So we've been talking about living systems responding and adapting to conditions. And once we begin to see ourselves that way, I think we have to become much more interested in something that I call capacity. Now we use that word all the time in everyday life.

I don't have the capacity for that today. She's at capacity. I wish I had more capacity.

But I think we often still hear the word through a psychological or maybe even a moral lens. And we can subtly equate capacity with strength, with resilience, with commitment, with how badly we want something or with whether we're willing to push ourselves hard enough to make it happen. That's not what I mean by capacity.

Capacity is the biological availability of resources to meet the demands of life. Capacity is the biological availability of resources to meet the demands of life. And that distinction matters enormously because capacity isn't a personality characteristic.

It's not something I either have or I don't have. It's dynamic. My capacity on Tuesday may not be my capacity on Thursday.

My capacity this year may be very different from my capacity five years ago because capacity exists in relationship with conditions. Capacity exists in relationship with conditions. Perhaps a way to think about it is as kind of a biological economy.

We have resources coming in and we have resources being spent. And before I consciously decide what I'd like to spend those resources on today, my biology already has some bills to pay. It has to keep breathing.

It has to circulate blood. It's got to regulate temperature, digest food. It's got to run an immune system.

It has to move and repair and sleep. And then there are the resources required to respond to whatever's happening in my life right now. Work, you know, relationships, parenting, caregiving, illness, grief, conflict, financial pressures, change, transitions, uncertainty.

And then, and this is a piece that I think can be so easily missed, there may also be resources being spent on adaptations that developed under historical conditions. Vigilance, bracing, anticipating, controlling, pleasing, suppressing, trying not to make a mistake, trying to be excellent, trying to remain acceptable, trying to make sure nothing goes wrong. Those patterns don't exist only as ideas in our heads.

Our historical blueprint can have a present day biological cost. Oh my goodness, that is so worth saying again. Our historical blueprint can have a present day biological cost.

So when I ask today, what capacity do I have available? I'm not asking how much should I be able to do today? I'm asking what is my living system already paying for? And I understand this one personally. About 35 years ago, I entered into a period in my life in which the demands were enormous. There were fertility interventions, pregnancy, birth, the transition into motherhood.

I was working in an extremely demanding professional environment. And even during what was technically my maternity leave, I continued working. My relationship at the time was not providing the kind of support I needed.

And then there was a sudden death and profound grief. Those were the visible conditions. But there was another set of conditions operating as well.

Because I came into that period of my life with a very well-practiced historical blueprint. I mean, I can feel the tears as I share this with you. I have the little goosebumps running up and down my legs.

My historical blueprint could probably be summarized as excellence at all costs. I had learned really early that being good wasn't really good enough. Being excellent mattered.

Getting it right mattered. Not making mistakes mattered. Being useful mattered.

Being able to handle things mattered. And underneath all of that was something really fundamental. A deeply, deeply learned understanding that being excellent was connected to belonging, acceptance, and love.

So there I was with enormous present day demands and a living system that had also become extremely practiced at vigilance, responsibility, anticipation, and excellence. But no mind. You know what I did? I kept going.

In fact, from the outside, I was functioning remarkably well. I was working. I was mothering.

I was accomplishing things. I was getting things done. I was winning awards.

I was being promoted. Which brings me to something that's so enormously important for me to say. Productivity is not evidence of capacity.

Whoa. Let's take a breath. Productivity is not evidence of capacity.

Just because a human being can keep going does not mean the human being has the biological resources to sustainably keep going. And that's difficult in a culture that celebrates the fact that we can push through. We admire the person who keeps functioning against all odds.

We admire ourselves for that. We expect it of ourselves. Look at me.

I'm handling it. And for a long time, I did. But my biology was also communicating.

I developed chronic headaches. I began experiencing panic attacks. There were signals, and I kept going.

Until eventually, my system did something that I've come to think of as a brownout. Not a complete blackout. My lights didn't go completely off.

They dimmed. I was still alive. I was functioning in some sense, but I wasn't really present anymore.

I eventually spent a week in hospital, and I have virtually no memory of that week. And I think when I look back on it now, one of the most important things I understand is that my conscious mind could continue making demands. My intellect could say, you have to, Nancy.

Keep going, Nancy. Try harder, Nancy. Other people manage this, Nancy.

You should be able to do this too, Nancy. But there was something my intellect couldn't do. My intellect could make demands on my biology, but it couldn't manufacture biological resources.

And eventually, biology got the final vote. And what happened in hospital was actually very simple in one respect. A whole lot of demands stopped.

I wasn't going to work. I wasn't looking after everything. I wasn't required to keep performing my life.

For a period of time, the conditions changed, and my living system had some space. Now, it's important to me that I'm careful with my story because I'm not suggesting that everybody who exceeds their capacity is going to have the experience I had. That's my story.

Living systems are individual. Conditions are individual. The way our biology communicates with us will be individual.

But I do think there's a broader question really worth asking. What if capacity is information rather than a verdict about who I am? Right? What if capacity is information rather than a verdict about who I am? What if my current capacity isn't evidence that I'm weak or lazy or uncommitted or not trying hard enough? What if it's information about the relationship between the demands being placed upon the living system and the resources currently available to meet them? Right? That changes something for me because instead of asking, how do I make myself have more capacity? I can become curious. What's using capacity right now? What is supporting capacity right now? What is draining it? What conditions am I living in? What historical subscriptions might my nervous system still be paying for? And then perhaps, is my biology spending precious resources today responding to conditions that are no longer present in the same way today? But that's not another reason to criticize the system.

It's the opposite. If vigilance belonged once, I want to understand that. If pleasing belonged once, I want to understand that.

And if excellence belonged and was necessary, I want to understand that. This belonged then. Does it belong now? And then I can become interested in what today's reality has to say.

Because maybe there are resources today being spent on protection that my system is still perceiving as necessary. Maybe some of those resources can eventually become available for something else. For learning, for creativity, for relationship, for play, for growth, for blooming.

But we don't get there by standing over ourselves and demanding more capacity. We begin by listening to the capacity that's actually here. Capacity is information.

It is not a measure of worth. Not a measure of worth. And once we understand that, it raises a really important question for healing itself.

Because healing isn't free either. Therapy requires capacity, resources. Coaching requires resources, capacity.

Learning requires resources, change requires resources, even EFT requires resources. So perhaps, before we ask what intervention might help this person, there's another question that needs to come first. Does this living system have the capacity for what we're about to ask of it? More simply, can this living system afford this intervention right now? And that's where I want to go next.