

Health As Belonging

A Relational Model of
Medicine and Wellbeing.

Based on the teachings of Yankunytjatjara elder Bob Randall.

H e a l t h i s n o t d e l i v e r e d . I t i s h e l d .

The Interventionist Model

The Assumption

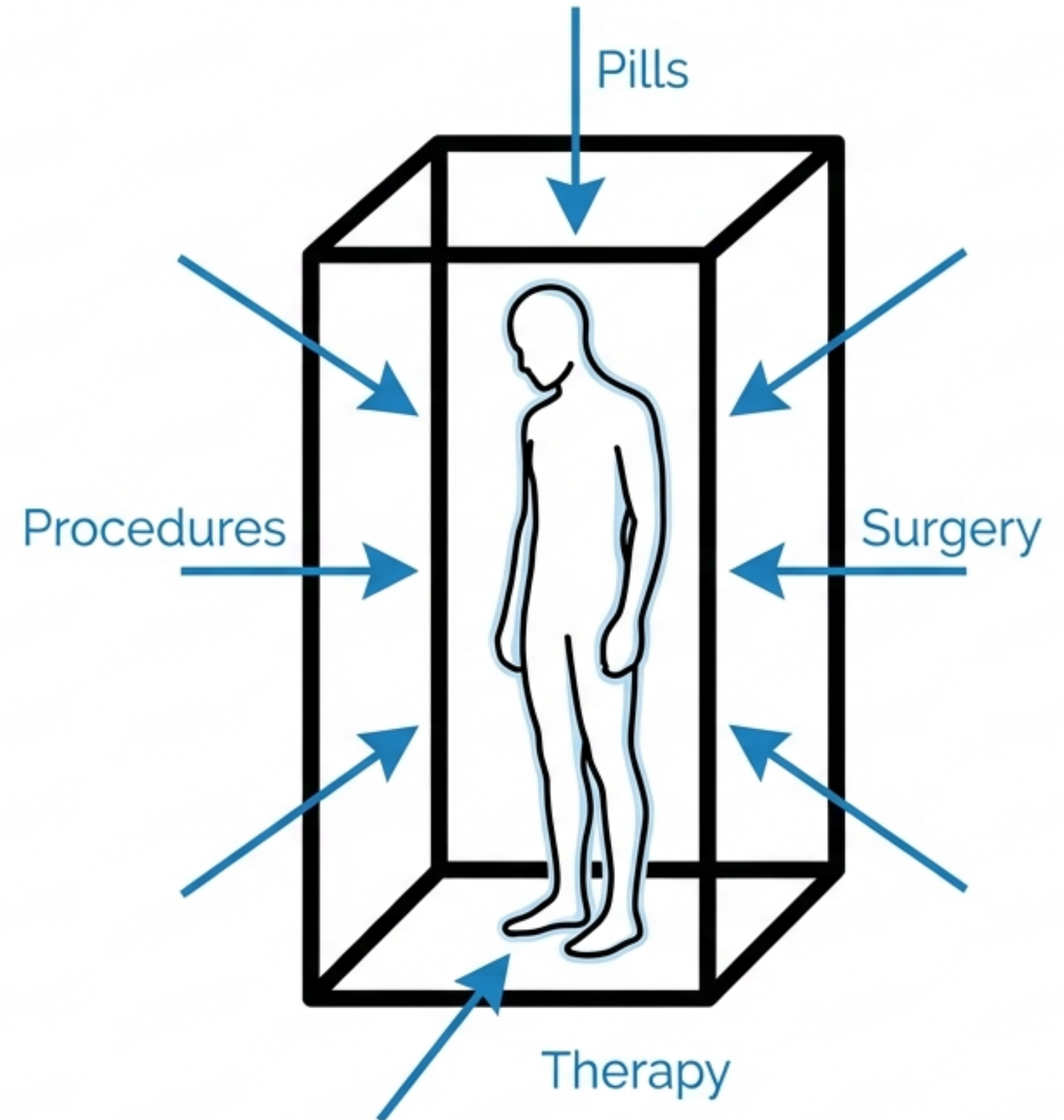
Contemporary medicine locates health strictly within the individual body and mind.

The Method

Disease is a dysfunction of organs or psyche; treatment is an action to correct that dysfunction.

The Limit

Even the "Biopsychosocial" model treats social factors as external variables acting upon a bounded individual, rather than constitutive of the person.



Competence Without Resolution



Acute Success

The interventionist model excels at mechanics—mending broken bones, fighting infection, and extending life expectancy.



Chronic Stagnation

It struggles with the persistence of chronic distress, intergenerational trauma, and mental anguish.

Care is delivered competently and compassionately, yet suffering remains unresolved.



The Ontological Error

We treat **bodies**, but we miss the person. We treat the person, but we miss the **relationships** that sustain them.

The failure to resolve chronic suffering is not technical; it is structural. We are looking for health in the wrong place.



Responsibility Precedes Wellbeing

The Perspective of Anangu Law.

The Shift

Health is not an outcome of care. It is a condition that arises when lawful relationships are intact.

The Definition

In Anangu understanding, there is no separate domain called 'health.' There is only the visible expression of whether relationships are being carried properly.

Quote

'Health is not inside you; it is between you and everything else.'



Law is the Physics of Connection

Not Legislation

Indigenous Law does not refer to codified rules or external governance.

Enduring Order

It refers to the enduring order that governs the relationship between people, place, and life itself.

The Consequence

Where Law is lived, life holds together. Where Law is broken, illness follows—not as a moral failure, but as a lawful consequence of physics.



Kanyini: Unconditional Love as Responsibility

The Concept

Kanyini is often translated as “responsibility,” but it specifically means “unconditional love lived as responsibility.”

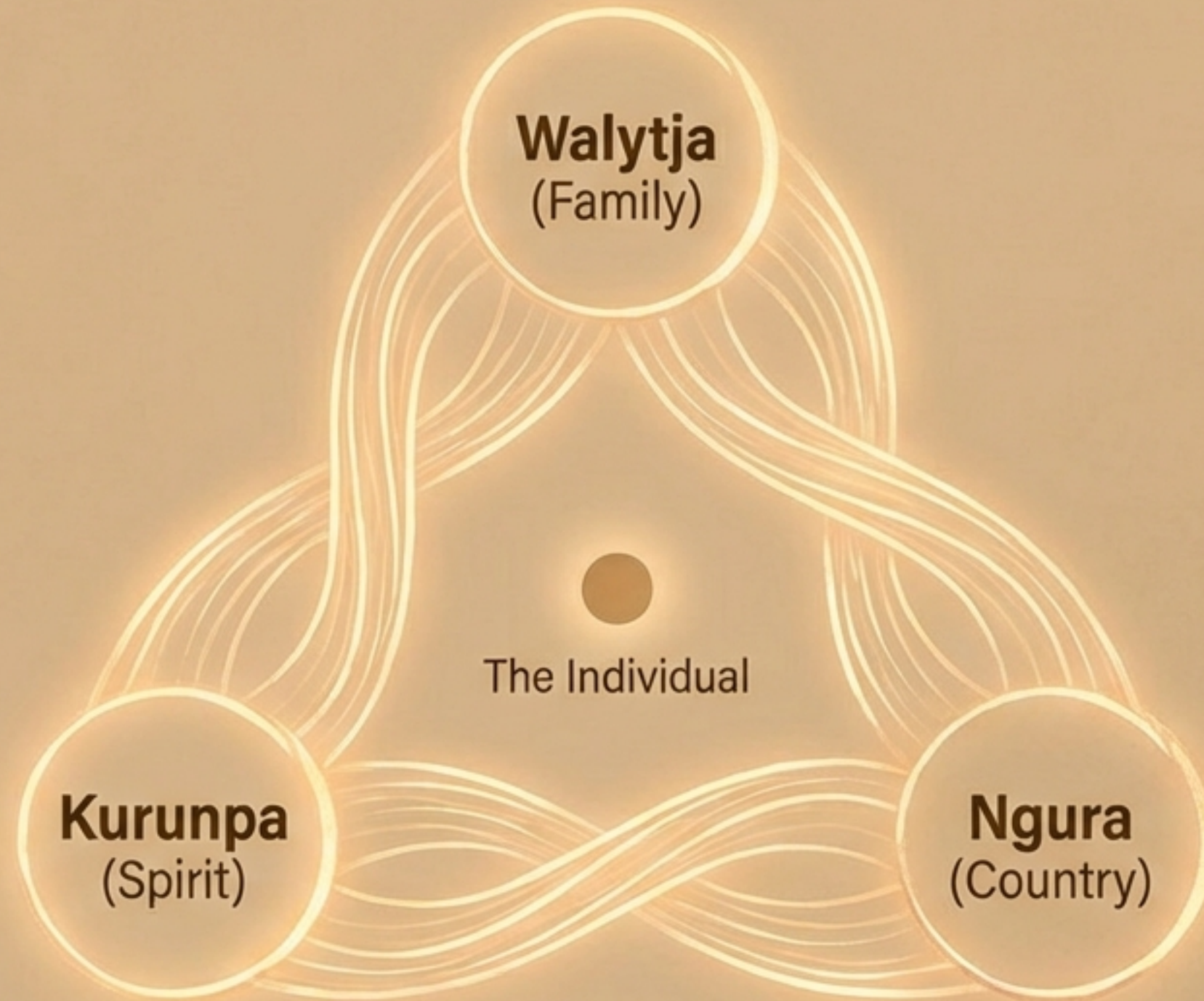
The Obligation

It is the obligation to care for all relations—human and more-than-human—without exception.

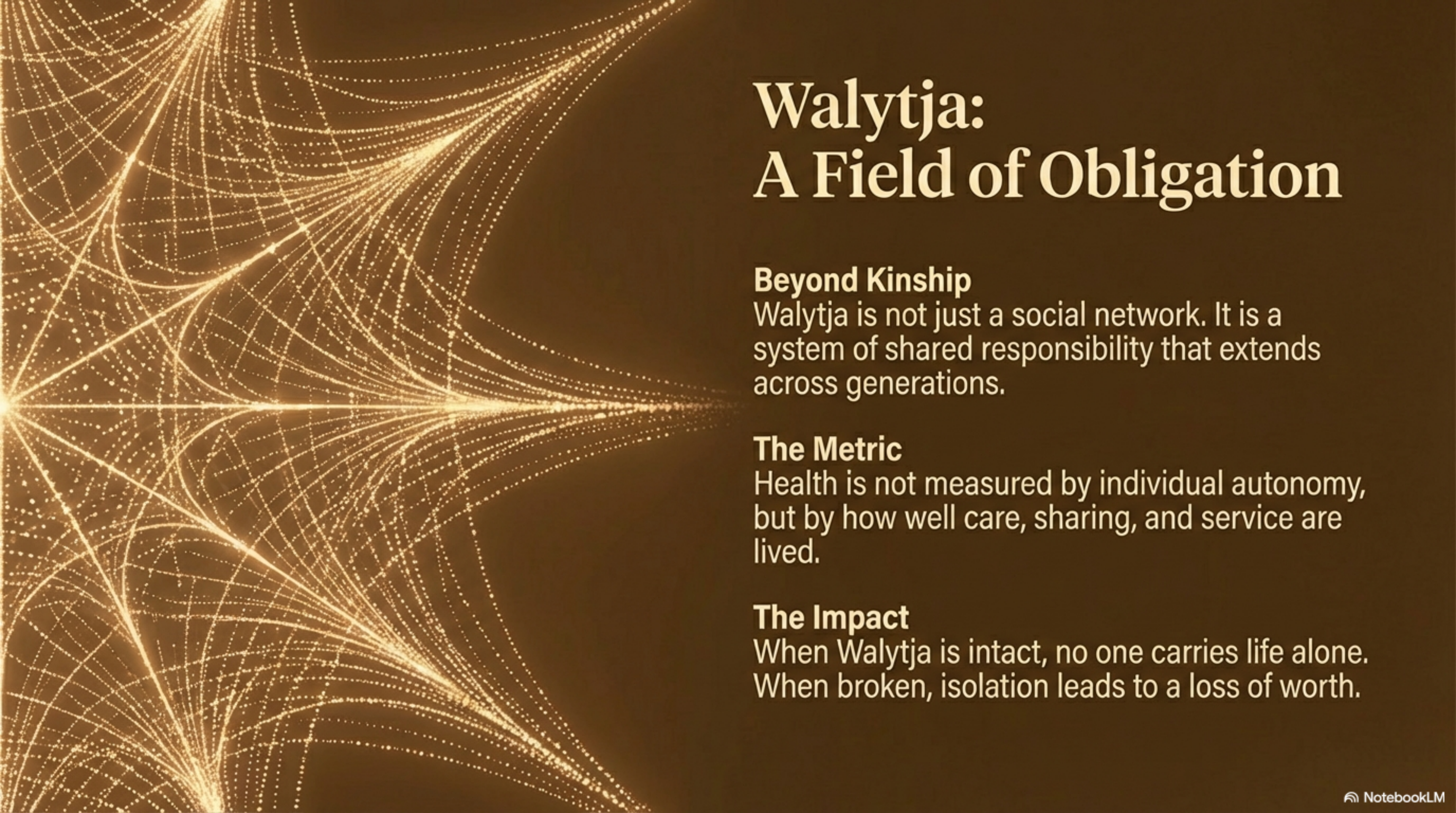
The Result

Kanyini is the glue of the system. When this obligation is lived, health follows. When it is denied, coherence collapses.

The Relational Ecosystem



Health is the coherence held between these three points.



Walytja: A Field of Obligation

Beyond Kinship

Walytja is not just a social network. It is a system of shared responsibility that extends across generations.

The Metric

Health is not measured by individual autonomy, but by how well care, sharing, and service are lived.

The Impact

When Walytja is intact, no one carries life alone. When broken, isolation leads to a loss of worth.

Ngura: Country as Living Relation

Not a Backdrop

Country is not an environmental context. It is a living entity that remembers, responds, and holds life.

Reciprocity

We do not just live *on* land; we live *with* it.

The Health Implication

Separation from Country interrupts the relational field that regulates coherence. You cannot be healthy if you are cut off from the place that knows you.

Kurunpa: The Continuity of Spirit

Not Psychology

Spirit is not an internal psychological state or a religious belief.

The Flow

It is the movement of life that connects people, land, ancestors, and future generations.

External Source

Spirit does not reside inside the individual; it flows *through* relationship. It cannot be fixed by treating the individual mind alone.



Health Is Coherence

Non-Additive

Health is not physical
+ mental + social.

Walytja

Family/Kin

Ngura

Country/Land

Kurunpa

Spirit

The Takeaway

Bodies do not become
healthy first and then
relate; they remain
healthy because they
are held in relationship.

The Flow

Health is the *flow*
between Walytja,
Ngura, and Kurunpa.

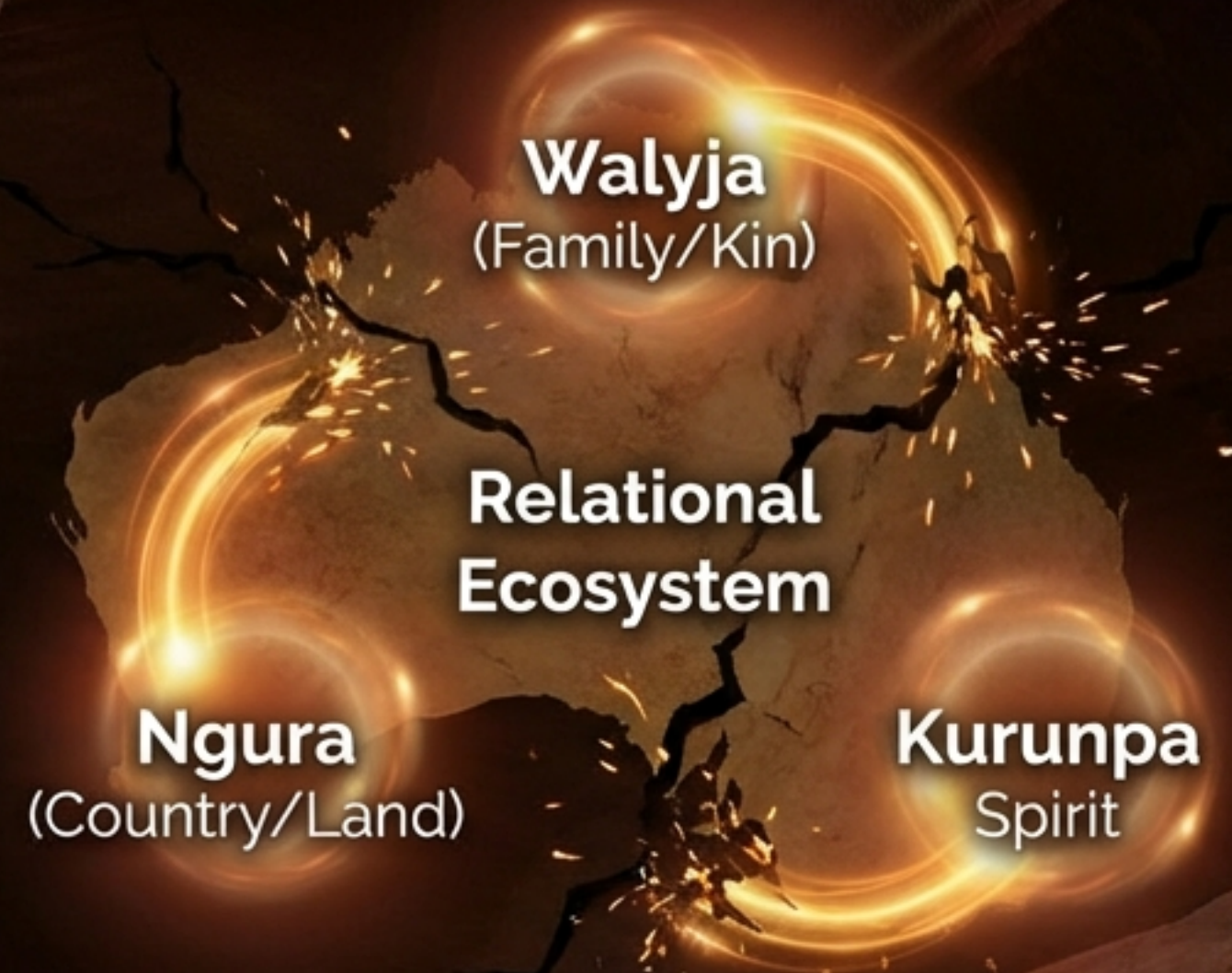
Reframing Trauma



The Old View

Trauma is an injury to the individual brain or psyche (a disordered memory).

The Reality: Trauma is the consequence of a world that no longer holds together.



The New View

Trauma is "Displacement." It is the lived experience of being severed from family, Country, and Law.

The Stolen Generations



- **Systemic Severance**
The removal of children was not just distressing; it dismantled the structure that holds life together.
- **Institutional Replacement**
Belonging was replaced with compliance. Responsibility was replaced with control.
- **The Outcome**
Under these conditions, health cannot be sustained, regardless of the quality of medical care provided later.

Illness is a Lawful Consequence

Broken Relationship
(Displacement)

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graph TD; A[Broken Relationship (Displacement)] --> B[Loss of Meaning & Worth]; B --> C[Physical & Mental Illness];
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Loss of Meaning &
Worth

Physical & Mental
Illness

Not Anomaly

Persistent illness in displaced communities is not a biological anomaly or a failure of compliance.

Expected Result

It is the *expected* result of broken relationships.

The Worthlessness Trap

When denied responsibility and connection, "worthlessness" appears not as a neurosis, but as an imposed condition of having no place in the order.

Medicine is Relational Practice

Restoring Order

Indigenous medicine is not a set of herbal techniques or therapies. It is the practice of restoring right relationship.

The Method

Ceremony, song, and listening are not 'interventions'; they are ways of realigning realigning with Law.

The Goal

To restore balance across Country and community, not just to fix the body.

The Trap of Appropriation



- **Context is Key**
You cannot extract Indigenous practices (smoking ceremonies, bush medicine) and apply them as clinical 'tools' within a Western system.
- **Loss of Law**
When removed from their custodial context, these practices lose the relational conditions that make them effective.
- **The Risk**
What remains may resemble care, but it no longer carries Law.

The Limits of Care



Life & Belonging

Clinical
Medicine

The Hard Truth

Medicine can support healing, but it cannot substitute for belonging.

The Gap

Clinical care cannot carry the obligations of family, community, or Country.

The Error

Expecting medicine to fix trauma caused by displacement places an impossible burden on the clinician.

A New Humility

RESTRAINT. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT. SUPPORT.

Shift in Emphasis

Rather than asking how medicine can do **more**, we must recognize where medicine must **stop**.

The Role

Medicine's role is to alleviate suffering and support recovery so that the work of reconnecting to Law can happen.

Restraint

We must avoid 'manufacturing coherence' where the conditions for it do not exist.

Health Is Held, Not Delivered

Final Argument

Health is not a commodity delivered by a system.
It is a coherence held in relationship.

The Future

A humane medical practice recognizes that the deepest conditions of health lie beyond intervention—in the relations that sustain life itself.

Closing Thought

‘Belonging is not a sentiment. It is Law.’

Acknowledgments

With deep gratitude to the **Indigenous Elders** and Knowledge Holders, especially **Bob Randall ('Tjilpi')**.

His teachings on Kanyini and relational responsibility form the foundation of this perspective.

These ideas are shared with respect, acknowledging that this wisdom belongs to the Anangu people and their custodians.