

RECLAIMING
Vitality

A HEALING JOURNEY THROUGH
CHRONIC FATIGUE AND BURNOUT

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INTRODUCTION

Remember when you used to wake up in the morning and roll out of bed happy to approach the day? And you felt full of life force, refreshed, and even joyful?

Now maybe you are exhausted, and you have been for a long time. Sleeping and resting do not seem to help. Or you do get better at times after a lot of rest, but then you crash again. In fact the crashing has become something of a lifestyle, and you really don't know how that happened. You were alive, you felt energized and vital, and then you got sick, and never really recovered even though the doctors and medical professionals couldn't find a true cause of the problem.

Perhaps when you try to restart your exercise program, you end up bedridden for days, or at least get markedly sicker for a time, even though earlier in your life exercise really wasn't a problem. Some of you may have even been very sporty, but now a fraction of that exercise sends your body reeling.

And for some of you, the brain fog might make you think that perhaps you are having some kind of midlife short-term memory issues. It is like a hangover that doesn't seem to lift with coffee at all, as it used to. In fact the coffee now makes you sick, just like so many other of your favorite foods, drinks, and substances.

Many of you will have seen alternative medical professionals, healers, and even therapists, sometimes paying ridiculous amounts of money just because you are so desperate to get better. These treatments may have helped the symptoms, to a degree. But treating the symptoms never really cured the underlying issue. And the underlying issue is still a mystery.

You may in fact be deeply frustrated, like I and many of the clients that I have seen were too. Angry that you feel chronically drained and that something as simple as a Zoom meeting or a trip to the mall can leave you laid out in bed or severely hindered for days.

The attempt to recover can also end up like a huge punishment, removing any possible triggers from your

lifestyle until you eventually feel very alone and perhaps even more exhausted.

You might be like some of the young people I have known who had hours of morning routines daily because they were taking so many supplements, shakes, and treatments. If you are like that, you might also find yourself having to drag around huge bags of supplements and special foods anytime you need to travel.

Here you will not have to drag around bags of supplements and special foods, and if you are already doing that, then this is totally fine and not in conflict. What I want to share with you here is not a replacement for all the other treatments that you might try or have already tried. It's something that works on a different level than what you have been doing so far.

Perhaps you have been diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) or Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME), as I was. Or you are experiencing severe burnout or Long COVID or another form of post-viral fatigue. And you are in severe pain, collapsing regularly but finding ways to cope so that you don't have to let anyone but those closest to you know what is going on.

The word "crash" and the experience of an energetic collapse of some kind resonated with the direct experience of many of the hundreds of people that I have worked with and interviewed over the past 20 years about severe fatigue, including CFS and burnout.

When I started my studies in this area in 2003, the words *crash* and *collapse* were not used about these illnesses, but now the CDC uses them to describe what is called post-exertional malaise (PEM):

What is Post-Exertional Malaise (PEM)?

PEM is worsening of ME/CFS symptoms after physical or mental activity that wouldn't have caused problems previously. During PEM, ME/CFS symptoms may get worse or appear for the first time.

Symptoms may include:

- *Difficulty thinking*
- *Problems sleeping*
- *Headaches*
- *Feeling dizzy*
- *Severe tiredness*

It may take days, weeks, or longer to recover from PEM. People with ME/CFS often describe this experience as a "crash," "relapse," or "collapse."¹

1. "Fast Facts: ME/CFS," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, May 30, 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/me-cfs/about/fast-facts-about-me-cfs.html>.

In the following chapters, I will describe what it means to crash or collapse from a unique perspective. It will illuminate some key pieces of the experience that will both allow you to recover a lot more quickly and also learn to sidestep the crashing altogether.

This is a proposal that the exploration of energetic and subtle aspects of the human body can help some people to recover from these illnesses. It is not meant to replace a physical diagnosis, nor the accompanying treatments. This is an additional lens through which to see the illness and the fatigue and in some cases find a pathway to full recovery.

More than anything, I feel that we are in a time when it is imperative to understand a holistic approach to illness.

If you have fully explored a Western approach to your fatigue, and it is not working, it is possible that seeing the issue through an understanding of the energetic or subtle aspects of your system could really help you to recover. This is an invitation to explore, to ask questions, and to see through the lens of a few different models. By all means take what is useful for you and apply it, and throw the rest away.

In all of the exploration and discovery along my own path, there was one thread that led me forward in the healing process, which was understanding the subtle-body mechanisms behind these little-understood conditions. “Subtle bodies” is a term used by Samuel Sagan, MD, (founder of the Clairvision School of Meditation) in his online correspondence course *KT Subtle Bodies, the Fourfold*

Model, and it is this model I will use to talk about subtle bodies.

This model of subtle bodies describes the nonphysical aspects of human anatomy and physiology drawing from Western and Eastern models of subtle energy.

A key concept here is that the energy of life is one big part of the missing link in our understanding of fatigue and so many conditions that come out of it. The other part of the missing link is understanding consciousness, not just as psychology or thoughts and emotions, but also as energy that interacts with our vitality or life force at a very deep level.

Understanding subtle bodies shows us that the relationship between the energetic component of vitality and consciousness is fundamental to human existence but also all sorts of health-related dysfunctions: fatigue, the ability to recover quickly from illnesses and physical injuries, the ability to let go, much of the sexual dysfunction that people experience in the modern day, many unexplained digestion issues, and the inability to sit still and truly connect with ourselves.

The term subtle bodies as it is used in this book refers to, “The nonphysical layers which, together with the physical body, constitute a human being. Subtle bodies form the nonphysical hardware of consciousness.”²

2. Samuel Sagan, “A Language to Map Consciousness,” Clairvision School, accessed June 11, 2024, <https://clairvision.org/books/altmc/a-language-to-map-consciousness.html>.

You might be skeptical about the existence of subtle energies and subtle bodies, as I was too. But this all changed when I had some profound experiences that opened up my own perception of how the crashing and collapsing was working in my body. In my search for recovery, I realized that I was missing a key piece of knowledge that many people in the world today are also in the dark about.

For myself this missing link first became clear when I had a kind of awakening in the year 2000, after nearly three years of debilitating fatigue, brain fog, post-exertion malaise (PEM), majorly uncomfortable digestive issues, and migraines, among other things. I had traveled the world and seen many doctors and alternative health professionals to find answers about what was happening, but at that point I still did not yet have a proper diagnosis.

That weekend I was meditating at a silent retreat just outside of London, UK, and I came down with one of the obliterating headaches that I had been suffering from since the onset of “whatever it was that had been happening to me” for the previous few years.

As I was in a meditation retreat, I was in complete silence. In the silence, I watched the excruciating pain come on. I noticed that while I was sitting, just observing my breath in stillness, that something inside me seemed to collapse.

I had no knowledge at that time of anything to do with “energy or qi or prana.” I was a financial journalist with a

scientist for a mother and a businessman for a father. For me “energy or qi” seemed vague at best and probably just a bit too “woo woo” for any serious consideration.

Nevertheless, I had a light bulb moment, sitting in total stillness and silence, watching the breath move in and out of my nose, seeing the pain slowly (but not so slowly, really, as it happened through the course of one day) descend into my body until I felt crippled. This was what my teacher in holistic counseling in Sydney, Australia later called an “aha moment.” It was a deep realization that this problem that I was suffering from was not emotional or physical; it was energetic. This was a knowing that felt like a click inside of me.

After that day, I knew I had to learn about “energy,” although I still did not know what that really meant. And I had to find out if there was a pathway to recover through understanding my own energy or what some people know as life force, “qi,” and others as “prana.”

Understanding subtle energetic mechanisms and how I could heal and cultivate my own life force was absolutely key in the journey of fully recovering from CFS, even after a diagnosis which essentially amounted to a doctor telling me that, “You have Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, and you will have to learn to live with it.”

Defying that diagnosis, I went on to fully recover and then study the energetic and spiritual side of the suite of fatigue-related illnesses, such as CFS/ME, burnout,

and other chronic unexplained conditions roughly under the same umbrella. I toured the world, gave talks and workshops, and worked with hundreds of people in one-on-one sessions as a practitioner in Inner Space Techniques (IST) and an instructor of the Clairvision School of Meditation.

In the 20 years of research that I have conducted on CFS, I also came across many people with burnout and even post-viral fatigue, and more recently Long COVID, that fit into a similar energetic category as the people who with CFS who were finding recovery from working underlying energetic issues that contributed to their illness in the first place.

I came to see these illnesses as a loosely grouped set of diagnoses that have some energetic crossover, much like a Venn diagram. In the crossover where these illnesses meet in this vision, some people with one or more of these diagnoses can have significant recovery through exploring and treating the subtle bodies or energetic level of the condition.

My point here is that knowledge of the subtle body and energetic component of these categories of illness is an additional tool that really worked for me, and for many others that I have either witnessed or worked with myself as an IST practitioner. While modern Western medicine is important and a marvel in many cases, it does not yet know how to treat every condition successfully, and in the case of these particular illnesses doesn't pinpoint what the

real cause of the problem is. In this case, I would like to put forward that it is worth considering exploring the condition from this bigger perspective of the human body.

To help you understand what I mean here, I have written this book using my own experiences of CFS and Long COVID, as well the case studies of many others, some of them diagnosed with burnout or post-viral fatigue. In all cases people were consulting their doctors and using Western medicine as much as possible to treat their condition. Many times, including for myself, this did not lead them to the road of recovery, and so we tried different approaches in the attempt to get better.

As part of this energetic approach, a fundamental aspect of my recovery and many others that I have worked together with over the years has been the foundational technique of uplifting, or pulling up heavy, dark fatigue out of the body of life or vitality. This is a technique that addresses fatigue which is not just your standard physical tiredness at the end of the day. It is a fatigue that results more from the ongoing gripping and tension of the unconscious intensity that many people with CFS are dealing with. They don't have a language for it, or a clear sense of how to address it. But when you talk to many people with CFS types of illnesses, they absolutely get the idea that their own intensity is crashing into them and causing these incredibly difficult symptoms.

Finding uplifting and applying it has been so foundational in my own recovery and that of many others I have interviewed or worked with as a private IST practitioner that I really am so happy to introduce this concept for you here in this book, including the whole context of understanding subtle bodies that goes with the technique. This technique can be applied even for those who are very unwell and bedridden in the earlier or more severe phases of the illness.

As CFS and burnout often have multiple layers of cause, there can be more than one way to treat such a condition. In my own recovery there were several different stages of return to full health and vitality.

After the initial very severe phase of being bedridden, a major part of my own journey and that of many others I've worked with or interviewed was learning how to connect deeply with the principle of life by fully letting go.

I bet you can relate to the fact that stress, tension, and gripping create or exacerbate illness. For those with CFS and some types of burnout or Long COVID, this incredible tension sometimes creates such severe symptoms that it can even be life-threatening when at its worst.

Even though grasping tension in the mind and the body is a central mechanism of consciousness in modern life, I bet you have also experienced the relief that comes with letting go of all that physical and emotional stress. In over two decades of exploration, I learned that we all share the primal

desire to let go, to spread, to merge, to feel that blissful feeling when you just allow your consciousness to dive into nature or another person and become one in such a way that you feel a total release.

This is the desire for sex, for a good night of sleep, for a great vacation on an island somewhere, or for the deep dive into nature that takes you away from the stress of everything in your life. For others, it takes the form of a deep inner realization of Peace, a spiritual experience that releases them from suffering.

This merging into a blissful state is one way that we can be deeply refreshed, rejuvenated, and renewed. Yet people are increasingly finding it hard to have this kind of reset.

What I have found working with thousands of people around the world is that we get stuck in “grasping,” tension, gripping, or some kind of contraction. Most of us at one time or another have experienced a phase when we cannot help but hold on. And so when we do try to sleep, even if it is for hours or even days at a time, we are not able to experience refreshment or rejuvenation.

In the (not so) distant past, this letting go into the essence of aliveness that is really inside all of us happened unconsciously. But as we move further and further into the technological age, we need to learn to let go consciously, to choose letting go.

Rediscovering the profound and yet simple joy of truly releasing all that unconscious tension and stress is one

of the fundamental things that I want to share with you in the journey of this book. Letting go means learning to consciously allow ourselves to go into a primordial chaos. This is like a kind of churning of the body of energy that affords a huge state of regeneration.

That is why I am proposing that this is a Noble Cure, a pathway to understanding subtle energies, including the primordial beauty of our own body of life force, how it interacts with the grasping mind and the relief and deep peace we experience when we can consciously choose to just let go. In understanding those levels of our own subtle energies, we can then learn how to cultivate this precious essence of life inside of us, and the deep calm that it can bring.

The next step in the recovery process is that of developing the ability to get things done with a connected sense of flow, meaning that the doing does not reignite this massive tension inside that creates the sickness and the crashing of vitality.

The Chinese model of yinyang³ flow, both the opposition and the complementarity, is so helpful here. In this yinyang model, we're all feminine and masculine all of

3. From Robin R. Wang's usage of the term. Wang uses the term "yinyang," rather than "yin or yang," "yin-yang," or "yin and yang." This reflects the Chinese usage, in which the terms are directly set together and would not be linked by a conjunction.

the time, but at any one moment we tend towards one or the other polarity.

These forces within us are also outside of us. And if we push against this flow, then it can enhance the tension or friction that tends towards creating the crash symptoms. So we need to learn to flow with the forces of masculine and feminine inside of us, sometimes needing to be driven and pointed, sometimes more receptive and peripheral, resting and letting go.

In this flow, the power of knowing what you want or desire is key because when you do what you really want—not the surface or externally conditioned desires that leave you empty and deflated, but the true wantings that come from deep inside—then you have more energy. People get things done when they are connected to the energy of wantings and desires. When you really want something, you find the energy to achieve it. This is a simple and yet powerful way to move forward with recovery, once you have the techniques of energy management under your belt.

My last chapter explores the power of truth in finding the way to recovery. This is a simple and beautiful teaching that can help many people find their way to shifting their relationship to CFS and burnout. For me, it was really instrumental in finding the steps to recovery.

Before I got sick with CFS, I had no thought nor even any idea of a spiritual path, let alone meditation. And when I got sick, I would never have dreamed that these things

would lead me to a full recovery from the same unbearable illness.

Not just any old meditation and spiritual path, but a path that showed me how to heal the condition at the level of my own energy or life force. Finding meditation and spirituality was profound, but it was also practical. This was a path that unfolded in a series of steps that resulted in my recovery and so much more.

Since then, I have discovered that many people find wellness and freedom through spiritual work and meditation in a very real way. I saw this shared experience through interviewing more than 100 people about their experiences with CFS and burnout, as well as completing thousands of private sessions with people around the world, working as an IST practitioner for nearly 20 years.

Lisa Miller, PhD, in her book *The Awakened Brain: The New Science of Spirituality and our Quest for an Inspired Life*, says that her breakthrough MRI findings showed that each of us has what she calls an ‘awakened brain.’

*Each of us is endowed with the natural capacity to perceive a greater reality and consciously connect to the life force that moves in, through, and around us. Whether or not we participate in a spiritual practice or adhere to a faith tradition, whether or not we identify as religious or spiritual, our brain has a natural inclination toward and docking station for spiritual awareness.*⁴

4. Lisa Miller PhD, *The Awakened Brain: The New Science of Spirituality and Our Quest for an Inspired Life* (New York: Random House, 2021), 7.

Miller describes the awakened brain as the “neutral circuitry that allows us to see the world more fully and thus enhance our individual, societal and global wellbeing.”⁵

In this book, Miller also says, “I’ve discovered that the awakened brain is both inherent to our physiology and invaluable to our health and functioning.”⁶

When I read about this, I was fascinated because Miller carefully lays out what I already knew to be true from years on the ground facilitating people to find and explore this in themselves.

Let me start at the beginning...

5. Lisa Miller, *The Awakened Brain*, 8.

6. Lisa Miller, *The Awakened Brain*, 9.

1

IN THE BEGINNING, MY STORY

Perhaps like me, you have a pattern of fighting to the top, chasing that euphoric high, until you crash and seriously burn out, taking what seems like an unusually long time to recover.

For me, full recovery from this pattern would only come through a complete shift inside of myself, when I started to understand my own subtle energies, and my relationship with my own willpower.

In that awakening, and the healing of my body, my experience of the world would be filled out like a picture postcard becoming a full 3D virtual image, bursting with the vibrancy of life, as I came through that dark night of the soul to learn about my own spirituality and how it could be

cultivated actively through engaging my subtle energy bodies using meditation techniques.

When I first had the impulse to write this book and do this work, the main thing that I wanted to share was that you can recover from the debilitating and bone-aching exhaustion of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome or Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME).

Whether you believe it or not right now, I want you to know that yes, you can get better, be more alive, have more energy, and experience hope and enthusiasm again in your life!

This epiphany first popped into my head when I really knew I was fully recovered from CFS. In that moment, there were clear vast blue skies above and all around me, as I drove across the rich red Australian desert. I was driving 12 hours to Sydney from White Cliffs in New South Wales, where I had been studying meditation and transformation full-time for 18 months at a retreat center directly with Dr. Samuel Sagan. I felt absolutely free, liberated of the pain and heavy brain fog, as well as numerous other symptoms that had plagued me during the previous five years of struggle with CFS.

Freedom after all that pain and suffering was so liberating that I decided then I wanted to share it with others who were feeling hopeless, hitting walls with burnout and ongoing, unexplained debilitating fatigue. I was feeling completely alive, and full of vitality, recovered from years of

sleep issues, exhaustion, being plagued with overwhelming sensitivities and allergies, migraines, brain fog, and bouts of flu-like symptoms.

Since my own recovery, I have lived in five different cities, in four different countries, on three different continents. I became an IST practitioner and taught many workshops in meditation around the world, seeing thousands of private clients from all walks of life, and wrote a master's thesis on the topic of recovering from CFS using the understanding of subtle bodies. Not to mention immigrating from Australia to the USA and falling in love a few times along the way.

Sharing my story of illness and recovery from chronic fatigue with you is intended to inspire you in case you are exhausted, drained, and feeling hopeless about your own path.

If you are burnt out, struggling with brain fog, dragging your body around with little sign of relief, or crashing on a regular basis in such a way that you end up in bed for long stretches not really knowing why, then this story is intended to convey a sense of possibility and victory.

It is important because now debilitating fatigue including CFS/ME, Long COVID and chronic situations of burnout have reached epidemic proportions around the world.

BEFORE I WAS SICK

Spinning back even earlier to 1995, before I was really sick, I was 23 years old, feeling a different kind of freedom, on a three-day journey across Australia, through that blistering red desert, this time on a bus from Perth in Western Australia, to Sydney in New South Wales on the other side of the country. I left my childhood home to go to the biggest city in Australia at the time, where I knew nobody. I was en-route to not only the career that I thought I wanted, but also a huge crash and then a spiritual awakening that would change everything.

That three-day journey across the desert felt like a transition through fire. By the time I arrived at my destination, the whites of my eyes had turned completely red, bloodshot from the brutal intensity of the bus air-conditioning. I guessed that desert temperatures over 105 F meant that they had some kind of refrigeration system blowing that dry air at us to keep us alive on the journey.

At that time I had no concept of anything spiritual or energetic at all. Instead I was en-route to an outer kind of success, one that came at a price.

On that bus, I was not sick, but I was on my way towards it. The stubborn will, the desperate desire to prove my worth, the wide-eyed enthusiasm about the world would lead me to fight harder than my body could possibly handle.

The pushing and the drive that got me onto that bus and that would eventually get me into the career as a journalist were definitely instrumental to the unexplained devastating levels of fatigue and physical pain that were to come.

I was living in one of the most magnificent cities in the world, desperately wanting to be great at a time when it was becoming increasingly difficult to get into print media without contacts and inroads. Print media was dying, and the internet was being birthed.

Just under a year after my arrival, I became a financial journalist working for an accounting newspaper, and within two years, I was working in the fast-paced wire industry getting news out second by second, living the dream.

That lifestyle of striving for the top and winning was so fun for me at the time. While my articles were published daily in newspapers around the country, I lived in an apartment near Bronte Beach where I went bodysurfing in the mornings and then caught the bus into the hectic high-rise building. I would arrive early in the office to read the three or four (physical) newspapers, while drinking my coffee and eating my huge chunks of sourdough toast. Yes physical newspapers, coffee, and buttered toast with Vegemite. (Side note: it has been a long time since I had any of those things!)

It was the beginning of the internet, the dawn of the new wave of media, and everything was happening at once. There were three computers on my desk, two phones, and a lot of manic noise in the newsroom as everyone was working at

breakneck speed to get the stories out faster than humanly possible while also being more accurate than any of our competitors.

It was so competitive that I used to describe a press pack interviewing one person for the same story as akin to a group of football players dressed in jackets and nice shoes. Nothing like running from a conference or an AGM (Annual General Meeting) at breakneck speed to call in a story to the editor while the competitors all did the same in the other corners of the room. Definitely an adrenaline buzz.

Then I crashed!

THE CRASH OF A SHOOTING STAR— OR SO I BELIEVED

Starting to get the picture of an adrenaline junkie yet? Perhaps you have your own version of this story?

But then after three years in that industry, just when I was becoming a shooting star, within reach of fame and recognition, I crashed, and I crashed hard. I got really sick, and it went on for a long time. I was dragging my body to and from work, falling asleep at the desk, pulled by a deep, heavy, foggy fatigue that did not leave me for several years. There were digestive issues that were painful, aggressive, embarrassing, and uncomfortable. Headaches of far greater severity than I had ever had before, unexplained fevers, aches, and pains. Most of all the strange situation that, for

the first time in my very active life, exercise made me much worse, not better.

I later found out that this crash was more than just a physical virus at the time. I probably had Epstein-Barr as years later this came up in tests. But even when I did everything to address that illness—cleansing, diets, detox, resting, changing my lifestyle—I did not get better. There was an energetic component that turned out to be key to my return to wellbeing.

For the first couple of years of the illness, I fought hard to find a diagnosis and cure, trying everything from specialists in Sydney, Australia, and London, UK to many different types of alternative doctors and healers. I moved countries—I was a fighter after all. This was how I generally rolled in my life. I changed jobs, I took time off, I rested, and I stopped eating any foods that seemed to make my symptoms worse. At times the so-called food intolerance issues resulted in a very basic diet of brown rice and selected steamed vegetables.

That little bit of relief that came out of so much focus on my health wasn't enough for me. I wanted a full recovery. I was adamant that it was possible because I had been physically fit and healthy before, and then for no apparent reason, I was debilitated, clouded in a heavy sleepy fog, plagued with constant headaches, drained by food and chemical sensitivities beyond what I had thought possible,

and my bowels seemed to be incapable of doing much more than embarrassing me in every way possible.

I would not give up until I was fully recovered. What I did not know, though, was that by the time I was recovered, I would be a completely different person, and yet so much more myself.

Everything Began to Change

A huge part of my own recovery was finding a spiritual path of real substance.

Central to the theory that human beings have subtle bodies, or nonphysical aspects to their existence, is the experience of ourselves as spiritual beings. The age-old dilemma of being both an animal and an angel in one body has been the motivator for many mythologies and religions across the ages and throughout different cultures around the world.

When I was still struggling with CFS, and had no real belief in anything spiritual or religious at all, I had a kind of awakening in June 1999. I returned to the place of my birth: Malawi, Africa. After several years of illness, being in bed a lot, and in pain even more, I just decided to do something I had really wanted to do for many years. I went on an epic journey to the place where I'd spent the first few years of my life, returning for the first time since my family left to immigrate to Australia in 1976. That was when my recovery really began.

I had been sick for several years, searched for answers in Australia and the UK, and finally just went on a backpacking trip regardless of the symptoms that plagued me. A couple of doctors thought I was mad. And maybe from a rational standpoint, I was. But sometimes you have to do what you have to do.

After a month of journeying through Zimbabwe and Zambia, I was in Malawi, when I had a really big shift of consciousness. What should have been a three-hour journey took me and two completely new backpacking friends more than 14 hours. A bus that had been very difficult to find in the first place that was supposed to take us to the lake just stopped halfway there in the middle of nowhere and dumped us and all the passengers on the side of the road. For the local people, I did not get the sense this was out of the ordinary. But for myself and my two young English companions at the time, this was really outside of our comfort zone.

We ended up backpacking, busing, hitchhiking and even walking to find our way from Lilongwe to a small village on the edge of Lake Malawi, one of the biggest freshwater lakes in the world. When we finally made it to the lake, we were sitting on the back of an open truck holding on fiercely for our lives as it bounced through the outback dirt road. The sun was setting on one side of the truck and the moon rising on the other.

I remembered a poem or prayer by Michael Leunig, the Australian cartoonist and philosopher:

*There are only two feelings
Love and fear.
There are only two languages,
Love and fear.
There are only two activities,
Love and fear.
There are only two motives,
two procedures, two frameworks,
two results.
Love and fear.
Love and fear.⁷*

Symbolically, on one side of the truck, there sat the golden flames of the sun looming brilliant over the Malawi landscape and on the other side of us the moon, its full silvery white sister, rising over the lake. The lake I had heard about my whole life, so big it looks like an ocean. I was awake to the choice in myself to see things one way or another, either full of love or brimming with fear.

There were no phones, no banks, no way to get money, no way to contact anyone, and I was here with two complete strangers who were now my brothers. I had never felt so alive in my life. I chose love.

A few days later, when I danced on a tiny island in the middle of Lake Malawi as the soft pitter-patter of summer

7. Michael Leunig, "Prayers," Leunig, accessed June 11, 2024, <https://www.leunig.com.au/works/prayers>.

rain hit the grass roof of our open-air shelter, I felt like I was dancing in the sky with the sea eagles that swooped in around us for the fish fed to them by the two men who had rowed me across the lake. In that moment, truly alone, and truly connected, there was only joy and physically a sense of no limits, and there was no CFS. I was awake to myself in a way that I had never been before. It was the beginning of a new phase, a discovery of my inner self as a pathway to the fullness of life and light.

Somewhere in the following two weeks between Lake Malawi, meeting another old friend and my original traveling companion at a hostel in Blantyre, and then traveling together on a bus through Mozambique, seeing children eat roasted rats on a skewer, and arriving back in Zimbabwe, I realized that I had changed. I was a different person. It was not just a profound memory; it was an experience that had enlarged me and given me more breadth of being.

When I returned to London, I remained symptom-free for a month or so, and then the crashing returned. This time, they were not constant heavy dark crashes that went on for months, but still days or weeks of pain and suffering that just happened as part of my ongoing experience of life. I was shifting in and out of wellness and illness pretty quickly and unexpectedly.

The inner shift that happened in Africa had brought with it the realization that I had to meditate. It is hard to explain

because it was not a rational idea, but more on the silent level of a flash of intuition.

Something inside me had cracked open when I went to Africa and traveled around, meeting people and seeing how they lived. I realized firstly how small my problems were. Really so small and the solutions seemed very possible. I no longer felt defeated by the illness. My Spirit soared with enthusiasm and the need to just become that different person that I had felt in Malawi, the person with no limits.

Looking back, it is clear that that through those years when I was really sick, the CFS seemed to lift off of me completely for days and even weeks sometimes when I traveled to places of great natural beauty and when I exceeded my own expectations of what was possible for me.

In the model of subtle bodies that I will unpack more as we go, that liftoff of the CFS symptoms, so to speak, was because I was immersed in natural environments full of life force. I was in spectacular landscapes like the Alps, or the Zambezi River, or Victoria Falls. These are places where the power of life is so immense it would boost my energy and life force in a very positive way.

When I returned to London after the trip to Malawi, I proceeded to change around my whole life so that I could meditate. That meant switching to a part-time job editing a finance magazine, leaving my husband at the time, and joining a group called Friends of the Western Buddhist

Order (FWBO), attending classes several times a week as well as going to silent meditation retreats whenever possible.

In that year after the trip to east Africa, working in London, meditating and going to yoga classes, life took on a newfound simplicity. It was a massive relief. I could feel myself get tangibly lighter. My yoga postures became easier; my diet became simpler. There was a joy in the whole thing that lifted me up. And there were new friends who were also passionate about meditation and transformation. They were all battling with their own demons and sincerely wanting to grow and open their hearts. I loved them; they loved me. The world opened up to be a friendlier and warmer place.

There were still times, though, when I got sick, I crashed, and the pain and misery came back.

None of this was consciously about getting better from the illness; it was just taking steps towards something that I wanted that was coming from the inside of me, not an external expectation that I was trying to shape myself towards.

Meditation was like a switch that went on inside of me and never turned off again.

A NEWFOUND PASSION FOR MEDITATION – AND RECOVERY!

Finding meditation was the beginning of my journey to full recovery.

I am not alone in finding recovery as part of a bigger spiritual awakening. Psychologist Lisa Miller documents scientific studies that show we are biologically hardwired for spiritual connection.

Spirituality is an inner sense of relationship to a higher power that is loving and guiding. The word we give to this higher power might be God, nature, spirit, the universe, the creator, or other words that represent a divine presence. But the important point is that spirituality encompasses our relationship and dialogue with this higher presence.⁸

This journey inside of myself, a spiritual awakening that was to continue for the rest of my life, started to give me a sense of how to move towards full recovery. I was immediately passionate about meditation, not because I thought it would make me better but because the immense frustration of my health journey had somehow led me to this totally different place in my life where going inside

8. Lisa Miller and Teresa Barker, *The Spiritual Child: The New Science on Parenting for Health and Lifelong Thriving* (New York: Picador/St. Martin's Press, 2016), 25.

and finding real peace was the only thing that seemed to make sense. Along the way, I also saw a lot about what was blocking that inner peace.

One weekend on a silent retreat with a group of Buddhist meditators, I had another big insight or flash of intuition that opened up the recovery process at another level.

It was two days of silence, watching the breath move in and out, sitting in a little old house, a bus ride from my flat in East London. Feeling awkward, I sat with about 15 others as I tried to follow the instructions of a senior Buddhist man and woman.

I was really new to all of this. Listening to the soft hum of my breath, trying to silence the mind, noticing every single thought and tension as it moved in and out of my awareness. It had begun to dawn on me that my internal space of consciousness was so rich and at times even tempestuous. But more than that, my mind was also sometimes really bloody loud!

About halfway in, earnestly sitting still, I started to feel like I was becoming heavier and heavier. Literally, it was as if I was watching the pain descend into me until I felt crushed. All through this, I also seemed to become more and more angry, frustrated, unhappy. I mean, I was in a lot of pain. And I do remember seeing the other silent retreat participants gently parting like waves to make space around me.

In other agonizing moments during that weekend, also sitting still, watching my breath move in and out of my body,

I was in total pain, and felt completely stuck. I was caught in emotions for long stretches, which felt like eons, but more likely were more like 15 or 20 minutes. And I was sick.

As I sat watching the breath, I just had this kind of epiphany. “This is energetic. It is not physical; it is not emotional.” I did not have a context for energy at all. I knew nothing of life force, prana, or qi or nonphysical realities. But somehow my mind had opened enough, and perhaps in the Buddhist texts that I was reading, something was passing unconsciously. I just knew that my issue had to do with my energy.

That realization that my crash was energetic changed my life because it was a lead, something to find out more about, that would uncover the true cause of the CFS.

Yet at the same time, there were long moments of elevated inspiration full of depth and presence. The tranquility that filled the room seemed to be golden and complete rather than empty and scary. In the peace, it felt like there was a silent sound of internal singing, as if I was sitting in the quiet harmonies and high eloquent notes of angels.

I did not realize it, but I was starting to connect back with the silence and peace of my own higher self, the part of me that had been drowned out by my desperate grasping frustration to win. And it would be the key to many of my unanswered questions.

In the magnified awareness of meditation, I was seeing the experience of being in myself when I felt so healthy and well, contrasted with a crash or collapse into a state of grasping and pain. This disparity between the blissful states of wellbeing and peace with the intense grasping and pain fraught with frustration and other emotions and thoughts was a mirror of my whole life.

Seeing this apparent contradiction between the grasping pain and the deep inner wellbeing at more and more refined levels would be a very important key to my recovery. In that moment of epiphany about my energy, I was given the first clue to learning that I could change that pattern of swinging between wellness and extreme pain and illness. It was to take me to another style of meditation in Sydney where I would learn how to choose being grounded in myself more and more of the time until it became the norm.

It was completely unexpected that meditation helped me to find my way to recovery. When I started to meditate, it was a result of a desire to know myself and to learn to master stillness and peace. What I didn't expect was that while sitting there, through the ups and downs, I'd also begin to see things about the mysterious illness that had gripped me and find my way to techniques that would help me to recover.

It's easy to think that this crash might have an emotional cause, and there were certainly a number of people who suggested that it did. Before I had the diagnosis for CFS, there were people who tried to imply that the illness was a result

of something emotional that I was doing to myself. To them it might have appeared like that because the illness came with an extra intensity of emotions, and so they thought my emotionality was the cause. But that was not right. In fact, it was narrow-minded, judgmental, and illustrated a lack of understanding of the illness and its cause.

However, there was something that they were (perhaps) trying to point to, which was that the road to recovery would require a lot of inner searching for me to really comprehend. I needed to have an open mind to see what was the real cause of this massive energetic collapse that had ruined my life at the time. What I found out was that it was energetic in its cause, not physical, and not emotional.

A SPIRITUAL COMPONENT TO MY RECOVERY

CFS is an umbrella term that covers numerous conditions and symptoms, and therefore there are a number of different ways that people recover from this illness.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says:

ME/CFS is a biological illness that affects many body parts. It causes severe fatigue not improved by rest, problems thinking and sleeping, dizziness, pain, and many other symptoms.

People with ME/CFS may not look sick but can't do their normal activities. ME/CFS may get worse after they do any activity -- physical or mental. This symptom is called post-exertional malaise (PEM). After they exert themselves, they may need to stay in bed for an extended time. About 1 in 4 people with ME/CFS are confined to bed at some point in their illness.⁹

As far as the CDC was concerned at the time of writing, there was no cure or approved treatment for these conditions. However, the reality is that some people do get better and others do not.

In the 20 years that I have spent researching CFS, talking about it with groups and at workshops, interviewing and working as a practitioner with those who have this kind of illness, I saw a kind of crossover with a few other illnesses such as burnout, post-viral fatigue, and more recently Long COVID. Medical authorities and therapists of many kind had theories and treatments for these conditions yet in general have been mystified about what they really are and the real cause. I found that some of the people who fit into the umbrella of one or a few of these conditions did find recovery like me, through working on the subtle underlying energetic causes of their fatigue and other symptoms.

9. "ME/CFS Basics," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, May 10, 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/me-cfs/about/index.html>.

There are alternative therapists of all kinds who claim to have a cure, and they do work for some people. Many of us with these conditions try so many different things, and spend a lot of money on treatments that do not work before we find our way out. Some people do what my first doctor told me in 1997 when I went to complain of this mysterious condition, “learn to cope.”

While I do see that the path to recovery all started for me with meditation, that is definitely not true for everyone who recovers.

However, the context of my recovery is important because when interviewing and then later working with people as a practitioner, I saw that many others with these illnesses have also found some kind of spiritual or meditative practice was important in their recovery.

2

DISCOVERING SUBTLE BODIES AND AWAKENING

Perhaps you already know firsthand that the first phases of illness with CFS or some very intense types of burnout are just so difficult. Maybe you have even experienced that kind of debilitating fatigue where just getting out of bed is near impossible?

Phase two of the illness is a little bit different because that is where you are up and down out of bed, some days better than others, some weeks in bed, some weeks able to semi-function in the world.

What I call phase two is where you might be more likely to start looking for alternative solutions to the health issue that plagues you. This is where I started to find meditation

and knowledge of subtle bodies, and I was able to shift into recovery.

On the road to recovery, after finding meditation, I started to learn more about spirituality and energy, including concepts of qi, prana or life force. That is when I met Ruth-Helen Camden, IST practitioner, naturopath, and psychologist. Her brown curly hair was bouncing with the enthusiasm that shone out of her eyes as she shared about some of the things I was so fascinated to learn. She was teaching an introductory course in energetic healing at Nature Care College in Sydney, Australia.

I knew there was a missing piece to this puzzle, but I did not have the context to understand it at all. And then suddenly, that previously hidden context was being laid out in front of me in this course, piece by piece, giving the distinct sensation that a light bulb was turned on, illuminating a formerly dark room inside. It was a welcome blast of clarity after years of struggling in the fog of mysterious symptoms and unpredictable collapses.

That light bulb really came from Ruth-Helen, and her passion for Inner Space Techniques or IST, a modality of therapies based on meditation that brings a metaphysical dimension into a psychotherapeutic approach. Ruth-Helen had many modalities under her belt as a healer, but really favored IST because she found it worked at a deep level. Through her IST would become key to my journey of

recovery, bringing a precision and clarity to my own ability to understand and rebuild my own subtle energetic vitality.

Later, I would become so passionate about this journey that I would go on to be an IST practitioner myself and help thousands of others on their own paths of healing and inner growth.

By the time I met Ruth-Helen, I had been through so much frustration and even depression about my symptoms that her positivity and bubbly encouragement was very welcome in my life.

Perhaps like you, I had fought for answers, given up, tried to accept the situation, and just plain settled for this angry painful existence. And now finally here was someone who had a model to describe what I called a crash. I am sure that you can imagine the relief I felt when she spoke to exactly what was happening inside me with such joyful confidence that I was completely lifted up out of my funk. It was a new birth of hope.

When I started to see Ruth-Helen for private sessions after the semester had completed, I realized that she expertly used IST with her one-one-one clients as a set of modalities to help people release stuck and blocked emotions, but also the energies behind those emotions.

I was so excited to hear that this system had a whole set of techniques developed just for people with CFS and burnout-type illnesses. A way to rebuild your energy and vitality. There is also a whole understanding within the model

of how technology and modern-day issues like pollution and climate change impact our vital energy, and what to do about it.

There is a regression component to IST, but it is also backed by an in-depth model of subtle bodies or nonphysical aspects of the human body.

The fourfold model of subtle bodies used by Samuel Sagan, MD, is modeled on his own experiences and research with his students of Clairvision School. In addition to his own vision and experience, he drew from traditional Chinese medicine, Indian models of healing and meditation, and Western esoteric systems, deliberately using common terminology where possible to highlight similarities between different systems. Sagan's system also included a body of knowledge gained through direct experience of a group of meditators that included therapists, psychologists, business people, and others from diverse backgrounds.

The first time I went to see Ruth-Helen as a private client, I was simply curious about past-life regression, and while I did not necessarily believe in past lives at the time, I was open and wondering what it would be like.

Ruth-Helen, dressed in a chocolate-brown soft sweater and long flowing skirt, with bouncing soft brown curls, was bright, bubbly, and uplifting in her very presence. She made me laugh even as I described my misery. It was so invigorating to laugh at something that had weighed on me for years.

When she looked me deep in the eyes, she seemed to see right through my soul, cutting into the core of whatever I was saying like a knife through butter. I felt transparent, really understood, and embraced. It was easy to see how her clients would really like just being in her presence.

To begin, Ruth-Helen had me lay down on a mat, and she sat next to me on a cushion on the floor. She talked me through a series of steps into an experience of meditation. It was like being taken by the hand and led to a vast space inside of myself that was both familiar and unfamiliar. It had a feeling of softness and warmth.

She put her hand lightly on the center of my chest, the energetic heart center, and I went into the feelings there where I found sadness, loneliness, and an image of a little girl. The little girl was me, and Ruth-Helen encouraged me to feel into the child as me even though it wasn't anything that I had consciously remembered from this life. I spent some time feeling what the girl was feeling and sensing the whole experience. We went through the coldness of a cave, being abandoned by her family, and then the way that she died alone without ever knowing why they left her behind. I cried and cried.

It was such a deep felt sense of abandonment. The tears flowed for the whole session, and at the end there was a peaceful silence full of presence that felt so tender and filled up the darkness inside of me. It was all so beautiful and loving, and also very intense and painful.

After the years of meditation and CFS, it felt like a relief to let out all of that heavy emotion and feel the levity of the stillness at the end of the session. Then I went home and I cried more and more for the next few days until I returned to Ruth-Helen for the next visit. More tears and more tears were released. It took a couple more visits to get out the weight of this built-up emotion, but when it finally lifted, I felt washed and clean.

Later, when I spoke with Ruth-Helen about those first visits and the immense outpouring of grief that I went through after the sessions once I returned home, she told me that she was really surprised and impressed that I just allowed those emotions to flow, somehow understanding it was simply part of the process. I did not freak out that I was crying so much, because somewhere inside it was an immense relief to let go of that baggage. I understood that I had been carrying it around for a long time, and this was now the time to put it down, let it be washed away.

Many people with heavy fatigue and burnout have a lot of pent-up or repressed emotions from trauma in this life or past lives that has not been released. It was not just an emotional release, nor a physical shift. I was releasing blocked energy inside of me that had not moved in other styles of meditation.

Releasing that stuck energy with tears, anger, or whatever is needed to go deeper inside can be a tremendous relief, and even more than that, it can reveal a lot of vitality

or life force. (From here when I talk about life or life force, I am also referring to what is known as qi in the system of traditional Chinese medicine and prana in the Indian model.)

It certainly left me a lot lighter and wanting to release more and more of the unnecessary burdens inside. Things that were stuck in my life and seemed impossible began to move very fast after those first few sessions.

It didn't bother me that the techniques made me cry, that I felt sad, even heartbroken. Intuitively, I knew that this was what I needed to let go of that heavy baggage from the past, to release the blockages that kept pulling me back in the same way a rower might feel when trying to row a boat that remains anchored. It did not matter to me whether it was an actual past life or just something symbolic deep inside me that was coming up to the light of my own self-awareness to be released. My tears seemed to rinse away the dark weight that I was carrying in my heart.

Later, Ruth-Helen remarked to me that many people would not want to return for a second session after so much emotional outpouring. For me, though, after more than two years of intensive meditation including weeks at a time of silence, just feeling my stuff, I was so overwhelmingly grateful to have someone to help me with that stuff. It had been in my face while I sat through the silence, and I could not resolve it on my own. Now I had an expert who just helped me to let go. Wow, for me that was all I wanted to do.