

THE VITALITY MAP

A GUIDE TO DEEP HEALTH, JOYFUL SELF-CARE,
AND RESILIENT WELL-BEING



"This book will be a
beacon and a gift to many."

—ELIZABETH GILBERT,
author of *Eat, Pray, Love*

DR. DEBORAH ZUCKER

Praise for

THE VITALITY MAP

“Deborah Zucker is a gifted healer, working with great compassion to help others find their holistic health mojo. Her book will be a beacon and a gift to many.”

—ELIZABETH GILBERT, author of *Eat, Pray, Love*

“Health involves more than a normal physical exam, blood tests, and scans. ‘Health’ is related to ‘wholeness’ and ‘holy’—how we fit into the grand pattern of existence, where we find meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. Dr. Deborah Zucker is a wise guide who will help anyone go beyond the ‘merely material’ to find what genuine health is all about.”

—LARRY DOSSEY, MD, author of *One Mind*

“*The Vitality Map* reveals the path you need to take to find your true self and fulfill your meaningful desires and needs. Deborah’s words are a guidebook and life coach on your journey through life.”

—BERNIE SIEGEL, MD, author of
The Art of Healing and *365 Prescriptions for the Soul*

“Deborah Zucker offers a foundational piece missing in our urgency to ‘get better’: a skillful and compassionate relationship with the process of healing ourselves so that our illnesses can become gateways to a more integrated life.”

—VICKI ROBIN, author of
Blessing the Hands that Feed Us and *Your Money or Your Life*

“Dr. Deborah Zucker offers an excellent traveler’s guide for authentic self-care that reanimates you at all levels of your being. She takes you on an intimate journey into these deeper realms of self-care, effortlessly weaving together a wide array of methods—psychotherapy, spirituality, physical health, and community—into one integrated approach. *The Vitality Map* shines light on what really matters in life and inspires you to become deeply

healthy so that you can bring your best self forward in all that you do. I am inspired by the contribution that Dr. Deborah Zucker offers in this important work to the field of medicine as a whole. May her message be heard and give us all the courage to live with more vitality!”

—BARON SHORT, MD, MS, Brain Stimulation Service Medical Director,
Associate Professor at Medical University of South Carolina

“*The Vitality Map* will guide you through a more vital and holistic approach to your health and reveal to you the hidden treasures of a balanced way to eat, nurture, and care for yourself. Deborah is a magical health guide that will lead you on your journey to optimal health! Keep this book by your side!”

—AGAPI STASSINOPOULOS, author of *Unbinding the Heart*

“In an era of dramatic change and constant stress, maintaining your health is more challenging and also more imperative than ever before. In her new book, Dr. Deborah Zucker beautifully interweaves the principles of spirituality and health to offer a robust and novel approach to addressing health challenges. *The Vitality Map* provides useful tools to develop both physically and spiritually, and shows you how awakening to deep health makes possible the fullest realization of your own potential.”

—MAUREEN METCALF, CEO Metcalf & Associates, Inc. and
author of the *Innovative Leadership* Workbook Series

“Most of us are more worried about disease, but what we need to turn our attention to is optimum health and vibrant vitality! Deborah Zucker has a ‘get real’ conversation with the reader on one of the most pressing issues of the maniacal modern day—how to get back their inner mojo, motivation, and momentum. With her 9 keys to wellness, she makes the path to becoming vital illuminating and enlightening, even when we feel like we are in the dark and burnt out with no hope left. Follow her great beacon of wisdom!”

—DEANNA MINICH, PHD, author of *Whole Detox*

“This book is a gem. True healing necessitates more than visiting the doctor, taking the medication, staying on the diet, or doing the exercises. How

we find the wholeness and empowerment within ourselves is vital, and Dr. Deborah Zucker has designed a clear and engaging guide for recognizing and reclaiming greater vibrancy and health. A valuable resource to engage with and savor!”

—LUANN OVERMYER, author of *Ortho-Bionomy: A Path to Self-Care*

“Deborah Zucker invites you on a sacred journey to your own healing potential which brings you into intimate contact with your inner wisdom and beauty. Each step along the way is rooted in self-compassion, gratitude, and trust in yourself. *The Vitality Map* points the way to who you’ve been looking for.”

—JANETTI MAROTTA, PHD, author of *50 Mindful Steps to Self-Esteem*

“*The Vitality Map* is the essential guide for growing your health. Dr. Deborah Zucker ushers us into the depths of our aliveness and provides unparalleled instruction on how we can holistically approach vitality and well-being. This extraordinary work instills compassion, illuminates much needed clarity, and touches our human vulnerabilities with grace. *The Vitality Map* is the new path forward and we all have a responsibility to follow Dr. Zucker’s wisdom.”

—ROB MCNAMARA, author of *The Elegant Self* and *Strength to Awaken*

“Whether you face health challenges or wish to maintain your current health status, *The Vitality Map* is a wonderful guide to ensuring that you have covered all bases. So many of us obsess over our ‘numbers’ on test results, or believe that taking our daily pills is the maximum expected of us to ensure our health. But it is far from the truth. We now understand that the body/mind/spirit connection must be factored into our daily regimen. Consider this book for yourself or for a friend with health challenges.”

—LYNNE D. FELDMAN, MA, JD, author of *Integral Healing*

“Every individual body, imbalance, and healing process is unique. Yet the shape of the hero’s journey of restoring health can be charted. And the practical know-how of navigating the detective work and practice of healing can be described. Dr. Deborah Zucker has traveled this path, and this book

shares the wisdom, savvy and tips she's learned navigating her own healing and in guiding others as a health practitioner. This lonely journey just got a little less lonely."

—TERRY PATTEN, author of *Integral Life Practice*

"Dr. Zucker provides your personalized roadmap to freedom, health, and happiness. Embracing the feminine, the shadow, and bringing in her rich experience as a mind-body-spirit provider, I have yet to encounter a more insightful, well-crafted, and helpful book."

—GEORGIA TETLOW, MD, CEO of Philadelphia Integrative Medicine and Assistant Professor of Rehabilitation Medicine, Thomas Jefferson University

"When it comes to creating health and well-being in our lives, most of us have very good intentions. We just fall short in the follow through. Dr. Deborah Zucker's book, *The Vitality Map*, gets to the root of why we so often fail and gives us a path to true and lasting success. You have to go deep and *The Vitality Map* takes you there."

—BONNIE HERRIGAN, author of *The Bravewell Story*
and Editorial Director of *EXPLORE: The Journal of Science and Healing*

"I am honored to join the growing list of supporters for Dr. Deborah Zucker's new book, *The Vitality Map*. Her experience and teachings are clear, guided messages that will enlighten the mind, heart and spirit. The honest word here is DEEP; no hype or fluff in this world of quick fixes. Dr. Zucker's 9 keys are most relevant for anyone who seeks lasting peace, health, and the vitality needed for a deeper, more meaningful life."

—JO ANN STAUGAARD-JONES, author of
The Vital Psoas Muscle and *The Concise Book of Yoga Anatomy*

"Dr. Zucker manages to go way beyond current spiritual and medical paradigms without violently shredding those ideas to pieces as I've too often seen. She truly has stood upon the shoulders of giants with grace and has offered a logical, doable system for healing and for living our greatest potential. By incorporating the strengths of both the left and right brain and inviting us to viscerally embody her time-tested ideas through various rec-

ommendations and exercises, a new road map of healing and wholeness has become clear. I believe this will be a best seller for years to come!”

—DAVE MARKOWITZ, medical intuitive
and author of *Self-Care for the Self-Aware*

“At least 97% of Americans lack one or more of the essentials for health. And at least 90% of illnesses are the result of poor health habits! *The Vitality Map* offers the guide to optimal health!”

—C. NORMAN SHEALY, MD, PhD,
Founder and CEO International Institute of Holistic Medicine

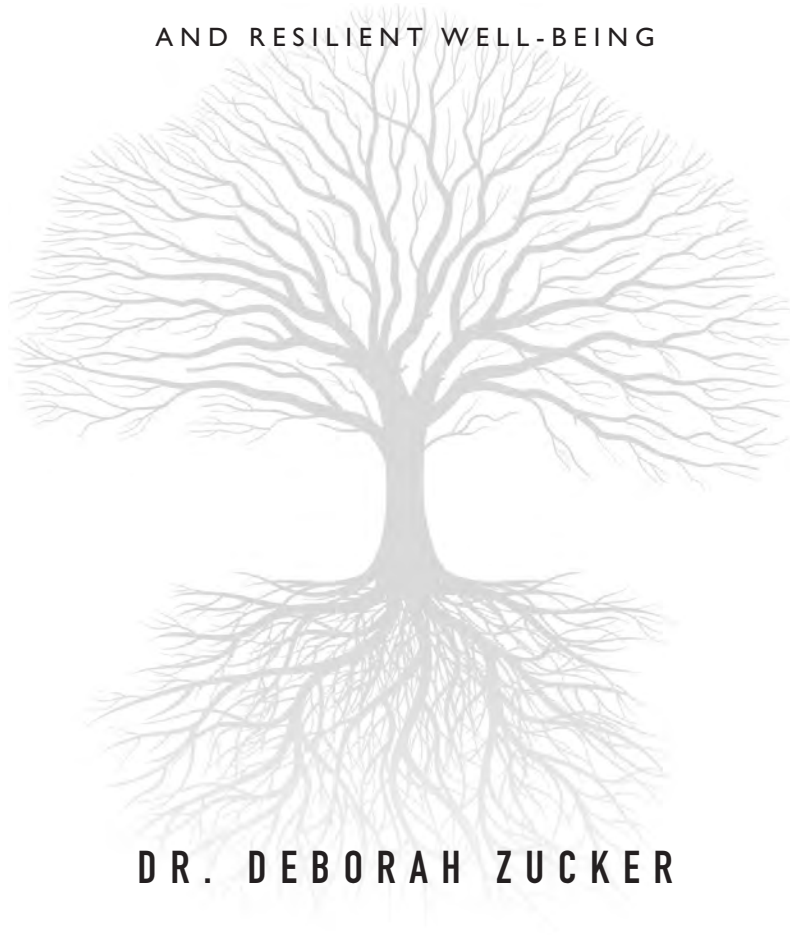
“Deborah Zucker is a profound healer who helps people discover their own potential for maximum health and growth. Her book *The Vitality Map*, with its 9 Keys to Deep Vitality, provides not just theories, but tested tools and proven strategies for whole-person healing. This remarkable book can truly unlock the mystery of integrated body, mind, and spirit wellness and should be a trusted guidebook for everyone who desires optimum health.”

—KAREN WYATT, MD, author of *What Really Matters*

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2016

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FOREWORD

For many years, as I rose through the ranks of the medical profession and built my career as a successful doctor, I was haunted by the feeling that something was missing. Although my patients thanked me and my peers honored my work, I felt out of place in my own medical practice and the systems in which I worked. I came to realize that I wasn't really healing people. I was just giving them quick fixes, in the form of pills, prescriptions, and procedures, and sooner or later, they would come back for more. The principle reason for this revolving door was that I, like most doctors, was not really teaching people how to live healthy lives. So I ventured beyond the medical establishment and launched a personal quest to become a true healer and a true teacher, giving people the tools they need to live skillfully.

I am happy to have met a kindred spirit in Deborah Zucker—someone who brings wisdom and thoughtfulness to the complex riddle of human health. The title of this book promises something we all long for: Vitality. And yet as much as that word may evoke feelings of energy, dynamism, and vigor, Deborah understands an important truth: that sometimes, to get well means to slow down.

In this age of too much information, we are subjected to a nonstop barrage of stress-inducing images and messages. In addition, with everything moving at lightning speed, we are under constant strain to perform and produce around the clock. For these reasons, many of us hit fight-or-flight mode shortly after opening our eyes and keep at it until we collapse into bed at night. Some of us never even exit this state and are therefore unable to sleep well, despite how exhausted we feel.

Our state of exhaustion on the macro level is a reflection of what is going on at the micro, or cellular, level. Our sympathetic nervous system is wired to handle some stress, but not to be locked in the “on” position, the way it is in our modern world. As a result of our go-go-go lifestyles today, our natural reserves of vitamins, minerals, and enzymes—all of which we need to stay energized and healthy—are getting depleted.

This becomes quite evident when our bodies succumb to illness, and when our minds are preoccupied with troubling thoughts and feelings of

anxiety and dis-ease. The medical establishment, presumptively here to relieve us from these states, is unable to handle all of it, leaving many, if not most, in distress. Increasingly, many turn to alternatives, but they too, especially those emphasizing simplistic “remedies,” let us down.

The fact is that in order to find genuine relief, there is a bigger picture that requires our attention. And neither the body nor the mind need to be in perfect shape to achieve this. Instead, what we need is an approach to living that addresses the whole of it, including the pain, the suffering, and the death. This is humbling to consider. It may even feel like a form of surrender to these great forces that affect and limit our lifespan. But, they do not have to ruin our lives.

The fact is, you are not your disease, or your mortal condition, no matter how you define it. The you inside, the witness observing what is taking place, is a deep-seated consciousness that will transcend the problems. What you need is not a quick fix, then, but rather a slow and conscientious process of engagement in the one life you have, allowing you to live it to the fullest. And for that, you need wisdom, which is what you will find in these pages.

Deborah Zucker has pulled together the science of life and a highly intelligent and comprehensive understanding of living. She understands that we all need something practical to hold onto, especially as we venture away from the crowd (which happens to be heading off a cliff in its desperation for short-term solutions). With both courage and integrity she offers a sustainable way to move in the other direction. She offers a map for a relationship with life that helps us deal with our challenges—not only through relieving some of the associated suffering but through allowing us to immediately sense the beauty as it unfolds around us in our hope-filled journey back to wholeness.

What I like about Deborah’s writing is the honest voice of a caring practitioner who presents herself as a fellow traveler more than an authority. It is the latter that, for me, gives her the greatest credibility, though her formal training in the healing arts also goes a long way toward assuring the reader they are in good hands. She freely shares her own insight and knowledge, but she also does something more important: she connects readers with their own deeper intelligence and the wisdom of the body. With her personal and professional experience, she guides us to check in to the body-mind source of our awareness—to feel more completely and to transform any

anxiety into action that makes sense.

Along the way, she invites us to reflect on questions of personal inquiry; key among them is, “What brings you vitally alive,” a question that emphasizes the inner wisdom, unique purpose, and passions we each possess. And she urges us to remain playful and curious despite the seriousness of the project, leading us away from the tendency to be too harsh a critic of our own progress. Instead, she compassionately counsels us to experiment, to learn, and to see this as a process—one that is insightful and thoughtful as well as practical.

I agree with Deborah—there are several keys to success, and I like how she frames the work in that way. Her book is digestible, and while the path is not entirely easy, it is actually simple enough. I think you will find this book a refreshing alternative to many of the simplistic “how-to” books so common these days. We human beings are wiser than we may realize. While we may instinctively look for quick relief, we know that shortcuts and Band-Aids don’t work. Our bodies and our innate intelligence will appreciate the deep truth of the plan that Deborah lays out in *The Vitality Map*.

—MICHAEL B. FINKELSTEIN, M.D.,
author of *Slow Medicine*

*Every part of you is welcome here
From cells to bones to spirit
From everyday challenges to ancient wisdom
Your stories, beliefs, hopes, dreams, and fears
Your community, your solitude,
and your sacred relationship with yourself*

INTRODUCTION

I COULDN'T STOP CRYING. Lying in my bed in the fetal position, I could hear my friends joking around as they cooked dinner downstairs. I felt exhausted, awful, and their happy voices just made me feel worse. I was twenty-four years old, living in a community of wonderful people who shared my passions and my values, and yet, for no reason that I could name, my life felt like it was spinning out of control.

A few weeks earlier, seemingly without warning, I had spiraled rapidly into deep fatigue and depression. I'd had blood tests done, gone to see a series of conventional doctors, and had consultations with alternative practitioners—I was swimming in the confusion of it all. The diagnoses they'd given me didn't seem to explain the depth of my fatigue and my relatively sudden emotional dive.

In that moment, as I lay in my bed in this home I loved, I came to the realization that I was going to have to stay with my parents for awhile. I needed a different kind of space to figure out what this health crisis was about for me, I needed to rest, recover, and find my way to healing so I could move forward. I felt the truth of that need, and then felt the requisite shame that came with it. How could I—the energetic, enthusiastic, world-changing overachiever—be in this situation? I should be in my prime. I should be able to rally. And yet I couldn't even get out of bed.

For months, much of that time living with my parents, I was so tired that just walking around the block each day was a huge feat. Ironically, the community where I was living and working when this began was a sustainability education center in Oregon. I was helping to heal our world, yet hadn't learned how to treat myself with the same care. Sure, I was eating organic, growing my own food, exercising daily, living among supportive friends, doing work that felt important, and yet, surprisingly, these things weren't enough.

In retrospect, I can clearly see all the warning signs that had been there for months, even years. I can now see the level of stress I was living under, much of which was created by my high expectations for myself. Because I hadn't learned how to acknowledge, feel, and share the full range of my

emotions and reactions, I was tightly wound and contained, using so much energy to maintain a particular persona. Vulnerability was my greatest fear. I didn't know how to let others in, to ask for support, to cry and be held, to acknowledge my fears and anxiety, or to express anger.

What began as chronic fatigue, depression, and a host of other ailments quickly evolved into an intimate encounter with every level of my being: body, psyche, emotions, and spirit. The experience, uncomfortable as it was, also became an eye-opening and educational tour through the spectrum of both ancient and modern healing modalities. Becoming a doctor had never been part of my plan, but the healer in me had awakened, and there was no putting it back to sleep. Even when I could barely get out of bed, I felt compelled to share what I was learning about health and healing with others. I felt truly called to guide others through their often lonely and scary healing transitions.

Thus began my Naturopathic medical training at Bastyr University and my own spiritual quest to create a path to health and vitality that takes into account the wholeness and uniqueness of each individual, while being deeply rooted in nature and community—two foundational pillars of my own experience of healing holistically. While I found ways to adapt and function at a fairly “normal” level during my doctorate training, my personal health challenges continued and were intimately woven into my medical studies. It took many years of being chronically ill, repeating unconscious patterns in relation to my own self-care, even relapsing into a period of deep fatigue after I was a licensed physician, to awaken to and refine my own healing navigation tool—the Vitality Map—which I will share with you in this book.

My own health journey, with all its ups and downs, is at the core of my approach to healing. I consider myself a “wounded healer,” meaning that I bring forth everything I've learned and become on my journey to support and empower you on yours. I am intimate with the landscape and its obstacles, and what it takes to move across it and through life with more ease and aliveness. I know how important it is to feel greater alignment and wholeness, and how essential it is to increase your capacity to nourish and empower yourself along your healing journey.

Today, I feel more vital and at home in myself than ever before. I hold a soft, compassionate space for the entire range of this human experience—the light *and* the dark. I understand transitions, challenges, and topsy-turvy

times—and I know they hold within them the possibility for great awakenings, renewed vitality, and deeper connections.

I believe “health” is the sum of your entire experience in this life. It’s not just the number you see when you stand on the scale, the lunch you had yesterday, or whether you can successfully do a downward dog pose in your yoga class. It’s everything—from your intimate relationships to your spiritual practice to how you talk to yourself when no one’s listening. It all matters—every single part of you and your unique, precious life.

My main mission—the thing that lights me up most—is helping conscious, compassionate people revolutionize their health by learning how to love, nourish, and heal themselves, on every level, so they can show up fully to help heal our world.

Through my Vital Medicine work, I mentor individuals and groups in many virtual and retreat-based programs, including private Skype mentoring, an intimate nine-month small-cohort program, wilderness mini vision quests, online home-study courses, and continuing-education programs for health practitioners. I am grateful through these pages to now have the opportunity and the platform to share what I’ve learned with readers like you who long for greater vitality.

In this book you will receive guidance and encouragement in how to:

- ♦ Stop beating yourself up over all the things you think you “should” be doing to get healthy, and instead learn to listen to what your body truly needs.
- ♦ Peacefully conquer your self-sabotaging habits, and make sustainable changes to create the life you’re meant to live.
- ♦ Move into a more vibrant relationship with yourself and the web of relationships that support you.
- ♦ Stop trying to fix yourself, and step into an entirely new, positive, and deeply reverent relationship with your own self-care.
- ♦ Let go of what no longer belongs in your life and experience the freedom and ease to focus on what truly brings you alive.

- ◆ Experience a profound shift into a new relationship with yourself, your body, and your life journey—a shift marked by deep integration, wholeness, and nurturing self-care.

I am not promising you a quick fix, and I have no interest in sharing a prescription that might help for a few weeks until the realities of your daily life kick in, and this journey becomes yet another thing to add to your growing list of shame-building internal failures. This is a guidebook for the long haul, for help in reaching, practicing, and experiencing *sustainable* health and vitality.

These days, we're overwhelmed with a deluge of theories and tips that claim to be the keys to health, and we can spend years, if not decades, bouncing between the latest fads—diets, exercise programs, supplements, therapies, and on and on. But until we address what is going on *at the foundational level of our relationship with health and how we care for ourselves*, we will forever be disconnected from our potential to truly thrive and flourish.

The 9 Keys to Deep Vitality are meant to support you in revolutionizing your health and life, *starting at the foundation*. This book will guide you to drop into a deeper, more authentic relationship with yourself, and with life itself. By investing in creating a strong foundation you invest in changing your whole approach to life, in how you make everyday choices regarding your self-care, your work, and your relationships. It will transform your priorities. Living with the guidance of these keys offers you the opportunity to feel empowered in skillfully caring for yourself and aligning your life at a level that you may have never known.

Throughout this book, I share stories from real people I've worked with that demonstrate the kind of transformation that is possible when you embrace your self-care and compassion at the deepest levels. While names and details have been changed to protect identities, the problems these people have faced and the shifts they've experienced are absolutely authentic. I hope that seeing how they were able to turn their lives and their health around will inspire you to realize that you can do the same.

Why waste another day, another hour, another second feeling trapped or unhappy in your body, in your life? You can accomplish deep, radically positive shifts with less effort and fewer tears than you think. It simply takes willingness, commitment, and deep support. I'd be honored to support you, wherever you are in your life's journey.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Before I head out on any extended backcountry wilderness journey I always take time to study the map and get a feel for the territory I'm heading into. Doing so gives me a sense of how to pace myself, what to bring along, and where I plan to camp each night. Even if things change along the way, I feel safer and more relaxed when I have the sense that I know how to confidently guide myself to where I want to go. In the same way, this Vitality Map can help you to see the big picture and topography of your unique health journey.

Please take your time as you move through these pages. The Vitality Map offers the opportunity for a significant restructuring of your internal navigation system, and it's a process that needs time and space to unfold. The 9 Keys to Deep Vitality open the doors into the territory of the Vitality Map and serve as a framework for you to follow. Each key builds upon the next, and they are meant to be read in order, at least initially. Once you are familiar with them, I think you'll find you'll want to return to individual keys, depending on where you are on your health journey and with the larger process and flow of the entire Vitality Map, to dive even deeper into their wisdom.

Each key has its own chapter, and I'd suggest giving yourself the spaciousness to read no more than one key a week to allow time to integrate, steep, and let the words penetrate deeper into the realities of your day-to-day life.

As I've said, this guide is about the long haul. There's no hurry. I encourage you to trust your own self-knowing in this. You might integrate the material better if you read it through once initially at a steady pace to get an overview of the territory, then return to explore the material more intimately and with spaciousness to incorporate the learning into your daily life. Only you can know for yourself what you need, and what will best support your transformative process. You are your own best guide, and if there is one thing I hope you will take away from this book, it is greater confidence in that fact.

The Vitality Map offers you the chance to experience a truly transformative journey—one that will help you reclaim your energy, joy, and vitality and begin to live in your fullest natural expression. I've designed the book to support you in engaging intimately and experientially with the material I present, not to remain in an intellectual, detached stance. I will give you

ample opportunity to practice, experiment, and inquire.

If you'd like, take a moment now to settle in and allow yourself to arrive in the calm and safety of this space. Perhaps you can close your eyes and take a few conscious breaths. Let yourself feel what's present for you right now.

What is it that you are yearning for? What is it that you hope this book may offer you in your life? Are you longing to feel more vital? Are you overwhelmed, exhausted, too busy to take care of yourself in the ways you'd like to? Are you feeling as if you've tried everything—pills, detoxes, diets—to bring more energy, ease, and strength into your life, but nothing seems to work?

If so, please know that you're not alone. Almost everyone who comes to work with me feels similarly. And as I've shared already, I know intimately how frustrating it is to not feel good in your body or to feel out of alignment in your life—and I've learned through my own healing journey how to change it.

Your journey will be unique and particular to you, and there is no book that can predict every twist and turn of your path. As the old saying goes, the map is not the territory. But maps can be tremendously useful in orienting us to the general contours of the landscape. When we discover a map of somewhere we have never been, it can be like opening a door to a whole new world.

CHECKING IN

Each of the chapters will include a “check-in,” a suggestion to take a moment and be present with yourself in the midst of your reading. This will be an opportunity to pause in the consumption of the material and inquire within, becoming more aware of and intimate with the reactions, openings, and insights that may be arising. Think of the check-ins as little nudges to drop deeper into yourself and integrate and embody what you are reading. The check-ins offer you an opportunity to strengthen your awareness muscles. I hope this practice will be something you carry into your daily life, making you more conscious of your reactions and insights, shifts and changes that might be happening, and the feedback that your body is giving you all the time.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Woven throughout all of the chapters are inquiry questions, meditations, guided visualizations, and suggested practices designed to help you engage with the ideas in a direct, intimate, and personal way. I want to provide you with as many opportunities as possible to enter into a process that is alive, dynamic, transformative, and healing. Much can happen simply by encountering the ideas in each chapter and letting them percolate in your consciousness. Yet if you feel ready to begin applying them concretely, I have no doubt that you will find yourself coming alive in ways you never expected.

TOOLS TO SUPPORT YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY

JOURNAL: Throughout the book, I will guide you through inquiry processes. I'd recommend buying a special journal that is dedicated solely to your exploration here.

VITALITY BUDDY: Later in the book we'll discuss the importance of having support on your journey. A simple way to start receiving support now is to reach out to your friends and see who might be interested in going through *The Vitality Map* and the exercises with you. You might even introduce them to the possibility by gifting them a copy of the book.

VITALITY DATES: I'd encourage you to create dedicated time each week—to make a date with yourself (or with your Vitality Buddy)—for devoting yourself to the practices offered in each chapter. Schedule it into your calendar and head to an inspiring spot in nature, a quiet place in your home, or your favorite coffee shop.

PERSONAL & PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT: Along the way, you may find that in order to move forward with this journey, you may need or want to reach out for different kinds of support. Pay attention to your inner guidance as you are reading and make sure that you ask for the support you need, whether it be professional help or encouragement from your loved ones.



CHAPTER I

WHAT'S BECOME OF YOUR VITALITY?

“Unbeing dead isn’t being alive.”

—E.E. CUMMINGS

THE VOICE ON the other end of the phone sounded close to breaking. “I’m feeling completely exhausted. I have to drag myself to work each day. And not only that, but the depression I had in my twenties has returned in full force this fall.” I could hear that the tears had started to flow. “It all feels so messed up.”

The voice and the tears belonged to Amy, a longtime friend of mine. It had been about ten years since we had been in touch, but she’d recently reached out to me for support. She sounded desperate.

Amy is forty-five years old, married, with two children ages five and ten, and lives in Portland, Oregon, where she has her own business as a life coach.

“I’m so sorry to hear you’re having such a rough time,” I told her. “From what I could see on your Facebook posts, everything seemed to be going great.”

“That’s just the thing—it is!” she responded. “My kids are amazing, and I feel so blessed to be a mom. My business is doing great—my clientele comes almost entirely from referrals at this point. And I love my husband and the home we’ve created together. I spend my days supporting others in making choices to create lives they love, and I pour out all of this energy to nurture my kids as they blossom into the unique people that they are, but I feel completely lost. I feel like I should know by now how to find my way back and that I shouldn’t be feeling like I do. Who am I to be miserable and

depressed when I have so much to be grateful for? It's crazy, right?"

Amy's story didn't sound crazy to me at all. It was heart-wrenching and, sadly, very familiar. I hear so many stories just like Amy's, from clients, friends, and loved ones—so much so that it feels like an epidemic is happening. On the outside, things look great—a beautiful family, a loving relationship, a fulfilling career of serving and helping others. And yet at a deeper, more foundational level there is something missing—something that would allow Amy, or any of us, to feel alive, vital, and thriving. I can say from my personal and professional experience that that elusive something is directly connected to how we care for ourselves.

If I were to boil it down to one word, I would choose “vitality.” We all have within us an innate life-energy that infuses us, a force within that naturally wishes us to express, grow, move, heal, and evolve. And yet, in the same way that the energy of a wild animal diminishes when it is put into a cage at the zoo, our own vitality may not have the conditions, nourishment, and freedom it needs in order to fully express itself in our lives.

The details of the story are different for each of us—what specific issues we find ourselves struggling with—and yet there are similar patterns I've seen in our underlying relationship with our own self-care. In the midst of all the modern advances in medicine, it seems that so many of us live with a baffling sense of *dis*-ease, a knowing that we are not experiencing the level of health and well-being that we know is possible.

I'm certainly not the only one to notice this epidemic of vitality loss. In the business world, it's called, aptly, “burnout.” A Harvard Medical School study found that an astonishing 96 percent of leaders felt burned out.¹ Arianna Huffington, who charts this phenomenon in great detail in her book *Thrive*, offers a host of statistics showing how widespread burnout is, and the impacts it has on our happiness, health, and well-being. For example, she points out that in the United Kingdom prescriptions for antidepressants have gone up 495 percent since 1991.² She goes on to share that US employers are shelling out 200 to 300 percent more on healthcare related to reduced productivity, sick days, and absenteeism than they are on direct healthcare costs.³ And in Germany the labor minister estimated that they were losing ten billion euros per year on burnout. Reflecting on all of this research, Arianna concludes, “Burnout, stress, and depression have become worldwide epidemics.”⁴

Does any of this sound familiar to you? Perhaps you're not taking anti-

depressants, or getting out of bed is not a problem for you, but I wonder if you've recently uttered any of these phrases that I hear all the time from clients and loved ones:

"I'm too busy to . . ."

"I feel like I should know better."

"I am embarrassed to admit . . ."

"I'm lazy. I can't seem to keep any new healthy habit going."

"I've tried everything—pills, diets, exercise routines—and nothing really works."

"I'm so confused about what to do to take care of myself. I feel spun around with all the conflicting information out there. Each week there's something new to do."

"I feel lost and out of control."

"I don't know who I am anymore."

"I want to feel energized and alive, yet I don't know how to get there from here."

"I'm tired of the boom and bust cycle in how I care for myself."

"I feel like true health is always out of reach."

"I used to feel energized and unstoppable, but it has been a long time since I felt that way."

I have a feeling that for every person who I hear say these things, there are so many more who have these kinds of thoughts, self-judgments, and shame about how they are or aren't caring for themselves and yet have not shared those sentiments with anyone.

I have the honor of working with many smart, compassionate, capable people. These are folks who are out there doing so much good in the world—leading organizations, supporting others as healers and teachers, activists and consultants, mothers and fathers. Outwardly, these people may look like they have it all together, yet I get to hear the inner stories: how they have felt embarrassed and struggled for years with their weight; how they've been hooked on sleep medication for too long because they are riddled with anxiety in the night; how they have had a secret addiction to cigarettes for the last twenty-five years; how they feel ashamed that they can't seem to get over their resistance to exercise; how they haven't had sex with their spouse for years. It seems that no one is immune to these secret sources of shame, no matter how evolved or competent they may seem.

What I have observed is that other than sharing these secrets with a

health practitioner like myself (in the way of a confessional), most of us rarely, if ever, say out loud to another person the vulnerable truth of what is really going on for us in our relationship with self-care—the frustration, the confusion, the embarrassment, and the shame. Even if we occasionally confide in a professional, there is a sense of isolation, a compartmentalization where we don't open up to our friends and loved ones about our struggles. The irony is that if we did, we'd probably discover that we are not alone at all. Most of us, in our own way, are struggling to achieve and sustain the changes we need in order to feel more alive and vital.

The cost of the isolation and the shame is huge. We can find ourselves in a self-perpetuating cycle as we become trapped in our self-judgments and pain about our inability to create and sustain change—the loud voices within reinforce the behavior patterns and then the behavior patterns reinforce the loud voices. When it comes to our perceived failures in the realm of self-care, we rarely take the risk to be vulnerable and, because of this, we unwittingly keep ourselves locked in unhealthy patterns.

One of the most insightful writers on the topic of shame and vulnerability is Brené Brown, and I have come to lean on her wisdom often in my work with clients because she cuts right to the heart of what is going on for so many of us. I particularly appreciate how she normalizes shame. She writes, “People often want to believe that shame is reserved for people who have survived an unspeakable trauma, but this is not true. Shame is something we all experience.”⁵ She goes on to share the twelve shame categories that she has identified in her research. The top shame inducer for women is appearance and body image. Others inducers include mental and physical health, addiction, sex, and aging.⁶

I see all of these sources of shame among my clients, both women and men. Brown has also researched and written extensively on the topic of vulnerability, and how it is our greatest fear and the thing that will help us heal:

Our rejection of vulnerability often stems from our associating it with dark emotions like fear, shame, grief, sadness, and disappointment, emotions we don't want to discuss. . . . What most of us fail to understand, and what took me a decade of research to learn is that vulnerability is also the cradle of the emotions and experiences we crave. Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity.⁷

Brown points out that vulnerability about our weaknesses is key to actually changing the very things we're ashamed of, including our health challenges. "From the field of health psychology," she writes, "studies show that perceived vulnerability, meaning the ability to acknowledge our risks and exposure, greatly increases our chances of adhering to some kind of positive health regimen. In order to get patients to comply with prevention routines, they must work on perceived vulnerability."⁸

If you're struggling with the kinds of issues I've been describing in this chapter—if, like my friend Amy, you feel exhausted, depressed, and desperate, but ashamed of yourself for feeling that way—I hope that what I am sharing here serves as an invitation to you to be vulnerable, even if only with yourself. Our lack of vulnerability tends to start with ourselves, with the perceived failings we are ashamed to admit even in the privacy of our own minds. Now is the time to be gentle with yourself, to stop beating yourself up inwardly about all those things you know you "should" be doing, or all the things you think you "shouldn't" be feeling.

CHECKING IN: *Pause for a moment to check in. How are you feeling physically in this moment? Emotionally? What is being evoked for you by what you have been reading so far?*

THE BODHISATTVA SYNDROME

Once Amy let herself admit to me how desperate she was feeling, and how ashamed she was of feeling that way, I started asking questions to find out more about what was going on. The picture that emerged is a common one. Amy had been juggling being a mom with starting and running her business for the last nine years. While her husband is a very nurturing man, she felt that when the kids came into the picture, he channeled that nurturing energy to them. They parented well together, yet she felt a distance with him, a lack of the intimacy that she yearned for. And while she could see that her clients were benefiting from working with her, she felt disconnected from her passion in her work. It was like the fire had gone out.

"It all feels like too much," she told me. "I am always running from this thing to that, juggling everything. I feel overwhelmed, like there is never enough time. I know all of the things I should do to take care of myself that

will probably make me feel better, yet I never can seem to get around to them or sustain the changes if I do try something. My exercise is sporadic at best. I know that I have been leaning on food to try to make me feel better, and I have been gaining weight for a while now. My sleep no longer feels refreshing. I wake up tired. My digestion seems to be all messed up. I feel like I'm falling apart. I'm so frightened and anxious that things will continue to spiral down, and feel more out of control and out of balance and then I won't be able to find my way back up. I don't know how to make it all stop. My doctor wants to put me on an antidepressant, but that doesn't feel like the answer."

As she spoke, it was clear to me that Amy didn't need drugs—she just needed the kind of support and nurturing that she was constantly giving to others. I suggested this to her, and there was a long silence in which I heard her struggling to stem the flow of tears. Finally, she said, "You, know, you're right. It feels kind of selfish, but recently I've found myself thinking, 'What about me?'"

Amy's predicament reflects a pattern that I see so often (and have certainly known in myself), in which it can be so much easier to care for others than to care for ourselves, to support everyone around us than to reach out for support for ourselves. I've playfully come to call this the Bodhisattva Syndrome.

In the Buddhist tradition, a Bodhisattva is someone who gives his or her life to compassionate service to reduce the suffering of all sentient beings. The term Bodhisattva Syndrome is my way to point to how, in our earnest desire to serve and benefit others, we often sacrifice ourselves in ways that are counterproductive to our intentions. Self-sacrifice and martyrdom are well reinforced culturally even amongst the most conscious and self-aware leaders and teachers.

It honestly breaks my heart to see how entrenched these beliefs and behavior patterns can be. When I reflected to Amy that it sounded like she needed to be held, too, she agreed, but with tentativeness, as if it were uncomfortable for her to acknowledge this and say it out loud. She had been having thoughts along these lines but had told herself she was just being selfish.

I've noticed that women, with our hardwired propensity to nurture, are more likely to fall prey to the Bodhisattva Syndrome, especially those who are juggling a family and a career. But I've seen the same symptoms in

plenty of men as well. Last summer I met Daniel, a man in his late forties who was just getting back on his feet after devoting a decade of his life to caring for two disabled parents, putting his own life's dreams on hold. The self-sacrifice culminated in extreme sleep deprivation while doing nighttime care for his mother during an extended fourteen-month hospice journey. It took him two years to emerge from the fatigue that enveloped him.

What I wish for is that we can become the Bodhisattvas who do not forsake ourselves. We can include our own welfare in our service—whether it be as parents, in our work, how we show up with friends, or the ways in which we volunteer in our communities. If we exclude ourselves from our own circle of care, we shortchange not only our own health and well-being, but also those we want to care for most. Amy, like so many people I know, was finding herself spiraling down and away from her own sense of thriving with such momentum that it felt impossible to reverse. There's nothing sustainable about this, nor does it benefit her kids, loved ones, clients, or community. How valuable and helpful are her gifts if she runs herself into the ground trying to offer them?

PERSONAL SUSTAINABILITY

What I shared with Amy that day is the idea of personal sustainability. In a culture that reinforces the ideal of self-sacrifice, we often prioritize caring for others and caring for our world, while we view caring for ourselves as being somehow in opposition to that ideal, even interpreting it as being selfish or narcissistic. And yet what I'm talking about here has nothing to do with narcissism or selfishness. In fact, the sentiment is quite the opposite. Personal sustainability is about caring for ourselves in such a way that we have more to give and more energy to serve.

Personal sustainability means to me that we hold a long-term perspective on our lives. Our self-care is about the long haul, and over time, self-sacrifice serves no one. Running ourselves into the ground is a losing strategy both for ourselves and for the people we care about. We can only serve and care for others if we have consciously cultivated our own foundation of health.

From this perspective, self-care and care for others are not opposite poles, but inextricably linked. We live our days replenishing and renewing ourselves through how we care for ourselves so that we can continue to show

up in service to others and our world. For me, this becomes an authentic and holistic Bodhisattva vow where we recognize that we are in service to life, and that each human being (including ourselves) is part of life; we each matter.

Whether you are just beginning to recognize these symptoms and patterns at play or are already way down the rabbit hole like Amy, I'm glad you found your way here. I wrote this book, and the keys in it, to meet you wherever you are and help you to create a new foundation of empowered self-care that gives you the roots and capacity to show up in the world to support and serve the needs of yourself and others, as well as our collective future.

SEEING WITH CLEAR EYES

If you are like Amy and my other clients, you probably already have a pretty clear idea of what your individual struggles are in relation to your health and the quality of your self-care. You may not have ever voiced them, but deep down you know what they are. My hope is that with a little bit of guidance and support from the Vitality Map to bring things to the surface, you will become more aware of what deeply nourishes you and brings you alive—what feeds your sense of vitality. Some of this awareness may be front and center in your mind—you see it and feel it every single day (and it might not be comfortable)—while some of it may be just beneath the surface, showing up every so often. Other parts of it may be things that you've known and acknowledged to yourself but haven't consciously thought about for years.

As we begin this journey together, I invite you to take a moment to begin to see with clear eyes where you are now, acknowledging those elements that are right on the surface as well as those that are a little buried. I know from my own healing and learning experiences that it is difficult to dive into new waters, to fully open myself to the growth opportunities available to me, if I haven't first come into a direct, clear, authentic relationship with the waters I'm currently swimming in.



INQUIRY QUESTIONS

I invite you now to grab your journal and give yourself the gift of 30 minutes to explore the following questions:

- ◆ What does the word “vitality” mean to you?
- ◆ What are your passions? What do you love to do? What makes you come alive?
- ◆ If you were to imagine nourishing and unleashing your innate vitality, what would that look/feel like to you? Write a list of activities that you know nourish your vitality. If you can't think of any, try to remember the last time you felt yourself come alive: What were you doing? Who were you with? Describe the scene.
- ◆ In this moment, if you were to create a list of things that stifle your vitality, what would you include?
- ◆ How does your daily life reflect these two lists? Is it weighted more on one side or the other? And what changes might you need to make in order to unleash your vitality?
- ◆ What potential obstacles do you foresee in implementing the life changes you seek?
- ◆ Who do you know who could sincerely and consistently support you as you embark on this transformative healing path?



9 KEYS TO DEEP VITALITY

KEY #1: HONORING YOUR UNIQUE LIFE

KEY #2: FACING AND EMBRACING YOUR SHADOWS

KEY #3: STRENGTHENING YOUR SELF-AWARENESS MUSCLES

KEY #4: CULTIVATING RESILIENCE

KEY #5: ALIGNING WITH YOUR YES!

KEY #6: EXPERIMENTING WITH PLAYFUL CURIOSITY

KEY #7: DISCOVERING EASEFUL DISCIPLINE

KEY #8: INVITING SUPPORT AND CONNECTION

KEY #9: LIVING LIKE YOU MATTER

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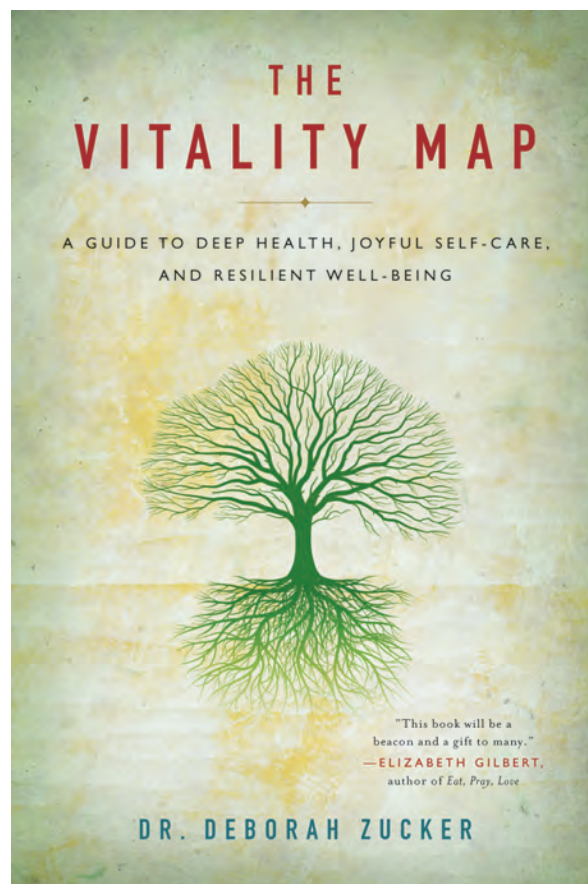
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—Bernie Siegel, MD, author of *The Art of Healing*



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Deborah Zucker is a naturopathic physician and transformational health coach who helps conscious, compassionate people revolutionize their health. Deborah is the founder of Vital Medicine where she offers many virtual and retreat-based programs. She holds a doctorate in naturopathic medicine from Bastyr University where she has also served as adjunct faculty.