Chaga is also a good one especially during the immunity season. And then, I really like turkey tail and shitake as well for kids. We, for example, we use a turkey tail and reishi on a caffeine free chai. That's also a good evening time drink. It's good for the gut. And so, turkey tail's very good for the gut but also good for the immunity. So those are just maybe a couple to highlight. And then cooking with shitake mushrooms is...shitake is also one of the most cultivated mushrooms in the world and one of the most studied mushrooms in the world. So second most cultivated after the button mushroom and second most studied after the reishi. So, shitake is also quite a safe bet for kids for general wellness and immunity.

Katie: I love that.

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This podcast is brought to you by Good Culture. Good Culture makes amazing cottage cheese. I know, I know, not necessarily two words you would put in the same sentence on everyday speaking. But theirs is awesome, I promise, even if you don't love cottage cheese. Because I used to not. Basically, it's naturally fermented cottage cheese so it's free of gums, fillers, and additives and it's packed with probiotics. And because it's made naturally it doesn't have that weird mouth feel that a lot of cottage cheese has. So, I use it all the time in cooking and smoothies as a substitute for other types of cheese, or just a meal on the go. You can find it at Whole Foods and many other grocery stores and it comes in yogurt-sized cups too, and those are perfect for a meal. So, check them out. It's Good Culture and they are available at many grocery stores.

Katie: And speaking of cooking, I'm always so curious, because of my background in nutrition and just all the recipes I've developed over the years. I'm so curious what the winter food culture looks like in such a cold environment. Because I know in America, we kind of missed the mark about eating seasonally and we pretty much just eat whatever we want all year round. But I feel like so many other cultures have this beautiful wisdom in eating with the seasons. I'm just curious what that looks like in such a cold place where I would guess it's actually difficult to find a lot of different foods.

Tero: Yeah, I think there's a lot of debate in the nutrition industry should you eat animal products, should you not. Well, how much plants? Which things are good, yada, yada, yada. And I think the two themes that often get overlooked that should have a lot more conversation around nutrition, health, and wellness is one is quality and I know you're a bit proponent of that. Eating a tomato and eating a tomato are not the same thing. But the second thing is what you just mentioned, seasonality. Seasonality is everything. If we assume that we should eat the same way the whole year, I think we're delusional. Our bodies are meant to have seasons. Our bodies are...we are great at adapting, so we can have one season a year-round. I think optimally that's not the case.

And just so you know, even if you live in a place where weather is fairly consistent, you don't have weather wise seasons, you have seasons in your lives. You have busy periods, you have less busy periods. You have periods when you're resting. There're periods when you're growing. And in a place like Finland, that's forced by the nature. That's not by choice. It's probably just purely by the weather and availability of the ingredients. And obviously today, you can buy any ingredient any place any time. But in its truest sense, Finland has very clear four seasons and those four seasons are very different in diet and I think there's a lesson to be learned here.

So, for example, the spring time is a time of detox. We're all so tempted of juice detoxes and whatever detoxes a few times a year. But in Finland when dandelion comes and it's one of the first things to kind of pop out after the winter, it's something that we're meant to eat for a month, two months. Dandelion is not meant to be eaten year-round necessarily. But during that time, it's a great liver detoxicator. So, spring is a time of cleansing. It's a time of like cleansing from the winter, purifying your body, purifying your blood. Maybe there's a fast there. Obviously, a lot of the Easter and those celebrations also, like carnival also was combined with the fast. So, carnival, eating meat and celebrating was combined with the fasting period. So that's also pretty popular in multiple cultures.

Summer is a time when you have a lot of these fresh berries and fruits. So, there's a period there where you might be heavier on carbs. Eat a little lighter. You have a lot of hydrating foods, foods that keep your water levels up as it's a little warmer and your body needs more of the cooling things. And then in the fall time, when it's harvest season you kind of bulk up. You go from maybe some of the root veggies and you go heavier because those are fresh in season, some tubers and other things like that. And in the winter time, which is kind of the fascinating is there is really no growing. So, nothing can be grown. So, a lot of fermented foods which are also great for immunity. So be it sauerkrauts and different pickles. So fermented foods during the winter is something really to maybe where you go a little heavier on because summer time you can roll in the grass and dirt, and you can get good bacteria on your skin externally. But in the winter time, it's maybe better to get it internally, so fermented foods.

I mentioned the salty fishes. There's a lot of...I mentioned bone broths. There's a lot of stews, things like that and more of the root vegetables and meat. So historically, winter was more meat heavy and summer was not really meat heavy at all. So, they would be the seasonality of when do you have for example animal products and when you have maybe a little less of them. So, the idea that our diet would be consistent 12 months of the year is I think that's not really an ideal place. So, if you're listening to this and you are not forced...external seasons in your location, maybe think of what are your seasons in your life. When are your busiest? Maybe when you're really busy, you got a really fuel body in a way that gives you energy or maybe when there's time to relax, maybe you go off of caffeine, maybe do a fast. Maybe you cleanse a little differently to be ready for the next busy season. So, I think there's something really to be learned on seasonal eating. And in Finland, especially winter time, fermented foods, broths, stews, warm beverages, those are just some of the fundamentals that everybody would be having.

Katie: I agree to those. All we know now, basically, they're very objectively beneficial foods for all the different compounds they contain. And it sounds like it's a much lower consumption of sugar and processed foods as well which are more the mainstays of the American diet over the holidays. And I'm sure that alone makes a tremendous difference in the immune system and in people not getting sick in that really cold winter like that.

Tero: Yeah, a 100%. I mean, almost any more traditional culture would've had very limited amount of processed foods or processed sugars particularly. But it's not a carbohydrate scared...because you're so cold and in cold weather, your metabolism gets ramped up, so you actually need more calories to stay warm. Your body needs to consume energy. And that's why you kind of bulk up in the harvest season in the fall to kind of have the fat percentage to go through the winter. But definitely, like berries and root vegetables, starchy vegetables can also be part of a certain part of the year. It doesn't mean that you eat fruits, and veggies, and starches throughout the whole year, but there's definitely a period when you're kinda heavier on those carbohydrates and natural forms of sugar.

And I think for kids especially and their eyes and these polyphenols and those berries are incredibly powerful. And again, as a percentage, they have sugars but it's a smaller amount and they come with fibers and other things like that. So, Finland's definitely not scared of...there's not a scare of carbohydrates or fats. Both are very prevalent, but we just very seasonally go through those things versus consuming them every day 12 months of the year.

Katie: Exactly. So much we can learn. I love it. And I'll make sure we have links to everything we talked about in the show notes both on the mushroom side and the link to the book, and also a link to the post I've written in the past about keeping the immune system strong throughout the winter and remedies that I always keep on hand with kids. But Tero, you're always so fun to talk to. This has been so much fun and so informative, and I would encourage everyone listening to check out the book. It's a really fun book to read with kids and also of course everyone knows that all of the Four Sigmatic products are favorites of ours in our house and so I would encourage everyone to check all of those out. But thank you so much for your time. This was a blast.

Tero: Yeah. Thanks a lot for having me on again, and hopefully somebody got inspired to google the Sami people and read up more on the Santa story, and hopefully get the book as well. It's quite a funny one. And if nothing else, go to the sauna in Christmas time with your family and have a hot cup of something.

Katie: Absolutely. I love that. And thank you to all of you for listening and sharing your most valuable resource of your time with us today and I hope that you'll join again on the next episode of the Wellness Mama Podcast.

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