Opening and Guest Introduction

And there are other techniques where you just like… When we sigh, a sigh is our own mind and body naturally trying to just let go of tension. We know when someone annoys us, what do we do?

That is literally our body trying to let go of tension. So this is just an example of us realizing, especially when we have some kind of illness, we hold on to a lot of tension in our body.

And that tension also translates into tension in the gut as well which causes a lot of gut issues. So us regularly checking in with our bodies somatically, noticing where we're holding tension and learning to let go of tension enables to come back into our body, inhabit our body and feel safer in our body and that is part of the process of regulating our nervous system as the first step of…

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Now, let's go to Vitality Made Simple. Welcome to Vitality Made Simple. This is the podcast that equips you to feel better, look better, and to enjoy better relationships.

You know, we want to have the best relationships we possibly can. And when we feel good, we're going to have better relationships. We've got to have a healthy brain for that.

So today we have a neuroscience expert. Welcome Ashok Gupta. Thank you, Debbie. Thank you so much for the invitation. It's lovely to be here. Well, it's lovely to have you.

I have to tell my listeners that I practiced your name over and over, and I'm probably still saying it so wrong, but I respect that beautiful name, and I even found the meaning of your name.

Did you know your name means one without sorrows? Yes. Yes. Yeah. And what's interesting is we have the, obviously the Gupta program and Gupta actually means protector or defender.

So the actual Gupta program means that the protection program. So that's quite interesting, isn't it? That's fascinating. Now, I love the meaning of names.

My name is not quite so exciting. It means little B. So, you know, that's pretty appropriate. I think I like to buzz around and I'm very interested in a lot of different things.

So, you have dedicated your life to helping people navigate chronic illnesses. Now, tell us how that got started for you. Yeah, absolutely. So this journey started for me around 30 years ago.

And I was studying as an undergrad at Cambridge and I was living life to the full. I had lots of energy. So I was partying. I was doing the usual things you do at university, but then also studying hard and kind of pushing my body a little too much.

And often we see when people get chronic illness, In the one or two years before they get a chronic illness, there tends to be times when they've been pushing a bit too hard.

So I was certainly doing that. And I got some kind of virus and I didn't think much of it. You know, it's kind of a fluy cold virus with some gastrointestinal aspects.

And the virus seemed to go, but I seemed to feel worse and worse and worse to the point at which, you know, I'd

be looking at a textbook and I couldn't read the words on it.

I'd feel so exhausted just from the tiniest exertion. And it was so mysterious because I thought, well, why is this happening? And I thought it would go away, but it seemed to get worse and worse and worse.

So I really spiraled and couldn't continue with that year of education. And, you know, I'd go from doctor to doctor and I would say, you know, what's going on?

Like, why am I feeling so awful? And in those days, ME or chronic fatigue syndrome wasn't really recognized so much. And they would say, well, we don't know what you have.

We don't know what to call it. We have no treatment for it. You might have it for the rest of your life. There's nothing we could do. Goodbye. And you can imagine for a young man, that is just like unbelievable.

Ashok Guptau2019s Origin Story

Like how could this possibly be happening? And I met so many others, hundreds of others actually, who were suffering in similar ways. Literally a few weeks later, I was in a bookstore in Cambridge and there was one book just jutting off the shelf.

So this is, you know, pre-internet days where, well, the internet was around, it wasn't very sophisticated. So we actually used to read books and articles and things.

And it was in the self-help section and there's a neurology section, mind-body section. And there was one book that jutted off the shelf. It was a neurology book that was called The Emotional Life of the Brain by Professor Joseph Ledoux.

I read that book and I was like, wow, this actually holds a secret to what I think might be going on in these illnesses. I wrote a hypothesis and in ad hoc way, I managed to retrain my brain, got 100% well, And then set up a clinic to treat others and publish my hypothesis in Medical Journal in 2002. Then set up a clinic to treat others.

So I did a lot of one-on-one work with people with fatigue, but pain and other chronic conditions that doctors don't seem to have answers for. And then in 2007, we were the first brain retraining neuroplasticity program to publish.

And in this 30 year journey since then, we've published seven independent clinical medical trials. I have lots of research evidence now. Now we're an app.

and a full on program with, you know, probably 50,000 people who've experienced it. So that's been the 30 year journey from my own illness, from my own challenges, from that purpose to passion.

And yeah, that's where we are. Oh, purpose to passion. I love that. So, you know, when you think about these chronic illnesses, of course you think about healthy food, you think about exercise, you think about rest.

But nobody really talks about brain retraining. Ashok, it was a new area. I actually came across your information in an integrative medicine journal. There was an excellent interview that you had a conversation actually about long COVID.

So I will actually post that link in the show notes for people. But that's part of all this. Long COVID is still an issue. I'm still seeing patients who are telling me they're suffering from long COVID died into that and your method of dealing with long COVID.

Sure. Yeah, absolutely. So I think that the first port of call here is really to understand what on earth causes these mysterious illnesses. Because unless we have an explanation of what causes it, it's very difficult to approach it.

And as you say, naturally, if somebody has chronic fatigue syndrome or fibromyalgia or long COVID or mold illness

or some of these inflammatory diseases, Generally, the first port of call will be, well, it must be my diet.

It must be supplements that I need. Maybe there's some medications, maybe some lifestyle changes. And that's natural. And I would like to go through a hypothesis as to what might be causing these conditions, which might help us understand that actually perhaps brain retraining is an integral part of that overall protocol.

It's not an either or, but it's part of that holistic way of approaching it. So I always like to start this explanation with the biggest question of all, why are we here?

Now, that could be a lovely philosophical conversation about the meaning of life. But let's say, why are we here from an evolutionary biology perspective?

Well, we're here because over millions of years, this brain, this body, this nervous system, and this immune system have evolved to adapt to our environment, protect us from dangers, help us survive and pass on our genes to the next generation.

So we are survival machines and our brain and our body, our nervous system prioritizes survival over well-being. So that's our kind of first clue as to what causes these conditions.

So survival is number one priority. And now in the modern world, we aren't living according to our genetic and biological inheritance. So for millions of years, we would live in small villages, communities, tribes.

We would never be lonely. We'd be outdoors in fresh air. We'd be eating organic food. And we wouldn't have the stresses and strains that we have in modern life and the modern threats that we have continually on our nervous system.

Fast forward to the modern world. We now live in boxes, stare at screens, sedentary lifestyle, eating and breathing toxic food and air, and essentially getting stressed and competing with everyone in the world.

So you can see how now the brain perceives that we've got a lot more threats coming our way than we have in previous generations. Now imagine that if the body is overloaded through stress, that could be emotional stress, physical stress, toxic stress.

Imagine we call it the kind of bucket analogy. So imagine there's a certain amount of stress in this glass that your body can handle. So that's emotional stress, might be childhood trauma, could be toxic threats, could be physiologically you're overdoing it.

You've had a lot of pathogens in your body. You've had a lot of viruses. The more and more this builds up, when it flows over the edge, then we get into a chronic illness.

That was the kind of idea of overwhelm. And therefore, our system is primed to become ill when we are overwhelmed with too many stresses. So then let's take the example of long COVID, because you mentioned that.

Now, when the COVID virus, let's say, comes along to somebody whose immune system's a little weaker, they may actually, like normal people, fight off the virus.

So the immune system goes on, the nervous system goes on, fight off the virus, come back to baseline. It switches off once it's fought off the virus. But imagine if the system gets stuck in the on position.

So the virus goes away, it's managed to fight off long COVID-19. But imagine if the immune system now gets stuck in the on position. And once it gets stuck in the on position, then It would feel like the virus is still present.

The body will still be ramping up the immune system, ramping up the nervous system, causing lots of inflammation in the body, which uses up the body's energy and then can create all the symptoms of long COVID.

Because when we think of, let's say having a flu virus, we think, oh, that nasty flu virus is causing all these symptoms in my body. But as we know, it's not the virus that is causing the symptoms.

It is our own immune response that is causing the symptoms. And Debbie, if I may use an analogy, which a lot of people find very useful to try and understand this hypothesis.

So imagine you are Queen Debbie of your kingdom. Queen Bee. Queen Bee of your kingdom. It has a nice ring to it. So imagine you are Queen Bee of your kingdom and your kingdom is your body.

And you as the queen are the prefrontal cortex, so the rational, logical mind.

How Chronic Illness and Long COVID May Work

And you look after your kingdom. And imagine now that the kingdom is weaker because of the drought in the kingdom. So because of the drought, the kingdom is weaker.

And you have two key defenders of your kingdom. Now I've got a couple of little props here. You have the army, represented by this guy. So there's the army generals.

That's your nervous system. And you have your Navy, which is your immune system. Your army and Navy defend your kingdom. Now, imagine that because of the drought, the army and Navy guys, their whole teams are weaker as a result.

And in comes an invading army over the hill to invade your kingdom. Now that invader could be COVID. It could be another virus. It could be bacteria. It could be mold.

be pain. Anything that invades your body and causes pain. All of these different things come over the hill as invading army. And your army and navy think, wow, we really need to defend Queen Bee's kingdom at all costs.

So they fight valiantly against the invader, and they think they fought off the invader, but they're not sure. You know, because they are weak, weaker than normal.

They think, I wonder if the army is still hiding behind the hill. I wonder if the army is still in the forest. So as a result, they keep firing off their weapons of war just in case the invaders around.

But the more and more they fire off their weapons of war, the more and more some of those weapons fall back into the kingdom. And that then causes the inflammation in the body, the inflammation in the brain, because that's the immune inflammation that can cause fatigue, exhaustion.

And the weaker and weaker the body gets, the more and more they fight off, they fire off their weapons of war because they think we're weak. We need to keep fighting, keep fighting, keep fighting.

So they fire off more and more weapons. And as they fire off more and more weapons, then opportunistic infections now start flourishing in the kingdom.

The spies, to extend the analogy, the spies in the kingdom start flourishing. So we have more opportunistic infections. Detoxification systems shut down.

So we're not detoxifying the kingdom. So the kingdom now gets full of sewage in the system. So it can no longer work effectively. And more and more resources keep getting channeled to the army and navy, because every time they have their weekly meeting with Queen B, They say, Queen B, we need all the resources of the kingdom.

And you think, well, they've got to defend the kingdom, so they get all the water, the wheat, the corn. So less and less resources available for energy in general, more and more resources going to triggering the immune system and nervous system.

And that whole lack of homeostasis is what we see in these conditions. And that means that then a person is exhausted, tired, sore throats, can't function correctly, sensitive and reactive to the environment, has opportunistic infections, gut dysbiosis.

The gut is not working correctly. There's detoxification issues. And all of that we think might be coming from the gut. But I want people to think about, could it be coming from the brain itself?

Because the brain, these two guys, have decided to keep defending the kingdom. And we believe this is in two brain structures, which I'll talk about later.

So what do we do now? These guys, once they've made their decision that we're still in danger, will keep firing off their weapons of war, immune and nervous system over response.

But what happens is brain retraining is when you come to their weekly meeting with Queen B, they say, we need all the resources. We need all the resources.

And you as the Queen say, my dear generals, thank you for doing a wonderful job at defending the kingdom, but the war is over. You can stand down. they won't believe you the first time or the second time or the third time because they'll think it's a trick.

need to be cajoled, persuaded over time that the threat is over, the war is over. And that is where neuroplasticity comes in, that we have to keep telling them again and again and again through repetition that the war is over and they can stand out.

So in our work, in our brain retraining, we have these special mechanisms by which we can access the unconscious, access these unconscious parts of our brain that are overfiring train them to calm down and the whole body can go back to homeostasis and balance.

And that in a nutshell is our hypothesis. Yeah. I really like that metaphor. That's fantastic. Now, it reminds me of the Hebbian law. One of my favorite dead guys is Donald Hebb.

About 100 years ago, he hypothesized and was right that neurons that fire together, wire together. So whatever thoughts people, as you know, as you're going to explain, people have repetitively, they actually become unconscious thoughts because those super highways are in the brain.

So I would think, Ashok, that your program is going to help people, you know, get new roads built. Correct? That's exactly what we are doing. Yes. So the analogy that we have is imagine You're giving the example of roads.

We use the analogy of rivers. So imagine how a river is formed. So if there's water falling on a mountain, what happens? It's not that the water all cascades off the soil, it creates river channels.

So there's river channels that occur down the side of the mountain. Those are our repetitive habits of thinking and responding to the world around us, those river channels.

So imagine you've got a river channel in a field and that river channel says, stimulus is symptoms in my body. Interpretation is, I've still got COVID, COVID is still here.

The response is let's trigger the immune system and nervous system. So that is like a river channel, stimulus interpretation response model. So the stimulus is there and the more and more water flows, the more and more it digs that channel.

And what we want to do is we want to dig a different channel and reroute the river. So instead of the river going down this left-hand channel and triggering the immune and nervous systems, we want it to actually go into a place of safety.

And so we dig a new river channel. But how do we div that river channel? Because the ground is frozen. The first thing we have to do is thaw the ground.

We have to loosen up the soil because it's all frozen and solid. So the first thing we do to help neuroplasticity and dig those new pathways is to relax the nervous system.

Because if the nervous system is tight, anxious, hyperreactive, then unfortunately it's not open to new learning. So we start digging a new channel firstly by loosening the soil.

relaxation. Then we start digging that river pathway and the water starts flowing down that new pathway. But if we're not consistent, the water will sometimes go back to the old pathway again.

So we have to keep digging it again and again and again. And that's the idea of neurons that fire together, wire together. It is constantly digging these new channels, these new patterns.

Yep. So eventually all the water now starts flowing down the right-hand path and none of the water is flowing down the left-hand path. And what also happens is sometimes the left hand path gets stuck because there have been two things happening at the same time.

So when we're ill, we have the virus, let's say COVID-19, and we have triggering of the immune system as a result of that. But we also have physical symptoms in the body, the third factor.

Now imagine if the brain suddenly makes a decision, it's our immune system here. Not only is COVID-19 an indication that I need to trigger the immune system, but all the while I'm having physical symptoms in my body.

Maybe the physical symptoms in my body… are characteristic of COVID-19 still being around. So now anytime I discover physical symptoms in the body like fatigue, exhaustion, tiredness, that's a proxy for COVID-19 being here.

So now I must also trigger the immune system as well. So that summarises your point that neurons that fire together wire together. The idea that I have symptoms in my body is another neuron firing at the same time as the immune system's firing.

So they get locked together and the body starts reacting to itself. So the immune system triggers creating the symptoms in the body. Those symptoms loop back to the immune system.

The immune system says, I knew it. I knew we're in danger. Trigger the immune system, creating all the symptoms in our body, fatigue, exhaustion. Those symptoms loop back.

round and around we go. So an acute illness then turns into a chronic illness. And that's one of the mechanisms there. Oh, Shook, is that partly because your brain is telling your body, oh, COVID's back?

Or, you know, I mean, your brain is triggering that. For example, what this makes me think of is one of my very favorite aunts, if she heard, you know, bad news or she was worried about something, she would suddenly have diarrhea.

And like, you know, she didn't have a GI problem. without that mental thought process of, ah, you know, I'm in danger. I mean, you know, so we talk about the gut-brain axis, and of course I'm looking at it from the oral gut-brain axis, but you're sort of going the other direction.

Correct. And I think all directions, yes, because I think there is definitely these cycles and mechanisms. So the gut is impacting on the brain. The brain is impacting on the gut.

The mouth and the oral microbiome is impacting on the brain and around and around. That's another cycle. So these things happen in cycles. And as you say, we also have to take into account the emotional components of this.

So traditionally, medicine has been very reductionist and say, right, psychology department over here, immunology department over here, gastroenterology over here.

And it's a completely artificial separation because the brain doesn't work like that. The brain says, are we in danger? What's the response? And so now we suddenly understand, well, there's the gut-brain axis.

So the gut gets disrupted. It affects the brain. The brain then affects the gut. So all of these systems are working together for protection. And as you say, someone might get really anxious and we even call it butterflies in the stomach.

And that can directly tighten up the, um, the intestines, the guts, uh, cause leaky guts can cause dysbiosis, can cause all the other challenges, sensitivities, inflammation, just simply through the emotional systems, which then can loop back to the brain.

And we know for instance, 50% of depression cases are in fact cases of over inflammation rather than purely, purely depression. So it shows us that yes, as you say, there are so many different mechanisms contributing to the chronic diseases that we see in the modern world.

And ultimately the gut is involved and having a good diet and all these great things is so, so important. And we recommend those things as well. And can we go up stream as far as possible to the brain to say what's going upstream?

What's the brain actually doing here? And can we train it to let go? As I understand your program, which I understand just a little bit at this point, you differentiate the brain from the mind, correct?

So explain that to our listeners.

Brain Retraining, the Amygdala, and the Insula

Yes, we think this is an important distinction because so many people who have these chronic diseases and illnesses, inflammatory illnesses, have been told that it's all in your mind.

when we say the word mind, it sounds like the illness is psychological, in the sense that the person is making it up. or that it's psychosomatic in terms of it's not a real physiological condition.

And what we're saying is no, actually it's not just in the mind in the sense of the consciousness and the psychology, but actually it's in the brain itself.

The brain itself has materially different changes in the physiological brain. And therefore these are real illnesses where the wiring of the brain is shifted.

And therefore it's not blaming then the patient for it. And that's, I think, a very, very important distinction that these are illnesses that have come because the unconscious brain has unfortunately trained itself to hyperreact.

And how can we control that and change that? Yes, I like that distinction, the unconscious brain. So you're talking about the amygdala, the area that we think we have no control over.

But indeed, through your research and your clinical experience, you've found that people can have a lot of control over that. So when someone comes to see you, what are some of the first things you do?

Yeah. So you mentioned the structure of the brain called the amygdala. And we focus on two structures, the amygdala and the insula that we need to retrain.

And so the amygdala, I'm sure a lot of your audience already know, these are two almond shaped structures that sit behind our eyes. And their role is to take in the incoming information from the senses and decide if we're under

threat.

and in danger. And that's where emotions are often triggered. So fear is an emotional protection. Anger is an emotional protection against threats. And then the insula, that's not actually part of the limbic system, but the insula sits in the cortex part of the brain and its job is to take in all the incoming information from the body and the senses and the immune system, integrate it and create the appropriate physiological response in terms of the autonomic nervous system.

And we now know the immune system. And so those two brain structures are essentially always monitoring our environment and making sure that we stay safe and that we survive.

And in terms of that retraining, the first thing that we want to do, as we mentioned, we've got to loosen up the soil. So that's when we first help a patient understand the hypothesis.

And you know, many patients or many clients of ours, when they just understand the hypothesis, that helps them just, ah, okay, there's a logical explanation for what's going on.

I'm not being attacked by something mysterious that I can't control. And the first R of the program, we've got three Rs, but the first R is regulating the nervous system.

So that's when we use breathing techniques, meditation techniques, relaxation techniques to loosen up the soil and help someone relax their nervous system.

Once the soil is loose, then the second avenue or the second R of the program is retraining the brain. And that's where we have these specialized techniques to train a client to recognize when their brain is about to over respond.

So when it's about to trigger the immune system, about to trigger the nervous system, how we can stop it in its tracks and calm down that reactivity and those reactions.

And that's the second part of the program. And so we have lots of different techniques, something called somatic retraining. So we retrain the brain through awareness of physiological body, which we train the brain in terms of a special seven step process that we have.

We have another technique called the accelerator technique. So these are all designed to target these unconscious defense mechanisms in the brain, stop them in their tracks.

And the third R of the program is what we call re-engaging with joy. And what this means is that for someone to stay well, not only get well and retrain their brain, but stay well, they have to recognise their stress triggers.

So many of us aren't aware that we are constantly having reactions to our environment because of aspects of our personality. There are certain parts of our personality, certainly personality traits that can mean that our nervous system can be up and down.

And we need to learn to regulate through observing why we react to our environment, why we react to people. And then as we regulate that nervous system long-term, we can connect to more of that inner joy.

And that process then enables us not only to retrain our brain and get well, but also stay well. Because I'm sure Debbie, in your clinic, you've seen this where you'll do some amazing work with a client.

You'll do, you know, the suite of things that you do, the diet, the supplements, the lifestyle things, exercise, and someone will improve and get well.

But then there might be another stress that comes into their life. It could be end of a relationship. It could be overworking. It could be anything. And suddenly all of the symptoms can come flooding back in a slightly different way.

And then you're beginning all of those processes and protocols again to try and unearth what's going on. And that often is because when we suddenly become dysregulated again, some of those old pathways are still dormant and can re-trigger some of the symptoms.

I agree. I think also people have to know that their comfort zone does not have to be that illness. It becomes often their identity. So you're helping them know, I don't have to live this way.

it could be different. So let's go back through those three R's. So the first R is that you're going to teach them relaxation techniques. So give us an example of say a breathing technique that somebody could do right now.

Yeah, so there are many different breathing techniques that people can engage in. And we can do one now, if you like, for a couple of minutes, so you can kind of get the experience of this.

So we mentioned that our nervous system is triggered. That was the army general who's looking after us through triggering the nervous system. And many of us aren't aware of how triggered our nervous system actually is.

So this is kind of a semisomatic breath work technique, but if we close our eyes, And we just tune into our body. Can we notice that we sometimes are holding on tightly to our body?

Maybe our shoulders are tense. Maybe we're actually holding onto our pelvis tighter than we expected. Or our legs are tight. And what we're going to do is we just observe that in a moment, we're going to take a deep breath in and as we breathe out, we're going to imagine just loosening up body and consciously letting go.

Okay, so notice that resistance that you've got, you're almost tensing up against your body. Let's take a slow deep breath in. Hold the breath, slightly tense up your body even more and let go.

Drop your shoulders, loosen your body, loosen your arms, loosen your legs and smile. Just imagine you're letting go. Keeping our eyes closed, let's take another slow, deep breath in.

Observe a tightness in our body, in our limbs, in our muscles and let go. Just drop your body like a rag doll and notice that feeling. Let's take another deep breath in from the stomach through the nose.

Hold the breath. And now we're going to slowly breathe out through the nose with a smile, loosening the body as we do so. And we'll do it one more time.

Let's take a slow, deep breath in. Observe any remaining tightness in your body. And let go. With our eyes closed, just notice Have we been able to sink into our body a little more?

Have we been able to let go of the tensing up and the resistance that our body has to this present moment? Just observe what is different in our body right now.

Let's take a normal breath in and breathe out. And when we're ready, we can just gently open our eyes. That was beautiful. Thank you. Thank you for taking us through that fully.

The Three Rs: Regulate, Retrain, Re-engage

I kept opening my eyes thinking it was almost over. And it was so nice and relaxing. I actually feel a decreased tension in my neck. You know, that's what takes beating.

in my world. So thank you. And that's something every listener can do at home several times a day. Ashok, I've never seen anybody have you release the breath suddenly.

That's new for me. Yes. So there are many different breathing techniques for different situations. And essentially there can be breathing techniques where you just go, you breathe out slowly through the nose with a controlled breath and that has a certain type of relaxation.

And there are other techniques where you just like, like, you know, it's when you always sigh, a sigh is our own mind and body naturally trying to just let go of tension.

We know when someone annoys us, What do we do? That is literally our body trying to let go of tension. So this is just an example of us realizing, especially when we have some kind of illness, we hold onto a lot of tension in our body.

And that tension also translates into tension in the gut as well, which causes a lot of the gut issues. So us regularly checking in with our bodies somatically, noticing where we're holding tension and learning to let go of tension.

enables to come back into our body, inhabit our body and feel safer in our body. And that is part of the process of regulating our nervous system as the first step of brain retraining.

The first R. So then the second R is going to be to recognize When retrain the brain. Yeah. So recognizing the patterns and people might say, well, hang on, actually, this sounds a bit mysterious.

Our immune system is automatic. It's just responding to bacteria and viruses and toxins. How on earth can we can directly control the immune system? That doesn't make sense.

So I want to give you a very simple analogy here that helps us understand how we can control our unconscious responses. So imagine everybody, I've got a lemon.

And I want you to, and we're going to do a little exercise where I don't want you to salivate at all because it's not real. So I take a slice of this lemon and imagine this really tangy lemon.

I'm just going to place this on your tongue. So everyone at home, just placing this lemon on your tongue, but don't bite into it yet. Ooh, very sour, isn't it?

All of a sudden, very sour, but don't salivate because it's not real. very, very sour, that tangy, tangy lemon. And now you bite into that lemon. Oh, wow.

Now it's creating saliva in your mouth, but don't salivate because it's not real. And it's really tangy, really, really tangy. Right. So Debbie, have you noticed any extra…

Oh, yeah. Yeah, I'm going to have to swallow really big. It's so true. And I think the power of our brain is just incredible. I think we're designed to have so much more control over our environment than we do.

The power of life and death is in the tongue. I'm always talking to my patients. I shook about Like, don't take these word curses from your physician or from your family member or from your friend or whatever.

You decide what you're going to think. This is exactly kind of what you're talking about too, is we can be real if we think on it too much, it becomes real.

And I think that's the really interesting thing here, isn't it? That I was able to create a physiological response in you and unconscious, because normally saliva is not something that we have control over.

I was able to create a response in you, even though you knew it's not real and you try to resist it. So imagine if we took those same mechanisms and we could control the immune system through those unconscious signals.

And that's what we do in the program is teach a person to recognize when they're about to trigger immune and nervous system responses, which have got tied together and retrain them.

Tell the brain that we are safe. We are no longer in the presence of that pathogen. or that pain or that mold or whatever, and they can calm down, come back to baseline.

And that's what we do. And that requires repetition of that commitment to train the brain, because this is a protective response. Your brain thinks it's doing what it needs to do in order to help you survive.

So you're retraining a survival mechanism. And that's why it takes repetition and belief in what you're doing. Well, and then that brings us to that third R, which I may be saying it wrong, but it recaptured joy.

It's about joy. And I think in terms of survival, joy's, you know, really on the back row, but joy should be moved up to the front row. So talk about that.

Yes, exactly. So many of us in our modern world, we're living in this kind of fight or flight mode, this survival mode. Debbie, I don't know if you noticed this, but so many people these days are almost on the edge of burnout continuously, which they weren't, I think, 10 years ago.

I think it wasn't like that. And, you know, when I think about this, a lot of this is down to the modern way that we are living our lives. and something you mentioned, you know, before we started this chat, which was around social media and our screens.

that normally when we have difficulties in life, we sit down and we reflect on what we're thinking, we reflect on our emotions, the default mode network, we're daydreaming, we're processing.

But nowadays, the moment we have an uncomfortable emotion, we reach for our phones, we reach for social media, we reach for scrolling mindlessly. And the impact that that's having is our nervous system can never relax.

We're not processing and reflecting on life. And that then causes lots of secondary issues. So I think that the idea of re-engaging with joy is saying, let me recognize my stress triggers.

And a lot of it is also around our personality traits. So some personality traits we observe is overachieving, people pleasing. over rescuing the people around us, being a martyr to the people around us, not feeling good enough, you know, approval seeking and therefore feeling that stress and tension in the body.

So when we feel that stress and tension of not feeling loved, not feeling good enough, feeling that we're in an unsafe environment, then that means we can't re-engage with joy and our nervous system is tense on edge, always looking for the next challenge that is going to come.

And that's why so many people are living on the edge of burnout. But if we learn to regulate those aspects of our personality, those aspects of our nervous system, we can re-engage with joy and then life becomes what we all really want, which is just to be happy and live joyfully and live with gratitude.

So these are all ways which we encourage our clients to then stay well in the longer term. That is so key because people have to almost give themselves permission to have joy in our world.

We live in this world of mirrors where people are comparing themselves to other people all the time. And I tell my patients if they're overworking, you know, money never made anybody rich.

I mean, That's the truth. It might be time in the garden. I mean, it's relationships. It's just laughter, dance, whatever gives a person joy. But I so appreciate that that's part of your program.

That's not in a pill. You don't get joy in a pill, a supplement or a pharmaceutical. And that's why we see a lot of the time that someone might heal from one type of illness, but then they go on to getting another type of illness.

because we're just pushing these systems in different directions, but ultimately the dysregulation of our immune and nervous system is now responsible, I think, for the majority of modern conditions that we see is dysregulation in those two systems.

We estimate 60% of the illnesses that someone goes to see a doctor for are actually issues of brain rewiring. So if

we think of pain, and there's a lot of literature now showing that long-term pain actually isn't structural, it's actually the pain networks themselves overfiring and dysfunctional.

We see obviously a lot of these fatigue illnesses, stress, anxiety, panic, depression, and then even a lot of these inflammatory diseases, we talked about long COVID and fibromyalgia, pain disorders.

And then of course, these environmental illnesses like mold illness that we see so much more of. And then even lots of things like eczema where the immune system itself is dysregulated.

All of these illnesses aren't because of infectious diseases, but they're because our own immune system is now getting dysregulated and causing it's over-responding in our inflammatory environment.

And so we can take, we can, there's lots of great work that can actually heal a lot of those things like diet, like supplements, like exercise. They can certainly help, but in certain severe cases, it's actually the brain will not retrain just through those mechanisms and require something a little more direct.

Well, there's so much good research about natural killer cells and how they improve with joy, how they improve with humor, how they improve with, you know, creativity.

I mean, these are immune cells for our listeners that directly impact everything Ashoka is talking about. But, you know, they improve or they degrade based on these emotional issues.

Absolutely. And I think that as we learn these connections between our emotions, our ways of dealing with the world and then illnesses that come, when we see those connections, then we start taking responsibility for our own health versus thinking that the body randomly goes wrong and we go see our doctor and they give us some biomedical agents that somehow solve it at the the smallest level, the reductionist level.

And it's really that whole mind body spirit healing. And that's the thing in our program. We, I think long-term healing has to come from all the different levels.

So we know that, of course, at the physical level, we need to heal the body in terms of the diet, supplements, sleep, et cetera. But then there's the emotional level of healing.

There's the mental level of healing. If we have overthinking, rumination, then there's a spiritual level of healing in terms of how are we in relation to ourselves and the world around us?

Are we feeling like we live in an unsafe world? Then no matter, no manner of healing is going to heal that core issue. And then finally, even energetic healing.

So for a long term healing, we find that people have to address all of these different levels to make sure that they, as we say, get well and stay well.

Well, and you're giving people hope, which is another one of those factors that really matters. I talk to people that they'll come in and they'll say, well, Dr.

Debbie, I'm a cancer patient, or I'm a diabetic, or they're labeled, they've accepted that identity from their doctor. And I'm like, no, you aren't. Go stand in front of the mirror and repeat after me.

And I make them say, you know, I am a child of the living God. My body's designed to heal. And it's not one thing. You know, one thing I think it was in your conversation in the medical journal about you look at this as sort of a soup and there's a lot of ways to make soup.

And there's not just one single recipe, but you're going to need some of those, you know, basic areas that have to be touched to have a good soup. Yeah, absolutely.

That holistic aspect, you know, is so important. And you mentioned the medical journal, I think, It's so important that these days, people are bombarded with so many different quick fixes and cures on Instagram and YouTube and all manner of types of things.

And I think for us, what's really been important has been the medical research. So we want to make sure that this isn't just theory, but we have medical studies that back this up.

We've now conducted seven medical studies on this, six of which are independent, five of which are randomized controlled trials. And they've all shown really powerful results as initial studies in terms of this type of approach.

And so whether it's long COVID, fibromyalgia, mold illness, all these mysterious illnesses, I think we are beginning to see now what causes them, what interventions can improve them.

And I'm just really hoping we can raise more funds for larger scale studies so that we can finally prove this to medical professionals. What comes to mind when you think about the most amazing thing you've seen in your clinic in terms of healing?

Breathing, Somatic Awareness, and Repetition

I mean, so many stories I can share with you over the years, but the most poignant memory I have is a gentleman in New Zealand who was using our program because it's an app and all online.

And he was 82. Now, when you're 82, of course, it's very difficult to tell what is coming from a chronic inflammatory condition, what might be coming from natural old age, other kind of degenerative diseases, what is causing what.

And he had had fibromyalgia, mold illness, Lyme disease, a whole bunch of gut issues for 30 years. Had never been able to work, hadn't been able to really enjoy his life.

And he was very depressed by that all. And he started using our program and within six months he was up to an 80, 85% recovery. And we were amazed and we thought, this is amazing.

You know, we normally think that the older someone gets, their brain is less neuroplastic. And it turns out, no, the brain is constantly rewiring itself.

If you really want to learn something new, you want to learn the piano as you're 80, if you really are dedicated, you can do it. You can still create those pathways.

And I said to him, what are you going to do now? You know, you're 82 and you've got your health back. And he said, oh, I'm going to travel the world. I'm going to go to all the places in the world I've always wanted to go.

I'm going to enjoy my life. I'm going to make up for every single moment where I was at home. And I thought, wow, isn't that amazing that if somebody has that dedication at the age of 82 to retrain their brain, get their life back, I believe that, I'm not going to say everybody, but I believe that most people with these conditions, with that commitment, we can get them back onto the good path.

So that was a really lovely story. Oh, wonderful. And when people keep their purpose, you know, as sort of their guide, I know from my perspective, their God given purpose has to kind of guide them wanting to get well.

And, you know, these habits, these retraining neuroplasticity habits, these physical habits, then, you know, then they get to see the culmination of living out their purpose, whatever it is.

Absolutely. And as you say correctly, that purpose, having purpose in life is one of the most important things to help regulate our stress levels. Because if we're just wandering aimlessly in life, the mind has nothing to focus on.

And when it doesn't have something to focus on, it defaults. to worry and anxiety. That's such an important aspect.

And I think also it's, what do people believe in?

In the sense that in our program, we're not from any particular tradition. We're just about scientific tradition of getting people well. But we help people to connect with their version of their religion, their spirituality, or if they're an atheist, what do they believe in?

We all believe in love. Love is that universal concept that all of us as human beings can connect on and agree on. So we have many Christians who use our program and connect with Jesus and see that as part of their purpose and their healing methodology.

We have people from all different religious backgrounds and we ask them, what is your representation of love? What is your representation of connection to something higher?

And you connect with that and that can help you and support you in healing and gives you purpose, gives you meaning. in life, and that can also support our physical healing.

Yeah, it really does. It's, you know, I'm coming from the Christian standpoint, but, you know, be transformed by the renewal of your mind. And that's what you're helping people do in a very practical sense, very scientifically based sense, something They can do at home, on an app, anywhere in the world, right?

That's fantastic. The podcast is in over 140 countries. And so anybody listening out there, it's really funny. Ashok, this comes out at 3 a.m. on Tuesdays, Central Time.

But the first people that listen are in Australia, always. So, you know, it's wonderful to meet someone like you who can reach the whole world with your work.

Thank you for that. Thank you, Debbie. Thank you for your kind words. And you mentioned actually people in Australia, and something that's very important in our program is the idea of community.

Because when we heal in community, that's much more powerful than us healing at home. And the way we generate community healing is through a number of different ways.

So we have weekly webinars, we have like a few hundred people who come on those webinars, and everyone can see each other in the community. if they choose to.

And then we have breakout rooms where you can go into the breakout rooms, meet other people and develop bonds, have buddies. So that's an important part of community.

We have a forum as well. But the game changer for us has been actually the daily sessions. So live on Zoom, five days a week, Monday to Friday, we have live calls for nervous system regulation and brain retraining.

And that has been a game changer for many people. Because sometimes we're at home, we're demotivated, we don't know if we're going to do any activity today that supports our health.

But if we know at this time, there's a Zoom call every day, jump on, we'll take care of you, we'll go through everything. Then it creates that sense of commitment with people.

And it is that repetition that makes this work. And that has been a game changer. So I think healing in community with others has always been an important tradition in every tribe, in every civilization, we've always had healing in community.

And I think that's an important aspect of this as well. Absolutely. It always comes back to relationships. You know, it always does. That's why we want to feel good.

That's what gives us joy. So often are the relationships in our life or what gives us pain. So that is really interesting

that you're forming a community that people can know they get to tune in with like-minded people every single day.

Community, Access, and Closing Remarks

Well, thank you for being here. Tell our listeners how they can find you, how they can access your program. I will put things in the show notes, but tell us all about it.

Yeah, absolutely. So people can come to our website, which is GuptaProgramme.com. So G-U-P-T-A-Programme.com. And there they can sign up for a free trial and there's no credit card required or anything.

And there with a free trial, they'll get videos, they'll get audios, they'll get lots of free information that they can look through. And then if that is something that they connect with and they want to go through our full program, then they can upgrade to the full program, which involves, as I said, the daily sessions, the weekly sessions, the community, the videos and the audios and a complete sanctuary of support for healing.

And that's a one year subscription that they get. And until we get the large scale trials, we offer a one year money back guarantee on the treatment. So people can buy it, go through it all, use it as much as they want.

And after six months, if they have no improvement or we don't even check, if you just want to return it, return it, have your money back, use that for something else.

So people have got nothing to lose by giving this approach a go and seeing how it can improve their health. Well, and that shows integrity and that shows how much you believe in what you're doing.

And then you've seen results. If you weren't having results, you know, you would not be giving people's money back. So that's impressive. Exactly. And, you know, it's something where, as I said, as we keep refining the program, so we keep getting feedback from our clients, we keep improving, improving, improving, improving.

And it comes to a stage where then as we get these larger scale studies, we want this to be embedded into healthcare systems. So imagine the first time you get long COVID or the first time you get pain that you can't explain, instead of going through the medical system and spending 10, 20 years not having understanding of what's going on, if you've got this treatment straight away, then how many wasted lives and wasted years would we be able to save for getting them through neuroplasticity?

Yeah. Healthcare from the top down. That is awesome. That's fantastic. Well, thanks for your time today. Where are you located? So I'm based in Europe, but I often travel to the US for conferences and presentations.

And most of our clients are all over the world. So US, Canada, Europe, Australia, India, everywhere. Yeah, yeah. You've got a beautiful voice and it's a pleasure to meet you.

Just thank you so much. And thank you listeners. Thank you for sharing and subscribing. Send this to anybody who has a brain. And I think they will be helped by this interview.

Thanks for joining us today. Blessings until next time. Thanks for joining us on Vitality Made Simple Podcast. Be sure to visit DrDebbieOslet.com for our courses and resources designed to help you feel better, look better, and enjoy better relationships.

Please remember to like, subscribe, and share. Thanks for joining us.