

Burnout - A Spiritual Crisis

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BURNOUT AND STRESS are often found close together in the literature, the one (burnout) being presumed to flow from an extreme experience of the other. Stress is undoubtedly closely associated with burnout, but this guide offers a broader perspective, developed from work at the Sacred Space Foundation, a charity based in the north of England for people suffering from the extremes of stress and burnout. Many studies highlight exceptionally high levels of stress among nurses (Borrill *et al* 1998, Williams *et al* 1998, Health Education Authority (HEA) 1998, Snow and Willard 1989). The evidence for stress in the workplace is strong (World Health Organization (WHO) 1994, HEA 1996, Health and Safety Executive (HSE) 2004), and stress is costly to organizations (currently in excess of £4 billion to the UK economy)(Confederation of British Industry (CBI) 1999, HSE 2005). One report suggests that each NHS trust is losing on average £450,000 a year in stress-related absence (Gooding 2005), and high-profile reports have described successful prosecutions of organizations that fail to reduce stress on their staff(HSE 2005). An employer has a duty of care to employees to prevent harm from stress.

Current responses to workplace stress

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has launched a scheme to reduce stress in the NHS, suggesting methods and policies for best practice (HSE 2005). Laudable as these aims are, however, the emphasis tends to be on cost control and risk management for the benefit of employers and 'human resources' departments (Wright 2005). The benefits to staff are implicit but are rarely discussed and the real human suffering that is encountered in the extremes of stress and burnout is often sidelined. As a result, guidelines tend to be more about developing effective systems of control and monitoring, and ways of softening the system (such as introducing massage sessions), rather than tackling more difficult and fundamental problems, such as why those who enter caring professions are more prone to stress and burnout in the first place (Snow and Willard 1989, Wright and Sayre-Adams 2000). Also overlooked are ways of approaching stress and burnout that take account of what is going on in organizations at a deeper level, reflecting the wider cultural shift that is under way (Tacey 2005, Heelas and Woodhead 2005).

Research by sociologists suggests the situation is much more complex than the recommendations commonly made by various stress management organisations. For example, Heelas and Woodhead (2005) describe the 'subjective turn' of the past 50 years or so in our culture. Hitherto, a characteristic of our culture was the tendency for people to identify themselves according to objective, externally defined criteria established ways of doing things, deference to authority or acceptance of certain truths (the superiority of men, professionals and so on). The steady death of our way of defining our place in the world in this way is characterised in the 'subjective turn' – a cultural shift in which we seek inner understanding, exploration of self, personal experience of the world and so on.

This has led to changes in organisational emphases. In health care it was always 'doctor or nurse knows best'; now it is patient-centred care, patients' charters, rights, partnership and involvement. Nurses and other healthcare staff have been caught up in this shift into what Heelas and Woodhead (2005) call the 'holistic milieu', as we have taken the subjective turn too. Surrender to authority is no longer acceptable if holistic person-to-person care is to be possible. Yet many of us find ourselves trapped in organisations that do not foster the holistic milieu, and while these lay claim to caring for staff and patients, in reality our health institutions incline towards the 'iron cage of bureaucracy model, in which targets and authoritarian approaches tend to dominate. After some time trying to accommodate the iron cage, many give up and go part time, or leave to find some environment more in tune with an holistic ideology. Trying to 'hang on in there' in an environment that is fundamentally inhospitable to the subjective, person-centred experience and expression may be one of the major precipitating factors of stress and burnout in the workplace.

Attempts at tinkering with the system – introducing aerobics for staff or bringing in better controls and monitoring systems – may be just that: tinkering. A complex problem needs complex responses. A single response to a multi-level phenomenon is inadequate, an organization that thinks it has solved the problem by, for example, implementing independent counselling but little else is deluding itself. Meanwhile, beneath the current limited efforts, a gigantic undertow of cultural change is under way, which – some might argue – the more ossified structures of the health services are unable to grasp and respond to.

What causes burnout?

Burnout is almost entirely a wealthy Western, middle-class professional, post-industrial, post-war phenomenon, reinforcing the subjective turn thesis. Reports of burnout did not arise in industrial Europe, nor do they arise in societies where life as defined by external rules continues – for example, aboriginal cultures and authoritarian regimes. These cultures have their own problems, but burnout does not seem to be one of them. In cultures experiencing the subjective turn (mainly Western-style liberal democracies), we can be released from externally defined ways of being, but we must confront the risks and challenges of defining our own reality.

Burnout also tends to occur predominantly among people who are involved in caring work, where they bring their natural heart-centredness into their jobs. In doing so they tend to get into patterns of over-giving (Snow and Willard 1989) while under-receiving – valuing looking after others but often neglecting to value themselves. One of the solutions to burnout is to move more to patterns of equally valuing caring for the deepest self, feeding one's own soul as much as that of others. Conversely, unloving people tend not to get burnout (Glouberman 2002), but they do have other problems.

Burnout may be related to stress in the workplace, but deeper issues may also be at work. The challenge of burnout is to treat it for what it is – a spiritual crisis. Work pressures have a lot to do with it, and while not denying that these are legitimate problems to be addressed, these are often the *agents provocateurs* rather than the root causes. Burnout is the desperate cry of the soul to break free, to be true to itself in the world and no longer defined by objective criteria. It is the climactic and exhausting struggle for work and relationships that have heartfelt meaning and joy.

A spiritual crisis is one of meaning, purpose and connection, as is burnout. Everything we once thought of as normal, valuable or certain in our lives can suddenly be thrown into turmoil. Psychotherapist and author Frances Vaughan (1995) writes that 'anyone who has experienced burnout, a common occupational hazard among helping professionals, has probably had the feeling of being trapped in a web of necessity and impossible demands. Most recommended treatments for burnout consist of stress reduction or setting boundaries. They overlook the fact that burnout usually indicates a state of spiritual aridity, and the effective treatment may call for spiritual renewal or awakening the soul.'

This 'spiritual aridity' is burnout – what happens when the energy we are investing in trying to keep things normal, to keep control of our lives, to keep things the same, demands more and more from us. As the energy needed to keep things stable increases, we become increasingly depleted, exhausted and heartsick with the effort. The greater the exhaustion, the closer we get to almost complete mental, physical, social and spiritual collapse. At some level, one or more relationships are changing, or change is being demanded, perhaps with work or a primary personal relationship, or with our deepest truth about ourselves or our belief system. Often the process is an unconscious one as we call to ourselves challenge after challenge that bring us closer to the edge, even though consciously we may think we do not want these things to be happening. We may feel the cause lies in something outside ourselves – a bullying boss, new demands at work without the resources to meet them, a relationship at home that has grown cold, the demands of a loved one for care, a sudden trauma in life that throws cherished values into question. While these external factors are indeed happening, and we may project the cause of our distress on to them, something deeper may be at work.

Burnout is a form of deep human suffering at every level – physical, psychological, social, spiritual – which occurs when old ways of being in the world no longer work and start to disintegrate. Our normal ways of functioning in these domains almost grind to a halt – disease (dis-ease) in many forms can occur in each of them. A few people can become so distressed as the pressure mounts that severe physical or mental illness or even suicide can result. The suffering is accentuated because the cause is not clear to us, although we may project it on to external events that are in reality the mirror to our inner unconscious processes. It is made worse too because our usual resources for dealing with such distress do not seem to work, and because being stuck in our present way of being we cannot look up and see how things might be otherwise. The vision of how we might be without suffering eludes us, so we stay stuck in the way we are, while exhausting ourselves trying to deal with the status quo. Nothing less than a complete transformation (Wright and Sayre-Adams 2000, Glouberman 2002, Wright 2005) in our being is called for, and, whether we perceive it consciously or whether it is bubbling along in the unconscious, this fact too can be terrifying. The levels of fear, panic, pain and distress in our lives are often unprecedented.

Individual responses to burnout

Some people respond by becoming a victim of circumstance – bad things happen and we can do little or nothing except surrender, fight back or try to maintain the status quo. Struggling to keep going in the face of what seems like an attack can be immensely energy-intensive, leading to the collapse known as burnout. In this model we are victims, and other than engaging in the fight, or getting the unions out or whatever, there are limits to what we can do.

Another approach is to try to change things in the workplace or home. At work, employers might bring in staff counselling schemes, or we might take a holiday or distract ourselves with the thought that a change of house would help. Attempts like these are a bit like moving the deckchairs around on the Titanic: they provide temporary distraction but do nothing to tackle the underlying problem. Any relief is always temporary. Burnout is always a call for change at some level (Box 1). Burnout tends to persist when we will not, or cannot, move.

Box 1

Dealing with burnout – two examples

John was a dentist who had spent a lot of his life doing things to meet with the approval of others, including the career path his parents wanted for him. He realised that all his life he had been a dentist because that was what his parents wanted. He left dentistry, became a meditation teacher and is now very happy.

Julia, a woman locked in a relationship in which she could not be true to herself, had spent decades to the point of exhaustion trying to remain what she deemed socially acceptable. For her, becoming whole and accepted in the world meant that she had to face up to the difficulties of telling her family and partner about her sexuality, which she had kept under wraps all those years.

Are you at risk of burnout?

At this point you might consider answering the questions in Appendices 1–3 to think about whether there are risk factors in your life that are making burnout a possibility for you. Have a look at each statement and answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ according to whether you agree with them. Treat a ‘maybe’ or a ‘not sure’ as a ‘no’. Then total your ‘yes’ score in each list. The questions are not designed as absolutes but are intended to give a general impression of what your working environment is like, its feelgood factor and also about how you see yourself in this – what value you place on yourself and your ability or opportunity to take care of yourself.

The first list of questions looks at your relationship to your work, what it feels like in your wider employing organisation such as an NHS trust. The second appendix focuses more on what relationships are like with your immediate team or work colleagues. The third asks you to look at some factors about how you are relating to and taking care of yourself.

How did you score? There is no fixed right or wrong score, but in general the fewer ‘yes’ answers you have for each one the higher the risks to yourself. If you are scoring 50 per cent or fewer ‘yes’ answers in any of Appendices 1–3, that would be a serious cause for concern, indicating a high level of probability that burnout is on the cards for you unless you take action.

Now take a look at Appendix 4, which we can think of as a self-diagnostic tool: am I burning out? There is no fixed score, but clearly the higher the number of ‘yes’ answers in this case the closer you are to being in burnout. Answering ‘yes’ to more than 50 per cent would suggest that you are very close to, if not actually in, burnout.

Factors that make things worse

In our efforts to respond to burnout, some things can be ruled out as unhelpful. ‘Job’s comforters’ – people constantly telling you that it will be all right, or making endless suggestions for change – just make you feel worse. As do those who get involved in your drama and try to interfere with work or relationships or get angry or upset on your behalf. Trying to disconnect from work and people just makes us feel lonely and isolated; the problem does not go away – we just stew on it more in our isolation. Antidepressant drugs might get us through the immediate crisis, but in the long term they just mask the cause of the suffering, which at some point will have to be dealt with. Escape routes (job or relationship hopping, holidays, the ‘grass is greener’ phenomenon) may offer temporary respite, but the real issue simply lurks underneath waiting for the right moment to surface again – it is only a matter of time. Diagnosis as a psychiatric problem, which sometimes happens because the problem can appear as depression, can again make matters worse – locking us into the mental health system, with a diagnostic and treatment label that may haunt us for a long time and that has overlooked the root causes. Lastly, trying to hold it together just makes it worse – the energy we have to put into doing so exacerbates the exhaustion.

How to deal with burnout – the ‘R’ words

The immediate task is to get out of the situation. It might be necessary to take sick leave, or move to the home of a friend where you feel safe and taken care of or maybe seek out specialist retreat facilities. This is not a time for action

or for trying to make solutions happen – the effort needed for this can make the burnout worse. This is a time to come to stillness, to wait and see, to get out of the situation and find the space to allow the solutions that are waiting within to emerge. There are lots of possibilities, but getting temporarily out of the sick environment and creating the space – where there is time for you and only you and which allows the new insights and healings to emerge (Wright and Sayre-Adams 2000) – for the next steps is a priority.

Rest, re-energising and recuperation – looking after your physical wellbeing by eating, exercising and sleeping better – are part of the process, coupled with time to reflect on what is going on with you. This problem cannot be solved alone, so disconnection in retreat is not the answer; reconnection is what is called for, so the support of a wise counsellor who can guide you through the reflective process is essential. As we recollect what has gone on, we can start a process of revisioning our lives. Using all kinds of reflective and awareness-building processes, such as guided meditation, the Enneagram, spiritual counselling and so on, we can begin to return to that place in ourselves where we feel at home – recovering a sense of meaning, purpose and connection in life – the very stuff of spirituality. It may become clear to us through this process what has to change in our lives – a different career, a renewal or letting go of a relationship and often, and most especially, learning to live our lives with what has heart and meaning for us with a deeper connection to our spiritual needs. As we burn out we tend to ‘hang on’ to normality as best we can; one of the signs of a healthy recovery can be our willingness to let go of something – a relationship or a job, for example, that we have been working so hard to stay with. Equally, we may find that the revisioning process enables us to stay with a job or relationship, because something in ourselves has changed – some change of consciousness or awareness that helps us to be with old roles in new and less harmful ways.

As we begin to see more clearly what has been happening to us, and what we need to do or how we need to be, there is a need for an ongoing plan to ensure we do not slip backwards. Four key ‘soul care’ criteria need to be in place (Box 2)

Preventing burnout

If we refer again to Appendices 1–3, each of these statements offers some clues about what needs to change, but it is important to be gentle on ourselves and remember that we do not have to have everything perfectly in place. (Trying to be perfect or make the world perfect is one of the catalysts for burnout.) The trick is to adopt an incremental approach – the more pieces of the jigsaw puzzle are in place the more complete the picture, but it does not have to be done all at once. For example, it might not be possible to do much about the wider workplace culture, but could something be done to enhance support in your team, such as implementing reflective practice? Could you do something to improve your diet or ensure you have a day a month of ‘me’ time? Starting small by tackling one or two achievable issues that can make a difference is a more realistic and healthy approach.

Preventing burnout again can follow similar lines. Looking at the statements in the first three appendices, some of the answers lie there, such as finding better ways to take care of ourselves, building better teams and creating more hospitable employment environments, such as the HSE (2005) guidelines suggest or such as have been listed in detail (Wright and Sayre-Adams 2000) elsewhere. If burnout is a sign of soul sickness, bringing things into the workplace that make our working relationships more soulful – replete with meaning, connection and purpose – would seem to be helpful. If we look at the work of the nursing development unit (NDU) movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s, these units were often working harder and doing more, yet sickness, absenteeism and attrition rates were lower. Why? Because the staff in them felt more supportive of each other, had a shared sense of mission and purpose in their work, and had a deeper sense of connection with each other, which made the work culture more soulful and more satisfying. Dispirited workforces are a recipe for disaster for the individuals who work in them, for the teams and for those who depend on them for care.

Box 2

‘Soul care’ criteria

Soul friends

Access to the support of one or more wise counsellors or mentors to whom we can turn for ongoing guidance when needed in our lives. People who have walked the path before us and know how to support us in times of need.

Soul communities

Groups of people with whom we feel at home and who nourish our ongoing spiritual awakening, such as a group of fellow meditators, a reflective practice group at work or a religious group – there are many possibilities.

Soul foods

Through the inspiration of poetry, music, art, nature, scripture and so on that refresh, renew and revitalise us.

Soul works

Developing practices that take care of and keep us on track: meditation, yoga, t'ai chi; the list is endless. Practical things we can do, some alone, some in groups with our soul community, that help to keep us centred and at home in ourselves.

Suggestions for improving workplace relationships, for building more connected and soulful communities, are wide-ranging in the studies cited above. Box 3 lists a few examples of the many possibilities available that have been used –

with some success, according to the reports – in a wide range of settings. What is needed if the extremes of stress and burnout are to be prevented is a comprehensive strategy, not just providing employee-friendly policies, staff counselling or team-building days, or better personal exercise. It is all of these and more. The more comprehensive the strategy, the more likely it is to be successful in prevention.

A root-and-branch approach seems necessary at every level of the organisation to produce an employing culture that is inclusive, supportive and nurturing. The cultivation of ‘right relationships’ (Wright and Sayre-Adams 2000) between the organisation and those it employs, among teams and individual employees is essential. The interplay of the relationships between the individual person’s inner experience – how I feel about myself, how grounded and ‘at one’ with the world I am – and the quality of relationships in teams and in the wider organisation provides the milieu for burnout to arise or not. Thus prevention of burnout takes place at many different levels simultaneously. It could be argued that all the staff-support policies in the world will not help if an employee is not in right relationship with him- or herself. Equally, it is a tough call to expect an individual to carry through the inner exploration of moving to right relationship with the self if the work or team relationships are out of balance.

That said, there is a paradox here. It seems, like motherhood and apple pie, that preventing burnout is self-evidently good. Yet, if we look at the evidence in Box 1 of those who have passed through burnout, one of the outcomes is that people tend to be grateful for it. Glouberman (2002) talks of the ‘joy’ of burnout and Wright and Sayre-Adams (2000) of the ‘awakening to our bliss, our sacred truth’.

It was terrible at the time, but without burnout some people would not have transformed their lives into new, more meaningful ways. It could be argued that burnout should not be prevented if this is the case. On the other hand, perhaps there are also ways of finding a more soulful path in life without going through the torment of burnout.

Box 3

Ways to improve workplace relationships

- *Shared educational programmes*
- *Social events*
- *Multidisciplinary projects*
- *Pre- and post-shift debriefings*
- *Team-building sessions*
- *Proper resources for staff to do the job, and systems in place to check this*
- *Reflective practice, clinical supervision, mentoring*
- *Shared exploration of boundaries and working practices*
- *Developing and implementing anti-bullying policies*
- *Networking and learning sets with groups with similar interests*
- *Using email networks, staff journals and so on to ensure that everyone knows what is going on*
- *Staff involvement in decision making at every level*
- *Stress management education*
- *Introducing relaxation techniques for staff, such as meditation training, t'ai chi and complementary therapies*
- *Creating quiet ‘sanctuaries’ where staff can be in silence away from work*
- *Access to independent counselling*

Burnout – what it is and what it is not

Finally, a few important points to remember:

- Burnout is not a fixed diagnosis – it is a state of being and it will pass.
- Burning out does not mean that we cannot re-ignite and find new passion and zeal in our lives.
- It is not a social, physical or psychological problem, although all the symptoms are manifested in these domains.
- It is a spiritual problem – a crisis of meaning and purpose in life, when the deepest core of our being simply cannot bear to be in the world where it cannot be true to itself.
- It is a crisis of disconnection from old ways of being and the hunger for new, more meaningful ways of connection.
- It is not a dead end but an opportunity for learning and transformation.
- The ‘causes’ are often seen as external factors (the unloving partner, the threat of redundancy, the difficult boss – that is, victim behaviour), but these are also catalysts for something that is going on deep within ourselves.
- Just because we have burned out once does not mean it cannot happen again. Unless we maintain a consistent pattern of self-care and awareness, it is easy to ‘forget’, to get caught up in old patterns, although experience suggests that when we start to feel off-centre and disconnected again, we are more likely to recognise the symptoms and take corrective action.
- Burnout is the demand from our deepest source to find our true path in life.
- Approaching burnout from a spiritual perspective does not obviate the need for good employment practices or excuse abusive behaviour. The spiritual, holistic perspective is not either/or – it demands that we approach the problem from all the possibilities.

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Appendices – self-assessment questions

Consider each of the following statements. How do they fit with your experience of your workplace? Answer 'yes' or 'no' to each as honestly as you can; a maybe is a 'no'. It is probably best to put down the first answer that comes to you. These are simple indicators of your work experience; there is no need to get too analytical about them.

Appendix 1: The organisation as a whole – your employer, such as an NHS trust or independent hospital

Y N

- ? ? I know what is expected of me
- ? ? I have sufficient resources to do the job
- ? ? I have the opportunity to do what I do best
- ? ? I have received praise from my boss in the past seven days
- ? ? I am aware of what is going on in the organisation
- ? ? I can participate in decisions that affect my work
- ? ? My boss has talked with me about my progress within the past six months
- ? ? I would recognise all the executives of the organisation (for example, the chief executive) if I saw them
- ? ? What I have to say counts
- ? ? I have the support and opportunity to keep learning
- ? ? The mission and purpose of our organisation is clear to me
- ? ? I feel the organisation cares about me

Appendix 2: Your immediate team – the group of people you work with on a regular basis, such as a ward, clinic or community

Y N

- ? ? Although our work is serious and hard, my team laughs easily and plays hard
- ? ? I feel able to ask my team for help when I need it
- ? ? In my team, people offer help without needing to be asked
- ? ? I trust my team to keep a confidence about me
- ? ? Work is a pleasure with this team
- ? ? We talk about our practice and reflect on it to make care better, in formal sessions, at least monthly
- ? ? We have pre-shift and post-shift debriefings to check that everyone arrives at and leaves work feeling okay
- ? ? We have at least one day a year as a team out of the work situation, where as many as possible of us gather to review how we work together and see how we might improve our relationships
- ? ? I feel confident that my team does not gossip about me when my back is turned
- ? ? I do not gossip about my team members in their absence
- ? ? I feel respected in my team
- ? ? I have the opportunity to 'take five' and gather myself without being made to feel guilty or shamed

Appendix 3: Taking care of yourself at work

Y N

- ? ? I get a good night's sleep
- ? ? I eat a healthy, well-balanced diet

- ? ? I take plenty of exercise
- ? ? I can talk through work problems with my partner/a close friend
- ? ? Work does not interfere with my personal time
- ? ? Other people's problems at work do not get to me
- ? ? I practise some form of meditation or relaxation regularly
- ? ? I can withdraw appropriately if a situation at work gets too stressful.
- ? ? I have day a month when I do exactly as I please
- ? ? I allow myself a good read, or something similar, every day, for at least half an hour, that takes all of my attention and is nothing to do with work
- ? ? I make sure I get my proper breaks for meals and refreshments at work.
- ? ? I know my limits and boundaries and keep to them

Appendix 4: How close are you to burnout? These statements apply to your life in general, including work and home

Y N

- ? ? I find myself feeling stressed or irritated when others make even simple demands of me
- ? ? Work always seems to exhaust me
- ? ? I seem to get angry more easily than I used to
- ? ? I have this feeling of being in the 'wrong' place a lot of the time
- ? ? I worry about things a lot more than I used to
- ? ? When I go to sleep, I wake up feeling tired
- ? ? I often cannot sleep because of thoughts or worries racing through my mind.
- ? ? I do not feel a sense of peace
- ? ? I feel disconnected from normal life
- ? ? Everyone seems to be okay but me
- ? ? I seem to move from one job to another, and nothing really satisfies
- ? ? I seem to move from one relationship to another, and nothing really satisfies
- ? ? I feel stuck and going nowhere in my current main relationship(s)
- ? ? I feel stuck and going nowhere in my work
- ? ? I am more suspicious of people than I used to be
- ? ? I feel unhappy a lot at home
- ? ? Work no longer satisfies me
- ? ? I feel weighed down by responsibility
- ? ? Changes or demands at work feel like a threat
- ? ? I feel I am in the wrong job
- ? ? I feel I am in the wrong marriage/partnership
- ? ? People seem to be avoiding me
- ? ? I avoid other people
- ? ? I feel helpless at work
- ? ? I feel helpless at home
- ? ? I seem to be running just to stay still – doing more but achieving less
- ? ? I seem to be helping everyone else, but no one seems to see my suffering
- ? ? I get sick a lot
- ? ? I seem to get a lot of aches and pains
- ? ? The thought of going to work makes me feel sick
- ? ? The thought of going home makes me feel sick

? ? Doing ordinary things such as shopping takes a monumental effort
 ? ? I seem to forget things more than usual
 ? ? Normal conversation seems to take more effort than usual
 ? ? I feel ashamed that I am not coping
 ? ? I feel no one really understands what life is like for me
 ? ? People trying to help just makes things worse
 ? ? The future seems hopeless
 ? ? I have lost confidence in myself
 ? ? I feel like I am on my own
 ? ? Whatever is wrong, it is all my fault
 ? ? Whatever is wrong, it is because others are getting at me
 ? ? Things I once believed in do not seem true any more
 ? ? The world seems a place of horror and despair
 ? ? I have sometimes thought that death would be better than life
 ? ? I am taking more time off work than I used to
 ? ? At work, I feel like I am under attack a lot of the time
 ? ? I burst into tears for no apparent reason
 ? ? I have inexplicable feelings of deep sadness
 ? ? I can explode with anger at things I would once have seen as trivial
 ? ? I have lost interest in my pastimes or hobbies
 ? ? When I am talking with people, it is sometimes like we are using different languages

? ? I seem to be making a lot more mistakes than usual
 ? ? People I love seem to be getting more angry with me
 ? ? There seems to be no time for anything but work
 ? ? I have no time for people, even those I love
 ? ? I seem to indulge in more drink, drugs, food, casual sex, junk TV or whatever
 ? ? I feel exhausted and drained of energy a lot of the time
 ? ? At home, people's demands on me can feel like an attack
 ? ? I feel mentally paralysed and do not know which way to turn
 ? ? I have lost interest in sex
 ? ? I spend more time in bed than usual
 ? ? When things go wrong I tend to blame myself
 ? ? I have put on/lost weight
 ? ? I have had more of the following of late – headaches, vomiting, diarrhoea, tummy ache, constipation, breathlessness, fainting, dizziness
 ? ? I seem to be making a lot of mistakes with even the simplest of things
 ? ? I am easily irritated by things I would normally ignore – background noises, people speaking, loud TV and so on
 ? ? I seem to be taking more careless risks – for example, at work, while driving while doing household jobs
 ? ? I have become more cynical
 ? ? A lot of the time I feel like I just want to curl up in a ball and the world to go away

Notes on the four appendices

The first three appendices explore whether some of the conditions for burnout are present in your life. Appendix 4 looks at how close you are to burnout at the moment. Count your responses to each questionnaire and total the 'yes' responses. In Appendices 1–3, the higher your 'yes' response, the less is the likelihood of burnout occurring. If you score 100 per cent in any of these first three appendices, you are probably kidding yourself or you are in denial. Most people who are okay in their lives and work will get around 75 per cent. The lower your score in any of Appendices 1–3, the more a problem is indicated. In general, a score of 50 per cent or less in any one of these should be a warning sign of a real problem that will provide the seedbed for burnout. The risks would be incrementally greater if the score was below 50 per cent in more than one of these.

Conversely, each question has an implicit solution. So, for example, if you have answered 'no' to question 2 in Appendix 3, are there steps you can take to look after yourself better with a better diet? It is important not to get into trying to get a high score on all of them at once if there is a problem. Putting that degree of energy into it will probably make things worse. Be gentle on yourself. If there are problem areas, set one or two realistic goals rather than trying to sort the whole lot out. For example, in Appendix 1 you might feel you do not have the power to change a lot of things, but you might be able to fix an appointment with your boss to talk about your progress. Or it may be that some things in the first appendix are beyond you, but you can reduce your risks by boosting your score in another arena – for example, in Appendix 2 you might look at what can be done to develop better working relationships in your team.

The picture with Appendix 4 is quite different. The higher your 'yes' count, the closer you are to burnout. In general, a score of 50 per cent or more would indicate a state of serious challenge in your life. More than 75 per cent and you are probably in burnout right now. But these are very general perspectives based on our experience at the Sacred Space foundation.

Remember that it is the overall picture with these scores that counts, rather than responses to individual questions. The intention of the whole is to raise awareness of the situation so that things can change if necessary.