

pure belonging

Enjoy your free chapter of

PEACE WITH SELF, PEACE WITH FOOD

by Galina Denzel



Chapter 9

STEP 4 - MAKE SPACE FOR EMOTIONS

Why do we call it emotional eating? Stress eating? Comfort eating?

Why not call it by its real name? Lonely eating, sad eating, betrayed eating, not feeling safe eating, grief eating, tired eating, what's-the-point-eating, despair eating, miss you eating, my heart hurts eating?

The reality is, when we use eating, or restricting, as a way to re-inhabit our window of tolerance, that place where we can function with the least cost to the system physiologically, and with the least demand for change on the system psychologically, emotions will not be recognized, allowed, digested and transformed.

Mission accomplished - we eat and we feel ourselves less. We practically "Photoshop" what's going on in our bodies. We can temporarily cope and maintain a perception of capacity to handle things, but while we physiologically manage to become more regulated with the help of an external means, what we photo shopped over stays in the deeper layers of our inner experience. Undigested emotion becomes the past that is always living in us as if it's the present, whether we feel it or not.



"I have this feeling that this is not my life, that I am wasting my days. And I am already 43. I do what I can to take care of my body during the day, but so often, I just go through the motions, never really feeling joy, or fulfillment. Everything feels either numb or painful. At night, the only pleasure is eating from a deep bowl, until I am full and distended. In the morning I run and do yoga to compensate and then I do it all over again. It's really a horrible place to be stuck."

JM, London

That being said, making space to process, to literally digest our emotions is absolutely necessary to decrease the occurrence and toll of suffering of emotional eating. Not because emotional eating is bad, shameful, or despicable, wrong at its very core, but because in its own way it's giving you important information that matters to your life and your very essence. If you only look at it as a coping skill, or God forbid, as some character flaw or lack of willpower, you will forget to ask what is it that you are coping with and at what cost.

This is very much like a heroine's journey. On it, you will eventually get to the dark woods where your strength will be tested. In the emotional eating realm, the dark woods are full of the shadows of emotions we've been too afraid to feel. And like any heroine's journey, it can't be complete without the guidance of a wise teacher or mentor that you meet in the woods.

On this journey, on your own, with a community, or the support of a therapist who can work with the unconscious and implicit - you will come to a turning point. You will be asked to build affect tolerance and capacity to meet, recognize, allow and be with your emotions.

Remember how in the previous chapter we talked about the metaphor of the three brains. Learning how to be present with your emotions will help integrate the mammalian brain with the brainstem and the prefrontal cortex. This is the next step toward integration. It's also the one where you will meet the ultimate healers - grief, rage, shame, compassion, acceptance and love.

Why is it so damn hard to meet our emotions?

"Don't cry!"

"Enough already, you are so emotional!"

"If you don't stop crying, I will give you something to cry about!"

"In this house, we don't get angry!"

"You are under my roof, you follow my rules."

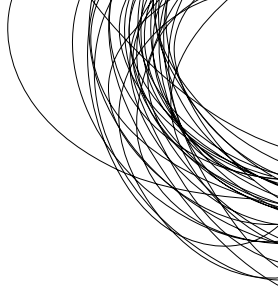
"One day when you have your own kids, you'll understand."

These, and messages like these, are written in stone in our minds. We can all go to our mind attics and pull out stone tablets of emotional commandments, each of them more invalidating, minimizing, offensive, and damaging, than the next.

Today, we talk about narcissistic abuse, gas lighting, the Adverse Childhood Experiences studies and complex PTSD with ease - the public space is full of these conversations. But this is all new, and many of us have lived our lives thinking something is wrong with us. Our parents did what they could, so we should be OK. So many people don't realize that even if they weren't physically hurt by their caregivers, containment and capacity for emotions and a healthy relationship with feelings was probably never modeled or fostered in our childhood. When you are a child experiencing strong emotions, you depend on the capacity of those around you to literally eat and digest those emotions for you. And if that capacity has been lacking, then you are left with the responses - staying stuck in hyper or hypoarousal every time you feel anything.

And it's not just our families of origin. Social rules for girls and boys, religious and educational frameworks, jailed our emotions even more. New age messages of positivity, raising your vibrations to attract better experiences, habits of spiritual bypass and an ever growing list of addictions - continue to make the jail walls thicker.

Our true emotions grow more and more wild behind those jail walls - and when we eventually meet them, they can be wild, savage, scary, powerful, like a beast that was held down by massive chains. Then please, dear ones, don't wonder why we eat, why we cope, why it's not a one woman job to heal. At its core healing the patterns of emotional eating is a process of reconciliation, where many parts were



hurt, and many parts need to be listened to, witnessed to, held, and understood before we can come to peace with self and peace with food.

"Ask not why the addiction, but why the pain?" - Gabor Mate

We can paraphrase this to ask, "Ask not why the eating, but why the pain?"

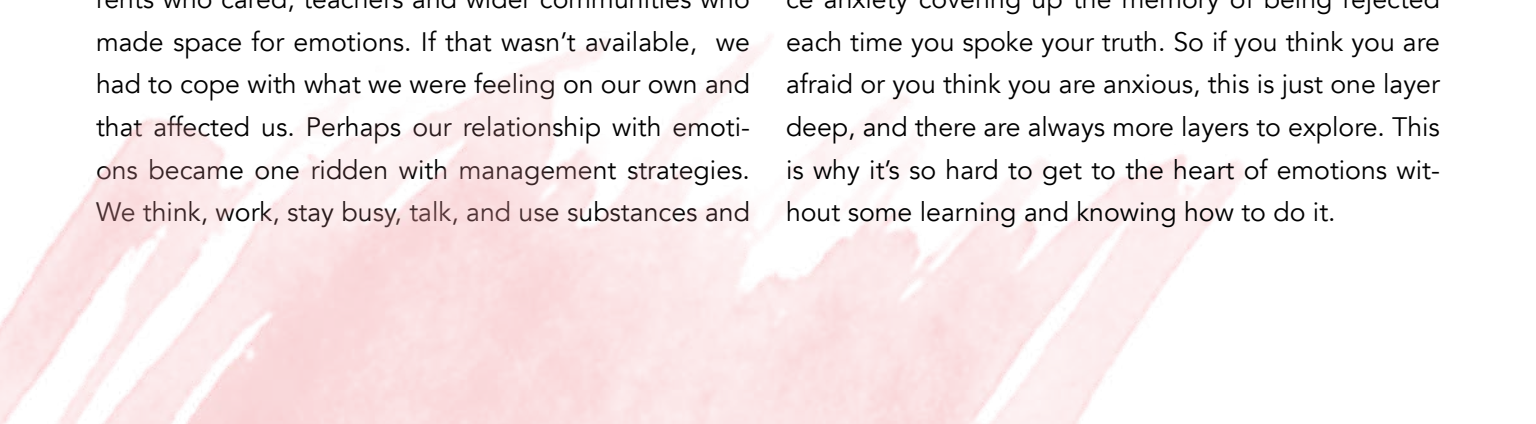
In this next step, we will be exploring emotions - as they emerge in the body, as they surface to be met by consciousness, and as they ask to be seen, digested, metabolized and transformed. Please be gentle with yourself as you learn these skills, and if it's difficult to even read about them, reach out for professional support from a therapist or counselor who can support you in this process. Many of us have survived by dealing with everything on our own, especially when it comes to emotions, so often, it doesn't even cross our mind that we need to be held in a space that can provide the skills and presence to allow for healing to happen.

Emotions are adaptive and all emotions serve a purpose. Ideally, in development, we should have been raised to be emotionally intelligent and wise - with parents who cared, teachers and wider communities who made space for emotions. If that wasn't available, we had to cope with what we were feeling on our own and that affected us. Perhaps our relationship with emotions became one ridden with management strategies. We think, work, stay busy, talk, and use substances and

addictive behaviors to not feel. If you are reading this book, something in the way you developed didn't teach you how to meet your emotions directly. Maybe you are incredibly smart and intelligent and you can think and reason about your emotions, but feeling them is a whole other ballgame.

Today, when we want to explore our emotions and give ourselves the support we might have never had growing up, it takes a real slowing down. In the process we untangle layers and layers of emotions to discover what's really driving them, and what the emotions are asking for.

Primary emotions - anger, joy, surprise, disgust, sadness, and fear - give us information about our relationship to self, others and the environment, and help us make adaptive choices - to approach, avoid, wait, etc. But we also have emotional responses to the primary emotions, so unless you are wisely guided to take your time, and explore - through image, sensation, thoughts, movement, and affect - you won't really know what you are dealing with or you will have thoughts about it and not much else to help you digest the emotion. You might feel fear covering up anger. You might experience anxiety covering up the memory of being rejected each time you spoke your truth. So if you think you are afraid or you think you are anxious, this is just one layer deep, and there are always more layers to explore. This is why it's so hard to get to the heart of emotions without some learning and knowing how to do it.



Some of us grew up in ways that we got cut off from whole categories of emotion – for example always crying and feeling sad, but never contacting our anger and killer level rage. Others grew up in ways that made anger ok, but there was no space for sadness and grief. Some of my students share stories that they were always welcome when they were happy and the good kid, but asked to go to their room if they were upset, disappointed or sad, left to deal with overwhelming experiences on their own. And if you remember from previous chapters in some people this leads to perpetual stuckness in flight or fight, a never ending vigilance, and for others, it's equivalent to numbness and depression, feeling cut off from life and living.

Picture this. You are about to get on a phone call and you are experiencing some anxiety. Your heart is fluttering and your mind is racing. You assume that the anxiety is about the fact that you feel pushed with the deadline for this project. You are so busy and now you have to handle this! Your counterpart on the phone - Jane - is an old coworker.

You sit down and really pay attention to the anxiety. What's under that felt sense? After a few moments of observation, you realize you are actually feeling fear. You feel a pit in your stomach and your legs wish they could run out of the office. The next layer of exploration leads to a burning up in your neck and shoulders and you feel your jaw and fists tighten. You are sooo angry. "F&%" her!", you think! You are taken aback by this discovery. It's been years since you worked together...

You remember back then you were close and she pretended to be your best friend at work....and she still chose to apply for the job you needed after you had your baby.... she knew you wanted it and yet she fought for it, made you look bad in front of your manager and got it instead of you. You are not anxious about the deadline, you are not afraid about the call, you are angry - but the fear of feeling the anger towards Jane is covering the anger. The primary emotion is anger – yet you are afraid of feeling your anger - so you are only aware of the fear and aware of the anxiety. You have much less free access to anger - and understandably, can't recognize it, or know what

it's about. This energy reminds you of the violent fights between your dad and your brother. Anger is not safe to feel. Anger hurts people. Fear and anxiety feel easier to carry around...and no one gets hurt.

Unless you learn how to recognize, allow, digest, metabolize and transform emotions, you will always just feel their effects - driving your brain towards disorganization and overwhelm, or rigidity and shut down. As you connect with emotions in the body, and explore coupled patterns of thinking, you connect the brainstem, mammalian brain and prefrontal cortex - you can have access to choice, wisdom and peace.

To repeat Dr. Siegel's definition you will have access to body regulation, attuned communication, emotional balance, response flexibility, empathy, self-knowing awareness, fear modulation, intuition and morality. In one word – integration! And when those are on board, emotional eating becomes a non-issue. Not because you beat the habit, but because you don't need to cope with an emotion - in your adult empowered stance, your brain and body are in a state that allows you to function within your window of tolerance. Food is just food, and you no longer need it as a life-vest on the stormy ocean of emotions.

I am not pretending you can learn how to be with emotions just from reading this book, but we will start here and you will take these skills out into the real world, first on your own, then in relationship or in specific situations.

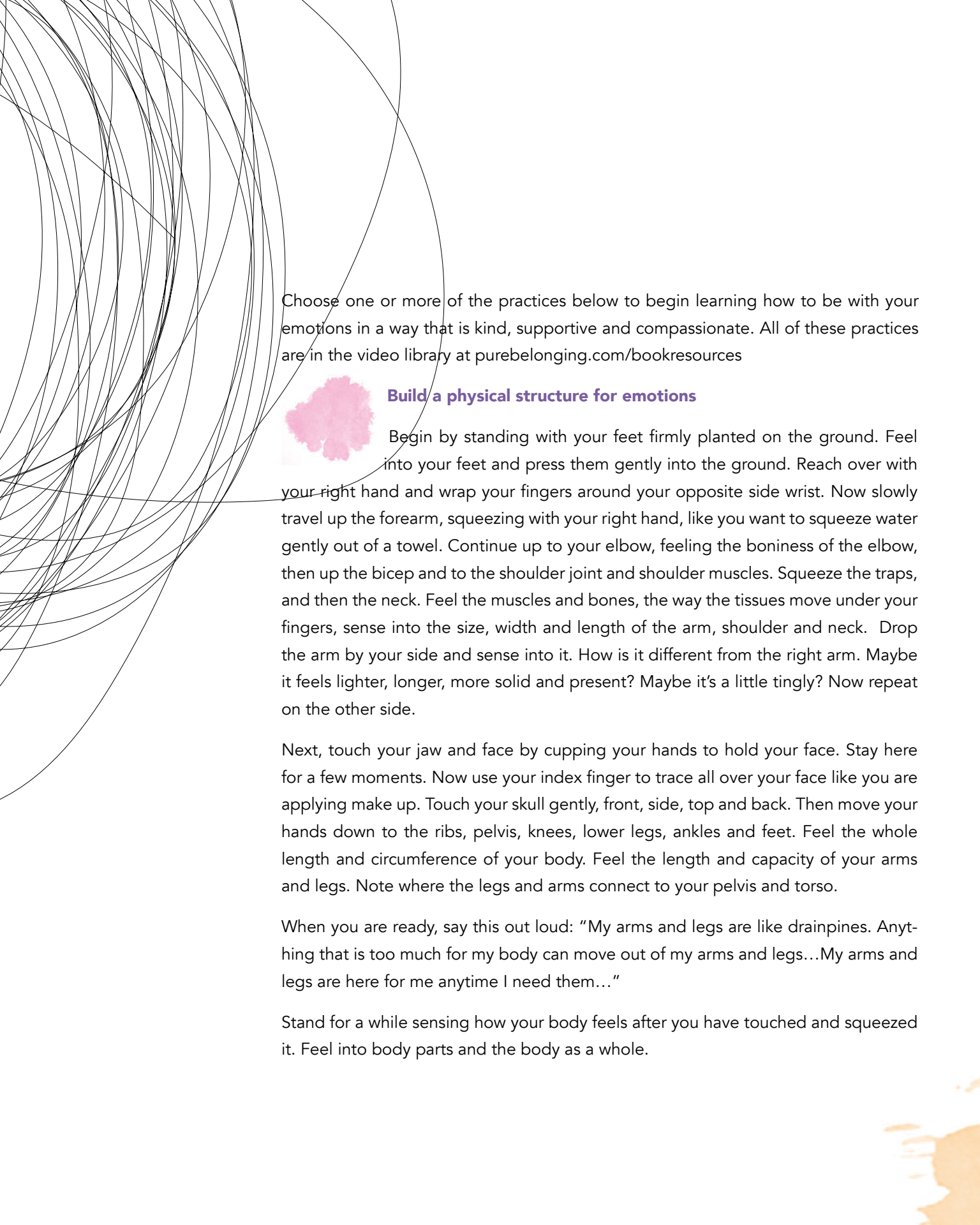
Let's begin.

Find a comfortable place to sit, feel your environment, orient around and read this statement out loud, allowing the words to touch you.

"All humans experience emotions. All emotions, energizing, painful, or even confusing, are necessary not just so I survive, but so that I can thrive and express the fullness of my being. I need emotions to inform my decisions and actions and I welcome all emotions with curiosity and an open heart, sincerely believing that they matter and are important. I am able to learn how to recognize, allow, digest, metabolize and transform my emotions. In doing so I also remember that I matter and I am important."

If this statement touched something in you, take time to notice what is happening, and even give yourself a self hug. Hold yourself in a kind and supportive way. If this is new to you, just maybe whisper: "I am here and I care, and I am not going anywhere". Wait for your breath to come through and for your heart to come down to where you know it feels normal. If tears come up, let them flow. If frustration arises, just let it be in your space and welcome it.





Choose one or more of the practices below to begin learning how to be with your emotions in a way that is kind, supportive and compassionate. All of these practices are in the video library at purebelonging.com/bookresources

Build a physical structure for emotions

Begin by standing with your feet firmly planted on the ground. Feel into your feet and press them gently into the ground. Reach over with your right hand and wrap your fingers around your opposite side wrist. Now slowly travel up the forearm, squeezing with your right hand, like you want to squeeze water gently out of a towel. Continue up to your elbow, feeling the boniness of the elbow, then up the bicep and to the shoulder joint and shoulder muscles. Squeeze the traps, and then the neck. Feel the muscles and bones, the way the tissues move under your fingers, sense into the size, width and length of the arm, shoulder and neck. Drop the arm by your side and sense into it. How is it different from the right arm. Maybe it feels lighter, longer, more solid and present? Maybe it's a little tingly? Now repeat on the other side.

Next, touch your jaw and face by cupping your hands to hold your face. Stay here for a few moments. Now use your index finger to trace all over your face like you are applying make up. Touch your skull gently, front, side, top and back. Then move your hands down to the ribs, pelvis, knees, lower legs, ankles and feet. Feel the whole length and circumference of your body. Feel the length and capacity of your arms and legs. Note where the legs and arms connect to your pelvis and torso.

When you are ready, say this out loud: "My arms and legs are like drainpipes. Anything that is too much for my body can move out of my arms and legs...My arms and legs are here for me anytime I need them..."

Stand for a while sensing how your body feels after you have touched and squeezed it. Feel into body parts and the body as a whole.



Find a sense of ease in the body

Remember a recent time when you felt content. Remember this state of being present and at ease in your body. Perhaps a time or situation that you felt most like yourself. Maybe you were with a friend, lost in conversation, or you were working on a creative project and really felt a sense of flow and wellbeing.

Explore the inside of your body - where do you notice that memory of feeling good as a sensation - perhaps your breath is calmer, your shoulders feel wider, your neck is more relaxed. Or it might be a sensation of warmth and a gentle softening spreading through your heart and chest. Perhaps your mind is quieter and you are thinking slower. Allow the whole experience to unfold here in the present moment - feel it in your face, chest, belly, arms and legs. If the sensation is too much, move your attention out of the body to the room around you and orient to the senses like we learned in the chapter about Orienting.



Let emotions rise and spread

You can do this standing, sitting or lying down. Begin by picturing that each emotion arises as a color in your body - you don't need to assign each emotion a color, but just hold that as an idea.

Now bring a pleasant emotion to mind - perhaps appreciation for a close friend. Choose someone easy to love, who you really appreciate having in your life. Notice how your whole body feels as you think of that person. Now picture the appreciation coming in the form of a color from a particular part of the body - maybe the heart area or the chest or even the pelvis or the eyes - let that color be as vivid as you can see it and imagine it filling that part of your body.

Now imagine that there is an invisible layer of space surrounding you - an oval shaped or round container - an energetic boundary all around you. Let that color come out of the solid lines of your body and become a part of the space around you. Picture that space being large and spacious, being able to hold this appreciation. Let the appreciation color get thinner and more diluted as it leaves your body and colors that space around you. Practice opening your peripheral vision as if you want to see all of that color left right up and down, you can even move your head and neck and picture seeing it left, right and behind you.



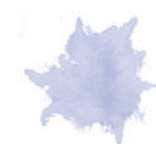
Offering comforting touch

In orienting, step 3, we did an exercise where you learned how to hold a hand on your heart and your belly. We will use this same technique to bring containment for a difficult emotion.



Please picture a slightly challenging situation about which you feel a painful or difficult to be with emotion - perhaps you are hurt, disappointed or upset about something. Don't choose the biggest betrayal or traumatic event of recent months, please - choose something manageable, yet slightly challenging. Feel where that emotion lives as sensation in your body - perhaps a knot in your stomach, a tenseness in your shoulders, a restlessness in your lower legs...Make contact with that part of your body - place your hand there and hold, offering support and comfort. If it's not an easy to reach place, you can place your attention there, watching it with the intention of support and care. Note what happens to the sensation in your body as you offer support. If it's too much to feel, move your attention out to the environment and orient, then come back again.

You might need to do a few passes of this until you feel it's all moved through. Sometimes, as emotions come both in waves and layers, you might end up meeting several of them in a row. Do not go about this like it's a set of exercises at the gym. Take long breaks, maybe even a walk, or listen to some music to rest between feeling your body and staying connected to the environment around you.



Naming emotions

Take out your journal or a sheet of paper and write down a few emotions you feel on a daily basis. While there are hundreds of emotions, the basic ones tend to repeat: loneliness, sadness, joy, happiness, relief, anticipation, frustration, impatience, apprehension, boredom, curiosity, excitement, love, compassion....doubt, worry, shame, guilt...

Now once, you are done, sit quietly and search your inner landscape. Can you name one or more emotions that you feel right now. How about earlier that day or week? The next time a strong emotion comes up, place a hand where you feel it arising in your body and say out loud:



"This is a moment of anger!" (or sadness, etc.). As you name it, notice what color and where it is in your body. Invite it out into your larger energetic space and be present with it till you feel a shift, then orient out into the environment.



Bilateral drawing for emotional expression

I practice bilateral drawing with my students a lot, especially when they have a harder time staying present with physical sensations or when they tend to think about emotions instead of feeling them. You need just a little bit of prep for this one. Take two sheets of paper and tape them next to each other on the table in front of you. This is so they don't move. You can also use one large piece of paper (poster size).

Sit so that the paper is right in front of you and you have equal size paper to the right and left of you. Now take two pens, pencils, crayons, or if feeling extra creative use finger paint.

Close your eyes and become aware of an emotion in the present moment. You might bring something up from previous days or maybe there is something current that you would like to help process and digest. Once you become aware of the particular sensation in your body, imagine that sensation as an image or a movement. For example if there is a throbbing in your belly, it would be smaller and larger circles. If there is a hot movement of

anger up your spine, it will be vertical lines, or flowing lava. Let your mind give you the right images that go with these sensations.

Now with your eyes closed, draw what you feel at the same time with your right and left hand. Do not worry about how it looks, but focus on the movement you are making and how the movement is happening from your body, through your hands, onto the sheet, exquisitely guided by the sensations moving in your body. It's as if the flow of sensation in the body is flowing onto the sheet through your movement and your hands. Do this for a few minutes, then pause and see if anything has shifted. Perhaps now there is a different flow of sensations. Draw those on top. Spend 10-15 minutes drawing in deep meditative presence drawing and staying open and curious about how your sense perceptions and your emotions shift.

You can do this as needed or you can do in place of your usual meditation practice.



Emotional eating SOS

What if you find yourself in the midst of an emotional eating episode? You are about to open that bag of chips, or maybe there is a cookie already in your mouth.

Here is my three step process to be with this.

First, acknowledge that something is happening to you. It's not about the food. It's not about the cravings. Move

your focus from the food to yourself. The truth is, right now, you are experiencing something difficult.

Think back on your day, your week, is there something that was hard, unfair, challenging, angering? Did something occur that would provoke an emotion, cause you to feel anxious, depressed?

If you can't find anything in particular that was triggering, for example you are thinking "I always feel this way at night" just name it: "I am not ok and I don't know why". Yet maybe there is a specific reason and you know why, so you can still say out loud: "I am not ok and I know exactly why".

Second, as you name your difficult state, just notice that it's causing suffering. "I am not ok and I am hurting, this is not feeling good..." or even "I am angry and as I realize it I am even angrier...and that is not feeling good and I am suffering." Use whatever language feels right to you in the moment to acknowledge that you are suffering.

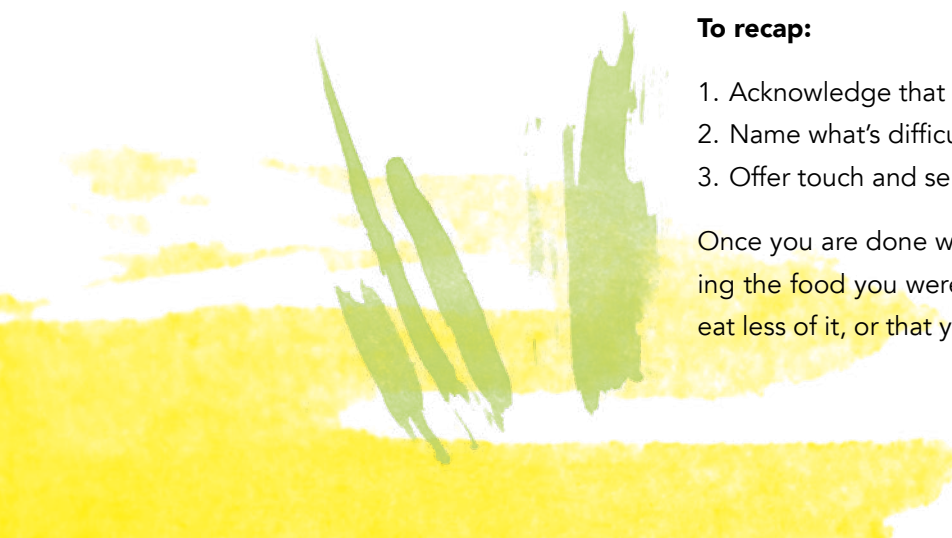
Now, in the third step just place a hand on your heart and one on the back of your head at your occiput, and say out loud: "This is hard, I am so sorry this is so hard. I wish it wasn't happening, but it's happening and it's so hard. I am sorry." Use the words that feel most honest to you.

This is self-kindness, this is self-compassion in action. This is you making it about you and putting you at the center of your life, and not food at the center of your life.

To recap:

1. Acknowledge that you are having a difficult moment
2. Name what's difficult and admit that it's causing suffering
3. Offer touch and self-comfort

Once you are done with your three steps, you can keep enjoying the food you were going to eat. You may find you want to eat less of it, or that you want a cup of tea or a shower instead.



You can also ask a question that my friend Kelly Coffee uses with her students: "What is the most caring thing I can do for myself right now?"

The question that works for me is: "How can I be most loving to myself right now?" When I was younger I would kiss my shoulder and say: "Oh sweetie, it will get better, it will get better..."

I would like to make a note about the SOS exercise: this is not a new way for you to lose weight, stop emotional eating, or try to fix yourself. There is nothing wrong with you - we all experience times of emotional overwhelm, and we all cope in our own ways. This exercise is not about making emotional eating bad and helping you not eat, but about attending to the underlying dynamics, so that you can belong to yourself as a whole being in all of your complexity.

And what about if you do this when you are feeling happy, joyful, excited, thrilled? Not all emotional eating behaviors are around negative emotions.

That's right. Some of us don't have tolerance for pleasurable sensations. Some of us truly need to build a tolerance for abundance. I know it might sound crazy at first. Shouldn't you want to be happy and joyful? Sure, unless your history made that not OK. For many of us moments of aliveness and joy were interrupted and collapsed into shame, guilt and pain. For many of us, we had something take the joy away just when we were feeling it, so we live our lives guarded from joy, happi-

ness and pleasure. If that's the case, you can still follow the same steps. You will be acknowledging the difficulty to be with the happiness, satisfaction or pleasure. You'll still need to explore and offer yourself the support you need to move through the moment.



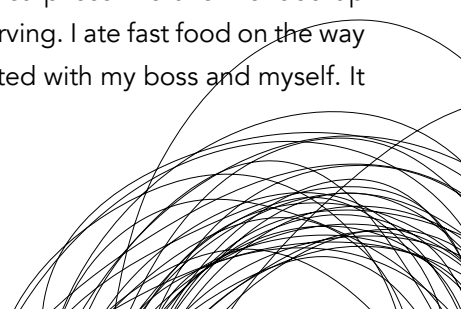
The sandwich journal practice

Some of my students are super journalers and others just don't like to journal, but no matter where they start, they deeply appreciate the power of journaling once they make a practice of it.

I suggest that at the end of your day sit down with pen and paper and write down how you felt during the day.

I invite you to journal in a "sandwich" pattern - starting with positive and neutral emotions, and then moving on to more unpleasant emotions, finishing again with positive and neutral emotions.

It can look something like this: "Today I woke up and I felt a pleasant anticipation for my day. I felt joy and connection, happiness and a deep faith in my good nature during my morning prayer. I felt love and compassion for my friend Karen while I was praying for her. Then at work, I felt anxious and agitated, because my boss was out sick and piled extra work for me without letting me know in advance. I hate surprises like this. I ended up working till 9 pm and starving. I ate fast food on the way home and got so frustrated with my boss and myself. It



was hard to feel so shaky and angry. Then I called Karen and we talked and I vented and felt better. I felt seen and understood and I felt calm and at ease. I love her. As I think of my love for her I feel so content and fortunate to have such a wonderful being as my friend. She really is an angel."

If you had a particularly hard day it may be hard to think of a positive or neutral emotion - but perhaps you can bring your attention to daily rituals - like having a favorite morning cup of coffee, or sitting in the sun - journal about those simple joys instead. Make your "sandwich" juicy and thick. Because of the negativity bias we talked about earlier, as well as our "tendency" to engage with painful thoughts and states, it may be hard to remember or reflect on what is positive or neutral. You may have to dial this way back and just journal about pleasant things you saw or experienced during your orienting practice, then name the difficult emotions, then finish your sandwich with more sensation based pleasure. Over time you will be able to note pleasant and neutral emotions, but there is no rush. Everything organizes at its own pace and own time and with your mindful attention it will happen soon.

What does the emotion want or need



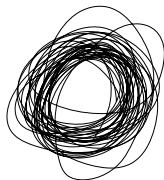
This practice is best done once you have worked on the previous ones and you are able to allow the energy of the emotion to rise and dissipate into your field, and once you can give your body some support through touch.

Once the waves on the ocean of emotions have quieted a bit, ask yourself this: "What does this emotion want or need?"

For example frustration might be asking you to set a boundary with a colleague or make adjustments to your work space. Feeling sad and hurt might be asking you to have a conversation with a friend who misattuned and called you "crazy" when you were struggling. And grief might be asking you to witness it and make some space, to stop running away from what's hard and to face it head on.

We meet emotions as sensation and an energetic movement in the body, and then we meet them as wise messengers through the wise function of the mind. When we have both, emotion leads to action, action leads to change, and we can join the original movement of life without stopping it with every scared breath.

Before we move on to the next step, remember that if it was easy and simple to be with emotions, you would be breezing through life. No one has it easy, we just each cope the best we can. Universes of past, present and future weave into each other in complex patterns of neu-



Thank you for reading this chapter of Peace with Self, Peace with Food.

The full edited and printed version of this chapter will appear in the color print paperback in the spring of 2021. Please use the email you entered to download this chapter to check for news and updates from me.

If this chapter helped you gain insight into your relationship with food, I am deeply grateful.

May your path to peace with self and peace with food be blessed!

Galina

ral firing - which produce an ever changing landscape of sensations, emotions and feelings. Be confident that you can become a kind and compassionate friend to yourself and make sense of this rich and complex world inside of you. And know it will increase your wellbeing exponentially! You are so brave to be walking this path to peace with food and you've got this!

Disclaimer:

Please note Galina is not a psychotherapist or counselor, and none of the advice should be taken as therapy or as a replacement for treatment with a licensed mental health professional.

Galina offers coaching and consultations as a Somatic Experiencing and NARM practitioner, and her support for your body and nervous system can be an important part of your healing journey, but is not medical advice, nor is it meant to cure, diagnose or prescribe. Please be gentle with yourself and surround yourself with the appropriate team of professionals.

For any questions or to share your feedback please reach out to galina@purebelonging.com