



# C M B M

## Webinar Series



This webinar is hosted by Kathie Madonna Swift, MS, RDN, LDN, Food As Medicine Education Director for the Center for Mind-Body Medicine, presented by Dr Aviva Romm.

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# Healing the Healer

with Integrative Women's Health Expert

Aviva Romm, MD



# Welcome.

- There is no conflict of interest to report for this presentation.
- A few terms:
  - Patient = Patient or Client in this talk
  - Healing is often used interchangeably to mean the word medicine and also applies to the form of work your practice takes (medicine, nursing, naturopathy, midwifery, massage therapy, therapy, etc.).
- Creating sacred space together.

Fatigue. Exhaustion. Poor sleep. We all see them in our patients – are you ignoring signs in yourself, assuming it's just the way it is? Or have you gone into irritability and agitation, even cynicism?

Burnout among practitioners has escalated to epidemic proportions, is considered a crisis in conventional medicine, and can be fatal (depression, alcohol, drugs, suicide, and patient errors are all associated with it).

Statistically, women, and particularly, the most conscientious healers and empathic healers, experience it the worst.

Lip service, but actually taboo to talk about or ask for self-care time!

It's not just MDs experiencing this: I hear it from midwives, NDs, yoga teachers, and so many others who are struggling.

Empathetic,  
conscientious  
health  
practitioners,  
especially  
women, are  
more at risk of  
burnout.



Many practitioners leave clinical practice because of burnout.

There's of course failure if you do walk away - it's a new path. This talk might shine light on that being right for you.

If we are going to continue this work as clinical practitioners, we have to ask ourselves where and why we are suffering.

And we have to begin to make it a priority to nourish ourselves deeply to get back on top of our lives, health, and happiness.

## Why is it happening?

- Often starts before we get into practice due to training pressures, internal pressures, debt, and for adult learners, competing life demands
- Clinical practice carries a high level of responsibility.
- High level of demand coming from every direction - constant time pressures
- Often leaves us feeling internally split (I should be at home, I should be doing more.)
- Loss of sleep, healthy food, exercise, self-care time
- Suppression of feelings of grief, sorrow, frustration, and lack of time to integrate experiences
- Lack of training in how to stay healthy as we care for others
- Legal concerns
- Moral dilemmas
- Financial stressors
- "Challenging" patients
- Working in 'unfriendly' environments

## Unreasonable expectations.

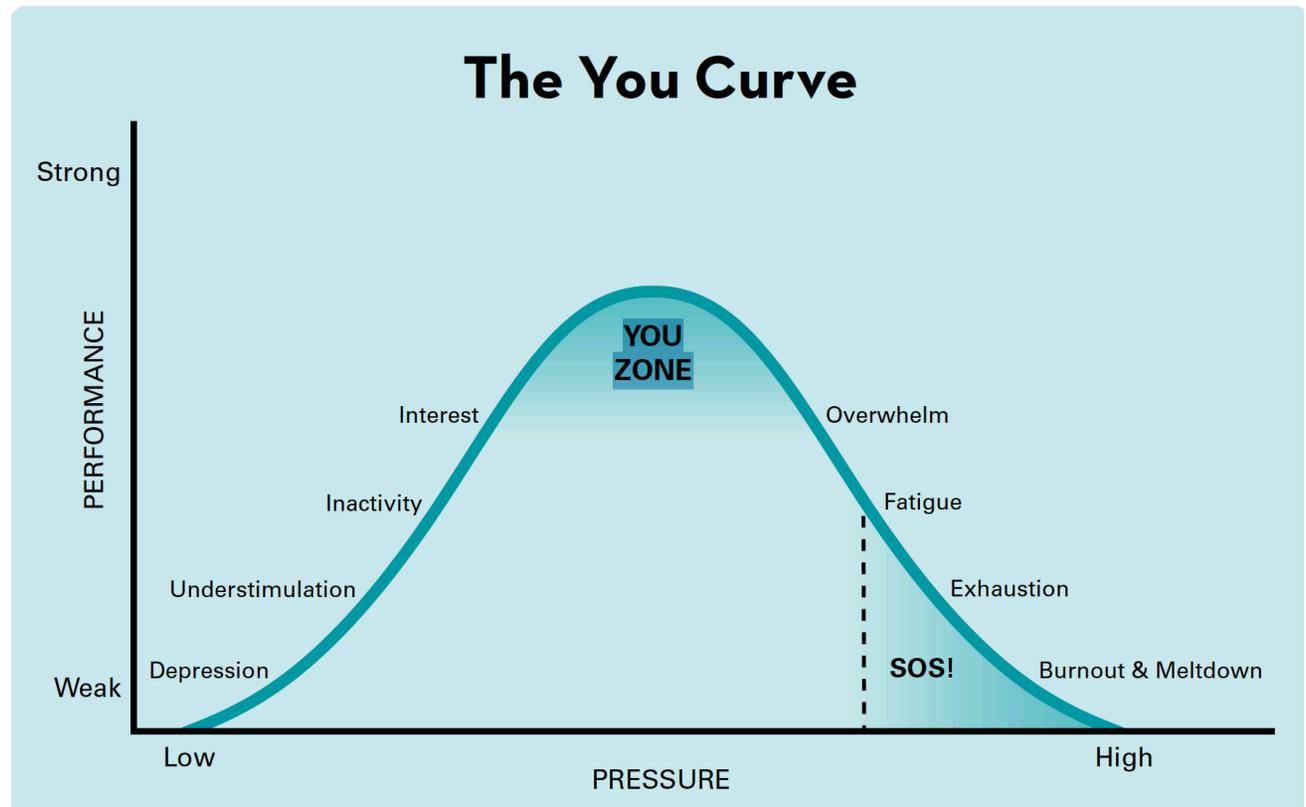
- The expectation that we are supposed to know everything and fix everything can be unbearable and is actually unachievable and unsustainable.
- Expectations (“Curisma,” for example) and training ideologies reinforce this.
- Additionally, most of us have deeply patterned behaviors that show up - and often even led us to - healing work: the healer/martyr or the perfectionist, for example.
- These patterns shape behaviors that can be exhausting and are often accompanied by relentless negative self-talk.

# How to recognize the symptoms of burnout (it's more than just fatigue!).

- Fatigue: lack energy to feeling physically and emotionally exhausted, drained, depleted
- A sense of dread about the day ahead of you
- Insomnia
- Forgetfulness/impaired concentration/attention
- Physical symptoms: chest pain, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, gastrointestinal pain, dizziness, fainting, and/or headaches (all of which should be medically assessed)
- Increased illness
- Loss of appetite
- Anxiety
- Pessimism: negative self-talk progresses to others - criticism, can't depend on anyone
- Isolation
- Depression
- Anger, resentment
- Loss of enjoyment
- Detachment
- Feelings of apathy and hopelessness
- Increased irritability
- Loss of productivity and poor performance
- Cynicism and detachment
- Feelings of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment (that you are never enough)
- Acting out in strange places (grocery store line!)
- Loss of empathy and compassion
- Hospitalization fantasies, passive suicidality

**THIS IS NOT "RUN OF THE MILL" STRESS**

# The You Curve.



Survival Mode.  
Our bodies, minds,  
and emotions when  
we're on the brink  
of, or in burnout.

- Adrenal Stress Response System gets activated
- Cognitively: brain fog, difficulty with memory, decision-making, focus
- Emotionally: agitated, irritable, confused, anxious, depressed, reactive, stuck in the negative, critical, judgmental, easily frustrated
- Physically: Sugar , fat, caffeine, salt cravings, weight gain (or loss), gut problems (IBS, IBD), hormone problems, blood sugar problems, BP problems, immune and autoimmune problems
- Risks to practice: making mistakes, loss of empathy and idealism, hate your work

# What's it all telling us?

Something is out of balance.

You're suffering.

The situation isn't sustainable.

You're potentially heading into a danger zone.

It's time to change things - outer, inner, or both.

It's painful, but it truly is **an opportunity.**



First, there is no  
shame in the  
breakdown.

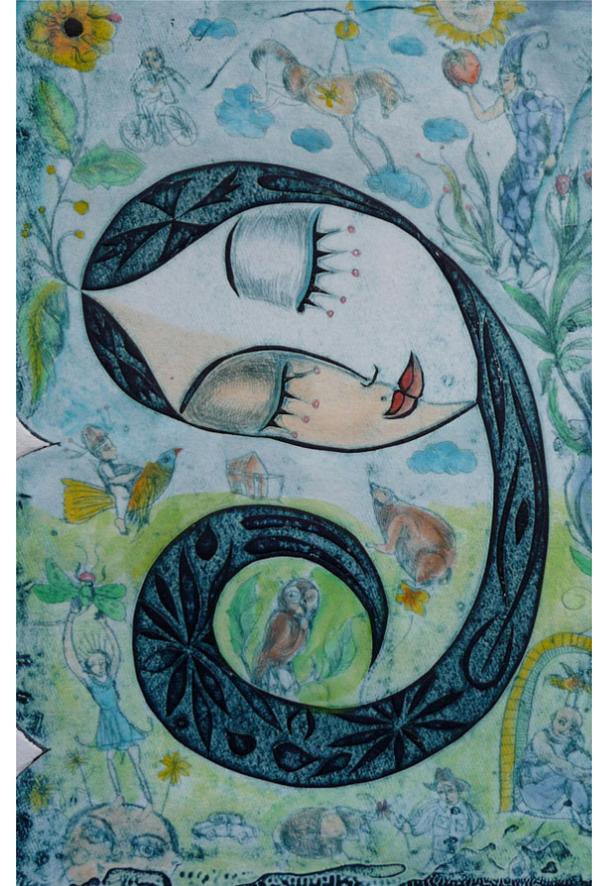
It heralds the need for a self-audit.



**Take this in:  
You deserve to feel  
peace and in love  
with your work and  
your life again!**



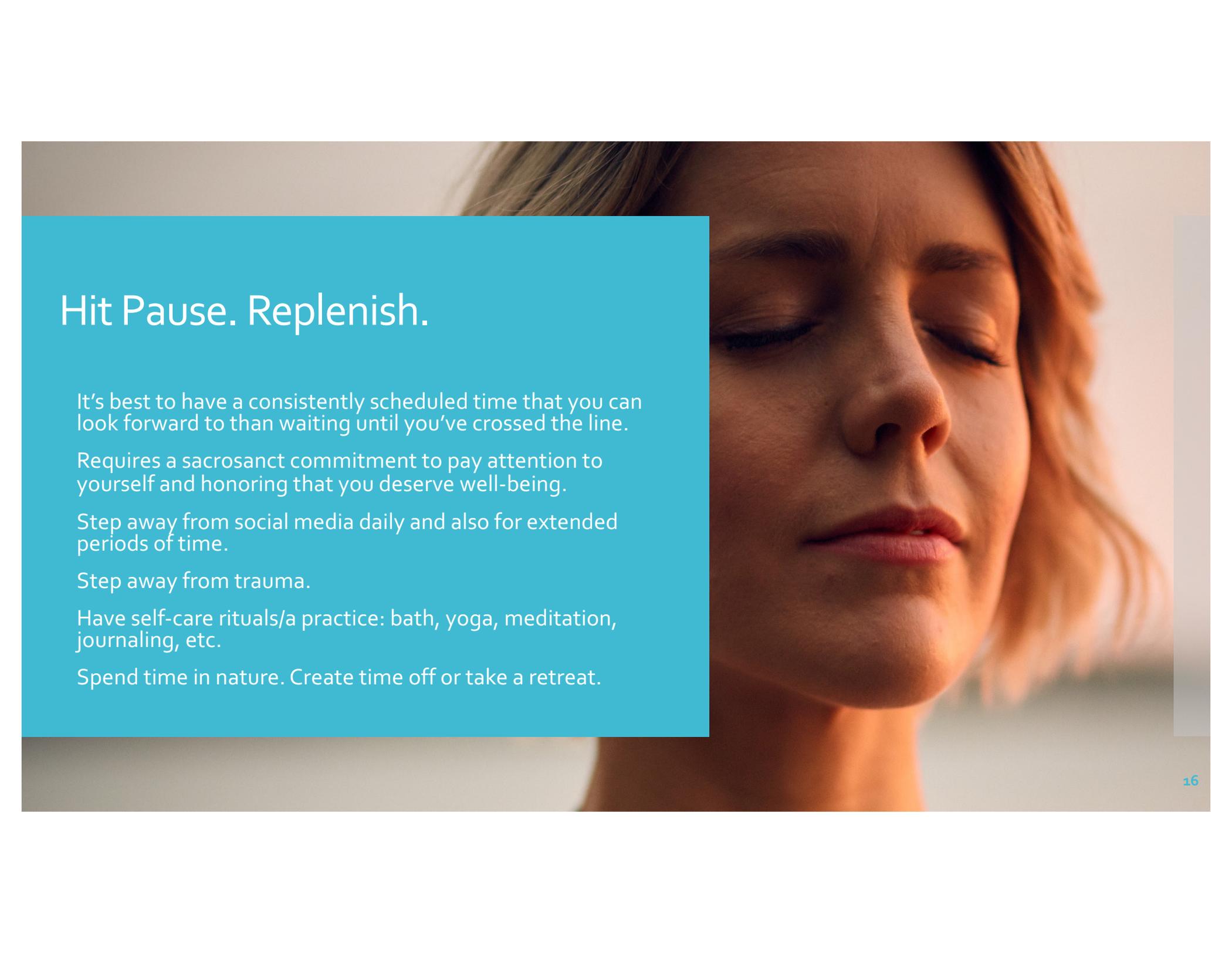
Self-Awareness is key.



## Build reserves & resilience.

- Good food (not just a vending machine burger!)
- Sleep (it's a superfood!)
- Movement
- Play and laughter
- Meditation
- Time in nature
- Community
- Sometimes just do nothing
- When you need to cave, cave.

Self care is not selfish, it is service.  
YOU CAN'T POUR WATER FROM AN EMPTY CUP.



## Hit Pause. Replenish.

It's best to have a consistently scheduled time that you can look forward to than waiting until you've crossed the line.

Requires a sacrosanct commitment to pay attention to yourself and honoring that you deserve well-being.

Step away from social media daily and also for extended periods of time.

Step away from trauma.

Have self-care rituals/a practice: bath, yoga, meditation, journaling, etc.

Spend time in nature. Create time off or take a retreat.

# Prioritize.

- Rethinking and establishing new PRIORITIES is a powerful way to **multiply by subtracting**.
- Carve out 30 minutes to do the following:
  - Define your mission: what are your real goals in your life and work.
  - Did you include self-care priorities in that list? If not, go back and modify the list to include at least sleep, good food, and movement.
  - What in your work or life right now is getting in the way of that?
  - What feels like 'it's just too much?'
- What's on offer that you can say no to or even back out of gracefully?
- What's on the calendar already that you're truly obligated to complete/do (and why)? Who can you delegate that/those to?
- How will you prevent yourself from taking on too much on your plate? Is this a chronic problem for you? (This takes you into looking at the deep why - Financial fears? Career building? Perfectionism? Proving?)

# Have boundaries.

- Healers seem to have porous boundaries and a lot of guilt!
- Take a minute to determine what healthy boundaries you need in your work and life.
- Set those clear boundaries.
- Look for energy leaks and sappers
- Practice saying no, without apology, and know you can be a good person and still say no.

When you do take on projects: Do one thing.  
Learn the life-changing magic of serial task monogamy.

- Prevents being scattered
- Reduces overwhelm
- Increases productivity
- Increases a sense of completion and accomplishment



## Reduce screen time and social media to essentials.

- Digital burnout is a real phenomenon.
- Constant comparison to the perfectly curated lives of healers, foodies, yoginis, 'thought leaders,' functional medicine docs, etc. , can be a recipe for perceived inadequacy. It's called **compare and despair**.
- It's distracting and leads to anxiety and depression.
- You feel me on this? It's real.
- Unplug.

# Going deeper. Own your wounds and your truth.

She who loves 50 people has 50 woes;  
she who loves no one has none.

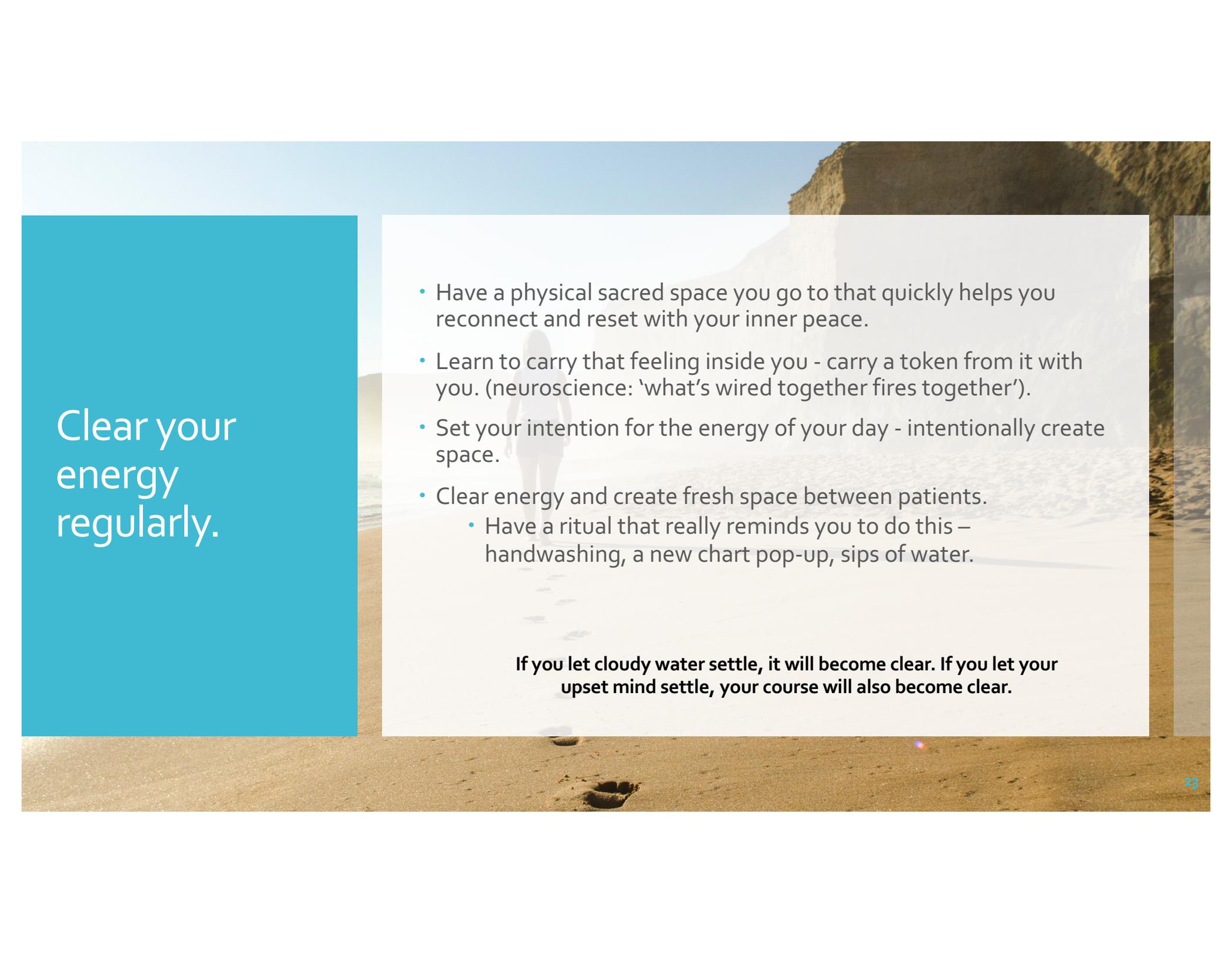
Why do you go into healing?

- What inspired you initially?
- What were your initial beliefs?
- How have these changed?
- What has changed that you feel are the biggest factors in your burnout?
  - How do beliefs about your self-worth show up in your healing practice? Do you feel you are responsible for fixing others? Do you believe that your modality can fix everything? Are you surrounded by practitioners (or patients) who believe this?
  - Do you believe that you have to suffer or continually sacrifice because you're a healer?
- Do you make time to hold space for the suffering you're exposed to in your life?
- Okay, and a really big question: Do you still want to be in clinical practice?

# Be Kinder to Yourself.

- You can't ever know everything. You can't heal everyone.
- How will you maintain resilience? Self-esteem?
- Practice self-compassion:
  - Learn to become mindful and aware of negative self talk - recognize it for what it is; thank it, let it go.
  - Recognize that you have suffering, too. How would you speak to your patient or your child or best friend if she were going through what you're going through? What guidance would you give?
- Self compassion increases resilience, well-being, and health.
- It increases our capacity to handle stress and set-backs, and helps to reset our Stress-Response System.
- Self-compassionate people are more likely to adopt health-promoting behaviors and maintain them.

**The heart is like a garden: it can grow compassion or fear, resentment or love. What seeds will you plant there?**

A person is walking away from the camera on a sandy beach. In the background, there is a large, light-colored cliff face under a clear blue sky. The ocean waves are visible in the distance. The overall scene is bright and serene.

## Clear your energy regularly.

- Have a physical sacred space you go to that quickly helps you reconnect and reset with your inner peace.
- Learn to carry that feeling inside you - carry a token from it with you. (neuroscience: 'what's wired together fires together').
- Set your intention for the energy of your day - intentionally create space.
- Clear energy and create fresh space between patients.
  - Have a ritual that really reminds you to do this – handwashing, a new chart pop-up, sips of water.

**If you let cloudy water settle, it will become clear. If you let your upset mind settle, your course will also become clear.**

# Make things easier for yourself.

## Choose a niche.

I don't know about you - but I find there to be an almost unbearable amount of information to keep up with.

One way to subtract in order to multiply is to find your **niche**.

You then don't have to know it all or do it all.

Another way to make things easier for yourself is to **create reproducible information** - you don't have to reinvent the wheel every time.

Finally, **get help you can really lean on** - people that have your back and want to always keep you looking good!



## Rewrite your story.

Know that you deserve to be happy and healthy.

The wounded healer, the perfectionist, the good girl – Do you have a story about how you have to be a healer that is no longer serving you?

How can you create a new story?

Take the time to write down your 'new way' of being and practicing that does work for you. What would that look like? What's one step you can take toward that immediately?



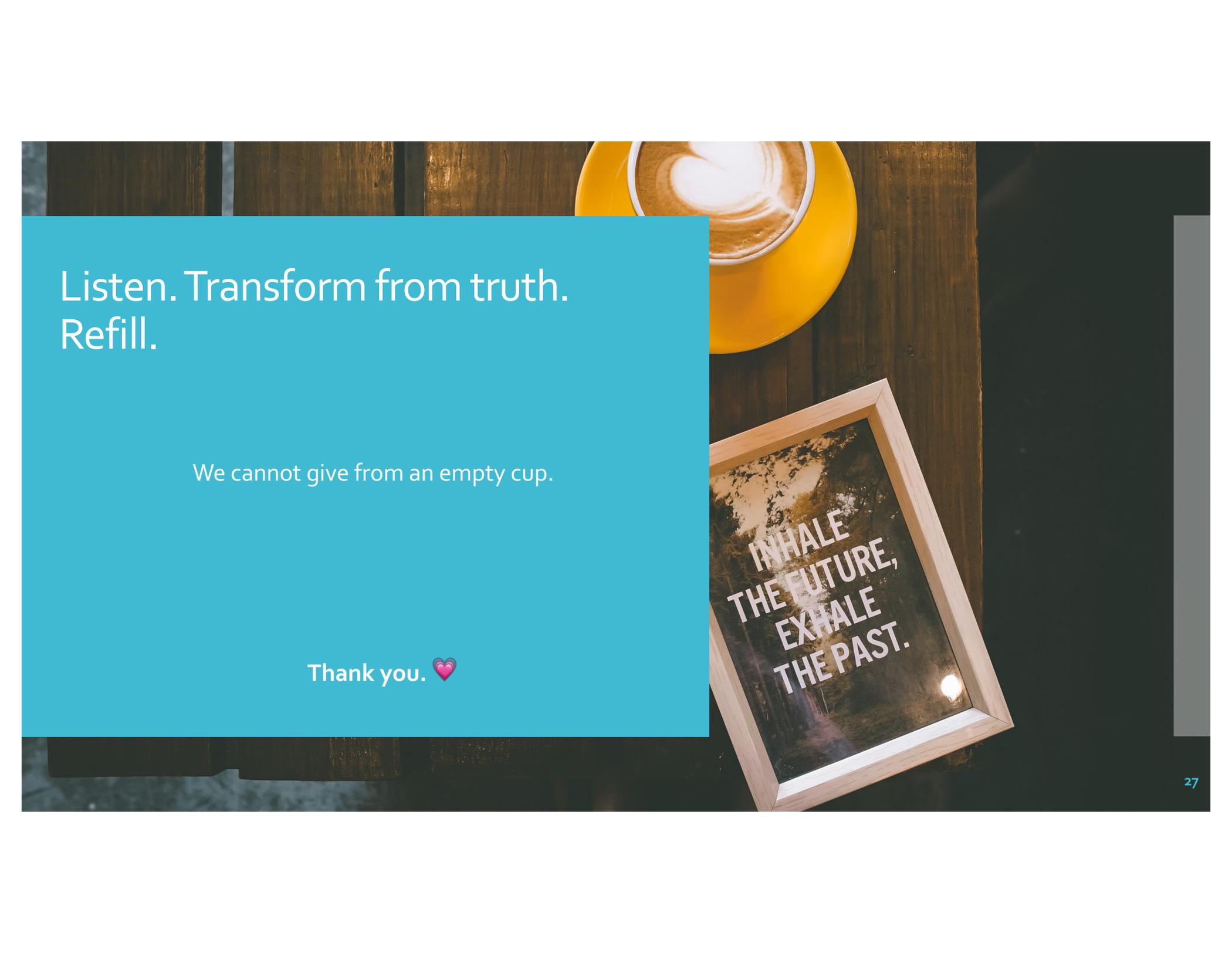
Don't go it alone.  
Tend and befriend.

Talk about how you're  
feeling with others you  
feel safe with.

Have a tribe of healers to  
connect with.

Love is a gift of one's innermost  
soul to another so both can be  
whole.



A photograph of a cup of coffee on a yellow saucer and a framed sign with a forest background. The sign reads "INHALE THE FUTURE, EXHALE THE PAST." The background is a dark wooden surface.

Listen. Transform from truth.  
Refill.

We cannot give from an empty cup.

Thank you. 💕



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**Webinar Series**

This webinar has been recorded. The presentation and the slides will be available within 24 hours at [CMBM.org/webinar](https://CMBM.org/webinar).



# MIND, MOOD & FOOD

A Food As Medicine  
Professional Training

September 13 - 17, 2019

Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health  
Stockbridge, MA

