



*Dr. Ellie's*  
BOOK OF LOVE

NOTES FROM THE PANDEMIC  
ELLIE ZARRABIAN, PHD

*The wound is the place where the light enters you.*

*- Rumi*

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*Notes from the Pandemic*

*Ellie Zarrabian, PhD*

*Project Editor:*  
Floyd Smith

# *Dedication*

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Dedicated to those we have lost in the Covid-19 pandemic.



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# *Introduction*

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I'd like to thank a few people for helping to make this e-book possible.

First, I would like to thank my clients, each of whom has entrusted me with the care of their heart and soul. In coming to see me, they have shared with me painful life experiences that they have endured. They have often kept these experiences secret, sometimes for decades, before sharing them in our sessions, all of which is a true honor. I hold these secrets to be both delicate and special, and we look at and work on them together with great care, sometimes even through an almost microscopic lens.

To be entrusted with such information puts me in a position of great privilege, and I am always reminded to “keep it real,” within a space of humility and gratitude. Also, the healing that my clients experience is not one-way. The courage that it takes for people to step forward and share themselves, to show vulnerability, and to find the resolve needed to heal, continuously pushes me to grow. Because of them, I continue to learn, to heal, and become a better human being. You will see some of that learning and growth reflected in these pages.

I would also like to thank my two teenage daughters. I'm renewing, and even rewriting, my own life journey as I watch them grow into adulthood. I am moved every day by what they share with me. I did not have a “normal”

childhood or teenage life myself. So I have the privilege of witnessing their growth and increasing maturity, as I help to parent them and guide them through life challenges, in a healthier manner than I was able to experience for myself. They inspire me to see so much including that, when managed properly, difficult and challenging life circumstances in childhood do not have to become lifelong traumas to be overcome, but important life lessons to learn from.

And finally, I'd like to thank my partner for his help in pulling this e-book together. He has been a pivotal source of support and encouragement to me, especially through this pandemic. During these challenging times, I've sometimes been triggered, with my own childhood traumas kicking in. He gently pushed me to turn those dramatic and painful moments into teachable moments for others - much as I do with my clients, and even with my children. In doing so, he has helped me find and strengthen my voice.

## About Me

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I'm Dr. Ellie Zarrabian, and I'm a healer, counselor, educator and advisor. I was born in Tehran, Iran, to a Persian Jewish family. I'm a third generation healer, drawing from the Jewish Sufi tradition in Iran. My ongoing recovery from childhood trauma, my daily life, and my work are all based in spirituality. (For some related background, please see the chapter on shamanism later in this e-book.)



In 1980, my family and I fled Tehran in the face of war, revolution, and persecution, which accompanied the fall of the Shah of Iran and the founding of today's Islamic Republic. We emigrated, destitute, to London, then to Los Angeles, in the early 1980s.

I believed that only education could lift me out of poverty. After three decades of hard work, overcoming obstacles that had seemed insurmountable, I earned a bachelor's degree in psychobiology from UCLA, a master's degree in transpersonal psychology from John F. Kennedy University, and a doctorate in psychology from Saybrook University, both in the Bay Area.

My varied interests are reflected in my educational path, as well as in my career. My undergraduate degree from UCLA is in the sciences. For my

master's degree, I examined the work of the Persian poet Rumi in relation to the psychological approach of Carl Jung. And my doctoral work combined science, psychology, and spirituality, as I continue to do today.

In my career, I've spent a decade teaching psychology and the effects of trauma on people's mental health and wellbeing; worked as a drug and alcohol counselor; and practiced therapeutic touch with hospice patients, who then transitioned from this life under my care. (This last is among the deepest and most rewarding work I've done.)

More than ten years ago, I founded the Centerpeace Foundation. I now serve as a healer, coach, educator, and counselor. That work is reflected in the case studies in these pages.

I'm also a single mother of two teenage daughters, and I turned 50 not long ago. I've recently embraced my identity as a (relatively young) elder, and I enjoy working with my clients from this new perspective.



## *My Client Work*

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I work with multicultural, multinational, LGBTQ, and otherwise diverse clients worldwide. As a unifying thread, I'd describe my clients as "soulful."

Many of my clients are refugees, immigrants, or children of immigrants, like myself. Also like me, many have suffered severe psychological trauma, largely in their families of origin. But most of my clients are millennials in their 30s.

Current clients are from California, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. They include a widower grieving the loss of his lovely, older wife; an artist working to grow her career, while keeping her integrity in a social media-saturated world; and a couple, from different cultural backgrounds, working to keep their new relationship lively, while facing pressures and distraction from work and their new family.

Although my client base is diverse, clients tend to come from a religious background and share a spiritual orientation. Issues we address include romance, couples' issues, career, family, friendships, spirituality, trauma, illness, and death.

If you would like to discuss working with me, please reach out through [www.centeronpeace.com](http://www.centeronpeace.com). I take on new clients where appropriate, and refer others to one of the several other specialists whom I work with.

You may be interested to know why I do what I do. My goal is to use my own, often harsh, life experiences to help others who have also faced difficult life circumstances. I give them hope that there is light at the end of the tunnel, help them develop the skills they need, and show them how to gradually move beyond the pain and drama into a happier and more productive life.

In fact, many even go beyond that. We call this going from post traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, to post-traumatic growth, or PTG. PTG means going beyond trauma to ending up as an amazing human being in service of helping uplift oneself, one's family and friends, and even the world.

# *A Psychospiritual Theory of Healing*

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Drawing on my Sufi/Jewish background (yes, this is a thing), my formal education, my life experience, and my career, I've developed my own, psychospiritual theory of healing. I apply this theory in working with clients. Let me explain it briefly.

I've developed my approach to healing through my own efforts. Before now, I've only shared it with clients. But this theory informs my work, my life, and of course the case studies and observations you'll read in this e-book.

After experiencing trauma of many kinds in my early years, including abuse, I faced a tough decision: whether to engage fully in this troubled and, to me, very troubling world, or to find some way or another to check out, as so many do.

I actually chose both paths. While staying engaged in this world, I was able to use my cultural inheritance and my own inner resources to spend time in, and align with, a more spiritual realm. This gave me some degree of emotional protection and distance from the traumatic events, abuse, and deep poverty (of many kinds) that I experienced as I grew up.

From these difficulties, and the growth I managed despite them, I developed a strong desire to help others. As a young adult, I pursued

educational goals, work, and life experiences that would help me do so.

The theory I developed is that all people have the opportunity to heal from pain and trauma by engaging in a process of soul evolution. During this life, we can heal, raise our consciousness to a higher level, and engage in and with the world in a purposeful and meaningful way. I was able to do this for myself, and then I set out to help others do the same.

Much of what I seek to achieve is common to the field of psychology and also to the path of spirituality. What's different is how I put the two together to, first, heal myself, and then to heal my clients.

When I engage with a client, I meet them where they're at. I don't question that they come to me struggling; we all face difficulties, and these difficulties are often the starting point. Many of my clients come to me having suffered severe trauma and great pain, and it's important to let them know their pain is real and that I don't trivialize or minimize what they have been through.

What I do is to try to help them solve the immediate problems they bring to me; and, at the same time, to grow psychologically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually as they work through their problems. (My former practice of therapeutic touch also addressed physical pain and challenges, along with the other dimensions.)

Somewhere around half of my work with a client is to help them with the issues they set out as their reasons for coming to see me. The other half is deeper, helping them to evolve on their journey as a human being. This primarily happens as the individual gains more empathy and compassion for their own suffering and pain.

For instance, several of my clients - mostly younger women - have sought

my help in finding a life partner, often with the intention to start a family. So they are always surprised when I ask them to first spend a long time, perhaps a year or more, off the dating scene. Instead, I work with my client on their individual issues, childhood traumas, expectations, self-esteem, and spiritual standing.

In doing this work, I access - I like to say download - a great deal of information from the spiritual realm. This information includes a deeper understanding of my client and their situation, but also growth of my own, as I advance along my own spiritual and personal journey.

I serve as an alchemical vessel for all of this information - what I learn from my client, my own past experiences, and much knowledge about the world - past, present, and, I believe, future. All of it fuses together within me, and I then serve as an ally to my client. They share in the alchemical process, as well as in the results.

This is what makes up, for instance, the first year or so of my work with clients who are seeking romance. We start by bringing everything we can to the process of helping the client grow as an individual. Only then do we turn our attention to my client's effort to actually find a partner. Almost all of my clients who have done this work with me have found partners. However, my favorite story of this kind is not about a client who gained a partner; it's about a client who lost his beloved partner in life when she died. He came to see me, devastated and grief-stricken.

For several months, he shared his memories of love, loss, and pain with me. We worked to free him from overdependence on her memory. Gradually, he was able to let her go, and he grew a great deal along the way. He now cherishes his memories of their time together more than he mourns her passing.



Through this process, he also became deeply spiritual, and began to connect with her through his dreams and weekly walks to the ocean and the mountains. This forged an alchemical process within him that gradually expanded his love toward the world, and not just toward her. I will not be surprised if he becomes a mystic in the remaining years of his own life.

## Why This Book?

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This e-book is part of a larger project, in progress, to be called **Dr. Ellie's Book of Love**. I've searched for a long time for a way to share what I've learned in working with clients around the world, and this title serves as an umbrella that includes most of my work to date.

In this e-book, subtitled *Notes from the Pandemic*, I address the Covid19 pandemic that is currently growing an impact around the globe. I want to help people cope with the pandemic as it's occurring and reflect on lessons learned to date.

The effects of the pandemic will, in an important sense, never end. Many of the truths people believed in previously have been called into question; some have been shattered. For example, the sense of safety on this planet that most of us felt previously will never be the same. Our trust in modern medicine is shaken, and our confidence in each other as well. And people are much more aware of the climate crisis, another "pandemic" - with no vaccine to quickly bring it to an end.

With all of this taken into account, I believe that life will be harder, for humanity as a whole, than it was in the years up to 2020. This e-book will help to give you a map for all the changes we are going through during the pandemic, and help you to keep yourself well in these difficult times. It will

also help you to set out your path for the years ahead.

And it will help you find, and deepen, love in your life. Having a strong love relationship is now more valuable than ever. If you are currently in a relationship, you can use this e-book to help make sure that it's serving you well. If you are looking for a new relationship, this e-book can assist you in finding someone who makes a strong contribution to your well-being. With such a partner, you will be able to help and inspire one another through the stresses and difficulties that I believe are likely to mark the years ahead.

The same is true with family and friends. Every source of support in your life matters. I hope to help you to heal, to deepen your relationships, and to give love a more important role in your life.

# *How the Book is Structured*

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This e-book tells two separate sets of stories. I've included key points from information clients have shared with me during the pandemic. Details in the stories are changed to preserve my clients' privacy.

The client stories show how people have been able to tackle problems, move forward, and grow, even in these difficult times. I've had clients marry, bring children into the world, purposefully change careers, and recover from loss.

I also share vignettes from my own experiences. I was also able to grow during this time. I deepened a love relationship I had started before the pandemic; brought my entire practice online; helped my daughters through fear, disruption, and lack of connection with friends; and led international groups in meditation via Zoom.

I hope you see some of your own experiences during these challenging times reflected in mine, and find all that I've shared here to be a source of support and inspiration for the years ahead.

I hope to expand on this book in the future. Please send comments to me at my website, [www.centerpeace.com](http://www.centerpeace.com). And, if you are looking for a healer, for issues similar to those described in this e-book, you can reach me through

the website as well. I am often taking on new clients, and I also have a network of trusted fellow professionals that I refer people to.



# *Before the Pandemic*

## *- "Dr. Ellie"*

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I was born in Tehran, the capital of Iran, in 1969, during the reign of the Shah of Iran. When his government teetered, then fell in 1979, the Ayatollah Khomeini returned from exile, and the Islamic Republic was established. I experienced firsthand the effects of war, revolution, and persecution.

My community, a Persian Jewish group of perhaps 80,000 people, was threatened and dispossessed economically, with the government confiscating our assets. Many leading Persian Jews were imprisoned, and some were even killed. The great majority of us fled, mostly to Israel or America.

My own family spent several years in London before arriving in Los Angeles in 1983. My father, who had been a prosperous business owner, returned several times to Tehran, but we were left with very little. Our family suffered long periods of separation and disruption, and my father passed away two years ago from colon cancer.

I responded to these challenges in many ways, largely through developing a strong spiritual side. My father had passed on a Sufi connection - he was well read in Sufi philosophy and poetry and transmitted his love of Sufism to me. I drew on this and other resources to develop my own spiritual

connection, separate from any specific religious group, even my own Jewish heritage.

After high school, I set out to become a medical doctor, and graduated from UCLA in 1992 with a degree in psychobiology. But I disliked the clinical work in my program, which included euthanizing a fairly large number of frogs. I realized that my calling was more toward working with people, and toward psychological, emotional, and spiritual healing. I pursued this through a variety of relevant experiences, including teaching courses in psychology and trauma, working with alcohol and drug-addicted individuals, and serving as an end-of-life transition doula for people in hospice care.

I also began graduate education in psychology. I was very happy to discover transpersonal psychology - a spiritually oriented discipline that draws heavily on the work of William James, Carl Jung, and Ken Wilber, though it is now separate from Jungian psychology. I found programs at JFK University and Saybrook University, both in the Bay Area, that supported this interest.

I met and married my now ex-husband, an engineer and lawyer who continues to live in Brentwood. We split after about a decade, and I've moved to Culver City, sharing custody of our daughters.

By the time I graduated from Saybrook University, in 2010, I was ready to use my personal experience, my professional experience, and my newly minted doctorate to help people. I started the Centerpeace Foundation, with myself as the head.

My given name is Elham, a Muslim rather than Jewish name, meaning "divine intuition or inspiration" - a very appropriate name for the kind of work I set out to do in the world. But I have been called Ellie for years. As I

found clients, I became known as “Dr. Ellie,” and people still call me this today.

I spent the decade before the pandemic starting and building up my healing practice, and building up the Web home for it that you will now find at the Centerpeace site.

# *The Pandemic Arrives*

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Coming into the pandemic, life was good for me. But I had been planning to give a public talk for the Persian Poetry Forum at the Los Angeles Library on Valentine's Day, Friday, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020. It was canceled because of the coronavirus. A month later, in mid March, the entire state shut down, hard.

I had a premonition years before, in a dream. I was in an open field, a ruined forest, decimated. There were holes dug in the earth, from people looking for minerals. A group of white male politicians, including Bill Clinton, plus Barack Obama, stood there watching the decimated state of the land, looking on as though they knew what was happening. As they stood there watching, juvenile elephants wandered the field, sniffing the holes in the earth. Whenever one of them died, the politicians got excited, as it meant they could find the resources they were seeking in that spot.

I found this dream devastating, but at the time didn't understand the significance behind it. I wondered what the dream meant. I now take it as foreshadowing both the Covid-19 pandemic and the worsening climate crisis. The earth is sick, humans are killing it, and nature is suffering tremendously while a few people of privilege and power benefit from it. With the pandemic, and other natural disasters, we are now suffering, just

as the dream had foreshadowed.

The pandemic shutdown hit me hard. It took me back to my childhood years in Iran, in the late 1970s, up to and through the fall of the Shah. Things were shut down, we had to stay indoors all the time, and commodities, such as oil and gas, and food, including milk, disappeared from store shelves. We had to stand in line for rationed food. The pandemic brought all of this back to me, quite forcefully.

There was a hollowness in people's eyes, as often occurs in wartime. And as Jews, we had even more reason to be afraid. Prominent Jews were among those executed by mobs. After many months of torment, we joined nearly all Persian Jews in fleeing Iran. For my family and I, this was the beginning of more than a decade as poverty-stricken refugees. This hard period lasted through the rest of my childhood and teenage years - attending school first in London, learning English from a standing start, then in Los Angeles.

As Covid changed life as we knew it, I tried not to panic. My partner did panic, but constructively. On a Sunday, Bay Area authorities announced that the whole region would shut down at midnight on the following day. He fled the Bay Area on Monday night, on just one day's notice, unsure if he might be arrested on the freeway.

He reached a Costco grocery outlet in Santa Barbara and joined one of those long lines I so dreaded. (Even today, long lines at grocery stores give me something akin to PTSD.) He filled his Prius with food, antiseptic wipes, and toilet paper, for my family and his grown daughters. By the time the rest of the state closed down, Thursday of the same week, he was staying with me in Los Angeles.

He had to return to the Bay Area a few days later, having assured himself



that no one was being arrested for driving. But the intervention steadied my nerves. In speaking with my daughters, I was able to keep things cool and calm. I didn't catastrophize the, well, catastrophe, nor project my own fears onto my children.

I preoccupied my daughters with all sorts of distractions like building a massive fort out of sheets and string in our apartment, and I got them started with online schooling, online client work for me, and online family connections and friendships for all of us. We were among the lucky people who already had computers, broadband, and tech-savvy friends and family to help where we needed it. And we have remained among the lucky people who have avoided deprivation, serious illness, and death. A year later, I joined millions of my fellow Californians among the first groups of people on Earth to be vaccinated.

My practice fell off sharply, then rebounded. I'd been told that I should try to reach people with talks, video, and other communications around the pandemic. I was able to co-lead an international group, centered in Indonesia, of mostly young people in leadership positions. I reached into the depths of my own journey of survival during war, immigration and poverty and turned that experience into dharma talks. I would deliver a talk, and then we meditated together. We were soon joined by a Sufi cleric and a Buddhist priest, and I stayed involved with this group for the first year of the pandemic.

Several of the group members joined me as clients, and the effort steadied all of our nerves, as well as my finances. I was able to avoid plunging into depression and anxiety.

I also had an insight that helped. My background in the sciences alerted me to the possibility that the virus might mutate, staying ahead of prevention

efforts. I was telling friends about this in the spring of 2021, even as they were getting vaccinated and preparing for the return of something approaching normality.

So when the Delta variant spread worldwide in mid-2021, intensifying and prolonging the pandemic, I was disappointed, but not surprised. My friends reminded me that I'd been wary about the pandemic ending quickly, even with widespread vaccinations.

What lessons do I take from my early experiences in the pandemic? The first is that the worst things that happen to you in life can become blessings in disguise, and sources of great strength. For me, the same hard life experiences that made the early weeks of the pandemic challenging also served as a tremendous asset and resource, to me and others, as it continued.

The second is that relationships are almost all-important - both being open to receiving from those who have something to offer you, and finding the strength to contribute to and support those who depend on you. I think these truths will continue to be relevant in the challenging years ahead.

# Polymathematics

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One of my ongoing clients is a woman that I refer to as a polymath - an individual who is highly skilled, approaching genius level, in multiple disciplines. She is a millennial, closer to 30 than 40, and is also what I call an “indigo child.” This is a group of children who are psychologically sensitive, spiritual, often not strongly gendered, and intelligent. They are often diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD), but the syndrome and the indigo child description are not the same thing.

My client, whom I'll call Becky, works for a large Bay Area computer company. Like most of that group, she started working remotely when the shelter in place orders came down. She found this to be somewhat of a relief - despite the loneliness and, at times, boredom that accompanied it.

She is primarily a musician and artist, a “singer, songwriter, producer and DJ.” Like many millennials, of all races and genders, Becky found corporate life stultifying, even in the supposedly freewheeling workplaces created by Silicon Valley-style companies. (I recommend the TV series *Silicon Valley*, if you want to get a feel for it.)

Working remotely significantly reduced the pressures of going to the office and fully committing herself, physically and psychologically, to the modern high-tech work environment.

What Becky found, that most of my clients have also encountered, is that the pandemic shutdown served as “a confront,” as it has been called in the human potential movement. That is, the sudden absence of most outside stimulation - commuting, office life, events, nights out with friends, and dating - plus the fear and scarcity experienced during the pandemic, shocked her, and made her look deeply and searchingly at where she was in life.

Becky harnessed the intellectual and emotional energy that had been pointing in many directions and focused it on her own existence. And she found her life wanting in two important areas: a primary love relationship and work.

The love relationship part scared her. She had been rather determinedly single, though hopeful of making a love match at some point. And now the pandemic had completely shut down the dating scene.

For Becky, as for others, dating had served two purposes. First, it was her primary avenue for seeking a love interest. Second, it was an effective distraction from the fact that she was not actually finding a love interest, through dating or otherwise. There was a swirl of interested and, occasionally, interesting men, but no pressure to work hard on a longer-term relationship with any one of them.

Now, that was over. This free and unconventional thinker suddenly had a highly conventional concern: would she be single forever?

She brought this worry to me, along with concerns about her career path, which we dealt with separately. For dating, I had bad news. She wasn't ready to get serious.

This did not help her, initially. She had thought herself to be on the verge of

love for years; perhaps a little unlucky, but not seriously held back. Then the pandemic ended the swirl that had offered her both hope and distraction. Now here I was, telling her, no mas?

It got worse. As Becky moved through the standard stages of grief - denial, anger, depression, bargaining, and acceptance - she asked me, tentatively, how long she might need to work on herself, before pursuing a serious relationship?

Not long, I told her. She had so much going for her - beauty, skills, career, intelligence, family, and friendships. Plus a sincere, if newfound, commitment to doing the work required. She'd be ready in just a couple of years; three, at most.

Becky was shocked, again, but recovered quickly - and threw herself into doing what was needed. (I'll share more about what that constitutes in a later section.) Although we did not "watch the clock," she got through most of the initial effort in just one year.

Once that happened, things moved quickly. Becky met a man she can take seriously, and is engaged to be married. Both she and her paramour, along with just about everyone they know, has been vaccinated. And she has left her job for an independent career as an artist, though another tech company is offering her either contract or permanent work.

# *A Lost Generation*

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Parenting has been hugely affected by the pandemic, even in the many families that didn't suffer serious illness, nor a sharp drop in income. Huge numbers of children have been pushed out of in-person schooling for most or all of the first year and a half of the pandemic, and similar numbers of parents have been given no choice but to do most or all of their work from home - largely working side-by-side on computers, tablets, and even phones.

For instance, as my daughters prepared to return to in-person schooling last fall, my older daughter said: "I'm going back to school as an 11<sup>th</sup>-grader. The last time I was in school, in person, I was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade." This was a profound realization on her part as to what she'd missed.

During the pandemic, many weaknesses got exposed, in individuals and in family systems. Students who really needed the classroom environment and in-person support and engagement with teachers and fellow students quickly fell behind. Families that had not been all that close were challenged to either quickly get closer, or suffer the consequences of arguments and awkwardness as they were thrown together into close quarters, day after day.

Strengths also emerged. The importance of family time, work life balance,

and parents focusing more on their kids and less on work all showed themselves during lockdowns. I've seen both the weaknesses and the strengths in my counseling work.

As the pandemic lockdowns end in some places, the commitment to work-life balance endures. That's accompanied by the desire to maintain “pod people”-type connections with a few close friends and family, and perhaps spend less time with more distant friends and family members. This results in a richer and warmer life for some, and a visibly lonelier and harder life for others.

I expect work-life balance to be an area of change for years to come. Here in California, tech companies in particular are seeing near-revolts among their employees as the companies try to insist they go back to commuting into the office at least three or four days per week.

Even the idea seems to feel offensive to both parents and “child free” adults who have maintained their productivity through remote work, while appreciating the flexibility it offers, during the pandemic. And a record number of people who are able to have changed jobs, or are seriously considering a career change, as the pandemic lockdowns are easing.

Where I'm consulted on these issues by clients, I encourage them to embed these changes into their lives. We are entering into a unique period of flexibility and change; for many, there is a kind of musical-chairs aspect to how they will resituate themselves in their lives going forward. (At home, and with friends and family, as well as at work.) Now is a good time to expend the effort needed to find the chair that fits best in each part of their lives.

I'll also take this opportunity to describe indigo children in more detail. I use this term to describe children who are almost like people from our future,

showing up among us now, within people's families. These children are smart, sensitive, insightful, and highly talented. They are also spiritual, and include the state of the natural world as part of their spiritual concerns.

I've been lucky to have several indigo children among my clients. They have felt the effects of the pandemic more deeply than others, and they speak up about these and other issues, often to the discomfort of their parents. Some of my trickiest work is helping indigo children cope with families, friends, schools - even an entire world - which is not quite ready for them.



## *An Indigo Child*

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One of my clients is an indigo child, with two successful parents who have allowed me to work directly with their daughter. One is in government work, the other in wellness. Their daughter is a “tweenager” - a pre-teen about to enter her teenage years. She is also extraordinary, as with most indigo children; smart, sensitive, and strong-willed.

Like other indigo children, she is also spiritually inclined, and very concerned about the future of the planet and other living beings. They are often quite articulate at a young age about what is wrong around them, with a strong focus on the environment. They tend to feel a deep sense of responsibility to be part of the solution, rather than the problem.

Her experiences during the pandemic have been a microcosm of so many issues that are coming up for people worldwide. This seems to be generally true of these children.

My client's concern showed up first in the form of challenges around food, to the extent that this was affecting her physical, mental, and emotional health. The problem got more severe in the early months of the pandemic. In our work together, I've been able to help her find a much better relationship with food, with strong support from her parents.

As this young person has regained her strength, in every dimension, she is finding her education increasingly useless. This first seemed to be a function of the move to remote schooling, but we soon realized it had been true all along; the pandemic just made it painfully obvious. What she needs to learn, and the ways in which she would most easily and productively learn it, have little to do with the lessons offered at school.

One great example is when she told me, “everything they teach me in school, I can just Google it, and read about it. Why do I need to sit in school for six hours and learn stuff that I can just Google on my own?” At first, I chuckled at her remark, but then as I thought about it more carefully, what she is saying to us adults is actually valid, requiring a careful and well-thought-out answer.

How do we respond to the fact that education is not meeting the concerns that she and other young people have about the world we are living in? My own daughter made a similar remark, saying, “I would rather learn about my human rights, or how to do my taxes, or how to help a suicidal friend, than learn about the Pythagorean Theorem.”

These are real concerns that young people are having. They are seeing that the current educational system is not addressing these concerns in a concrete way that they need to be able to navigate the world with greater know-how.

For my client, the pandemic has further opened her mind to a whole new level of concern, one emerging strongly with indigo children worldwide, about the future of our planet. They see the pandemic, climate change, and environmental degradation as deeply connected, just multiple sides of a single coin. She's experiencing despair; I'm supporting her in these feelings, with the expectation they will also lead to a sense of determination

to make a difference.

While I work closely with my client, I'm also struck by how her experiences represent the sensitivity, intelligence, and almost precognitive feel for, and comfort with, the future that are the norm among indigo children. Perhaps it's the very severity of our problems that is causing these children to appear. It certainly seems we will need their help and their leadership in solving them.

# Urban Shamanism

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I think of myself as a shamanic healer - which, to me, means someone who works in an indigenous tradition, using spiritual resources to contribute to healing. Shamanism has long been intimately connected to the natural world, but these days, most of us live in a way that lacks daily connection to either the natural world or indigenous traditions. I use the term “urban shamanism” to describe a way of practicing that carries the shamanic approach forward into a dramatically changed world.

In 2015, I contributed a chapter to the book *Shamanic Transformations: True Stories of the Moment of Awakening*, edited by Itzhak Beery. The chapter was titled, Urban Shamanism: Treating Depression and Other Ills Using Shamanic Healing Practices. (The link will take you to a slightly updated version of the article on my website.) And it was reprinted, with uncanny timing, in the Spring 2021 edition of Parabola magazine - just as mass vaccinations were beginning in a few fortunate countries.

When I wrote the article, I did not know we would soon be in a global pandemic. But the article and the thinking behind it were uncannily appropriate to the pandemic era, as it continues today, and to the post-pandemic world ahead of us.

The article begins by defining shamanism and my own relationship to, and

inheritance of, Persian and Sufi/Jewish shamanic traditions. (For more about Sufism, see this article: [Sufism: A Mystic Faith Soaked in Universal Love](#), in The Times of India.)

My chapter then goes on to describe how shamanism can be helpful in the treatment of depression, especially as an alternative to powerful medications, residential treatment, and voluntary or forced hospitalization.

According to [a recent article](#), an amazing 37 million Americans - more than 10% of all adults - were on medically prescribed antidepressants at the beginning of 2020, just as the pandemic began to reach the United States. These prescriptions increased a further 6%, according to [another journal article](#), in the last three months of 2020.

Also, sales of both alcohol and marijuana, often used for self medication with depression and anxiety, increased sharply during the pandemic ([about 20%](#) for alcohol alone). Liquor stores and marijuana dispensaries were deemed “essential businesses” and allowed to remain open during even the strictest pandemic lockdowns. (Two friends who work in a wine shop were deemed “essential agricultural workers” and received the Covid vaccine early.)

Most of my clients, however, have avoided heavy - and, if I may say so, sometimes mindless - use of mind-altering substances. Spiritual approaches, as I've described in the article, and which I employ in my work with clients, provide a positive, sustainable alternative to prescription medications and recreational substances.

## *Visits from Three Wise Women*

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I was reminded of the power of spiritual approaches by three elderly women who became my clients during the pandemic. They had all attended the same retreat, in mid-2021, at which the Parabola magazine with my article was shared and discussed. Each of them felt powerfully affected by the article. And they all reached out to me soon after the retreat, becoming clients.

Although they came to me for healing, I am very respectful of elders of any culture, especially those who embrace the role. This was true for all three women, and I found our work together as rewarding and fruitful for me as I hope it was for each of them.

All three women were fortunate to neither get Covid, nor be among the many who suffered serious financial hardship as a result of the pandemic. While careful, they did not let Covid lockdowns slow them down too much, though each of them saw many life changes as a result of the pandemic.

These women included a doctor; an artist and writer; and a hospice chaplain. They had suffered different traumas in their youth, within their families and outside. And each has had vivid experiences during our work together.

My medical client approached me with a strong interest in Sufism, the root

of my own shamanic lineage. During our sessions, she came into contact with her own spirit guides. Being quite the feminist, and liberal in her Judaism, she was quite taken aback to find that they appear to her as four older orthodox Jewish Rabbis! I helped her align to this new spiritual input. We also worked through some practical issues, such as the emotional impact she felt from giving up her beloved counseling office due to the pandemic. (Like me, she now practices mostly online.)

Like many others who are now changing (or simply pausing) their careers, the artist/writer found that the pandemic caused her to reconsider how she makes her living. She was working for the local newspaper, feeling that she needed to spread her wings as both a writer and an artist. So, while we were having our sessions, she left the newspaper and moved to a small artist colony, an intentional community, where she now paints and writes. She told me that our work together allowed her to give herself permission to move forward and change.

And the hospice chaplain had formerly worked with another Western shaman. She told me she now felt stuck - in her marriage, in her work, and in her financial situation. She was somewhat trapped, mentally and emotionally, in a childlike state, back at the age when she had suffered traumatic experiences. I was also able to help her connect to her spirit guide, which frightened her at first, but which she soon accepted. This connection is contributing to moving forward and making powerful changes in her life.

All three clients connected with me around the same time, just after the retreat, and in all three cases, our work is episodic - we connect to address a major issue, get a resolution, then pause until further work is needed. Elders tend not to need extensive work with me. They “get” my contribution very quickly and run with it. People in middle age and young adults, by contrast, tend to need a longer initial engagement

## Conclusion

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The pandemic and post-pandemic eras are a time for making big changes. Not only one's health and one's work, but larger issues such as climate, racial reconciliation, and our political order.

We no longer have the option of “staying safe.” Everything that supported our former lives has been shaken. Our former verities now provide only a weak foundation. We have to ground ourselves in new realities.

This takes courage. Reach outside of yourself. Do things you've never done before. Achieve things you've been longing for. Disruption opens doors. (Your longing for change is itself a source of courage.)

Begin by connecting spiritually. If you have an existing spiritual connection you can draw on, use that for this work.

If not, figure out how to connect. Start from where you already are. Take what works for you and let go of what doesn't, and make the result your own. Proper spiritual connection, like proper human connection, is based on love.

Begin by developing a meditation practice. Live more authentically and align your inner light to your outer life.



The pandemic has shown us that life is short ... that your life can change 180 degrees in an instant. After such a change, you can never entirely go back to where you were.

Our lives, and the lives of those whom we love, are very precious, and life can be taken away from us very quickly. As the Romans said, *carpe diem*: seize the day. If we don't make changes that need to be made, as individuals and across humanity, anything and everything can be lost.



## Recommended Reading

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I can easily recommend a lifetime's worth of reading, but I've restricted myself to a few key readings that relate directly to this e-book:

- This article from the venerable Jewish Telegraphic Agency describes some of my Persian Jewish refugee group's experience, in Iran and in the US.
- Wikipedia has a useful entry on Sufism, including its connection to Judaism.
- For more about Sufism, see this article: Sufism: A Mystic Faith Soaked in Universal Love, in The Times of India.
- Here's my academic article on shamanic healing in an Iranian cultural context.
- Here's my blog post on how shamanic healing can provide a non-pharmaceutical alternative for treating chronic depression.
- I spent several years of my graduate studies on the works of Rumi. Please see this thread for more on the mostly poor translations of Rumi's works that are out there. This book represents an improvement, but much remains to be done.



Dr. Ellie's Book of Love: Notes From the Pandemic is a short recounting of Dr. Ellie's life - from growing up in the midst of war and revolution in Iran, to leaving her native country, settling first in Britain and then her long-time home, the United States. She weaves her own personal story of triumph through war, poverty, trauma, and abuse with her clients' stories of struggle and growth, in particular during the pandemic. Through these stories, Dr. Ellie shows how adversity can become a source of strength and resilience, now and in the future.