



Lesson Five:
Exercises and Practices

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When You're Scared to Feel Your Pain

Unfortunately, just because you were told to get over your feelings doesn't mean you did. That's because feelings aren't something you can get over; you have to go through them in order to release them to completion and then move out of you. As a child, as soon as you learned that it wasn't safe to feel your big feelings, you pushed them down and tried to ignore them. That may work for a while, but eventually those squashed down feelings will reemerge as panic attacks, anxiety, worry, intrusive thoughts, physical ailments or depression. That's when people find their way to counseling and begin to learn how to re-parent themselves: the work of attending to their own core feelings that needed attention a long time ago.

This is not easy work. And it's not fast work. And it's not work for the feint of heart. But if you want to learn to open your heart and feel your love and attraction for your partner, you must be willing to feel your pain. Why? Because pain and love live in the same chamber of the heart, so when you close your heart to pain you also close it to love.

<http://conscious-transitions.com/grief-and-joy-live-in-the-same-chamber-of-the-heart/>

The best way to connect with your beliefs that are preventing you from feeling your big feelings is through the following exercise. Please take out your journal or start a new document on our computer. We're going to go pretty deep with this, so get ready.

1. The first step is to examine your beliefs about pain (and I use "pain" as an umbrella word to capture all uncomfortable feelings, including frustration, disappointment, loneliness, heartbreak, grief, uncertainty, fear of the unknown, and vulnerability). It often helps to explore how big feelings were handled when you were growing up. See if any of the following common beliefs about pain ring true for you:

1. I can't handle my pain.
2. If I start crying, I'll never stop.
3. If I start crying, I'll lose control.
4. If I start crying, I'll go crazy.
5. There's no point to feeling pain; it's in the past and that's where it should remain.
6. My pain is so big that if I open that door it will never end.
7. Feeling pain is weak.

2. The second step is to replace these false beliefs about pain with the truth. See if you can connect to any of the following statements:

1. I can handle my pain.
2. When I was little, the pain was too big for my body to handle, but my body is now bigger than my pain and it won't break me.
3. I know that the doorway to joy is through my willingness to feel my pain.
4. I won't go crazy or lose control if I feel my pain.
5. My pain is not a bottomless pit. I have an adult part of me that can decide to stop crying if I need to.
6. I'm ready to hear the stories from my past so that they don't dictate my future.
7. Feeling pain is a sign of strong vulnerability.

3. The third step is ask yourself if you're now willing to feel your pain. This means being willing to feel both past pain and current pain. This is not a one-time choice but a daily choice, and sometimes a moment-by-moment choice. It's the willingness to breathe into an uncomfortable feeling instead of distracting from it using a variety of addictions (food, alcohol, cigarettes, Internet, staying busy, working, sex, ruminating, worrying, thinking). It means making a conscious choice to shift out of your head and into your heart. The practice of Tonglen, which is included in this course, is one of the best practices I know for transforming our tendency to push away uncomfortable feelings into a new habit of meeting them with compassion and acceptance.

What Are Your Love Scripts?

We enter love relationships with the stories of all previous relationship attached to our hearts and minds. Some of these scripts will be positive if we were blessed enough to grow up with a positive model of marriage, and some will be harmful and contribute to the barricade of the fear-walls that grow up around our hearts. The more we can identify these love scripts, the more we can attend to them lovingly, which means dousing them with truth-water, fleshing out the stories, grieving the unshed tears, and finding the courage to open our hearts so that we can share love with our loving partners.

The following checklists will help you identify your love scripts. Once you can clearly articulate what scripts are barnacled to your heart, you may then choose to dialogue with these beliefs to see if you can loosen their hold (using the journaling technique I will share next and in the video):

Check all that apply:

What I saw/absorbed from my parents' marriage or relationship, what I learned from their relationship with me, and what I learned from early blueprints in my own love relationships:

- Love is easy.
- Love means no fighting.
- Love is a ticket to stability and happiness.
- Love with the right person should always feel fulfilling.
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- Love means self-sacrifice.
- Love means no self.
- Love means no needs.
- Love means losing myself completely.

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- Love means abandonment.
- Love means being alone.
- Love means violation.
- Love means betrayal.
- Love means rejections.
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- Nobody is to be trusted.
- Love isn't safe.
- Love means getting hurt.

Two Ways to Journal

Here are basic guidelines for journaling. These guidelines emerged from my work with clients and course members who sometimes agonize about doing journaling the “right” way or express fear about what they’ll discover when they start to journal. If you’re primarily focused on doing it “right” you’ll shut down the process and often feel paralyzed. If, on the other hand, you can view the journaling process as an interesting experiment where you might learn something new, you will approach it from the mindset of learning and your inner world will open up to you.

Open-ended journaling

Here are general guidelines for open-ended journaling:

1. Remind yourself before you start that there isn’t a “right” way to journal. Set your intention to explore and learn and stay open. Be curious about your inner world. Talk to yourself the way you wish your parents would have talked to you. Make time to get to know yourself. Curiosity is the key. Try to let go of judgment but if judgment arrives become curious about that as well.
2. Remind yourself that journaling is just for you and it doesn’t have to be perfect, pretty, brilliant, witty, or grammatically correct. Nobody will ever see it. It’s not for publication and it’s not for a grade. It’s only for you. Be as messy and imperfect as possible. Let it all hang out. Don’t censor. Don’t edit. Just express.

3. Ask open-ended questions and trust the answers. Try not overthink. Write before you have a chance to think too much about the answers. One way to do this is to keep your hand moving.
4. If you're scared about what you might learn or discover when you start to journal, you're not alone. It takes courage to dive into uncharted waters, and if journaling is new for you it will feel particularly scary. You may feel resistance, and if that's the case I would suggest that you start by journaling with the fear and resistance itself. Remember that everything inside of us wants to be seen and heard. When you give attention to the fear and resistance, you will notice that it transforms.
5. If you're concerned about someone else reading your journal, consider journaling on your computer and then deleting the files immediately. The record of the journaling isn't as important as having a space to unload and examine the contents of your inner world.
6. If writing isn't your thing, you can also "journal" out loud by speaking into a recorder or just simply speaking aloud in the shower or your car. What matters isn't the form the journaling takes but again that you take time to unload what's churning inside of you.
7. If you start to feel overwhelmed by your thoughts and feelings – as can happen in this open-ended or stream of consciousness type of journaling – shift into the guided journaling technique that I will teach next.

Here are some guideline questions for open-ended journaling:

1. What do I love?
2. What brings me joy?
3. Who do I enjoy spending time with?
4. How do I feel about my relationship with my mother/father/siblings?
5. What do I want for my life?
6. What's my earliest memory?
7. What's my most painful memory?
8. What's my happiest memory?
9. What's my favorite place on earth?
10. What do I value?
11. What are my favorite foods?
12. How do I feel about my body?
13. Do I allow myself time to rest?
14. What are my beliefs about rest?
15. How do I enjoy spending time in nourishing ways? In other words, what fills my well of Self?

cooking
taking a walk
reading
seeing a good friend
listening to spiritual or self-help audiobooks (see soundstrue.com)
taking a bath
writing
decorating
creative projects (photography, sculpture, drawing, painting, crafts, writing poetry,
dancing, singing) gardening

<http://conscious-transitions.com/filling-the-well/>

Many people like to end their journaling sessions by making a gratitude list, especially if you found yourself in painful territory. It's not about dismissing your pain but it's about being able to hold both the pain and the gratitude simultaneously – which means feeling the pain but also orienting toward gratitude.

Guided Journaling: Dialoguing with the different parts of you

Some people do very well with open-ended journaling, but others find that they feel flooded when they immerse themselves in the stream of consciousness without any rational - or left-brain – part of them tempering the flood. In the language of the brain, when you're writing from your body and spending time in the feeling realm you're activating the right hemisphere – the part that lives in the world of raw emotion, images, metaphors, and autobiographical memory. This is a beautiful world, but if you spend too much time there, especially if anxiety is activated, you may feel flooded and the journaling may actually be counterproductive.

So I want to teach you a simple journaling technique to work with anxiety when it arises. And again this can be done on paper or out loud and all of the previous guidelines apply.

This is a tool where you will engage in a dialogue between the different parts of you, and learn to move toward them with kindness through the dialogue tool. You may want to pull out Wheel #4 - The Parts of the Self - for this section.

Before we dive in to the technique, it's essential to have an overview of the parts of yourself, the different characters that are living inside of you at all times. These are the characters that I talked about in Lesson 5. Remember that we each have multiple parts of ourselves that rear up during different situations. When you understand these parts, you can start to name them and create some separateness where you then decide if it's a part of you that needs more attention and, if so, what kind of attention.

In the center is the core Self. This is the essential you: the you that is solid and secure, confident and loving. This is the you that doesn't care about what other people think, that has a clear sense of purpose and direction, that is able to allow

your feelings and thoughts to float through you without attaching on to them. This is the part of you that was born whole without having to prove yourself, that knows that you are worthy and lovable exactly as you are. This is the part of you that carries your intrinsic qualities: your gifts, your interests, your passions, your personality characteristics like kindness or a sense of humor – the parts of you that are independent from the transitory nature of externals, like looks or salary. This is the you of you – the you that we're cultivating through this course.

Then we have a fear-based ego. This is the part of us that struggles with the transitory nature of being human, that clings to the way things are, resists change, believes that the world isn't safe and that others aren't safe, and is committed at all costs to preserving its illusion that it can control others and outcomes. Regardless of how loving our childhood was, we all have an ego self; it's just part of being human.

And then we have our different masks or personas that develop as we grow up. Carl Jung understood that we all have parts of our personalities that are like different characters – or archetypes – living inside of us. The more we bring these characters to light – which means bringing them from the unconscious to the conscious – the more we can work with them, bring compassion to them, and make choices regarding how much power we give them.

So we have Self and ego and then the different characters or personas:

The Caretaker

The Chameleon

The Jealous/Envious The Good girl/good boy The Bad girl/bad boy The

Judgment

The Bully

The Taskmaster

A lot of these overlap, and most of them are adaptive and protective parts of you that grew from painful situations as a child. So if you grew up in a situation where you were abused every time you cried, a protector developed with a belief system that said, "It's not safe to cry. It's not safe to be me. I have to shut down parts of myself in order to survive."

When we start to move toward these adaptive parts of ourselves instead of trying to push them away or judge them, we learn that underneath most of them lives the soft, vulnerable core Self. Sometimes these parts can feel like an inner bully – like a judgmental part that is incessantly critical of everything you do – but when you soften into that part and even approach it with love, it starts to crumble and lose its grip. Inside every bully lives a scared child, and the same is true for the inner bullies. The journaling that I'm encouraging you to do in this course is about engaging with these different parts of you with curiosity and compassion – a mindset of learning.

Here's an example of a fictitious dialogue I wrote for a blog post called, "Am I Meant to Be With My Ex?" in which I explain that the first step in breaking free from this kind of rumination or intrusive thought is to name what's actually happening. It's a powerful first step, and when you can name your experience with conviction repeatedly it's like casting a powerful spell that breaks the allure of the fantasy. Eckhart Tolle says that the ego thrives on control, which is really the illusion of control. Once you identify the ego's tactics it begins to lose its power. The dialogue would go something like this - and again, it needs to be out loud or on paper, especially when you're first practicing the dialogue technique.

Ego: "There you go, thinking about your ex again. You had such amazing chemistry and you dream about him (her) at least once a week. That must mean that you're meant to be with him (or her)."

Self: "I know that's what it feels like, but that's not actually true. It's an illusion of my mind, your way to distract me from the risk of the here and now, of opening my heart to my present, available partner. I'm not going to indulge those thoughts anymore."

Ego: "That's crap. Just admit it: you're still in love with him. You'll never feel as excited about your partner as you did about your ex. Why do you keep feeding me these ridiculous lines?"

Self: "It's you who's feeding the lines. It's you who can't let go. It's you who is trying to convince me that I don't really love my partner. I know you're scared. I know you don't want me to risk making myself vulnerable. I know that when I think about my ex I feel safer in some way, sequestering myself in that same, familiar room in my mind. But

I'm not going to do that anymore. Instead I want to know what you're afraid of."

Ego: "I told you: I'm not scared! I'm telling you the truth and if you choose not to listen you're going to settle for less than what you deserve."

Self: "You sound incredibly convincing but every time I listen to you I feel anxious and confused. Listening to you ramble about my ex isn't serving me. But if you want to tell me what you're scared of I'm happy to listen."

Fear: "I'm scared that I'll get hurt. I'm scared I won't be good enough. I'm scared that once my partner really knows me he'll leave. I'm scared to be vulnerable. I'm scared to show him my heart. I'm scared to really, really let him in without having a wall up. I'm scared. I'm scared. I'm scared. I'm scared."

Self: "Thank you. I know. Tell me more."

I have hundreds of dialogues on my computer from various stages of my life. If you want to get into relationship with these parts of you that rule your actions, you need to call them out onto the mat. When people break free from relationship anxiety, it's usually because they're able to relate and respond to the different parts of themselves (instead of automatically hook in and react).

There is tremendous healing power in naming the different parts of yourself and allowing them to have a voice. Again, when you dialogue you're training your brain to move toward the parts of you that you normally, habitually want to hide away and deny. This is how you learn how to gain mastery over your thoughts and feelings instead of letting them control your life and using them as the litmus test for your decision making process. You make room for all thoughts and feelings, bathing them in the wash of acceptance, and then you connect to something deeper inside of you: a space between your thoughts and beneath your feelings. This is what the practice of mindfulness will help you to do.

Time Traveling to Heal Old Pain

When we shift into our emotional realm, we invite the opportunity for old pain to surface. This pain might not be immediately obvious, for it's the ego/protector's habit to focus on the relationship first. But once you filter through the first layer of emotion, as I suggest below, you will arrive at the true center of pain which has nothing to do with your present situation. If you can time travel back to the source-memory that holds this pain and meet it with compassion and reassurance (what you likely didn't receive at the time), you will begin to heal from the root.

Following is a loose guideline for time traveling:

1. Drop into the feeling. This requires a conscious choice to shift out the head space and move into the breath, body and heart.
2. Allow the first layer of feeling to bubble up. The first layer will almost always be connected to your relationship and will likely be some version of shame, fear, confusion, or uncertainty.
3. Let yourself feel those feelings until they crest. If it starts to feel intolerable, ask yourself, "What's the worst thing that's going to happen if I let myself fully feel these feelings?" Work with the first exercise in this packet if you're having trouble allowing yourself to feel the feelings.
4. Invite another time when you felt these same feelings to emerge. Try to stay with your breath, body, and heart and simply allow, gently invite, another body memory to arise.
5. Now time travel to meet this place with your loving parent and/or Wise Self (angel-guide, spirit, loving figure from your past; however you envision your

guidance) and allow yourself to plug into the truth. Use your imagination to enter into that time as fully as possible: feel the feelings and bring in the reassurance that you needed back then.

I'll give an example of how this works by sharing a composite session from my clients.

Thought: I don't love my girlfriend.

She stops the thought by consciously not giving it any attention. More on this in Section Three.

Then I drop into the feelings, which appear as shame, confused scared. I connect with a belief that I'm defective somehow. I'm not sure how that's connected, but it arises. I'm aware that these are first layer feelings.

Then I shift into the second layer, allowing myself to time travel back to a time when I felt these same feelings:

I'm being forced to attend a birthday party and I don't want to go. I'm about six years old. I'm crying, ashamed, confused, scared. I feel like there's something wrong with me. Why am I so weak? Why are all the other kids just fine? My mom is there. She's wearing a long, hippie, colorful skirt. I'm embarrassed by her, as I often am. But I don't want her to go. I desperately need her to stay. [cries]. Please don't leave me alone. Please stay with me until I feel safe. I don't feel safe. I feel so scared and empty and alone and ashamed. What's wrong with me?

I now ask if she can invite her own inner loving mother to show up at the scene.

Loving Mother: Hi sweetheart. I'm here.

Child: Please don't leave me. I'm so scared. I feel so alone. What's wrong with me?

Loving Mother (smiling): There's absolutely nothing wrong with you. You are a beautiful, sensitive child, and you have a harder time with separation and change than other kids. That's a gift, you just don't know it yet. Come here. Let me hold you. I will stay with you until you feel safe.

Client, with eyes closed, sees her young self climbing into her own loving arms. She cries but feels safe, held, and loved.

Each time you can time travel and meet your pain with compassion and reassurance, you heal a layer of your unshed grief and build a layer of inner strength as you learn that you can be the source of your own comfort. And the more you turn inward, the less you will focus on your relationship as the source of your pain.