Introduction to The Season of the Witch

And the reason I'm a psychiatrist who wants to make a case for magic is that I see not only how that's helped my resilience and helped me feeling guided, feeling knowing how to find alignment with what contribution I am here to making, but I've also witnessed in my practice how it helps my patients.

And it's not to say I mean practice proselytizing a certain belief system, that is not what it is at all. But I recognize that my field is squeamish about these topics.

And I was doing my patients a disservice by not creating space to contemplate the bigger questions of existence. And it's just permission to live those questions.

for more than a decade. We were friends back at the beginning of the Functional Forum and continue to be. Her last book, The Anatomy of Anxiety, was a big bestseller and now she has a new book called The Season of The Witch, A Psychiatrist's Case for Magic.

And I just thought that this would be an important topic for us to discuss. Um, we are in the season before Integrative Medicine for Mental Health conference that's coming up in Just a few weeks, I'll be there.

I hope that if you're interested in integrated medicine, you are interested mental health, it's the place to be. Hope you can join us. Without further ado, here's my interview with Dr.

Alan Vora. Enjoy. So a warm welcome to the Evolution of Medicine podcast. Dr Alan vora, welcome Alan. Thank you, James. It's good to be here. I think that I might have been the first person ever to reach out to you about an interview for this book when you announced it like a year ago, once on social media, because I was like, this is my jam.

But before we get into it, I guess I just want to acknowledge, you know, we became friends in New York back when the Functional Forum started. It's a long time ago.

People have taken a lot of routes, You know. I think Robin Burson introduced us. You see the journey that she's gone on. And I Guess I Just want To Acknowledge as a Wit- and, you know, co-collaborate in the journey that you've gone on.

It's a unique journey, but, from the practice and really learning how to be a holistic psychiatrist and stepping forth in that area, then your last book, The Anatomy of Anxiety, I think, for my perspective was a really made a powerful influence because it was showing people that there's more to do with the physiology of anxiety than just something happening in your head.

And my judgment with this book is you're sort of going a level deeper again. And I just want to acknowledge the journey because I've been here as a witness to it and it's wonderful to see the ripples that you've made and the stages that your landed on and I know you're just getting started.

Thanks. Yeah, I have a lot of nostalgia for those early days that the Functional Forum in New York City, which had so much energy to and there was this concentration of all of us who are trying on a different approach to health and healing within the conventional setting.

From Functional Medicine to Spiritual Inquiry

that was just so thrilling back then. But the journey I've been on, my first book, The Anatomy of Anxiety, was a very direct translation of the work that I do day in, day out.

It's a functional medicine approach to mental health, specifically around anxiety. And I think if I had more time, there's so many other more straightforward functional-medicine books that i'd love to write.

I'd the anatomy of bipolar. I think that's very needed in the world. And I would love to write a book about psychiatric medication tapering. But we don't have infinite time.

This book, it is deeper. That's not a strategic decision or anything like that. It's more that I've deepened in what I have experienced in life and what i've gone through.

At this point, if I'm taking on anything professionally, It is usually more of a spiritual inquiry where I was having sitting in meditation, asking this question, putting it out there of what should I be writing about.

And this topic came through so overwhelmingly and so clearly, and I really couldn't refute it, though I tried many times and sitting back down and saying, like, are you sure?

Really this? really now? And I kept getting the response of, yep, sit down in your chair and get to work. Well, I would say I've been keen for this because I have found myself surrounded by witches of various types.

Obviously, my kids go to Waldorf school and there's elements of the Steiner methodology that is witchy in itself and understanding that. But just to give you some examples, like one of my closest friends, a couple of pediatricians that my kid's go school with.

you know, similar journey where it's like conventional pediatrician, then see the light, train in functional medicine, but like the kind of medicine that they're doing today, you now, which is basically like biodynamic cranial and, bio-energetic work viewed through the lens of conventional pediatrics looks a lot closer to witchcraft than anything else.

However, look at the rates of chronic illness in their practice and the rate of autism and that the degree to which they've able to like document cases of reversal.

This thing's working right by any standard you compare the outcomes and details in that practice to the outcome in any other pediatrician in California and you're up for a rude awakening.

So this has been something that I've you know, surrounding myself with and connected to. And I guess, I'd love to hear from you, you how this methodology and nomenclature became the thing that you wanted to, make the book around.

Yeah. And I mean, I think you're married to one of the high priestesses of all. When I was pregnant, she put her hand on my belly. I felt like energy tingling over my whole body.

She's quite a witchy woman, magical. So I that, you know, once you get kind of red-pilled by functional medicine, It already says, like, once you've taken on that philosophy of we're not just suppressing symptoms, we are addressing a problem at the root, identifying the cause and going to that upstream, then it opens you up to, okay, so in a more straightforward functional medicine approach, you're thinking about micronutrient deficiencies or inflammation or intestinal permeability and blah, blah blah.

But for me in mental health, Like, I can't not acknowledge the psychospiritual roots that come to bear on my patient's pathologies, on their symptoms.

And so I recognized after a while I was doing my patients a disservice to not at least tread lightly into these waters that were not part of my conventional or my functional medicine training.

These waters, that I think the field of psychiatry gets quite squeamish around, bigger spiritual questions and what is somebody's worldview and how that comes to bare on our mental health.

And so this book, it's really both a little bit of a grief memoir, a bit a cultural commentary around I think a lot of

cultural conditioning that women take on.

And we'll talk about what that is. But it is still a prescriptive functional medicine book because I cannot help myself. That's who I am in my DNA. It's still an answer to that question of how do we suffer and get out of balance and how can we support humans from trying to address human suffering.

I love that. I was just going through the copy that you sent me and you have this Tolkien quote at the beginning. A thing is about to happen here that has not happened since the Elder Days.

The Ents are going to wake up and find out they are strong. That's a strong start. What does it mean to you and what's about Well I was probably, I don't know, halfway through writing this book while also in parallel reading the Lord of the Rings series with my daughter.

That was our bedtime story every night. And when I came across that it really captured what I'm trying to say here, which is that I think women have been feeling less than, doubting ourselves, fragmenting ourselves which I'll explain what i mean by that, but really betraying our selves, like taking a piece of us that's integral to who we are and disavowing it and suppressing it in order to be respectable, to make ourselves palatable for this world, To have some kind of power and safety in our very left-brained, rational world that we all operate in.

But I want women to have the aha moment, which is, hey, wait a minute. I think a long time ago, I looked around, perceived that this is a world That values a certain type of intelligence.

a left hemisphere, rational, linear type of intelligence, and we understand the assignment. We lean into that and perform that side of ourselves. But in the process, unconsciously, we suppress our mystical, intuitive, witchy side.

And it serves us for a period of time. It opens doors. I went through med school and residency and research fellowship, right? I don't dispute it entirely.

There's value to this. In mental health, if we know anything, it's that suppressed parts don' t go down without a fight.

Women, Witchiness, and Menopause

that if we are fragmented in that way and betraying ourselves in way, ultimately that comes to roost and we need to integrate our parts, meet ourselves, all parts of ourselves with acceptance.

And I think the aha moment I want people to have is that it was a self-protective mechanism that we did to suppress that. But if are here, we find ourselves today staunchly identified with that rational side of our selves.

We think I'm skeptical, I am discerning, the right way. I just want people to interrogate, is that skepticism truly yours or is it that cultural conditioning that you internalized decades ago?

And so I think the Ents, the women, which is more than just women. Many of us are, you're very witchy, right? But for us to recognize, oh, it's not that we're less than, It's that were quite powerful and it is time for to step forward because the world actually needs us standing firmly in that conviction.

I love that. So one of the areas in the book that I noticed is that you have a section that talks about menopause and I'm interested in connecting why you feel like this is something that is connected to the season of The Witch and is this, I am interested your take on the connection between those two things because this like the hottest topic in women's health, right?

Yeah, there's a chapter on menopause and a couple chapters actually on women's health in general. So, menoppause, what's interesting to me and how that is at the intersection of everything I'm passionate about, functional medicine and women stepping into their witchiness, is the way that women struggling with symptoms of perimenopausal menopus, There's, a way the estrogen in our reproductive lives seems to create a biologic imperative for us to make nice to play well in the sandbox and to be likeable.

And that seems to part of female reproductive fitness. It's all well and good, but it sometimes leaves women in a position of doing a lot of compromising and losing themselves and not even necessarily knowing what is their heart desire.

They find themselves in position living endlessly in selfless service of everyone around them. And menopause is this somewhat liberatory, though often uncomfortable transition, where even though the symptoms are unpleasant, the hot flashes and insomnia and frozen shoulder and osteopenia and osteoporosis and the list is on and on, and certainly genital urinary issues, but also there is a liberation from the ways that estrogen and progesterone keep us playing well in the sandbox.

And I think that is right at the threshold of how we're witchy. And that's, I think, no accident why our image of a witch is this prone with gnarled features, not the object of sexual desire, Not youthful and vital, but someone who is in a position where estrogen is not censoring them anymore, where they're able to say what's true without really giving a lot of care towards how people will react.

It's not to say you just go off and become needlessly cruel. It is that you can say the inconvenient truth, even if it's going to ruffle some feathers.

Women's health is a whole other subject that I take on over, spread over a couple chapters. There's one around childbirth. The ways that I've had too many patients to count whose psychiatric history began with the initiation of birth control pill, and that is something I'll continue to bring forward until our whole population appreciates it.

But I have had so many female patients who go on the pill sometime in college, that's when they become depressed and or anxious. end up going on various psychiatric medications and having a long and storied psychiatric history.

But it all began with that initiation of the pill. And sometimes the way we get back to a state where they feel well is by removing exogenous hormones.

We now know that exogeneous hormones do indeed influence mood, depression, and anxiety. Many decades of women were going back and saying, yeah, I think this is working by the way I'm crying every day.

And they were being gaslit. They were told, well, there's no evidence for that. You seem stressed. We should go on Paxil. Nothing against Poxil, but we just deserve to understand that's not your true blue genetic destiny depression.

That's a medication side effect. we deserve the full truth of what's happening under the hood in the body. Well, I'm so glad you're going there because I think that topic is mission critical and there's a wisdom of the world is such that a little bit of speaking truth to power and so forth is a necessary part of our transformation towards the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible.

And I look forward to seeing more of that in the work. That's right. I guess I want to feedback. One of the things that was quite interesting to me was to notice that in the early days of functional medicine, I'm not sure it was true or not, but still, that I know that 75% of both the patients and the practitioners were women.

And one of things I was thinking about was just that as you move from one vision of one understanding of body, sort of that linear understanding, of certainly medicine like single input, you know biochemistry into that that's going to be the soul to understanding that okay there's a lot going on it's complex system this feedback loops there is multi systems that can all produce the same symptoms you ultimately what you need is a different type of thinking unique thinking that understands the collective that control all of that information and And I remember saying, I remembered there was an amazing functional forum with, with where Jeff Bland and Kelly Brogan were the two keynotes.

And, and I said something like, you know, what about intuition? And Jeff was just, Jeff said, look, intuition is just really like a level of pattern recognition that you're not conscious of.

and that always stuck with me because I think, we are always in the process of trying to understand what's happening. But that, that stuck me as something that that it's a more sophisticated information gathering system in a certain way.

Does that resonate with you? Yes. And so, you know, it's funny the way you talked about that more biochemical straightforward approach. Like that was the, that's the integrative medicine gateway drug into functional medicine.

It's like green pharmacy where you're just like, okay, instead of Lexapro, we're going to give you St. John's wort for your depression. It's a step in that direction, but ultimately functional medicine explodes the possibilities of what are the inputs that it's complex system.

And that's when you start to recognize that the body is a storyteller, that there's sometimes meaning to the ways we get out of balance or become. To me, intuition is a smidge more than sophisticated pattern recognition.

I call intuition the witch's compass in the book, but basically, yes, it's sophisticated, patterned recognition, and maybe it sophisticated in a way that's even kind of awe-inspiring, like if you look at the cerebellum and all these ways that we are grappling with, it's almost a data science mystery, like we're grappling enormous amounts of information, trillions of dendritic endings to all of our neurons and how is our body distilling that into a conclusion.

Intuition, Wearables, and Embodied Listening

But I would argue that there's a couple dimensions that are even a little bit more inexplicable. I think the more we become embodied and are really dropped just out of navigating our lives from the head and we're in our bodies, there are antennae that emerge.

Our heart is sensing in a certain way, our gut is certainly sensing, in its own way. And I would argue even the energetic womb center is its type of antenna.

So I think there's other ways that we're picking up on information beyond straightforward neurologic sensory pattern recognition. And then I hold the possibility of something even more magical that, we are connected to something beyond us, that there is some way that were tapping into source or the field or whatever term feels resonant for someone, where we getting information in a way, there isn't strictly coming from the confines of our own bodies or minds.

that like the hundredth monkey and we're right into it, right? And I completely, I mean, if you look for evidence of that, it abounds. I don't know the 100th Monkey.

Can you tell me about it? The long story short is that as a group of monkeys learn something, the Hundredth Monkeys learns it much quicker. you know, than the first, second or third, and that information is transferred.

You can look at it at like quorum sensing, right, where groups of microbes work together in a way that you can't really understand. There's lots of different ways that I've been interested in of communication between people that isn't overt and how those systems work.

That's right. So yeah, you mentioned one of the things I was really interested in was this sort of like conversation about going beyond the wearable that I think you were sort-of touching in there and the ability to like tune in to ourselves and I feel a bit split on that because I know you're right and i know that that capability within us to understand ourselves to a degree and, I've gone through that journey like in my men's group to really like understand where I'm feeling things and what the implications are and fullest potential.

And I also understand the sort of downside of relying on this outside thing, this wearable to tell you about what's going inside. I have seen the potential of that sort information to a broader spectrum of information that might help us understand things that seem impossible to connect.

So I've seen that in action and I hope to see more of it. But I'd love to hear your thoughts on how you feel about

that. So I just want to take a moment to thank our mission partners, and I want talk a bit about brain medicine.

I believe that what is about to happen is that we are going to see a removal of the silos between psychiatry and neurology, because we're going start to understand that the same causative factors drive both psychiatric illness and neurological dysfunction.

And so, in order to facilitate that revolution, we need practitioners who are trained in that methodology and can build scalable practices to reverse it.

It's built in functional medicine, it's build in empowerment, and it has group medicine as a key part of it as well. And, so thank you to all of our mission partners.

Obviously, Fullscript has been a big supporter for a long time, with Fullscript Labs coming on. Full script is a place where you can get all of the functional labs or the conventional labs.

You can also get, um, all the supplements that you're used to from Full Script all in one convenient location. It is the sort of, uh, central operating system for running a scalable practice.

Uh, we have freedom practice coaching that is helping practitioners build sustainable episodes of care and be successful in bringing in consistent patients serving them with a higher standard of care and making a real impact to their own freedom and their potential in their practice.

Big boost, Uli and his team are at the leading edge and if you are entering into this world of brain medicine, no one understands the world better and can build you websites and funnels that can bring patients into your practice and then last but not least True Neura, which is in the business of bringing practitioners together to learn about healing brains And we do that through the lens of a mastermind, but also building decision support software to make it easy for this to become the standard of care.

So thank you to our mission partners. Let's get back to chatting with Ellen. I mean, I think that I'm nuanced on wearables. That's certainly not anti-wearable.

My husband often wears an aura ring. And I've recommended certain wearable to my patients, whether it's a continuous glucose monitor or an or a ring or whoop or whatever.

But basically, I think that we just want to recognize it's a tool that were using and we don't let it start to drive the ship and create other problems downstream.

When someone starts wearing something like an aura ring, it can be very impactful with behavioral change upfront. Like, okay, now I'm seeing in this concrete way, staying up too late, getting overtired, looking at screens close to bedtime, consuming alcohol, all this objectively impacts my sleep quality.

So that can be very compelling and it can motivate behavioral change and can give people information that otherwise it was falling on dead ears. I can say it so I'm blue in the face, like go to bed at the window when your body's perfectly tired and avoid screens and wear orange glasses and all this.

People aren't hearing it until they see, okay, that objectively impacted my own sleep. But I do think the downsides that I recognize, one is a nocebo effect, the opposite of a placebo effect.

where let's say you wear an aura ring and you wake up in the morning and maybe you feel okay, but then your ring says, no, actually you had a bad night of sleep.

So that can impact how you felt that day. And it's not even a perfect instrument. It might not be a even be perfect reflection of how your slept. But that could be bit of a drag to be told that you didn't have good sleep and I think it can influence our unconscious.

I can inform how we go through our day that I also think that it is making us rustier at trusting our own hotline to our proprioceptive awareness of what's going on in our bodies.

And we're already pretty atrophied at that embodied listening. So to me, there's a philosophical, something that makes me very uncomfortable, this idea that I don't know how I feel.

I need to outsource that to an objective instrument that tells me how i feel and how There's useful data in that, but we actually need to be strengthening and dusting off and really going back to more of a moment-to-moment checking in on how do I feel.

Because I think that relationship with ourselves is part of how we can have discernment. It's part how can listen to our, which is compass of intuition.

it's a foundational skill that's getting atrophied and I don't think these devices aren't doing us any favors in this respect. The only way we get to a sustainable health system is that much more of the responsibility has to fall on the individual than we have.

As long as it's always outsourced, it is going to cost too much and everything is gonna collapse. And there's not enough people to take care of all the people, you know what I mean?

At the levels of chronic illness that we so people have to have some more responsibility for themselves, otherwise you just end up with an unsustainable system.

I think that what you're talking about is a pathway And so I look forward to seeing, I guess, how things land on that way, because I know we're only really at the beginning of some of the data-informed care that can, you know, predict autistic meltdowns a week ahead of time.

because no one had really understood all of the different patterns and what affects what. And so I think there's potential in that. I agree that it's part of our interdependence that we have to make a priority to become less dependent on others for the whole system to work and for society to.

Magic, Grief, and Ongoing Connection

The subtitle of this book is The Psychiatrist's Case for Magic. experience with magic and how you would describe magic to a fellow practitioner or someone who might want to read the book and why that's a big part of this impulse to write this book at this time.

Yeah, I grew up in the suburbs of New York City and some of us grew with a lot of institutional religion in our lives. I did not have that. I grew in a very atheist, secular environment where the feeling on the street was we worshiped at the altar of science and skepticism was a virtue.

And so I was product of that culture and I thought, okay, I can perform that, and be intelligent in that way. I really did take that on as an identity.

It served me in certain ways, but it also foreclosed an openness to mystery. I was okay with a pretty light, diluted kind of pseudo-spirituality for a while, where I into skepticism and science, but also practicing yoga and chanting om.

But I held a lot of contradictions and it didn't matter to me. It was when my mom passed away suddenly, and this happened when I six months pregnant, that's when, I think loss has a way of demanding resolution.

I hold all these contradicting in terms of an openness to spirituality, but still a skepticism and an atheism. But when faced with loss, at least for me, what I felt like was that question of does my mom continue to exist in some form or is loss absolute?

I was stuck on that question and ultimately it cracked me open. And I just so, I found the idea that this is a material universe, death is random and senseless and the end is the End.

That view that I had been raised with was untenable in that moment. I wanted a worldview that could soften the ache of grief, that would make me believe that her spirit continues to exist in some form and I can continue to connect to it.

So I tried that on, it was almost an awkward fit at the beginning, but I find that once we open ourselves to that and become receptive to, that what rushes in is corroborating details, signs and synchronicities and what feels to me now, 11 years out, like a moment to moment constant ongoing.

connection with my mom. And the reason I'm a psychiatrist who wants to make a case for magic is that I see not only how that's helped my resilience and helped me feeling guided, feeling knowing how to find alignment with what contribution I am here to making, but I've also witnessed in my practice how it helps my patients.

It's not to say I mean practice proselytizing a certain belief system, that is not what it is at all. But I recognize that my field is squeamish about these topics.

And I was doing my patients a disservice by not creating space to contemplate the bigger questions of existence. And it's just permission to live those questions.

Then we land wherever we landed. But I noticed patients were missing out on the possibility of an ongoing connection with their lost loved ones. because it felt foolish or unfounded to them.

Or now I'm aware of the work of Dr. Lisa Miller out of Columbia who studies secular spirituality and its impacts on mental health and how we're having any type of spiritual worldview.

Doesn't have to be particular dog. Just any sense that there's something larger is protective against depression and suicidal ideation. And so this changes the way I practice medicine.

In a way that's not so evidence-based but is quite meaningful to me is that It also changes how I show up to a patient, whereas in the past it was humdrum, functional medicine-informed psychotherapy.

Now I am praying beforehand, I'm setting an intention, and if I find myself at an impasse with a patients or I feel stuck in some way, I ask for help from something beyond me and I find that it often enables a shift in the room or allows for some insight to come through.

And so I'm a different practitioner. I recognize that sometimes my patients need a spiritual inquiry when they're struggling, when their demoralized or disenchanted or despairing.

So I think we've been missing out on a lot of opportunities for magic and it's been doing us a disservice. Well, given the degree to which the success of the functional medicine paradigm requires the other person to fully participate for success, both in the short term and in long term, do you think it's reasonable to argue that the efficacy of your care in general goes up even though your know, by your own admission of not following the same evidence-based guidelines, even from functional medicine, because now you have someone that has adopted a worldview that can fully participate and the value of that participation goes above the, you know the randomized control trial for the medication or even the supplement that you might have recommended previously that the person would be relying on to do Ooh, I think not only we all just want to be seen, heard, and respected, but I also think when we as practitioners hold space for the full texture of someone's life, that helps them participate, engage, feel seen and understood in the treatment setting.

But I would argue, you said a couple minutes ago, how we need to take responsibility for our own health. And that, of course, is a controversial, complicated conversation to have.

I always used to say that thinking, who would ever disagree with this? I've now come to learn this can be

experienced as a political dog whistle, as something ableist or something denying systemic factors of oppression.

What I think is simultaneously that is all true and what is the both and, what's simultaneously true is that if we let that get us feeling stuck in a victim mentality, like we only harm ourselves, we still need to step forward with agency and authorship about how we take care of ourselves.

No one's coming to save us, certainly not allopathic medicine. And so I think that when we take on this type of worldview that this is not a senseless random material universe, but that there is something, there's guidance, that is, something we might even experience as benevolent.

It's not a spiritual bypass into everything happens for a reason, but I do find it helps people have a very resilient mindset where they can make meaning out of the unfoldings of their lives.

And it allows us to step into agency more readily, into authorship of our own lives where we recognize there's something meaningful happening here, there is guidance on tap, and I find that people are in a better position to take the steps to treat themselves well.

when the world feels a little bit less senseless and random in that way. Love that. What are some of the practices that you've adopted that, you would say, that patients can do to start to participate in this way?

I think part of what you're doing in the interview with this book is sort of creating a broader permission field for practitioners who may have felt this, but were embarrassed to talk about it, even maybe in their functional medicine conference, dinner time.

But now, hey, Alan Borah's doing it. Sounds cool. I've been doing bits of this anyway and now I feel okay to talk about it a little bit, so I like that.

But what are some of the ways that you've sort of broadened the permission field for the patient to engage in that way and what is some the practices that have you recommended?

Yeah, and even just on the practitioner front, so much of what we're doing as practitioners is getting better and better at listening. And sometimes we are listening through observing with our eyes.

Sometimes we listen just to the objective content in the room, what a patient is saying. biochemistry, but there's a lot to listen to in an interaction with a patient.

And you can watch their micro-expressions, you watch the saccades of their eyes, and you feel the feeling in the room. You can feel an energy sometimes in a room and I think all of these qualities of listening, these are things we can cultivate and these can make us more effective practitioners.

And it does start to seem a little witchy at certain points because you're picking up on things that maybe objectively we can't point to and say that's measurable, that occurring there, but we're taking up something and we are inclined to trust it.

I think that for patients, it's going to look completely different for everybody. You know, for me, I light a candle and I say a prayer before I start writing or I ask for help from guides.

But one thing that I really want for my patients is that they don't miss out. on an opportunity for an ongoing connection with their lost loved ones. And I think of a patient I had who lost her father when she was two years old, and she's in a bit of pendulum swing away from ways that Catholicism has harmed her.

So the idea of belief is a charged topic and doesn't feel comfortable. but she sometimes senses her father and then quickly dismisses it as that's foolish, that is unfounded, and I feel like she's been missing out on that ongoing connection.

So part of the work that we've done together is just help her open to that.

Collective Healing, Sovereignty, and True Nature

And it's not to say we know what the fundamental truth is. We don't know, she doesn't, I don' know. Nobody really knows. But if we're having a subjective experience of something salient, something uncanny, Something inexplicable, but it gives us comfort.

I think a little bit of permission to open to that and enjoy the benefits of it, whether or not we'll ever be able to prove that it is real. And so I just don"t want people to miss out if they are getting that subjective, experience, But they've been quick to dismiss it.

Maybe just that embodiment itself and presence, I think, are very critical tools that I want readers, patients, to give some energy to because I believe embodiments is part of how we, even with functional medicine, there's all these ways that the body whispers long before it begins to shout.

And sometimes patients washing up to shore in my office, their body is already shouting. And that's from sometimes decades of steamrolling over the quieter nudges from the body.

So the more embodied we are, the most we're listening and sensing and feeling into it and not just going through our lives from our neck up. I think that is how we catch our body saying, I need to rest," or, this food doesn't agree with me, or this job doesn' agree me.

So the more we can sense that and respond to it. And presence is a sprawling topic, but part of why I think presence so critical to this work is that we need integrity and we needs sovereignty.

This is especially true once we've gathered some power around our witchier, more magical listening. then we're going to be using this in the world and integrity ensures that we are using it for good and not for ill.

So we need to interrogate our motives. We need integrate our shadows. And we want to make sure that our actions are in alignment with our intentions. That's integrity.

But sovereignty is also critically important because we might have the best of intentions and even the most of integrity, but if we are not sovereign and handing over our power constantly or allowing ourselves to be influenced by outside forces that do not necessarily have our best interests in mind, it can really distort our powers and then we can start to operate from a way that's tainting our magic and so we need that sovereignty, which is something that comes up in how we feed ourselves and where we put our attention and our relationship to the phone and even our relationships to consumerism, all these ways that there's many forces around us that stand to benefit if they can stake claim to our life force, to where put time and attention, our energy and dollars.

Yeah. Well, some of that power is, you know, accentuated by the hyper individualization of society, right? Where you can't actually withstand the cultural poison by yourself, but groups of people learn how to withstand it.

And I think this is part of, you mentioned you thought that I was a bit witchy. Well, reading your book and understanding it, You talk about the difference of like, we have this hyper-individual society and the witching nature is the collective, the which serves the Collective.

I'd love to just jump into that as someone who wrote a book on community and grew up in community and it's like that's the theme of my work, you know, the through line.

I would just say one of the other things this reminds me of, I remember seven years ago driving with my wife through Croatia and we were listening to Alison Armstrong and she was talking about essentially There's sort of the journey that the man goes on.

The journey the woman goes and like the Man is the hunter, you know, single focus killing the animal and the

Woman is basically like collecting, um, You know is that is a gatherer and so has to have a like a broader view on the health of the collective, because that's the nature of those two.

And so it triggered in me a remembrance of that because ultimately, like, my wife and I have had dozens of conversations over the last seven years about that and coming back to, you know, I think it's been a journey for us over being married for 20 years of like seeing the world differently and that that is a strength, not a weakness, which can sometimes be the first thing that you have to get over.

Yes. Yeah. I mean, even if we just came at this from a very cut and dry evidence-based perspective, we are in the loneliness epidemic. We understand that social interaction is protective against dementia.

There's all these different ways that community is hardwired into us. We weren't the fastest species on the savanna. we weren' t the strongest species.we were the ones that figured out how to cooperate.

And that's why we We're able to prevail, but it also means that it's in our wiring that when we feel connected and a sense of belonging, we fell safe, feel well.

And when they feel isolated or disconnected or ostracized, it feels on some level like a matter of life or death. But that's the cut and dry perspective.

I think on a more spiritual level, if we step back and ask, like, what are we doing here? Like, what are we really doing here? I think a few answers feel unimpeachable to me, and one is, leave this place better than we found it.

And another is we're learning lessons about love, And both of those are keenly connected to the collective. How we leave place this better that we've found has to do with listening for our unique role in how we are meant to make our contribution to serve the Collective.

And that can feel weighty and like a lot of pressure. I actually find it's so joyous. It's saying you don't have to be anybody other than you who you are.

Its the icky guy idea of what are you passionate about? What are good at? what does the world need? That's where you're going to put your life force. And it usually is pretty liberatory to recognize that that's what's being asked of us.

We don t need to live somebody else's idea if the right life or the ambition. that we have a unique set of perspectives and skills and strengths and experiences that shape us to be able to carry out our unique contribution.

So we're here to serve the collective. We're to leave the place better than we found it. But I think we are also here learn about love and that's just my personal worldview is that this is earth school and maybe we all here as fractals of the same source energy, but here we've been exploded into an array of like a prism sets out a stream of white light into a rainbow.

We're having unique individual subjective experiences. Like I feel like I'm indigo. You feel you're purple. But then we are learning about love in a way that's, I think, in service of evolution of consciousness.

And so ultimately, we're one, connected, and man, our relationship is difficult. And man, is it hard to get along, but can we keep alchemizing, maybe that's not the right word, almost like distilling, burning off the impurities, the things that don't ultimately are not fully the frequency of the heart.

How do we burn that off? So what remains is, I am meeting someone from a place of compassion. And that's a lofty goal. We're not expected, we're meant to be batting 100 with that.

It's more that we are just keeping, continuously practicing getting toward that." Yeah, so I gave a keynote last week at a conference that was in London and it was called, the reason why I decided to speak at this conference was because the title was Reclaiming Our True Nature.

And straight away I was like, okay, I'm in a map because ultimately what I've seen in the men's work that I have done every week for the last seven years is that ultimately, what the collective allows us to do in that structure is like you can only understand yourself in context to others.

So, you know, when something happens that's small but triggers you significantly, then it's an opportunity to go inside and say, hey, why did I have a disproportionate reaction to that thing?

And then when you have the moment to unpack it with a process that is designed to pack it, What you start to realize is that, oh, this is a deep wound that came from some time before that I've been feeling and that's why, you know, This other person doing this thing is causing such a rupture inside of me that is disproportionate.

And if you have a moment to get into that and take it back, You start To realize what are the layers of stuff that i've taken on since, showed up here with most likely a joyous, creative, you know, connected energy.

And what are the, of others and societal pressures and, cultural norms and so forth that I've like put on top of myself that are not my true nature and how do I work my way out of it?

And ultimately, you know, I think that whether you're doing that with a psychiatrist, right, where you could obviously do that day-to-day with your patients, whether your doing it with Ben's group where that's part of the plan, that is a systematized structured way to achieve what you are talking about.

And that the evolution of consciousness in my mind to get back to that true nature and try and experience it consistently so that you'll know who you were.

I agree wholeheartedly. Awesome. Look, you know, one of the things I'm excited about is that, we continue to go in this sort of like parallel path every so often hanging out in Boulder or New York or wherever we end up or I think in LA at one point as well.

Closing Reflections and Podcast Outro

That's right. And I look forward to what's next because ultimately like this revolution hasn't quite happened yet and it's going to happen in our lifetime.

Like you said, the future's coming. And so I looked forward checking in with you regularly as we have done to see how you're seeing it because it informs my own opinion and informs the own way that I see the world.

I really feel strengthened towards the mission from spending time in your presence and your wisdom and to your wishiness. James, I always admire and appreciate the role you play in stewarding this revolution forward.

And they've assigned you a critical role in that ecosystem. I'm grateful for you for taking that call and showing up for it. Thank you so much. Well, look, if this has inspired you, the seasonal which might be something you want to have in your practice, maybe something, you know, reach for as a prescription, when things aren't going the way that you hoped with, with patient care or where you have a sort of an intuition that there's something deeper that we need to grab onto to get this patient to move in that right direction.

I think, even by having it in you're clinical office, You may create a new permission field for people to feel that like, Hey, it's safe for me to work with this practitioner.

Cause look at the book I saw in their library. So I hope that it can play that role for people as they read it, as the share it. Ultimately, part of what I wanted to reflect on is that the thesis of the sustainable healthcare system relies on people being more attuned to their own issues because no one can know it better than you.

And ultimately that's on all of us. So everyone who's listening to this, who is doing the Lord's work to facilitate that kind of embodiment or, you know, and whatever journey it takes, whether it goes through lab testing and wearables to a broader sense of self or whether It comes through a more spiritual lens.

This is the work that we're all engaged in, and this is a work of a lifetime. I witness and honor all of you who are engaged to that participation and thank you for being part of it here.

So, I've been here with Ellen Vora. She is an holistic psychiatrist. If you want to find out more of her work, we'll have all the details in the show notes, but the Season of the Witch is out now or very soon.

And grab a copy and get some for your practice. Thanks, Ellen, for beeing part the Evolution of Medicine podcast. Thanks for having me, James. All right.

Well, this has been the Evolution of Medicine podcast. I'm your host, Journeys allows you to set up your own lab offerings as the top of the funnel, give the patients what they want, they wanna know about themselves and it's the easiest way to bring them into your practice.

We have all types of practices from across the country that are building their own unique lab panels for their unique practices, selling them to their community and acting as a great funnel into their practice, this is a massive innovation.

I think this will accelerate the evolution of medicine. You can go to goevomed.com slash journeys to find out more, set up your own journeys in half an hour and transform the health of your community.

Go get it. So that was the podcast. What an epic session. Thank you so much for tuning in to the Evolution of Medicine podcast, we'll be back again next week and thanks so for much tuning and we will see you next time.