



Physiology of purpose:

a profession
rooted in feeling

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It was a warm summer day in Salvador de Bahia. I was on a work trip with the World Bank, implementing a Maternal Child Health program across the state. The workload felt endless, and the pressure to perform was high. The work culture could be summed up by the person who sent the latest email. We were staying in the most gorgeous hotel in a touristy area, with a delicious breakfast overlooking the turquoise beach from the top floor. Working at the World Bank had been my dream job. I had worked my whole life to be at this prestigious position: to change the world and make it a healthier place. After graduating summa cum laude from

UCLA, I moved to Washington, D.C. for my first policy internship, and was accepted into the top international studies school in the country. Soon after, I landed my first big ‘dream’ job.

But I wasn’t going to let that incredible beach go unused. On day two of the trip, despite an early meeting and an upcoming long day of meetings with government officials, hospitals, and late-night preparation, I woke up half an hour early to jog on the beach. The sun was gently caressing my skin, and I felt energized. By the end of my run, the alluring waves were just too tantalizing to ignore. I dove in and sighed in bliss. The water was the same temperature as my skin, and the waves embraced me with their gentle flow. I dove directly into the wave, and then something magical happened. I felt like I, as a separate entity, ceased to exist.

My body and the wave became one, and for a split second, I was nature and nature was me. I don’t

know how long that moment lasted, but when I got out—remembering I only had ten minutes to get ready—I promised myself I wanted to experience that feeling again. That weightless beingness. Back at the hotel, in the meetings, I couldn't stop thinking about the wave. Everything felt like a blur—policy discussions, endless presentations, graphs, negotiations. It all seemed so meaningless. Real life was out there with her. And here we were inside these walls, doing something we considered important.

I didn't have language for it then, but something in my body had a knowing long before my mind caught up. There was a truth in that sensation that no report or meeting could match. I had gone into health because of a very personal struggle with chronic disease. After endless doctor visits, I realized I had to figure out what health really meant for myself, and how I had lost it. Pillar by pillar, I unpacked its parts. I became a holistic nutritionist

and personal trainer. I studied health psychology and the role of the mind on our well-being. Here I was, doing health policy, trying to change the external factors that keep us unhealthy.

But in that moment with the wave, I felt like I had touched the real key to what health truly is. The aliveness I felt in the presence of Mother Nature, who I would later learn was Iemanjá, the Goddess of Water and Mother of Sea Life, revered by Bahians in the Yoruba tradition. Looking back at that moment now, 15 years later, I see it as the call that shifted everything. It pulled me out of the U.S. and into Brazil, where I learned to truly embrace life. Out of a serious career in international “disease” policy and into my dream wellness business in Rio. Out of living someone else’s dream and into living the aliveness of my own presence.

It was also the turning point for my health. Even though my physical healing had already occurred

once years before, it was here that the process of resignification happened and I realized how miraculous all of it had been—and that aliveness and true health don't actually come from any of the pillars I had studied, though all of them mattered. (In fact, I created a well-being puzzle—a tool to put all the pillars together in a seamless progression of transforming our health.) They come from deep within, from the awakened life force.

Our society primes us away from this symbiosis with nature—and our own nature—very early. From our first steps, we are told how we are supposed to act, eat, and do things. Then school deepens the separation: pulling us away from circadian rhythms and inner curiosity to follow schedules someone else created, learning programs someone else designed. We slowly learn to ignore our greatest instrument for healing and thriving—the body. What I didn't understand then, but became obvious later, is that most of the early signals are present in our

body long before they become medical diagnoses. The body reacts to misalignment we create before the latest tool can detect it.

By the time we start working, we've mastered the rules of others and unlearned what self-care, intuition, and inner guidance really look like. We ignore our needs. We sit in positions no human was meant to endure. We eat dead and chemically produced foods. We ignore the need to move, sleep, laugh, cry, hug, and express our desires. We distance ourselves from the very elements that give us vitality and forget the language of the instrument (that I later called Sensefulness) that could return us to health. At the core of the old Professional lies this disconnection—from our true nature and from the nature that gave us life.

For me, that disconnect cost me my health—an activation of a gene that codes for Familial Mediterranean Fever, a genetic inflammatory

condition. But my struggle since my early twenties had shown me that how I felt influenced the onset and the shutting off of the disease. I knew certain foods, over-exercise, and overworking made me sick. Stress too. But especially the stress that came from jobs I later realized were not aligned with my calling. On the other hand, owning a business and working overtime to bring a new methodology and unique retreats to people had its stresses—but not the kind that made me sick. On the contrary, working toward my purpose gave me unstoppable energy. The years of my entrepreneurship were some of the healthiest of my life.

I started helping people tap into their inner voice—Sensefulness —and be guided by the intrinsic pleasure of being alive—Pleasurable Wellness. The model I remembered (I can't say created, because it was created long before any of us were born). It stated a taboo truth: when we listen to our bodies and follow what feels good—not the high of external

validation, but the quiet sense of inner rightness—our system aligns. Body, mind, and spirit move in the same direction. But even more surprising was the unintended outcome of my work with clients that I kept noticing: people didn't just get healthier. They started saying no to jobs they hated, relationships that made them feel stuck, and life circumstances that no longer matched who they were. The inner guidance I helped them tap into for their health also awakened their purpose.

Or maybe health was simply the fuel for purpose—and they were different stages of the same journey? But the discovery I made later was even more radical. When I lost my dream business and happy marriage to the pandemic—and had to restart my life in a country I had resented returning to—accepting jobs became a necessity. And sure enough, my inflammatory condition returned, this time attacking the protective layer around my heart, the pericardium.

One day, coming back from the hospital, I was fully overtaken by my dis-ease. I felt it everywhere; it engulfed me. The Uber driver—I had no one to pick me up—was playing salsa. At first, I resisted listening. The music felt so far from what I felt inside. But after a long silence, the driver began talking about dancing, about being on the dance floor, and something in me remembered aliveness. I clung to it. Dancing always made me feel alive, but it had been a while. Listening to the driver, who felt every word he shared, I felt the vibration of that movement in my body. In that moment, I realized I had a choice to make: to choose aliveness over illness. Health over disease. Not in a rational goal-setting approach— but in an embodied, sensual shift in the body. I felt the state in my body gently, then stronger in every one of my cells, and the biology followed. Slowly but surely.

Later, I understood why. Research in neuroplasticity and epigenetics is beginning to show what many

ancient traditions have always understood intuitively: the signals we generate inside—through imagery, emotion, and sensations—shape our physiology. Studies from UC Irvine show that the nervous system registers “danger” or “safety” long before symptoms appear, shifting inflammatory pathways within hours. A study from the University of Colorado found that returning people to natural light for just one week reset their circadian rhythms and immune markers—simply by aligning them with what humans evolved to experience. Those findings echoed what my body had been teaching me for years. Feeling well precedes being well.

Over the next month, dancing and connecting with the feeling of being a true performer, a real dancer—feeling it, remembering it—became my anchor. It wasn't the decision to be healthy that shifted things. The decision went way beyond that. To the very thing I wanted to do with all my being, that **REQUIRED** me to be healthy. It was the sensation of

being alive in my own body, even if only imagined at first. And slowly, my system moved toward that state, the way it had once moved toward the wave. Neither dancing nor diving into waves is my profession. But I felt a deep purpose in helping other people experience this powerful elixir of life.

As children, we are allowed to hone our talents and hobbies and explore our creative side. And that spark makes us feel alive, moving forward. As adults, we become specialized, serious, and disconnected from the signals that sustain us. We ignore the deeper sense of whether our mind and spirit align with what we do. And when the work we choose—or accept—no longer lights us up, it pulls us toward numbness. We ignore our needs. Sleep suffers. Movement disappears. Sunlight becomes something we pass on the way to a car. The mind is overstimulated; the body underused. And slowly, dis-ease settles. Not because we failed, but because we stopped listening. This is why I no longer see

health as separate from my purpose. One reveals the other. I used to think my career defined me. That the goals I set were the measures of my life. Now I dare to let my aliveness lead me. Whatever consistently makes me feel unwell creates dis-ease. Whatever brings coherence—physically, emotionally, energetically—points me toward the work that is mine to do.

Health isn't just the absence of symptoms. It's the ongoing conversation between the body and the life we choose to live. Our ancestors understood this without naming it. They lived close to the rhythms that shaped them: sunlight, movement, food from the earth, rest, and community. Health was simply the natural outcome of living in alignment with their design. We've moved far away from that, but the body hasn't. It still tells us the truth. It whispers in a language we have all but forgotten. It knows when something supports us and when it tears us down. And when we listen, everything changes. Health

improves. Clarity returns. And purpose stops being an unattainable goal and becomes a lived present moment.

Purpose rises from within when we stop abandoning ourselves. It emerges through feeling—not goals and someone else’s dreams, but the deeper sense of rightness that the body recognizes instantly. This is why the old model of professionalism no longer works. We cannot disconnect from our bodies at work without disconnecting from our health and our direction. A new professional brings their whole self to their work. Someone who trusts the signals of their own system. Someone who knows that paying attention isn’t indulgent—it’s part of staying well. Its leadership is grounded in the truth of being human.

Feeling is not a distraction. It’s information. It’s guidance. Feeling is what allows us to stay well enough to contribute in a meaningful way. The

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future belongs to those who remain connected to themselves while living fully in the present moment and bring every part of who they are into their purpose.



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