

PRACTISING MINDFULNESS AND INSERTING "RECOVERY LOOPS" THROUGHOUT THE DAY ALLOW US TO RECONNECT WITH THE SOURCES OF ENERGY AND WISDOM WITHIN US.

Serena is sitting on the porch, the African sun warm on her neck. The air is swaying to its own silent rhythm. Bruised jacaranda flowers scattered on the grass are evidence of a wild night of thunderstorms. She doesn't notice. Once again, she's been wide-eyed all night, with the creatures of the dark and electrified air,

firting with the idea of ending it all.

With driving out to schools, educating, training, piloting projects, writing reports, taking care of her son David managing the household, Serena became the expert juggler. At night – after ensuring that tummies were full, the lullabies were sung and the world went to sleep – the textbooks opened up until the early hours. It felt good. Adrenalised energy always does, at the beginning.

Insidiously, the stress began to accumulate, and within a few months, her body began to grumble. She had less energy; she was snapping at David more often and was beginning to feel like a bad mother. And she forgot that she was a wife. The headaches were starting to become a constant companion.

For a long time, Serena's body had been whispering that something was amiss, but she was pushing too hard to notice.

Serena, like many of us, embarked on her career with abundant energy, hope and optimism. She was inspired by dreams of making a difference in the world. Over time, this changes as we get caught up in the demands of everyday living. Stress chemicals flood our bodies in response to multitasking, distraction, being overwhelmed, guilt, worry and lack of time.

We become more wired and tired, disconnected from our bodies and hearts as we hand over our life

to devices and distractions of the outside world. We become addicts of our own stress chemicals, without even knowing it. We drive ourselves beyond what the body-mind system is capable of handling and seek artificial aids to fuel the machine. Even though we have a sense that something is amiss, we push ourselves to the point of burnout, or we wait for a crisis that forces us to stop.

Despite our unnatural ways of living, the toxic air we breathe and the nutrient-void food we consume, there is an intelligence at play that is working tirelessly to keep our systems functioning optimally according to our perfect blueprint of health. This is "IPOL", the Intelligent Pulse of Life. Very rarely do we consider the miraculous workings of IPOL as we go about the business of everyday living. IPOL is generous, forgiving, resilient and adaptable. However, there comes a point where we overwhelm its capacity to maintain a state of equilibrium, and we are nudged back to awareness and action.

IPOL speaks through physical symptoms: headaches, muscle tension, insomnia, digestive issues and anxiety. It tells when we are veering off, when we feel more anxious or irritable than normal and when we begin to neglect the things that bring joy and feed authentic energy. We have found bizarre ways to shut it up and placate it for a while, with anti-inflammatories, antispasmodics, anti-hypertensives and antibiotics, coffee and alcohol, drugs, sugar, cigarettes, even extreme exercise.

Over the years in my work as a medical doctor, I have become more and more concerned about the epidemic of burnout and symptoms that show up on the path from optimum health to a state of depletion. I see it showing up physically, behaviourally. It shows up in the way that we treat ourselves and others. It shows up individually and collectively in families and organisations. We are at a point when we can no longer ignore its devastating effects.