


The Surprising Path beyond Depression,  
Anxiety, and Fatigue to Reclaiming Your  
Authenticity, Vitality, and Freedom



# Own Your Self

**KELLY BROGAN, M.D.**

*NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF A MIND OF YOUR OWN*

with Nancy Marriott

The Surprising Path beyond Depression,  
Anxiety, and Fatigue to Reclaiming Your  
Authenticity, Vitality, and Freedom

# Own Your Self

**KELLY BROGAN, M.D.**

*NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF A MIND OF YOUR OWN*

with Nancy Marriott

**Praise for**

**Own Your Self**

“Kelly Brogan engages us in a courageous conversation about the epidemic of mental health issues in our society. Her work is an important part of the understanding that will set us free, at a time when an increasingly narrow interpretation of why such issues exist—and what we need to do to heal them—is as much a part of the problem as part of the solution.”

— **Marianne Williamson**, *New York Times* best-selling author of *A Return to Love*

“We are in an age where mental, emotional, and physical balance has become our highest value. *Own Your Self* gives you the best possible solution on how to change your mind, your body, and your life. Kelly Brogan, M.D., does an amazing job combining cutting-edge information along with the practical tools for you to live a healthier personal reality. Her clinical and holistic approach from years of experience in doing independent research as a successful psychiatrist will teach as well as inspire you to get real, get well, and get free. This book holds the keys to inner peace and true happiness.”

— **Dr. Joe Dispenza**, *New York Times* best-selling author of *You Are the Placebo: Making Your Mind*

*Matter*

“*Own Your Self* is as compassionate as it is radical. Kelly Brogan calls you to make a change more profound than you ever thought possible—and gives

you a supportive, insightful road map to guide you every step of the way.”

— **Shefali Tsabary, Ph.D.** , *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Conscious Parent* and clinical

psychologist

“Dr. Kelly Brogan is a voice of sanity and compassion for our healing crises. She sings into the heart of our buried wisdom, makes clear what’s broken in the culture. And backing it with science, Kelly gives us the path to genuine healing and sovereignty. This is so hopeful. I want every woman to read this—and heal.”

— **Danielle LaPorte**, creator of *The Desire Map* series

“If you want to work on releasing suppressed emotions, Dr. Brogan has given you the perfect guide in *Own Your Self*. She encourages you to listen to and honor your emotions—and any related physical symptoms—fully and deeply, so that you may find a permanent, healing solution that gets to the root of the problem.”

— **Kelly Turner, Ph.D.** , *New York Times* best-selling author of *Radical Remission*

“Kelly Brogan’s quest for truth has uncovered yet another priceless gem. This book is a road map of relief for those yearning for authentic self-acceptance and long-lasting emotional freedom.”

— **Matt Kahn**, author of *Everything Is Here to Help You*

“This book is sourced in a deep and coherent spiritual radicalism. If you or someone you love is grappling with so-called psychiatric disorders, it is a potent instrument of intellectual liberation and practical healing.”

— **Charles Eisenstein**, author of *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible*

“*Own Your Self* is an education and a medical reformation—a much-needed island of sanity in a crazy world! Kelly Brogan is a true psychiatrist, a doctor of the soul, and a guide back home to your authentic self. Her synthesis of science, deep humanity, and practical tools for well-being are crystal clear and right on target. She empowers us all to unleash the power of self-care to bring wholeness and healing.”

— **Joan Borysenko, Ph.D.**, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Minding the Body, Mending the*

*Mind*

“Kelly Brogan has, once again, boldly, dangerously, and clearly pushed the conversation forward on how we individually and collectively heal. *Own Your Self* is at once an ice bucket over the head and a warm hug calling us home to the truest versions of ourselves, and then leading us there. I am elated to have this work to refer to from here forward.”

— **Kimberly Ann Johnson**, author of *The Fourth Trimester*

# Own Your Self

Also by Kelly Brogan, M.D.

*A Mind of Your Own*

*A Time for Rain*

# Own Your Self

The Surprising Path beyond Depression,  
Anxiety, and Fatigue to Reclaiming  
Your Authenticity, Vitality, and Freedom

**KELLY BROGAN, M.D.**

with Nancy Marriott



HAY HOUSE, INC.  
Carlsbad, California • New York City  
London • Sydney • New Delhi

Copyright © 2019 by Kelly Brogan

***Published in the United States by:*** [Hay House, Inc.: www.hayhouse.com®](http://www.hayhouse.com)

***Published in Australia by:*** Hay House Australia Pty. [Ltd.: www.hayhouse.com.au](http://www.hayhouse.com.au)

***Published in the United Kingdom by:*** [Hay House UK, Ltd.: www.hayhouse.co.uk](http://www.hayhouse.co.uk)

***Published in India by:*** Hay House Publishers India: [www.hayhouse.co.in](http://www.hayhouse.co.in)

*Cover and interior design:* Nick C. Welch

*Indexer:* Joan Shapiro

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced by any mechanical, photographic, or

electronic process, or in the form of a phonographic recording; nor may it be stored in a retrieval

system, transmitted, or otherwise be copied for public or private use—other than for “fair use” as

brief quotations embodied in articles and reviews—without prior written permission of the publisher.

The author of this book does not dispense medical advice or prescribe the use of any technique as a

form of treatment for physical, emotional, or medical problems. The intent of the author is only to

offer information of a general nature to help you in your quest for emotional, physical, and spiritual

well-being. The personal stories that appear in this book are based on real clinical and testimonial



experiences. Some individual names and identifying details have been changed. In the event you use

any of the information in this book for yourself, the author and the publisher assume no responsibility

for your actions.

**Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of**

**Congress**

**Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-4019-5682-0**

**e-book ISBN: 978-1-4019-5683-7**

**e-audio ISBN: 978-1-4019-5684-4**

*To my beloved, Sayer, and to our fierce love that created the container and continues to provide the alchemical ingredients for my rebirth in this lifetime, so I may serve the liberation of human consciousness and reclamation of unconditional love for myself, my daughters, and every person who hears the call to come home.*

## **CONTENTS**

[Introduction: From a Doctor of the Soul](#)

### [PART I: GET REAL](#)

[Chapter 1: Canaries in the Coal Mine](#)

[Chapter 2: The Pill Problem](#)

[Chapter 3: The Point of Pain](#)

[Chapter 4: Fear Is the Sickness](#)

## **[PART II: GET WELL](#)**

[Chapter 5: From Mess to Meaning: Five Psychiatric “Pretenders”](#)

[Chapter 6: A Reunion with Your Body in One Month](#)

[Chapter 7: Moving Beyond Meds and Navigating the Dark Night](#)

## **[PART III: GET FREE](#)**

[Chapter 8: The Lens of Your Perception](#)

[Chapter 9: Coming Home to You](#)

[Chapter 10: Faith: Trust in a Grand Design](#)

[\*Appendix A: Peaceful Parenting\*](#)

[\*Appendix B: Natural Medicine Toolkit\*](#)

[\*Appendix C: Sample Meal Plan\*](#)

[\*Endnotes\*](#)

[\*Bibliography\*](#)

[\*Index\*](#)

[\*Acknowledgments\*](#)

[\*About the Author\*](#)

## **[INTRODUCTION](#)**

[From a Doctor of the Soul](#)

When I went into psychiatry, attended MIT and Cornell University, never

did I imagine that I'd come to shun the primary tool of my trade—namely, pharmaceuticals.

But that's exactly what I did. In 2010 I laid down my prescription pad, and I have not started another patient on prescription medication since. Instead, I now take a holistic approach to helping people overcome their most crushing struggles, including those labeled as generalized anxiety, bipolar disorder, and major depressive disorder.

The term *psychiatrist* means “doctor of the soul,” and in today's world, millions of individuals are seeking their own souls—to feel alive, real, and strong— *to feel like themselves*. But they most often land in the office of a doctor who is trained to provide a singular service: a pill prescription. In fact, part of my training in conventional Western medicine was to dismiss and discount anything that's not scientifically measurable, which of course includes the spirit—the soul of a human being.

If people manage to avoid prescription medications, it's likely that they instead self-medicate with whatever they can find to temporarily ease the burden: recreational drugs, alcohol, sex, food, online shopping. All the while, they feel worse than ever, trapped outside of their own authentic selves.

How did we get here?

We have been told a story about illness: that it is caused by bad luck and bad genes, and that the best we can hope for is to survive it, mainly by leaning on prescription medications that too often have adverse effects or are just plain ineffective. But as new science and real stories of radical health reclamation light up the Internet, we are all beginning to see that story as old, limiting, and false.

Today, we know that we can adapt and change in real time. It's the beauty of epigenetics and the microbiome—a dynamic ecosystem within our bodies that presides over our well-being. I know that I can help people reclaim their vitality within the space of a few months, despite a lifetime of living out of alignment. All I do in clinical practice is work to restore the signal of safety for my patients. I use this phrase often—“signal of safety”—in reference to the many ways we can tell our nervous system that *It's okay, all is well, you can rebalance now*. And it is possible to do, and quickly, because the body longs for it that much.

This book is about a new story, the chief points of which I will cover in depth throughout the upcoming chapters, including:

That your “mental” problems, such as fatigue, brain fog, depression, anxiety, and even mania and psychosis, are telling you to change your life, pointing the way for how to recover and recalibrate. Illness is a

part of healthfulness because your psychospiritual baggage is part of your breakthrough.

Why most people today live in a state of chronic fear and have lost the part of themselves that accepts—embraces and copes naturally with—uncertainty, pain, sadness, grief, loss, despair, and disappointment.

There is a general malaise in our culture. People feel “homesick”: they are missing feeling at home in themselves, in their communities, and in the fabric of society as a whole.

I also provide a light in the darkness. In order to know what you want and where you’re going, you need to understand, feel, and see your possible destinations. You need to know that radical healing is possible. Radical healing was possible for Cindy, who resolved her 18 years of lupus symptoms in weeks, and for Ali, who put bipolar disorder behind her in months. Throughout this book, I’ll introduce you to the people who will light the path that you deserve to walk. You’ll hear their stories and read their words, taken directly from their communications to me during or after participating in the special program you’ll learn about in this book. You can also find their stories on video on my website, in the Video Testimonials section.

How did they do it? They did it *themselves*. We have collectively moved

beyond the era of the doctor-master-guru and into a phase of medicine where each individual has the opportunity to reclaim their own power to heal themselves, ideally in a community of support. In my first book, *New York Times* best-selling *A Mind of Your Own*, I spoke to women about healing depression. Here, I broaden the scope, speaking to all, and not just about depression, but about the struggle with illness in general and the negative mindset that leaves you living half a life, dependent on meds of all varieties. It turns out that there is a belief system required to escape that cage, and I'd like to help you engender it.

You'll also learn the core of my self-led Vital Mind Reset (VMR) online program, a "prescription" for diet and lifestyle change that is working for thousands to not only resolve the root cause of so-called mood disorders but help people get off medications they felt were theirs "for life." You'll hear from participants in the program—called Resetters—who are just like you, and have walked this path to share their wins, insights, and aha moments.

[Once you're on board with the reality of the situation I present in Part I: Get Real, about how psychiatric illnesses, including depression, are a summons](#) to explore what is out of balance, from the physical to the psychospiritual, you'll be ready for [Part II: Get Well](#), where I introduce you to a one-month dietary "Reset" program based on my clinical approach with patients one on

one. Then, in [Part III: Get Free](#), I'll guide you with practical tips and advice to take an inventory of what does not work in your new life and how to align more powerfully with what does work in regard to your beliefs about yourself and your health; your relationships with family, romantic partner, community; your orientation to the medical system; and your choice of work or career. The final freedom is developing trust in the universe and cultivating a perspective that can unleash abundant reserves of positive energy, a true *quantum shift* in how you live.

## **YOUR OWN JOURNEY**

Your journey begins when you submit to the reality of your circumstances, look at them and say, *okay*. You accept and surrender, raise the white flag, and stop fighting. Healing is a process of reunion with your body, your soul, and your environment. Resistance, and specifically a victim mindset, will just perpetuate the experience of sickness.

Almost every single one of my patients, at some point, looks at me and says, "I don't even know who I am anymore." Everything has changed, and the healing journey is surrender to the process of change. Sometimes the things that go wrong in our lives, including physical illness, happen when we have refused change at the point when it is most called for: when we continue to commute to an unfulfilling job, ignore the pain of a toxic

relationship, or perpetuate a self-harming habit; when we refuse to stop what we're doing even when we do not feel well doing it; when we neglect to ask ourselves, *What's the matter?* or to turn a sympathetic ear to the reply.

It is a critical distinction that the doctor says, "Your machine is broken"; the shaman says, "You have fallen out of relationship with the whole"; and the Helper says, "Your illness is an existential question that ultimately you must answer."

I no longer think of myself as a doctor. Instead, I have come to see my role as that of the Helper, one who is, in the words of Marc Ian Barasch, author of *The Healing Path*, who coined the term, "a facilitator of self-discovery; a change agent helping to pry the patient loose from pathological life patterns; a helper urging him away from mere normalcy toward authentic being."

Such a role is not for the faint of heart. It's also not for those who are in it to fix everything and pack things away into tidy diagnostic categories and discrete outcomes. While suicidal patients have told me that I saved their lives, I suspect that the way in which they meant it is figurative, acknowledging too minimally their own readiness to change.

In fact, with the humbling success of my online Vital Mind Reset healing



program, I have become convinced that right now, it simply takes strategic support and a loving community to catalyze the emergence of an individual's latent gifts and self-expansion.

## **THE BEST WAY OUT IS THROUGH**

My most urgent message is about the commitment you must make in order to benefit from the lessons in this book. That commitment is this: put your self-care *first*, and do that every day. From that space, everything gets clear, and you find yourself the protagonist in the adventure of your most beautiful life.

The path gets ever simpler and easier when you commit to your self-care. You shed what needs to go because the pull toward your most authentic self becomes too great. You find out where you have been donating your much-needed energy—what old constructs of safety have been leaching parts of you that are required for full integration. It will become clear what has to be reconfigured once you surrender to the unfoldment and accept the possibility that you are simply here to dance with life, not manage it, script it, or commandeer it. We think we want to be wealthy, attractive, intelligent, talented—but really, don't you just want to be yourself, comfortable in your own skin?

In this book, we will explore the surprising path to living a med-free life

through a deep appreciation of the meaning behind your symptoms. Our experiences reflect what we need to accept, acknowledge, and transform in order to truly become our adult selves. Only when we embrace our experiences can we begin to live a healthful, natural life without relying on substances and a mindset that rob us of our true power. All it takes is a commitment to curiosity, and it is my sincere hope that this book will inspire this life-changing shift.

It's time to get real, get well, and get free! Let's begin.

PART I

# GET REAL

Chapter 1

CANARIES IN THE COAL MINE

*It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society.*

— JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI

When was the last time you felt deep despair? The last time you dealt with debilitating grief, uncontrollable sorrow, or paralyzing anxiety? You might have felt stuck, detached, confused, foggy—basically dead inside. You may have started to think there was something seriously wrong with you, something that might require medical attention.

Maybe you saw a doctor who lovingly handed you a prescription to “take the edge off,” you watched a convincing commercial that promised relief, or you heard a friend tell you that she was “worried” about you and how you were doing.

Look around you. You are not alone. Pain and hopelessness pervade our world. If the description you just read doesn’t fit you, it probably fits someone you love or are close to. People have a growing sense that something *just isn’t right*. If you were to ask a room full of men and women if they think we are in the midst of an intensely disturbing time in human history, you’d see a lot of hands go up. And if you were to ask that same group if they’ve considered or tried (or are taking) medication for their pain, you’d also see a lot of hands raised.

I’ve come to see those people as the proverbial canaries in the coal mine

sending a signal to everyone else about something that is very, very wrong. Exactly what it is that is so wrong, and why some people are more aware of it than others, I'll explain shortly, but first, let's take a look at the territory. We are suffering, and the solutions we are presented with seem to be falling short. According to the 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 18.3 percent of adults live with a mental illness (44.7 million). That's nearly one in five. Women have a higher prevalence than men, and 18- to 25-year-olds have higher prevalence than older adults. Mood disorders, including major depression and bipolar disorder, are the third most common cause of hospitalization, costing \$193.2 billion in lost earnings per year. [1](#)

While such stats seem to identify the problem, they also point to the source of the problem: modern medicine's rush to judgment in legitimizing conditions that may actually be driven by the very viewpoint that is reflected in these reports. Investigative journalist Robert Whitaker helped us recognize, in his groundbreaking book *Anatomy of an Epidemic*, that we are in the midst of a disability epidemic that is perpetuated by the very medications prescribed to treat anxiety, inattention, psychosis, depression, and mood instability.

Why are so many of our illnesses chronic and often resistant to the

medications prescribed to help them? Is there something else going on that we are not aware of, and could it be that the symptoms so many of us experience are really a message, a warning even, that we must shift our perspective and embrace a bigger—and truer—picture than what conventional medicine has been showing us?

A new perspective involves a more complex and sophisticated view of the human body, mind, and soul. This view challenges our very concept of disease and illness, offering an understanding that is more empowering than what we've had before. We are learning that beliefs, cultural conditioning, and our interaction with our environment are the true determinants of health and illness. And, in fact, that genes are merely a suggested template.

In this chapter I'll be introducing you to that new view and set the course for the rest of the book to explore a radical way for you to respond to your experience of mental and physical suffering—and find that the two are inextricably linked.

## **THE PROBLEM OF YOU**

In order to understand a radically different perspective on the struggle so many are experiencing (and the transformation of struggle that this book presents), we need first to look at how conventional medicine has viewed illness. Sadly, through the lens of modern medicine, symptoms associated

with “mental illness” are seen as a problem with *you*, and specifically with your brain chemistry. It is your genes that caused a brain chemical imbalance, you’ve been told: a problem of faulty wiring in need of management. You are the problem, and drugs are the answer.

But let’s look closer. What follows from this view that the problem is with you and your brain chemistry is the belief that those who suffer from “mental illness” are the *victims* of their pathology. After all, you can’t be responsible if factors outside your control are causing the symptoms. The medical profession and pharmaceutical companies rally around these helpless “victims” with campaigns to destigmatize mental illness, delivering the message: *It’s not your fault. It’s your brain chemistry, and there’s nothing you can do about it.* But in this way, we keep millions captive to a narrative that disempowers and depersonalizes their very real experience. I’m going to suggest a different perspective, one that is more in sync with a newly emerging view of the body and mind that you’ll be learning about later in this chapter and throughout this book. For starters, the problem is not you, and those who are seen as victims are not victims but messengers of something important we need to pay attention to.

From my observations in over a decade of private practice, I’ve come to believe that those labeled as mentally ill are, in fact, the canaries in the coal

mine, sounding an alarm with exquisite sensitivity in service of the rest of us. Their symptoms, including fatigue, insomnia, ceaseless unrest and worry, disconnection, and deep sadness, carry the message of unrecognized physical, emotional, and even spiritual factors. They are telling us all that something is missing, very “off,” and we need to wake up and pay attention to find it and correct it in order to survive and be happy.

As the canaries in the coal mine, their bodily mechanisms are sensitive to toxicant exposure, processed foods, and otherwise industrial lifestyles, as much as they are sensitive to many other layers of wrongness unfolding on our planet today. Seen as part of a bigger picture, their “illness” is really a statement, a whole body/mind/soul refusal to accept what is wrong as normative.

Psychiatry as it is practiced does not acknowledge that something is really wrong, missing, or meaningfully imbalanced on this planet or in your life, beyond unfounded theories of brain chemistry (I will explore in [Chapter 3](#) just how unfounded these theories are!). In fact, in the current system, the context of your experience is largely irrelevant to the psychotropic-prescribing clinician because your symptoms are a problem to be fixed, not a meaningful response to explore. The prevailing view is that symptoms like withdrawal, fatigue, apathy, and anxiety emerge from faulty



wiring that requires a soldering patch.

But these symptoms aren't a problem with you; rather, they are signs of a sensitivity you possess. A sensitivity to *very real* factors and variables—from physical to spiritual. Something else is going on, and medicating the evidence of this sensitivity is like attempting to turn off the smoke alarm while letting the real fire rage.

## **EVOLUTIONARY MISMATCH**

Yes, something is profoundly off in our lives on this planet today. In fact, many things are acutely amiss: we are living disconnected from our bodies through an education system that primes us for industry; disconnected from our communities thanks to technology and isolated, single-family homes; and disconnected from the environment because of several centuries of science that says nature is a collection of utilitarian resources that will ultimately be successfully dominated by mankind. Furthermore, we are disconnected from our very souls by a dominant belief system that says you are only what you can produce, and disconnected from the mysterious wonder of the human experience by the worship of scientific dogma that says something only exists if we can measure and quantify it.

We come into this world through women who are told to be afraid of their birthing bodies while they drink Coke and eat McDonald's and fathers

whose sperm marinated in trans-generationally disruptive pesticides. We are ultrasounded in the womb regularly, birthed surgically, formula-fed, vaccinated, left by mothers who have a three-week maternity leave, schooled into a state of near-irreversible brainwashing while being microwaved by 5G networks. As adults, we work jobs that mean nothing and take everything and engage in relationships that could never possibly heal all of the unexamined wounds we bring to them, all the while swimming in a bath of chemicals.

The true scope of our wandering from the path of right living is obscured by multi-billion-dollar industries that are invested in meeting our primary needs with superficial satisfactions. Such satisfactions never do meet our true needs but rather increase the symptoms of what is being labeled “mental illness.”

*It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.*

— UPTON SINCLAIR

We have strayed so far from the path that there is a scientific phrase to capture our situation: *evolutionary mismatch*. This concept holds that we have evolved to have certain needs—physical, sensual, nutritional, relational—that are nonnegotiable according to our basic design. We are

living a lifestyle—diet, stress level, movement and sunlight deficiency, toxic exposures, pharmaceuticals—that is incompatible with what our genome has evolved, over millions of years, to expect. When these very basic needs are not met, the body, mind, and spirit rebel.

One example is how we treat babies in our culture, ignoring how they are designed, expectant of and singularly oriented toward human skin-to-skin contact. In indigenous living, and throughout ancestral time, babies are held from the moment they are born until they can crawl (six to eight months) and are not left without human contact for one minute. It certainly is not a life begun in a sterile, quiet bed, alone in a nursery. Immediate skin-to-skin contact is so embedded in the evolutionary mother-newborn dyad that in the absence of this imprinting (in a hospital birth where the baby is whisked off for cleaning and testing), a mother's physiology begins to prepare for the grief of a stillborn, potentially contributing to anything from poor milk supply to a diagnosis of postpartum depression.

The latest effort to manage the increasing preponderance of women struggling after childbirth is a drug called brexanolone. After only three randomized trials including a mere 247 women, the drug has an unknown mechanism of action, unknown effects on breastfed infants, and a \$20,000-to-\$50,000 treatment price tag. Because of the drug's risk profile, a woman

must receive the 60-hour intravenous infusion under medical supervision and cannot function as her infant's primary caregiver during that time. We can certainly do better by these women who are simply expressing a very real mismatch of their needs with what our society reflexively offers.

Evolutionary mismatch includes sociocultural factors as well as the myriad ways in which we expect our bodies to conform to the industrial era, such as:

Genetic modification of foods

Pesticides

Processing of foods into food-like products

Industrial chemicals

Radioisotopes from nuclear energy

In-hospital births

Formula feeding

Fluoridated water

Electromagnetic pollution

Vaccination

Antibiotic and other pharmaceutical exposures

Indoor living

Sedentary lifestyle

Isolated nuclear family living

So we must ask: Is depression (or any chronic illness) and our painful struggle with modern life an illness—or is it a logical response to a world that is “off” and to our experience that doesn’t align with our role in the natural world—an evolutionary mismatch?

Today, as I said in the introduction, we know that we can change in real time—and we can do it quickly, because the body longs for alignment.

As long as we live against the body, however, the struggle will continue.

## **THE CAGED ARTIST WITHIN**

I think of those who feel this mismatch most keenly, those who are warning us by their very symptoms of what is off, as the *artists* among us. I use the term “artist” not in the traditional way but to refer to the sensitive creatives who feel their mismatch to the world and to their bodies as a sign that they don’t fit.

Today, creative expression takes a backseat in our consumer-driven, productivity-oriented culture. Just as religion has become a dogmatic version of what it once was—a celebration of the experience of ecstatic merger—art has been neutered of its true power. That power lies in shedding blinders, lies, tales, and false identities and exposing the raw beauty in simply witnessing existence.

When artists are in alignment, they can channel direct experiences that shatter the frameworks that bind us into submission. They can come back to tell us about what they experienced, and in the sharing, the possibility increases that we too might have these experiences of wonder. It is only when they are forced to conform to today's societal expectations that they are pathologized, marginalized, and generally diminished. They may very well not even sense that something is missing, but the pain and suffering they experience *is* that sign. They live under a constant barrage of inadequacy, seeming failure, and “otherness” as they strive to force their square selves into the circular holes of Western culture.

Illness is often a reminder that the real you needs to be born from the ashes of your struggle. It is an invitation to address the false self that you are representing as the real you. The real you is the artist, the creative aspect of yourself, and it is not free.

Maybe your depression, chronic fatigue, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and chemical sensitivity are just ways your body, mind, and soul are saying *no*. The demands of this world, the day-to-day experience of this food, these chemicals, this disconnection—it is all not working. Consider that your *no*—*your symptom*— is a reminder to yourself that there is another way. It's an invitation back to who you really are and to

freeing your caged artist to become a greater expression of yourself.

## **PRICKLES AND GOOS**

The patients I work with, the people most likely to find themselves labeled with “mental illness” of one sort or another and recover through my program, are these artists, these sensitive souls responding to a sick planet.

But what is it about them that is different from others?

Under the guidance of my mentor, the late Dr. Nicholas Gonzalez, I came to understand the bigger picture of how and why people get sick and recover in different ways. He showed me how the success of my particular dietary template (which you will learn about in [Chapter 6](#)) is the result of my primarily treating patients who are what he called *parasympathetic dominants*.

To understand that term, you’ll need to know that the parasympathetic nervous system is an arm of the autonomic (think *automatic*) system that manages rebuilding, healing, and regenerating. It’s sometimes referred to as the “rest and digest” system. Immunity, digestion, and elimination are managed by parasympathetic nerve function. When the parasympathetic nervous system is unbalanced, in states of dis-ease and stress, it becomes overactive, causing symptoms of apathy, fatigue, autoimmunity, allergy, weight gain, low thyroid and sex hormone function, and liquid cancers. You

feel “tired but wired,” and are likely to reach for your meds, your substances, and extra cups of coffee, even though they make everything worse.

Dr. Gonzalez explained to me that such parasympathetic dominants have typical traits that are amplified when they are under stress and eat the wrong diet. They are not hungry in the morning and “hangry“ if they go too long without eating. They look at a piece of toast and gain weight. They are night people and don’t get going until noon. They sweat, have loose stools, and suffer from allergies. Their skin flushes easily, and they crave fatty foods. They often have low libidos and low drive in general, and are often called “dreamers.” These are the folks, Nick said, who are the “right brainers”—the Hemingways, Faulkners, and Picassos.

Broad sketches of these types may be familiar: there are alphas and betas, Type As and Type Bs, gunners and creatives, and my favorite, what philosopher Alan Watts called *prickles* and *goos*. Goos are the natural artists, the parasympathetic dominants, and the canaries in this coal mine of modern life who are telling us that things just ain’t right.

This book is for you, the goos.

It’s you, the goos, the parasympathetic dominants, who are being diagnosed with ADHD, chronic fatigue, depression, and multiple chemical



sensitivity, and your time has come to awaken to your gift through reclaiming your health. You are responding correctly on a mind, body, and soul level to the wrongness of your lived experience. Your depression is a sign of this mismatch: it's a sign that the processed food and the 100,000 unstudied chemicals are not right for you. Your body is saying no. Your spirit is rejecting a lifestyle that prizes productivity, linear thinking, measurable achievement, and relentless application of will to subdue any obstacle. Your very soul is saying no to a life lived by punching the clock until you die.

Where does your life force go when you suffer from this mismatch? Too often, it goes into self-medication with alcohol that temporarily dampens the pain of disconnection, and often into prescribed medications that hijack consciousness.

Graham Hancock speaks about such legal instruments of mind control and the suppression of the kind of creative drive that would overturn our social structure. Perhaps, he says, this is why hallucinogens, despite their completely nonaddictive profiles, are [banned](#).<sup>2</sup> The primal connection to metaconsciousness brought about by plant medicines such as *ayahuasca* could be the most threatening of all human behaviors to society as we know it. [3](#)

## HEALING THE ARTISTS

Ethnobotanist, mystic, and author Terence McKenna stated, “Artists are here to save [mankind.](#)”<sup>4</sup> And it has become clear to me that healing the parasympathetic dominants, the goos, the canaries in the coal mine will save us all. As I facilitate the reclamation and recovery of one patient after another from psychiatric medication injury, from environmental and dietary poisoning, and from a fear-based attachment to a lifestyle that doesn’t fit them, they show me that in this free state of self-possession, anything is possible. Their creativity blooms. They free that inner artist.

It’s been my experience that physical healing is a portal to such transformation. My patients wake up to themselves when they are able to reclaim their agency through simple interventions like a clean diet. They blow the dust off their existence, and their inner compass comes back online. They expand and expand and expand in fearlessness, and bloom into visionaries.

If I can give you, the goos, the tools to balance your bodily organism, I believe you will come into fuller contact with your soul, your reason for being, and your essential role in ushering the rest of humanity into the next story.

You will find out what you are here to do. You will keep looking for it

until you cannot control the drive to pursue what feels like the most important thing on the planet for you. This unstoppableity is the hallmark of the creative life force.

As such a creative force, your freed artist within is the ambassador to the next story. It is you who will demonstrate what it means to put love before fear. To shed the skins of an identity that served a purpose but now feels false—an identity of intellect-based dominance over all that challenges us, keeping us separate from nature and our true selves. You will show the rest of us how to tap into a limitless reserve of creative energy that flows from the deepest truth of all: that we can dematerialize our egos at will and come together whenever we want.

If you are struggling, know that there is an invitation embedded in that struggle. An invitation to free yourself—your creativity—and to light your fire that feels extinguished. We all need you awake, alive, and in touch with your soul.

This very real possibility is why responding to symptoms of so-called mental illness with support rather than interference is not simply about substituting an herb for Prozac. It's about engaging in a path of personal transformation, even rebirth, so you can show up in your truest expression for what you are here on the planet to do—your purpose in this life.

**Resetter: Vick**

I want to share a major victory I had today. I do this in the hope that someone will take heart and know that fighting for yourself is never a straight path, but that the twists and turns can serve to make us stronger.

I sang in public tonight. I haven't done that in six years. Four years ago when I was diagnosed with MDD [major depressive disorder] and severe anxiety, I had trouble even going out in public. Medication only increased my sense of dread. Singing is one of my passions, and for years I felt robbed of my ability to use that gift.

Today as it was my turn to go up to the mike, I heard all the familiar voices. The anxiety loomed. The negative thoughts said that hundreds of people would see me fail or that they would all laugh. But I found a strength that has been dormant in me for four years, a path back home to my true self.

**HONORING COMPLEXITY: A NEW VIEW**

If we are to heal our inner artist, and free our creative spark to embody our highest self, we need a new model of ourselves as humans. That model needs to be one that honors the body as an emergent representation of the soul. Fortunately, this complexity-embracing model is being ushered in by a

“new science” that reveals dynamic interconnectedness between bodily systems—the mind, emotions, and environment. This science is showing up in new fields with long names like *psychoneuroimmunology* and in a burgeoning scientific literature that explores our microbial selves.

The new science challenges the old view that if you are depressed, you were born with a brain chemical problem that you are destined to manage with prescriptions for your entire life. Instead, your symptoms are seen as representing imbalance related to lifestyle exposures that are interacting with your genes—that is, your stress, food, sleep (or lack of it), chemical exposures—and to your beliefs around the power you have to create your life. All of these variables impact how your genes are expressed and are within your control, a field of study known as *epigenetics*.

What we are learning from hard science is decimating our mechanistic perspective of the body as an input-output machine to be manipulated and managed by synthetic chemicals.

In the old, mechanistic view, the mind and body are separate, thanks in part to the legacy of 17th-century French philosopher René Descartes, who held the mind as nonphysical. The science of Isaac Newton further reduced everything of consequence to objective energy and matter: it’s only real if it can be measured. Thus, modern medicine cares about observable behavior,

not the deeply meaningful reason for it. In fact, patients are routinely dismissed as being “hysterical,” worriers, complainers and generally less of a reliable authority on their experience than the “objective” observer. The study of the mind (invisible to the observer) is limited to the study of thoughts (rarely emotions), with an eye toward socially appropriate, productivity-oriented functionality.

Psychiatry, as a guild, has made a strong effort to legitimize itself through this lens and “make material” the mind and emotions. The problem is that perceived pathology has been reduced to the localized effects of neurochemicals, which act in a vacuum in the brain. Psychiatrists regard troublesome emotions as emerging from inborn errors of neurochemical trafficking, with a reductionist focus on the neurotransmitter *serotonin*. The mind as enemy, pumping out mood- and anxiety-producing thoughts like a ticker tape.

This view holds no consideration for the interconnectedness of immune cells and endocrine glands throughout the body or the microorganisms in, among, and around us, let alone the emerging science of quantum biology and the role of energy in our manifest experience of being. [5](#) Neither is there

regard for the role of human emotion and its expression as an articulation of bodily imbalance, or personal suffering as a precursor for growth.

Philosopher Alan Watts, in his book *Does It Matter? Essays on Man's Relation to Materiality*, states, “ According to this view, the universe is a mindless mechanism and man a sort of accidental microorganism infesting a minute globular rock that revolves about an unimportant star on the outer fringe of one of the minor [galaxies](#).”<sup>6</sup> He goes on to say that this “put-down” theory of humanity is extremely common among those who are still thinking of the world in terms of Newtonian mechanics and have yet to catch up with the ideas of Einstein and Bohr, Oppenheimer and Schrödinger.

I'd like to add to Watts's list another scientist, Dr. Candace Pert. Once chief of brain chemistry in the neuroscience branch at the hallowed halls of the National Institutes of Health, and author of *Molecules of Emotion: The Science Behind Mind-Body Medicine*, Pert is acknowledged as the mother of psychoneuroimmunology or *psychoimmuno-endocrinology*, as she preferred it to be called.

The implications of Pert's work are profound. Through her research and more than 200 publications in the primary literature, and in her landmark book *Molecules of Emotion*, she described the body as an information network, with the “three classic areas of neuroscience, endocrinology, and immunology, with their various organs—the brain . . . the glands, and the

immune system . . . joined to each other in a bidirectional network of communication, and that the information ‘carriers’ are the [neuropeptides](#).”<sup>7</sup>

In other words, our current working model of the brain is antiquated. It is not, as we have maintained, an isolated no-man’s-land from which thoughts, emotions, behavior, and consciousness emerge.

Pert further asserts that the mind is in the body, and that the body is an expression of the mind, giving rise to the idea that the body’s symptoms are a window into the psyche. Brain neuropeptides (strings of amino acids) travel throughout the entire body to communicate to and from the brain. Previously thought to be a hardwired network of electrical impulses, the brain, in part, conveys its perceptions to the body through peptides as the body communicates to the brain. Furthermore, the immune, endocrine, and neurochemical systems are all speaking to each other in many cellular languages, from chemical to energetic. Cells that are thought to be brain, endocrine, or immune cells all contain all of the brain and immunopeptides, creating the opportunity for trillions of communications dictated by chemical affinity for a receptor.

Our bodies are changed by the emotions we experience, and in Pert’s work we have science that validates our experience. She asks us to consider the term *bodymind*, stating that our physical body is changed by the



emotions we experience, that emotions are coded into these substrates that move all around the body and concentrate in “nodal points.” This most certainly must be why we can change our emotions through our physical body, and also change our physical body through our emotions, further supporting the view that we can trust the body’s intelligence.

Pert understood that we are in charge, never victims, stating in *Molecules of Emotion*, “Now that I know my body has wisdom, this calls for a new kind of responsibility on my part. I can no longer act like a dumb machine and wait to be fixed by the mechanic, otherwise known as the doctor. I’m [both more powerful and more responsible.](#)”<sup>8</sup>

The field of psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) has grown from the time Pert had this insight and now has several decades of paradigm-shifting contributors. PNI acknowledges that all aspects of our physical, spiritual, and chemical bodies are connected, and disturbances to any part of the system propagate through the body. When symptoms emerge, they are meant to be a beacon; we are wired to respond to those symptoms, which are our inborn, natural recalibration system for when things go wrong. But often we respond by turning to pharmaceuticals that, according to the published literature, do more harm than good—a topic you’ll learn more about in [Chapter 2](#).

On many levels, PNI is an exciting revelation. It decimates false boundaries between different systems and allows more cohesive assessments to be made. No longer are there many blind men feeling different parts of the elephant and erroneously describing a rope and a tree trunk. We begin to see how the immune and endocrine systems appear to be in a bidirectional dialogue—a conversation between the gut and the brain. In this model, the gut influences the brain and the brain influences the gut, but they are still two separate entities communicating through biochemical signals.

This new science makes room for *you*. For your human experience that reflects deeply held beliefs, thoughts, and relationships.

One specific way PNI brings your mind and emotions into the gut-brain physiologic conversation is in the form of your stress response. But the mind is more than a response to stress; rather, it is the personal meaning of the stress that is relevant.

## **ROOT CAUSES: SICK GUT, LIFESTYLE, AND PERSONAL MEANING**

So if “mental illness” (including bipolar disorder, depression, ADHD, obsessive-compulsive disorder [OCD], panic disorder, and even schizophrenia) is not a genetically inherited chemical imbalance of the

brain, but rather our highly attuned response to a world gone wrong, we need to look more closely at the root causes driving it. We can start by appreciating the body's language of distress—it's called inflammation. Triggered by toxic thought patterns, toxic exposures, nutritional deficiencies, and more, inflammation is a response to perceived misalignment that recruits the hormonal, immune, and neurochemical systems to participate in a new normal: an adaptation to stress.

As it has abandoned the fictitious chemical imbalance theory of depression, for the better part of the last century, psychiatric research has focused on the role of the immune system in depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder. [9](#), [10](#),[11](#),[12](#)

But what drives inflammation? What is it a response to? A root-cause inquiry leads us to consider at least three major categories that need to be examined for potentially reversible and resolvable contributors to the symptoms called mental illness. These are 1) physiologic imbalances, 2) psycho-emotional toxicity, and 3) spiritual crisis/emergence. There is evidence that inflammation is driven by all of these elements, and that inflammation is a catch-all alert that is adaptive if transient and symptomatic if chronic.

Let's first look at how inflammation is connected to physiologic

imbalances that lead to a diagnosis of depression. If depression is a downstream collection of symptoms, and inflammation is driving these symptoms, what is a possible physical source of the inflammation? It appears, from data in animals and humans, that disruption of our gut ecology may be a major player, so the gut microbiome has stepped to the forefront of cutting-edge psychiatric research.

The other factors that drive inflammation—namely lifestyle factors such as stress from emotional toxicity in relationships and work, as well as psychospiritual responses to a suppressive society—are topics to be explored more thoroughly in Parts 2 and 3 of this book.

**Sick gut.** Our immune systems are largely housed in the gut, and the interplay between the gut and the brain is a complex and profoundly important relationship to appreciate. Housing more than 70 percent of our immune system, the gut is our interface between the outside and inside world, that separation being maintained by one cell thickness. The resident microorganisms of the gut develop into an ecosystem early in life through postnatal exposures, in the vaginal canal, through breastfeeding, and in the immediate environment, giving you your microbial template.

Disruption to the balance of bacteria through medication exposures, antigenic foods, herbicides, and stress can set the stage for the innate

immune system to prepare to respond. Depression, associated with compromised integrity of this intestinal barrier, [13](#) emerges from the swirling storm of inflammation, impairment of vital cellular components (i.e., mitochondria), oxidative stress, and then more inflammation in a carousel-like forward rotation. Specifically, depression is associated with elevated levels of lipopolysaccharide (LPS), a component of the bacteria cell wall that is in harmony when it remains in the gut.

We all recognize that anxiety or nervousness can impact our guts; you may have had butterflies before a date or even diarrhea with extreme performance anxiety. We are just learning that this relationship is bidirectional, however, and that the gut can also communicate its state of calm or alarm to the nervous system.

Researchers posit that the vagus nerve is a primary conduit of information and that inflammatory markers are the vehicles traveling this highway. Scientists have studied the “protective effects” of severing this nerve when animals are exposed to gut-related toxins that normally cause depressive symptoms. We are getting ahead of ourselves, however, because we need to better elucidate why inflammation matters, where it comes from, and why it is the universal driver of chronic illness, including in many cases depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and psychosis.

**The lifestyle connection.** If we start to look at mental disorders as a multiplex of relationships between the gut and the endocrine and immune systems, as psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) shows, we begin to see how all of the threads of our day-to-day lifestyle choices weave the web of our felt experience.

After I put down my prescription pad and dedicated my practice to helping women reclaim their health—body, mind, and spirit—I found that sending a signal of safety in multiple different, simultaneous ways was all that was needed to get radical results. In effect, I operationalized psychoneuroimmunology and packaged the experience into a powerful self-care ritual that prepared patients for their journey home to themselves.

Once I started to see and then expect tectonic plate shifts in perception, symptoms, and vitality, word got out and my waiting list grew to two years. This is not rocket science, and in fact, I'm not even sure a doctor is necessary to carry it out. I wrote my first book, *A Mind of Your Own*, to lay the foundation for the journey into living an awakened life that follows in [this book. Vital Mind Reset, an online program you'll read about in Chapter 6, is the exact protocol I use with my patients, informed by my own healing](#) journey, my work with Dr. Nicholas Gonzalez, and the support of experts who will help bring this one-month experience of self-reclamation to you,

anywhere in the world.

The results span from small but progressive wins to history-making cases of meds shed and disease labels defied.

One of the foundational premises of this approach is the glorious gut-brain connection, a powerful point of entry into the nervous system's wide-ranging impact on day-to-day life.

### **Resetter: Jacie**

I joined Vital Mind Reset because I've struggled with a sense of discomfort in my body and I have had a lifetime of constipation and reflux.

Since beginning VMR, I am having daily bowel movements and I can't believe how much more comfortable and confident I feel in my body. It is so clear to me that I just had to prioritize connecting to myself, taking care of myself, and give myself the chance to reset. I needed the motivation and support to finally put myself first.

### **CINDY'S STORY: REVERSAL OF LUPUS**

Cindy's story illustrates the immense power of sending this lifestyle-based signal of safety, with a focus on the gut-brain connection. Cindy was medically hexed with a lupus diagnosis after the birth of her son, and endured painful symptoms for the next 18 years. In the wake of this, and

because of sociocultural conditioning around the fate of someone with this potentially serious autoimmune condition, she shrunk her life to fit what she thought the experience of a sick woman should be. She felt unwell, took multiple medications, sometimes for unknown indications, and said no to many opportunities—until she said yes and entered the realm of radical healing through diet and lifestyle changes that put her lupus symptoms into remission.

Before that, she describes her daily life: “Lupus was a drag on my system. I had good days and bad. I would get nervous about planning trips and future dates because I never knew if I would feel well enough to go. I seemed to catch everything, and had chronic sinus infections and reflux. I also had swollen, hot, and extremely painful joints most days. In the latter years, I finally figured out that food was triggering the synovitis. I just couldn’t figure out which foods were causing it.”

Cindy got caught up in the web of multiple medications, including a brief trial of an antidepressant. And then she heard about the Vital Mind Reset program.

Here are her own words: “I followed the protocol for 14 days, taking out foods that caused inflammation, and my body responded immediately, telling me it was food sensitivity at the root. After only two weeks, I went



to my rheumatologist and had routine blood work done. When the results were in, my doctor told me that there were no signs of lupus. I nearly fell off the table! I cried happy tears all the way home, and soon received a letter from him confirming those results.”

This approach to depression and other conditions views them as complex, nonspecific symptoms reflecting a state of bodily disharmony. It isn't that you were born with bad genes or low serotonin. It is far more likely that you are experiencing an unhealthy inflammatory balance, driven by cortisol dysfunction and stemming from a sick gut.

Gut *dysbiosis* (a word that translates, etymologically, to “wrong living”) can stem from many lifestyle sources, including diet, environment, and stress from modern living, a topic I will cover in Parts II and III of this book.

This is where the evolutionary mismatch theory, citing modern lifestyles as the culprit, comes in: imbalanced flora in the gut due to modern diets and stress causes *permeability* of the blood/organ barrier, leading to “leaky gut” and increased levels of endotoxin (typically LPS) in the blood. Specifically, many food components have the potential to activate inflammatory responses, including modern wheat (with 15 to 20 times the gluten of ancient varieties) and processed cow dairy. Heating of foods—grilling and

broiling—can also produce advanced glycation end products and heterocyclic amines. Once these dietary compounds synergize, immune thresholds are lowered as white blood cells and chemokines are readied for response.

Add to dietary influence the pharmaceutical influence, and we've engaged an all-out war on humanity. A fascinating review describes the manifold adverse effects of common medications on the gut microbiome, including anti-hypertensives, chemotherapy, and even antiretrovirals used in the setting of an HIV diagnosis. [14](#) Antibiotics are, of course, notorious for their grenade-like effects, a topic we will explore in a future chapter with relevance to mental symptoms. I encourage my patients to question the use of antibiotics for this reason alone.

In summary, we need the gut lining to keep the gut contents away from the bloodstream because healthy boundaries are critical to well-being!

Increases in permeability allow for intestinal contents to set off autoimmune and inflammatory processes. Because an entire inner ecosystem is in need of restoration, the solution is never going to be in a pill—natural or chemical. What's needed is the deeper healing of lifestyle change with its myriad side benefits.

## **PERSONAL MEANING**