

I'm so happy to offer you a chunk of my book, *Scooch!: Edging into a Friendly Universe*. My request is that you not share it; instead, send someone who may benefit from it to [get the download from my website](#).

My wish is that this book would scooch you toward a kinder, gentler personal-growth process and into just plain loving and trusting your beautiful life much more.

This excerpt includes the preface and introduction, then all of part 1, or the first ten chapters of the book. You'll see the table of contents for part 1 at the beginning of the segment, then the TOC for parts 2-4 concludes this document.

If you're curious about coaching, [sign up for my free 30-minute exploration session](#).

Many blessings, Jaya the Trust Coach



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preface

## Scooch!

I just plain love the word *scooch*. I'm pretty sure people should sit around at parties and in coffee shops telling their history with *scooch* (and perhaps a few other great humble words). Here's mine. My grandmother was an Arkansas lady (not *woman*: those didn't really exist in Arkansas till Hillary got big, certainly never existed for my grandmother) who hardly ever bothered speaking without infusing a lot of *tone* and sometimes a fair amount of screeching into her words. She used to deliver a one-word command if she was plopping her hard-working self onto a car seat or couch cushion that one of her kin might be currently occupying without having left sufficient room for her. "Scooch!" she'd cry in her high-pitched, good-humored Southern-speak, and scooch we did, with no thought of talking back.

I started working with the concept of scooching to counter my clients' sense of overwhelm, discouragement, and sometimes defeat when they felt they had too far to reach. Finding themselves, for example, so far from love that it felt like hate (you know, the dreaded ex making one more thing unnecessarily caustic), they wanted to propel themselves straight to love (or thought they should or wished they could)—and it's just too far a trip to take in one leap. It's too far not only because it's on

the other end of the spectrum, but because they were contemplating the journey from a low spot, with a sense of being off-kilter and unequal to the challenge.

So what if, in such a moment, you didn't need to get all the way to love? What if you could just point yourself in that direction, and feel good about any movement aimed roughly the right way? What if, instead of somehow mustering or conjuring some huge burst of fuel to get you all the way from here to there, you could simply ... scooch?

Soon after I started articulating this, I discovered Abraham—that is, I finally listened to an audio clip featuring Esther Hicks, a nice, playful Southern lady from Texas (not *woman*: Texas) who channels a playful consciousness (not a single entity) named Abraham who specializes in teaching the law of attraction (LOA). May I just say that I had a self-diagnosed allergy to channels before I fell in love with Abraham? (I wasn't thrilled with LOA either, and still don't appreciate how most anyone else talks about it.) For almost two decades, people had been telling me to listen to Abraham-Hicks and I would have none of it. Then one day, the title of one of their talks caught my attention on YouTube and I tuned in to the first of many, many talks I would give my attention to through many a dishwashing or qigong session.

I didn't have to sample too many talks before hearing Abraham articulate my scooching idea. I got so excited. I was hollering "Yes!" at my computer. *Scooch* actually sounds like a word Esther would use

in her translations (she receives a message as wordless impressions, then puts Southern-American English to it so the rest of us can more or less get the message too), but I haven't heard *scooch* from Abraham/Esther. They do talk about the process of moving incrementally from one feeling state to another.

For example, they love to explain that, if you're depressed, you can't go straight to joy, but you might do well to get angry—which feels better than depressed because now you're not just shut down, you're moving— and then you can tone that down to frustration, which feels better still, and from there you could gradually get closer and closer to full-blown joy. Abraham on scooching!

I believe I held myself back in the personal-growth department for years (as do many human beings) by making my process unkind. It was full of guilt, shame, *should*, harsh self-admonitions, and self-evaluations that came when it wasn't time to evaluate (as in before the event even happened or while it was happening or instantly afterward, with no time for breath or for locating what actually felt good—or even fine). My process was lacking in forgiveness and full of multiple beliefs about what I did or didn't deserve and could or couldn't have, all of which finally got shaken up and scattered to the winds when I discovered The Work of Byron Katie.

A decade in, it's still astonishing to me how often I remember to live in ease and joy and kindness and love. It's amazing that I can be light and present and connected so very often. The fact that I used to be a

moody, depressive, overwhelmed victim accounts for the if-I-can-change-anyone-can mentality I bring to my life-coaching work. I honestly wasn't sure I could change. And the thing that accelerated the improvements most was to stop judging myself or my process or how long things took or what I found myself doing again and so on. (What if you didn't judge yourself, ever?) I learned to drop judgments (not stay out of judgments) and question my thoughts about everything (not be without thoughts) thanks to The Work of Byron Katie. When I started applying all of that to my judgments about myself and the things I believed I could or couldn't be, do, or have—that's when life started getting really good.

This book will urge you repeatedly to make your process kind. Be gentle with yourself. Quit treating yourself like you'd treat no other human being, or like you treat your familiars in your worst moments (a pretty accurate gauge of how you treat yourself most anytime). I'm all about personal power, so I won't be advocating wimpiness or letting yourself off the hook. I'm not into gushy or sloppy self-love, but I'm supremely interested in self-love that's unrelenting and gives at least equal time to knowing and cultivating your magnificence as it does to ferreting out and fixing your flaws. Honestly, if you're being truly kind to yourself, it gets much easier to look at yourself realistically and course-correct when you find yourself standing where you don't want to be or heading in the wrong direction. (And note that you're not being realistic when you fail to notice where you're amazing.)

If you want to get somewhere, and the way isn't clear, the resources aren't apparent, and you're just not sure you can do it, quit striving, quit judging yourself, quit believing anything should be other than it is: just point yourself in the right direction, and scooch.

The thing about scooching is, it works. It keeps you from getting stuck. It does away with all-or-nothing. It does away with timelines or expectations of any sort, being more in the realm of "Let's just see how far I get, here" than "I'm supposed to be way over there already and I have no clue how to take the journey"—otherwise stated, "Cain't get there from here" (with a dash of "what-the-hell-is-wrong-with-me?" thrown in). Perhaps most important, scooching is kind, it's reasonable, it's realistic. What's not to like?

The first time I wrote the word *scooch* myself was in a Facebook post on my Jaya the Trust Coach page on Valentine's day of 2013:

A day for love! See, hear, feel, smell, taste your vision of love; remove or post a profile, get off a fence and land on your feet, catch the spark & kindle the flame; take the right dose of chocolate; light candles with a dear one or no one; gaze into her eyes, his eyes, a cat's eyes, everyone's eyes; give hugs, roses, smiles, winks, words of true praise & appreciation; laugh & create levity all day; love yourself & count the ways. Valentine's Day is a human construct, so don't use it to make yourself feel

bad about relationship, romance, or sex. It's just a good excuse to scooch in closer to love.

There it is again: the kindness of scooching. Notice, too, what's special with this wording, as this is scooch with a twist: scooch in. To scooch in is to come even closer, as when cousin Buddy and Aunt Goob showed up next, and then the imperative was to make room on the couch for them too.

So c'mon, y'all—scooch in!

introduction

## Scooch toward a Friendly Universe

Now a good decade ago, I snarled a frustrated comment about someone I loved but didn't live with well, and a woman used my statement to guide me through an inquiry process. I had such an instant experience of seeing another in a new, kinder light (and of liking myself a whole lot better) that I paid this woman to help me understand how to question my thoughts on an ongoing basis. This was Jude Spacks of Truth and Dare creative inquiry coaching, who later became my friend and colleague. The inquiry process was The Work of Byron Katie.

Katie (she doesn't go by Byron!) works from the premise that nothing that happens is inherently stressful. Pain, anger, sadness, frustration—all come from our thoughts about what's happening. These thoughts can be questioned. She also advocates finding the benefits in anything that happens to you, and looking for all that supports you to get through it. (She starts in the concrete here and now: this chair, the floor, the working phone within reach.)

After some months of fruitful inquiry, I attended the nine-day School for The Work (inner excavation—get out your worst fears, your greatest shame, your most painful love story) then made inquiry a daily habit. I changed. I changed in a way that even your children notice. I changed in the way that makes

your spouse sign up for the same program. Within two years, things with my then-husband drastically improved, then we divorced. The short version is: we'd gotten the lessons and we were done.

Soon after this split, I drove through the desert to sit with a life coach named Steve Hardison for two hours, someone I met at the School for The Work. He told me this: treat everything like good news. Whatever comes to you, whatever doors open or shut, whatever happens even if it would look like failure and rejection to most intelligent life, believe that it's the best thing that could happen to you. This took what I'd learned from Katie to another level. Or perhaps it helped me to give more attention to that thing she teaches about looking for the benefits in everything. This is what it is to live in a friendly Universe.

Since then, I've been experimenting with radical trust: seeing everything (everything) as the Universe conspiring in my favor. This was a phrase I'd heard before, and liked the sound of, but had no relationship with whatsoever. I've developed a day-to-day, moment-to-moment intimacy with this idea. I scooped in close, and I keep scooping. Whenever I've strayed from believing it's a friendly Universe, I turn again to The Work. I put my stressful thoughts on paper and launch another round of inquiry. I did The Work almost daily for three years after the School. Now I do it rarely, when something big comes up, but not because I'm done with it. It lives inside me. Hardly a stressful thought comes up without the simultaneous awareness arising that this

thought just can't be all true. Stressful thoughts are jarring, so I pay attention to them: like the stranger who walks into the living room uninvited—why would I just pretend he's not there, even though my whole body bristles at his presence?

The first couple of years post-divorce brought plenty of thoughts to question. I moved to a town where I didn't want to be (so I thought) and didn't know anyone, simply because my ex moved there, so we could still co-parent together. (Can I just mention I was a lesbian before and again after this nuclear family detour? The place we all moved to, the college town of Ithaca in upstate New York, is about as queer-friendly as a town can get.) I arrived with little money, scant possessions, and no job. Suddenly, my decade-long source of freelance editorial work ran dry. This was a book publisher I was used to going to anytime I needed money, and they always had something for me. Now nothing. I cried over this during a memorable thunderstorm, used *The Work* to question my scary thoughts of abandonment, and recovered my courage by next sunrise. I found a low-paying job with a start-up and kept that for nine months (the boss-people systematically got rid of all their staff, each time making it about what was wrong with the employee), still had no savings, and figured if it wasn't time to panic—if everything is good news—it must be time to do what I love.

With four years' experience facilitating *The Work*, I expanded into life coaching. Here's one of the miracles that got me there, and a gorgeous example of the friendly Universe: A man named Brian

Whetten had asked me to edit his book a few months earlier, and I'd said no because of my over-full-time job (yeah, the one that paid badly). I wrote to ask if he still needed an editor and still wanted me. Yes and yes. Then he paid me some money (rent!) and also created a trade with me. What does Brian do? He (very skillfully) teaches people with soul-centered practices how to get clients, how to dissolve their conflicts over charging money for helping people heal and grow, how to set up business structures that work—in short, how to make a living pursuing their true calling. I assure you I couldn't have come up with something so perfect all by myself.

While I learned from Brian (plus anyone I could find on the internet offering tips for free), persisted in looking for all that supported me, gave coaching away (sometimes unasked-for, ay), I fed my little family with food stamps and cleaned houses on the side. I got just enough jobs to patch it together, but not so many that I was starting a housecleaning business instead of a coaching business! I stopped buying most things I ran out of (who needs aluminum foil or Scotch tape?), buzz-cut my hair so I didn't have to pay for styling (great for reestablishing that lesbian identity), patched our clothes, and traded the old family minivan for another month's rent and bus passes. I held doggedly to the conviction that coaching—being the Trust Coach—was my calling. My first paying client was an old acquaintance who phoned me in crisis (divorce!) just because she found my number in a drawer and followed the impulse to call. Most of my first round

of clients came from a chain of referrals that started with her, and some current clients actually still trace back to that beginning.

Proceeding through these challenges, I made constant use of a simple Byron Katie trick: list the benefits in whatever's happening. (Or ask, How could this be good news?) With enough boldness and courage, you can apply this to anything: when you've spilled the milk or been spurned by the lover, when your loss feels unspeakable, when your last best hope for help says no.

By choice and happenstance, I've started over in nearly every realm of life. Uncertainty has ruled. And far more often than not, I've been happy, connected, confident, reliable as a parent, quick to land on my feet, solid in my dignity, and shockingly kind to myself. I won't try to muster a sufficiently messy description of how I would've handled all this before The Work. Don't get me wrong: the uglies strike me sometimes. But they never pull me under or hold me down for long, because I can question any thought that isn't loving and serene, and come back to sanity. My coaching business is seven years old now, and thriving.

Sometimes Byron Katie invites people to look at a situation in their life and ask, "If it's a friendly Universe, how is this perfect?" It's a great question: If it's a friendly Universe, how is this perfect? I've come to ask this in a number of ways when I sit with people seeking to disconnect their suffering from their circumstances—whether they've lost or can't make money, don't know whether to stay or go in a

job or relationship, can't help the helpless around and near them and aren't sure how to help themselves, can't get healthy, can't find meaning in their work despite trainings and promotions and following all the right paths, can't truly love and accept these people stimulating them at work or home. So here are your circumstances and here's the cast of characters playing on Earthstage with you: How is it all perfect? How is it growing the muscles you lack? What's the invitation here? What healing is possible right in the midst of it—not despite it, but because of it? What is this situation teaching you that you need to learn? And my favorite, if you think in terms of meeting everything as consciousness, every face as the face of God: why would the face of God show up for you this way?

Would you like to experiment with the possibility of living in a friendly Universe? I invite you to this experiment. I invite you to scooch: just edge into a friendly Universe. In all my work, this is what I'm inviting people to do, whether I speak the invitation or not.

I do love to say, if you're going to experiment with the friendly Universe, or with scooching—if you're going to bother with any experiment at all—you may as well make it a grand experiment.



## PART 1

# Scooch In Closer to Your Pain and Suffering

Why begin the book with pain and suffering—especially the potentially odious idea of bringing them closer? Well, I figure what gets most people involved in personal growth and reading self-help books is this suffering thing. We all feel pain, we all suffer, and most of us tend to move away from pain and suffering. The initial impulse is to take note of what hurts and shove it down, push it away, make it stop. I invite you to bring it close, feel it fully, and thus go through it and out to the other side. Slow down when pain strikes—don't run. Paradoxically enough, I believe anything that feels bad moves along much faster when you slow ... way ... down the moment of meeting it.

Perhaps most important, in handling pain and suffering with presence, you won't abandon yourself. Presence is all I'm really proposing here. Get present to what you're feeling that feels bad: it has a gift for you. It may be showing you beliefs you have that aren't true (so you may want to clear them out). It may reveal what you're attached to that isn't serving you (so you may want to let it go). If it's a friendly Universe, even the things that initially feel bad are here to bring only your highest good.

## The Pure Relief of Nonresistance

Of course it's never all about any one thing, but I've still given way to the temptation to begin with these words: *It's all about nonresistance*. Honestly, what most gets us in trouble are crazy beliefs along the lines of *This can't be happening* (when it is) or *This shouldn't be happening* (oh but look, here it is).

Byron Katie based her whole inquiry system on nonresistance and called her first book *Loving What Is*. Abraham-Hicks (that teacher from the Nether Realms I avoided for years out of a self-diagnosed allergy to channeling) loves the topic of nonresistance and urges people to notice when they're in resistance and to scooch toward acceptance and allowing. Deepak Chopra placidly harps on the law of least effort. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi first primed the concept of flow, and any number of people have eased themselves into that current, and they're going with it. Don't push the river. Let go. My favorite latest discovery in the spiritual-guidance department, Tosha Silver (whose book *Outrageous Openness* I own in tenplicate to lend out all over the place), stresses yielding to divine order—which means, among other things, letting what wants to come, come, letting what wants to go, go.

*Nonresistance* is a great concept, as it creates a

bridge where people can't go directly to acceptance. It's a lot to ask, sometimes, that we accept what feels like the unacceptable, the ugly (especially in ourselves), the things that are really hard for us to do or show up for or let go of. Some of these, however, are things we must reckon with to save ourselves or at least to stop harming ourselves and others. So forget acceptance, never mind loving what is: how about nonresistance? That's doable. There's a striving in acceptance that releases in nonresistance.

Of course, it was Byron Katie who got my forty-two-year-old self onto the idea of letting life show me what's happening instead of telling life what should be happening. What matters, ultimately, is reality (what's actually happening), not your preconceived notions and fantasies, or even your best-laid plans. I've come to say, *Show up for what's actually happening—not what you thought should happen, not what you wanted to have happen.*

Here's a hot-off-the-press (and very low-stakes) illustration of that, the story du jour. I'm writing this in a coffee shop during a longer block of writing time than I can typically work into my schedule. To maximize this coveted time, I called in a sandwich order to the deli at my nearby food co-op so I could jump on my bike, get lunch quickly and effortlessly, and power-pedal back to *Gimme! Coffee* to keep working while I eat. Ah, the luxury of modern-day efficiency.

I am, in fact, licking my fingers as I write, but I didn't get my sandwich in a hurry. I got to the co-op and announced myself and the adorable one behind

the counter, a tall gangly twenty-something with hair like Shaggy's (of *Scooby-Doo* fame), said, "You're just the person we wanted to see." Ah, but not for love, only because they were out of some ingredient I'd asked for and had not even begun to fill my carefully called-in order. Somehow my vision of jogging up to the counter and grabbing my sandwich relay-style as I tossed money backward out of my pocket and sprinted back to the bike rack—vanished. I paused with the first sign of irritation that came (right) up. I gave it a nod (*Hey, there you are old friend—I know you*) and a breath, then brought myself back to a theory I like to keep coming back to: that I'm not entitled to have everything go my way all the time; that, in all likelihood, such a thing wouldn't be to my advantage.

So I stood there asking myself, *What if there's some inspiration I could open to now that could serve me when I go back to write?* I thought, *This is letting life show me what happens. I thought I was getting the most efficient lunch on the planet. Turned out to be something else. Let life show you.* ... Then Shaggy handed me my ticket and suggested I go get the paying part over with. It wasn't that long till I was back in my seat at the coffee shop, typing away. Truly, no problem.

Here's a higher-stakes example. One morning, when I was working at home, I noticed my refrigerator was making strange noises. It had indigestion, or it was cracking up—some undiagnosed, indefinite something was most definitely underway, and I was pretty sure it was not

pretty. I did walk over and peer in quizzically at some point, but this gave me no new information. My fridge has two long doors in front that run parallel to each other, top to bottom, the freezer door on the left being skinnier. I lingered there. Something up with the ice maker? I'm really not a fix-it kind of gal. I went back to my comfort zone, which was also my scheduled work. Then I left the house for some hours and returned around suppertime to a small pond in my kitchen. (No frogs or beavers yet, so that was good.)

I opened the freezer door again and more water gushed out from the pond's source inside. Everything in there was soggy and sagging, and I gave the contents the once-over with that grown-up head-of-household eye that calculates in a flash money thrown out and resources wasted. The floor looked okay, just really (really) wet. I opened the refrigerator side and not even a wee gasp of cold breath issued from there. To be sure: not pretty.

I can't count how many times I've heard Byron Katie ask, "Where's the problem?" So, very often, when I catch myself reacting, alarmed, or in any way freaking out, I come to and say, "Jaya! You're thinking there's a problem!" Katie also admonishes us to think of stress as the temple bell calling us back to truth—or, if I may amend her words, just calling us back, from wherever we went, to wherever we actually are.

I used to participate in intensive programs that included long meditations, much longer than I practiced on my own, and when we were supposed to

come back from our altered states (as opposed to when I actually did, if I ever got there at all), a lovely bell chimed. I loved the sound of that bell. Oh, how my mind and hips and back and legs and mind all twinkled to that bell.

At some point in my self-observations, I came to understand that the F-word is my temple bell. It really is. That's the word that flies out of my mouth when the computer won't turn on, the jug of milk slips out of my hand with the lid off, or the refrigerator has emptied its ample liquids onto my floor. *F\*\*k!* It's part of my mission to help spiritual types understand that it's really okay to have reactions: as long as you still have them, they're still okay. We keep them going much longer with the idea they shouldn't be here. (We're not in nonresistance when we believe we shouldn't react!) When I'm reacting I know I'm reacting because my temple bell goes off. And this calls me back. *Oh. I'm thinking there's a problem. Where's the problem?*

There really wasn't one in this instance, as I could clearly see as soon as the F-bell alerted me to look again. It did take hours to clean up the mess. I didn't try to salvage the freezer foods, as I take the threat of botulism seriously. So with no urgency to rescue freezer foods, I prioritized cleaning the floor. It happened that I was taking care of cats across the street for vacationing lesbian neighbors, so once the floor was relatively dry, I boxed and bagged up the stuff worth moving—veggies and nuts and meats and eggs and oils and dairy products and condiments. I drew some firm lines and left behind anything whose

origins weren't obvious or remembered. I read some expiration dates for the first time in a couple of years, purging things that might have been moved along a good while back.

It took a few trips across the street. As I walked back and forth in the dark on a lovely pre-spring evening, breathing the fresh air, feeling capable and strong, I was taken by a thought that I very likely first heard from Katie: *I've gotta be doing something on planet Earth tonight—it may as well be this.*

Everything didn't fit into my neighbors' already pretty full refrigerator, so I went next door to the other lesbians on my block (hey, you, too, could live in Ithaca), and they made room for the rest. Now all my salvageable fridge foods had somewhere to chill. I came back and filled trash bags with what had so recently and randomly become trash, including all the contents of my freezer except for bags of flour and those hard freezer packs that could be frozen again when conditions were right, to do their job another time.

I really, really dislike waste. It was somewhat appalling to throw out food, food that had been paid for and in a few cases had cost a life. All of it would have been perfectly good to eat without this seemingly pointless refrigerator meltdown. But thanks to Katie, I could say to myself, *Sometimes waste happens on this planet.* That's just a fact. If you're trying to line up with reality, that's actually truer than *Nothing should ever get wasted.* Nonresistance means lining up with reality.

I'm not sure when it occurred to me that night

that, in the not-so-distant past, this whole episode would have ruined my day, and the internal spoilage would have carried on well beyond. It certainly wouldn't have occurred to me to let life show me what I was doing that evening. I would have been furious to spend my time cleaning up and carting food about, knowing I was setting myself up Sisyphus-style to reverse the process and bring it all home again once the fridge was back in working order. I would have done the required tasks with angry, nervous energy, mulling over my gripes the whole time. I would have been devastated by the waste, and that feeling would have dropped into the pit of my stomach and fermented there into despair and the not-so-vague feeling that I was a bad person and, really, the whole planet was a hopeless case. I would have been anxious about the outcome, when, how long, how much, whose fault. ...

None of that was with me. I simply sent my landlord an e-mail and she wrote back that she'd be in touch in the morning, hopefully with the news someone was on the way. A nice man came over the very next day and cheerfully did his job, and my landlord (not I) paid the bill. And I did take the time required for all the food's return trips, which gave me more fun moments with the good-humored women next door and another rumbly purring moment with Sadie, the cat across the way, who is *the* official flirty cat of the neighborhood.

Before I brought the food back, I washed my emptied freezer and fridge, a task that was sorely overdue and that I just breezed through after life's

brilliant set-up for that task. When the food was back in place, I don't believe my fridge had ever looked so tidy. It felt great. I'm sure some huge galactic feng-shui tectonic-plates-in-the-cosmos alignment thing happened right then. And since I did really have to be doing something on planet Earth at that moment, it may as well have been that.

Nonresistance. There really is no problem. It really is all good.

Shortly after I wrote the section above, I had a session with a client whose daughter uses a wheelchair and seems to have been doled out an inordinate share of procedures and surgeries to show up for. Aubrey described a two-hour trip to another city the day before a recently scheduled surgery, the travails of setting up an overnight hotel life, getting up the next day at the crack of dawn, and getting to the hospital only to be told the surgery was off—they didn't have some gizmo they needed to make it happen.

After exploring various possibilities and scenarios, Aubrey decided the smartest way to proceed was to drive home (it was still quite early in the day) and drive back the following morning. She was actively playing with nonresistance at the time and found that she was able to allow an initial small meltdown and then simply locate her best choice and take it. There was really no problem. In the scheme of things that could get derailed and go crazily askew in her daughter's life, this was no more than a blip.

But honestly, it sounds like a big pain. I stand in

awe of her application of nonresistance and am struck by the perspective her story puts on what most of us deal with. Life inconveniences us, that's for sure, in small and large ways. Why huff and puff over any of it? What if we remembered to ask, *Where's the problem?*—and kept finding that there isn't one?

## Show Up for What's Actually Happening ...

... not what you thought should happen; not what you wanted to have happen. I began to talk about this in the last chapter on nonresistance and am now scooching in closer. It's such a helpful phrase to apply in all realms of life and every present moment. It's good for helping you stay grounded in the world instead of lifting off into fantasy. It's a way to live in the now instead of rushing to a future.

On the most basic level, this is what I meant when I used to tell my son to look before crossing, even if the stoplight did just turn red and the little white-light pedestrian-crossing dude did just start glowing. Show up for what's actually happening: yeah, the car approaching is supposed to stop; more to the point, is it stopping? There could be folks turning right on red, too—did you check that they actually saw you before even sticking a toe in the crosswalk? If you walk out into the road just because they *should* stop, just because you wanted them to stop, things really won't go well for you if in fact they don't stop.

Let's zoom in to the realm of dating to look at this more closely, then we'll pan out again for you to apply to other realms of life. (If dating doesn't apply to you, even better—you'll be able to see the concept

clearly.) Ay, the romance thing. It's just so exciting to meet someone new who's attractive and interesting. Oh, never mind exciting: it's a relief, sometimes, after weeding through some frightful specimens of ill-health (stick a *mental* somewhere in there), to connect with someone wonderful—or even wonderfully normal. He can string together three grammatically functional sentences! She doesn't sound like an ax murderer when she talks about her ex! No reference to a live-in mother! (Or, in the case of lesbians, a live-in ex.) We get intoxicated. We stop showing up for what's happening, because with very little information, we decide we want this to take. We want it to last. Coming back to *now*, can you remotely know you want such a thing? Not likely. You need a whole lot more information, even if that date looks really good on paper—even more if that date looks really good, period.

Consider the sanity of staying present to what's actually happening in each new moment and scenario as you come to know another human being. You might actually notice the red flags without being scared of them, or even seeing them as great disappointments. They're just information—very handy information for what you're considering. Go ahead, have fun; be excited, glow in the sparks. And at the same time, show up for what's actually happening. You'll make more reality-based decisions that actually serve you better.

My client Sandra went through some harsh pain in a breakup because she got involved with Ted too quickly. There was so much to like about him initially

that she dove in and got swept away—swept herself away—in the fantasy of coupling. He was so attentive, so verbal about his appreciation of her, such fun to be with. Why would she say no to great sex and a kind, open face turned her way? Well, because he didn't want kids, and she wanted nothing more.

There's nothing stupid or dull about Sandra, but the realm of sex and love is tricky territory, isn't it? Somewhere in her mind, the two of them were already three. Tonight's restaurant meant tomorrow's strollers and diaper bags. For him, while tonight's restaurant didn't mean disappearing the next morning, it had more to do with hanging out tomorrow afternoon drinking beer and seeing a great show later on. It didn't take long for Sandra to get that he wasn't remotely suited to the life she was after.

It would have been less painful for her if she hadn't gotten so deeply involved sexually and emotionally—which she could have avoided by showing up for what was actually happening instead of what she wanted to have happen. She could have lingered in the information-gathering stage. She could have waited longer to get in bed—not because of any right or wrong, but because she knows about herself that her clarity goes all topsy-turvy in the horizontal realm. She could have walked away more quickly and easily if she'd simply taken in that, however dreamy it felt to look into those eyes, this guy just didn't want what she wanted: they—and their dreams—actually weren't compatible.

Please note that it's not the fact Ted didn't want kids that created a problem for Sandra. This is in fact the thing that let her know what she most needed to know—that he wasn't the man for her. The problem was the agenda she carried in that kept her from showing up for what was actually happening. Notice that when you're (in delusion) focusing on what you want to have happen or what you believe should be happening, you see anything that would keep it from happening as somehow working against you! Actually, when the signs show up to reroute you, this is a good thing. It's your guidance system working on your behalf, with your best interests in view. Ultimately, it's more evidence of the Universe conspiring in your favor—pointing you to what you do need to see (not thwarting or depriving you).

I've invited any number of clients to look for a time they were dating the wrong person when they didn't get all the red flags they needed pointing them to get out early on (and again a bit later, and again after that). I've yet to talk to anyone who can find that no-flags scenario. People got the red flags and disregarded them, minimized them, pushed them to the background, and focused on the compelling factors that kept them pretending that this was the one, or even just insisting that they wanted to keep going when it was in fact time to stop.

The dating game offers potent and easy application of this principle of showing up for what's actually happening. Now apply it to everything in life. You thought this was going to be a really fun and special event with your kid (who's all mopey and

droopy through no fault of yours)? Just show up for what's happening—then you may be able to keep from getting mopey too, or snappy and threatening. ... This was supposed to be the job of your dreams, not a constant battle of the wills with your boss? Well, show up for what's happening. It may very well prove to be that job after all or lead you right to it, especially if you use this custom-made opportunity to develop skills you were lacking—like the ability to hold your ground without going into attack or defense. ... The shopping trip was supposed to be quick and uneventful so you could knock out another hour or two of work? Apparently not. Show up for what's happening and let life show you when the religion of efficiency and optimum output needs to be shed for something else: breathing, patience, looking into whatever eyes show up without any agenda but meeting consciousness.

Ever hear yourself ask, “Who am I kidding?” (If you weren't being rhetorical, wouldn't you answer, “Myself” every time?) Here's how not to kid yourself, about anything: show up for what's actually happening— not what you thought should happen, and not what you wanted to have happen.

My client Dana told me to tack on this addendum: *and not what you fear will happen*. She told me about feeling like she was always reacting to all the imagined scenarios in her head—the scary things that *could* happen. In particular, she was looking at the way she shut down in relationships when she succumbed to fear that the current conflict or

misunderstanding would result in various painful ends, all culminating in total abandonment. I love her addition. Sometimes (often) there's little to do with your fears except notice that they have nothing to do with what's happening now—and come back to reality.

You might also remember the power of intention. When people tell me their entirely valid fears (most fears fall under this category), I tell them this: Turn your fears and worries into intentions, because fears and worries tell you exactly what you do and don't want to come into being. You're scared the new baby will create a rift between you and your toddler? Set the intention that you'll stay close. Scared the young, sharp one just hired will oust you from your role in the office? Set the intention that you two will collaborate, that you'll learn from her, that you'll find your proper place for the greater good—and imagine her doing the same. Worried that you'll lose your cool while speaking and stop making sense? Set some intentions around your preparedness, your connection to the audience, your ability to roll with anything, with sense of humor intact.

And ... show up for what's actually happening.

## Mind the Pain Body, Tend the Mind

When you're suffering, you're simply carrying around thoughts that make you suffer and feeling (perhaps intensifying) emotions that confirm the sense of suffering. When you're suffering, notice all you disconnect from: you cannot be here now, practice nonresistance, believe there's no problem, trust that a friendly Universe supports you, or keep moving toward what you're seeking to create in your life. In short, whatever spiritual concepts or good-life ethics and practices you aspire to all become tricky to hold firm to or slip out of reach altogether.

In my coaching practice, I invite clients to practice a two-part process in response to their suffering: mind the pain body and tend the mind. Whatever they're going through that feels too hard or too much, whatever they write me to say they don't know how to face, whatever has them confuzzled this time, I point them again and again to minding the pain body and tending the mind. Think of it as a practice, never done, just something to keep coming back to: mind the pain body, tend the mind.

### **Mind the Pain Body**

I was sort of struck upside the head the first time I heard Eckhart Tolle talk about the pain body. This was also the first time I gazed into the face (on film)

of this adorable toad-eyed creature with a goatee. (I sat riffing through possibilities: modern-day German hobbit? Über-actualized alien? Ever notice his initials?) Listening to his words, I felt he was articulating what began to set right some chronic imbalance in me. Now, years later, without having particularly gotten into Eckhart Tolle's work in any significant way, I've changed my relationship with the pain body drastically. At some point, I began guiding my coaching clients more and more into being with the pain body as an entirely separate process from meeting and working with their thoughts—especially since working with thoughts doesn't necessarily (and rarely immediately) make pain go away.

At the simplest level of explanation, the pain body describes that place in your body where emotional pain lodges. It's the beast that clamps your throat or rubs raw the inside of your chest or settles weightily on your gut and won't get off. The pain body isn't personal. Every human being will experience its flare-ups at various points in life throughout a lifetime—part of the package deal of being human. But we tend to take the pain body very personally, especially when we believe the thoughts that show up when it's active. I like to depersonalize it and give it its full generic due by simply telling myself (based on how I heard ET describe it), "The pain body's active." This allows me to create distance from the story while still coming close to the pain itself.

When you think of it this way, then, little does it matter what events—what story—actually activated

the pain body this time. We're so conditioned to get involved with the story that got the pain body going, and the telling, retelling, and believing the story as we retell it again and one more time (or ten). ... If you know that life will get the pain body going at some point or another over some point or another, you can actually step back from the latest story that revved it up. It really makes no difference what it was. Someone will diss you or betray you or grossly misunderstand you or drop their end of an agreement or get sick and die on you. You'll get injured or hear about a natural disaster or scary political situation, or you'll suffer a costly technological snafu. In the greater scheme of things, the current story doesn't matter. How you meet the pain body matters very much.

Think of meeting the pain body as you might respond to a child who runs in crying with a skinned knee. Let's say you're working at the computer. To risk stating the obvious (call this next bit "Advice to a Clueless Parent"), don't keep typing. Don't glance over and say, "Aw, bummer," and crank out the next paragraph. Instead, drop what you're doing because, even with that deadline coming up, your work has just been temporarily usurped by something more important. Stop and give the child your full attention (full awareness). Cleanse the wound, apply a balm; give kindness, give love.

So you know what to do with a child—but are you a clueless parent to yourself? With the pain body, you can simply place your hand there once you locate it. More important, think of the breath as a balm, the

only balm you can apply from within. Breathe into the pain body for a few breaths, gently expanding into it then beyond to make space around it. (Don't breathe deep or hard, don't force anything, just gently direct the breath to soothe the pain body.) Give this a minute; give it a few. We love to rush through these moments, as if the to-do list were more important. When the kid runs in crying, nothing else matters—just for a bit. It all shakes back down pretty quickly—really just a minute or two, most of the time, for the kid to feel tended to and run back out for the next bit of fun—so just be still awhile. The truth is, if your child is distressed, you'll give it however long it takes: you're willing.

When the pain body gets all raw and hurting, or heavy and oppressive, it's time to stop what you're doing and take care of that. Please don't plow through the next e-mail and throw it an "Aw, bummer." Don't do that because it doesn't work.

The other thing not to do is to believe whatever thoughts are running alongside the pain. Just because we *feel* something, we take this as evidence that our thoughts around the feeling are true. They're not. They're certainly not, to use Byron Katie's phrase, *absolutely true*. Thoughts need to be met, questioned, looked at from different angles. That's what the inquiry process called The Work of Byron Katie does so brilliantly. Katie's process offers the *how* for disentangling from thoughts. We'll look at this more deeply when we turn to tending the mind.

But minding the pain body is a separate process that you can attend to with no reference to what

you're thinking—especially if you know not to believe your thoughts. If they're a strong presence, you can write them down—that's what Katie urges people to do. The writing fixes your thoughts to the page (or screen) so they can be still there, and you've got half a chance of seeing them clearly. It leaves you with a finite list of thoughts to work with (when you get to it) and sometimes the thoughts, once visible in ink on paper, fairly scream at you, "Not true!" Write down the thoughts, put them aside—acknowledging to yourself as clearly as you can that they're just thoughts, so they can't be absolutely true—and turn your attention to the pain body. ("Remember," I remind my clients when they're really distressed and caught up in their thoughts and fears of the moment, "mind the pain body! The story that activated it doesn't even matter.")

The process of meeting the pain body is almost absurdly simple, because the pain body wants two things from you: awareness and breath. More than anything, what's required is to bring your full, focused awareness to the place that hurts. For even a brief moment, give it your undivided attention. Be one-pointed, even for a few seconds, if that's all you've got. I tell my clients to just go to the restroom if that's all you can manage, and attend to your pain body for the time a potty break usually takes. The duration isn't what counts: what counts is full awareness, or total immersion. Drop into your pain body as deeply as you can, as you might get into a jacuzzi, right up to your chin.

From here, be your own soothing parent. Apply

that balm from within by breathing into the place that hurts. Breathe the pain body for several breath cycles, watching the breath go in and out, watching for any ease or release that comes of this—without forcing anything. Your job here is giving awareness and breath, not making it all better or fixing it.

As you breathe into the pain body, seek to fully feel what hurts. Get curious about it. Go into scientist mode, finding details beyond the pain body's general location: What are the parameters of the area affected? How far out does it go? Does it go beyond the limits of the body? How deep inward does it go? What's the pitch and timbre of it? How dense is it? Could you give it a color?

Now you're not just immersed in the pain body—you're witnessing it. I always find it useful to consciously locate the witness and notice that a part of you can separate from the pain body and watch you hurting; a part of you can even watch you attending to your hurting. It's like layers of awareness you can access and check in with. I remember being taken through an exercise once during a meditation intensive that involved locating the witness, then the one watching that one, then the one watching that one, in potentially endless succession as when two mirrors face each other so that a ricochet of reflections ensues.

To my mind, what's most useful in that with reference to the pain body is that you can always find some part of yourself that's outside of the pain, or beyond it. Ultimately the pain body is not who you are, no matter how much space it's taking up or how

loudly it's screaming; you're always bigger than that. It's weirdly counterintuitive: when you enter into the deep end of the pain body by giving it your full awareness, you start to distance yourself from it at once, because you release identification with it and become its observer instead.

Note that if you become conscious of the witness, you can also notice the quality of the witnessing. If you find you're witnessing with distaste, aversion, or judgment of any kind, call in the compassionate, dispassionate witness. The compassionate one will feel truly caring toward you, bringing some modicum of warmth to the observing. The compassionate one is gentle and nonjudgmental. The dispassionate one won't get sucked into the drama, always stands on neutral ground, may not even believe any attendant story that the mind fairly insists on hooking into. So once you're aware of witnessing, access the compassionate, dispassionate witness—or scooch that way.

Having given the pain body that full-on, one-pointed attention, even briefly, having applied the balm of breath, then carry on with what you need to do without losing track of the pain body. You know those infant carriers that allow you to strap a baby onto your chest and keep it close as you go about your business? Carry your pain body around like that. When you've got a baby in one of those things, you can do just about anything: work at the computer, talk on the phone, wash the dishes, walk, shop, teach—no turning cartwheels, but most things work. Some part of you, though, will remain aware of

the baby. You'll do little check-ins, monitoring noises, giving a sniff, applying touch. You might even move your body a little, providing a subtle rocking.

Likewise, carry on with the business at hand, giving it the majority of your focus, but don't lose track of that pain body as long as it's active in any way. Give it some part of your awareness, send some breath its way. Keep it gently, tenderly on your radar, like the baby in the carrier. You can even use a rating scale, if you're that type: *now it's a 6; it's dropped to 3; spiking again at 9*—no judgment in it, just a way to check in.

I have a client who's taken to saying "the pain baby" for the pain body. Another was struck by this image of carrying the baby around and had a tender epiphany around her own failure to be sufficiently gentle with herself when she's feeling painful emotions. I'm always in favor of increasing the kindness and gentleness you bring to your own process. This metaphor (with its good-parent mindset) promotes just that.

If you're scooching toward consciousness, you must show up for meeting the pain body one way or another. Think of it this way: sometimes, you'll have an appointment with the pain body. It's a date that won't show up on your calendar ahead of time (though sometimes it will—as when you know you're signed up for something pretty much guaranteed to set it off, like the visit with your family of origin or the high-stakes interview or court date or whatever). When it's time for the meeting, don't avoid it. Drop anything else, or incorporate it all: there's room for

the pain body no matter what life requires of you.

The pain body must be met—it's part of your job as a human being. Ignoring it, shoving it down, buffering it with food, alcohol, your drug of choice—this is what brings you ongoing harm. The pain body itself won't harm you. Neither will the particular story that got it going this time, however painful most people would agree the story to be. Something has to activate the pain body: look dispassionately at the story and think, *This is as good a trigger as any*. I do recommend meeting your thoughts about the story, covered in the next section just below. I also recommend meeting the pain body as a separate and crucially important process in your growth and healing.

### **Tend the Mind**

The first step in tending the mind is so important that I've already given it to you: write down your thoughts. Since I cannot stress this enough, let me overstress it. I usually tell my clients to write down their thoughts many times over before they actually try it in a moment of distress, anger, sorrow, or emotion of any kind. Either they forget or they decide in that unclear moment that this is some bullshit, not-truly-relevant thing I said that has little bearing on this very real occurrence happening right now and their actual capacity to meet it. Nothing could be more relevant in a moment of mental confusion than to empty the contents of your mind onto paper. (Note that you're mentally confused when you're angry, outraged, ashamed, alarmed, appalled,

sorrowful, disappointed. I'm not saying that these emotions aren't valid—just that they take you out of clarity in your thinking.)

It's a mucky, murky, slippery morass up there, and when you get the swirling, seemingly endless mess organized in list form—which simply requires spewing it out on paper—the first thing that's apparent is that you're working with a finite list. It's even often surprisingly short, much shorter than it seemed to be when it was swirling redundantly round that hamster wheel of the mind. As part of her inquiry system, Byron Katie offers a form for capturing thoughts called the Judge-Your-Neighbor Worksheet. Katie likes to say, "All war belongs on paper," and the point of this worksheet is to expose your vile thoughts about someone to yourself so you can explore them (she says, "meet them with understanding") instead of using them to clobber people (even if plenty of us agree that they deserve it). But you can also simply write down your thoughts, and I always follow and point clients to Katie's directive to use short, simple, sentences, one thought per line.

She also offers an insanely simple trick of adding the words "and that means that ..." after a general prompt related to your upset so that you can generate your list from there. For example, you might hear yourself think or say, "I'm completely overwhelmed." Noticing that your pain body is screaming as you walk around under the influence of this unexamined thought, you might want to first mind the pain body for a moment. Then after you sit

with that—or even as you sit, if the story won't stop asserting itself while you do—take a blank sheet of paper or open a blank screen and write it down. It may look something like this:

I'm completely overwhelmed, and that means that ...

- There's way too much going on.
- I can't possibly meet this deadline.
- I can't take care of Corey and get my work done.
- I need more help.
- My computer can't be acting up now.
- I can't be late with this project.
- I can't do this well if I get it done on time.
- I don't have time to eat.
- I'm sick of being the only grown-up around here.
- It's all up to me.
- This job is too much for one person.
- I can't love what I do when there's so much of it.
- I'm missing the joy of living.
- I'm losing track of gratitude.
- I'm not sleeping enough.
- I wake up haggard and pinched and horrid.
- I'm aging too quickly.
- I can't do this.

Don't stop till you feel you've gotten it all down. If it feels like it's getting repetitive (and it will), you can

call it done. It's worth sitting still a moment: pause and wait and maybe watch your breath for a couple of in-out cycles. See what else wants to come. Invite it. And then notice you've got a finite list.

There's a whole spectrum of possibility for how to then put your list to work for you, and I invite you to find the right level of attention to give it in the moment. The most basic level, which I invite you to do every time, is to simply look at the list and tell yourself that it's just that, a list of thoughts. Byron Katie made it crystal clear to me that thoughts may present themselves as if they're narrating reality inside your head, but they're really just thoughts. Every time. This means they're never true— or never *absolutely* true. So look at your list and simply say, out loud if you want to make sure you really hear it, "These are just thoughts. They're not true, at least not absolutely true." You might add, "They do explain why I feel so bad. Anyone believing this set of thoughts would probably feel pretty rotten."

On the other end of the spectrum is the possibility of looking closely at every single thought you've recorded. And, as always, there are multiple possibilities between the polarities, which we'll briefly consider after I take you through an example of The Work of Byron Katie, the best way I know to question the thoughts on your list. This is an inquiry system that consists of four questions (with plenty of possible subquestions, especially for question 3), and what Katie calls the turnaround, which is a recasting of the thought in a few ways to consider it from other angles, noticing that even the direct opposite may be

as true as or truer than the original thought.

If this inquiry process is interesting to you as I've laid it out here, I invite you to read Katie's book *Loving What Is: Four Questions That Can Change Your Life* (co-written with Stephen Mitchell), in which she demonstrates The Work over and over again on any number of topics. The audio version is lovely, because you get to hear the voices of the people she facilitates as well. Finally, Katie's official website, [TheWorkdot-com](http://TheWorkdot-com), is full of free resources, including numerous videos that allow you to watch her in action.

### ***A side trip into The Work of Byron Katie***

The four questions of Katie's inquiry process are as follows:

1. Is it true?
2. Can you absolutely know that it's true?
3. How do you react, what happens, when you believe the thought?
4. Who would you be without the thought?

Let's take one thought from the sample list above, *I can't possibly meet this deadline*, and walk it through what the Q-and-A process could look like.

Q: *You can't possibly meet this deadline*. Is that true?

A: Yes! Well, I don't know.

Q: *You can't possibly meet this deadline.* Can you absolutely know that it's true?

A: No. Meeting the deadline is actually within the realm of possibility.

[The following few questions, until we get to question 4 (*Who would you be without the thought?*), are all subquestions for #3 (*How do you react, what happens, when you believe this thought?*), all designed to explore cause-and-effect. Notice what it gets you—what kind of life you give yourself—when you believe this thought. Take your time exploring this. I don't tend to ask the overarching question for #3 but simply proceed through the subquestions, usually beginning with what emotion the thought produces and where it strikes in the body. You don't have to ask all the subquestions (in fact, please don't!). For me, it's a very intuitive process to choose what to ask and in what order. Ultimately, it just doesn't matter. All you're doing here is exploring the so-called reality you see when you look through the lens of this particular thought.]

Q: When you believe this thought, *You can't possibly meet this deadline*, what emotion do you feel, and where do you feel it in your body?

A: I feel heavy all over. I feel scared and irritable and irritated. The scared part sits in my gut. Then it's like I have these waves of sensation that move through my head. I feel incompetent, defeated. Tired,

overwhelmed, heavy.

Q: How do you treat other people when you believe this thought, *You can't possibly meet this deadline?*

A: I have no patience. I snap. I made a big deal last night of who should do the dishes, when a simple conversation was all we needed. I start getting into everything everybody does *all the time* (and exaggerate that) instead of just dealing with what's up in the moment.

Q: How do you treat your boss (including in your mind) when you believe *You can't possibly meet this deadline.*

A: I can actually hate her. I feel she wants too much of me and pays too little attention to all that's on my plate. Or I start begging her in my mind. I've had pathetic, embarrassing conversations with her in my mind.

Q: Does this thought, *You can't possibly meet this deadline*, make you feel connected or separate?

A: Separate. So alone.

Q: Does it give you peace or stress?

A: Stress!

Q: Does it put you in or out of your power?

A: Out.

[Katie doesn't do much with the concept of personal power, but I do. This is my question (not that I'm saying no one else ever thought of it—I'm betting they did and do). I just love it, and I use it a lot. I personally don't wish to hold on to thoughts that make me feel I have no power, no agency, no choice.]

Q: Whose business are you in when you're believing *You can't possibly meet this deadline?* [Katie's three kinds of business are yours, someone else's (hers, his, theirs), and God's (as defined by you). For the latter, I prefer to say the Universe's.]

A: The Universe's. I'm declaring what is and isn't possible, and that's not mine to determine. I'm also declaring something about my innate capability, and I don't have the last word on that. Oh, I'm also in the concept of time with this deadline thing, so that's always the Universe's domain. Ay, I'm completely out of my business with this thought.

[When I facilitate people in The Work, I love to remind them that the point of the three kinds of business as Katie explains it is that there's a self-abandonment in leaving your business. You leave yourself—you're no longer here to take care of yourself, or to tend what's actually yours to tend—when you're minding someone else's business or the Universe's.]

Q: What is it you fail to notice or lose track of completely when you believe *You can't possibly meet this deadline?*

A: I lose track of the fact I almost always meet deadlines. And when I don't, there's a very good reason and the deadline gets moved. I notice I'm scared this time because I don't see this one getting moved. But I've never gotten in trouble with this boss for not making a deadline. I used to get in trouble with that when I was younger, but not now, and never in this job. I also completely lose track of the idea that you can do jobs at different levels, and I need to quit trying to hold a standard of perfection when I'm up against a deadline. I just need to complete it and let it be as good as it is.

Q: How's your relationship with the present moment when you're believing this thought?

A: I'm not in the present moment. I'm jumping to a future where everything's not okay. I guess I go to the past, too—at least the immediate past, to review how hard it's been. Wow, this thought doesn't allow me to get totally present to the time I've got and make the most of that.

Q: Are there any addictions or addictive processes you go to when you're believing the thought *You can't possibly meet this deadline?*

A: I go over old victimy thought patterns about how hard life is. That whole list of thoughts I wrote from the prompt pretty much sums it up, plus a few more thoughts specific to the single-mom thing.

Q: Can you think of one peaceful reason for holding on to the thought *You can't possibly meet this deadline*?

A: No.

Q: Close your eyes and watch scenes of what it's actually like to move through the days and hours leading up to this deadline. Who would you be (in this reality) without the thought *You can't possibly meet this deadline*?

A: Okay, I think I'd be the competent, good worker that I am. I'd stand in the truth of how good I am at this, and allow what I can do in this time frame to be enough even if it's not my best. I'd be less frazzled and freaked out. I could maybe even relax a bit, or at least be focused and stay steadfast with the work—really give myself to it when it's time to do it and breathe a little when it's time to pause for food or to do something with my kid. Amazing: I can breathe more right now just thinking in these terms.

Q: Let's turn the thought around. Find an opposite for *I can't possibly meet this deadline*.

A: I *can* possibly meet this deadline.

[Note that the turnarounds ask that you change as little of the original phrasing as possible. Thus, the simplest turnaround is to make a negative statement positive or a positive, negative.]

Q: Does that seem as true as or truer than the original thought?

A: It could be at least as true. I mean, it's interesting to me to notice that it's true at all!

Q: Give a concrete example of how it could be true that you can in fact meet this deadline.

A: It's possible. I can meet it because I could go for the bare minimum and simply make sure that the beginning, middle, and end are in place. It'll be done, just not with all the bells and whistles. And if I get the bare bones in place, there could still be time to go in and flesh it out a bit here and there—a very good chance of that, in fact.

Q: Find another example of why it's true you *can* meet the deadline.

A: Well, there is some time left. I don't have to turn it in right this second, which would be a fiasco.

Q: Find one more example.

A: I can meet the deadline because I'm smart and

capable and know the priorities and have done this enough times to know what I'm doing, even with the specific unknowns of this specific project factored in.

Q: Do you still want to believe that you can't possibly meet the deadline?

A: No. It's really not true, and it really messes me up to believe it's true. I choose to believe that I can.

[This completes Byron Katie's inquiry process for the statement *I can't possibly meet the deadline*. Note that the situation in which you might believe such a thought would likely also have you believe there's no time to question it. Can you imagine the upgrade in efficiency once this thought is questioned and countered? My experience has been that self-inquiry is always worth the time it takes—even, and perhaps especially, in time-sensitive situations.]

Note that there are often several turnarounds. The most basic is the one we did here, going from positive to negative, or vice versa. When you do just one turnaround, that direct opposite is a good one to explore. It may be worth going another direction with a different kind of statement in which you're strongly accusing someone of something or calling them something, especially if you're very focused on what's wrong with them or how maddening they are. In that case, you might benefit even more from turning it around to yourself.

The turnaround to the self simply entails saying

about yourself what you're saying about another. Thus, "She can't see past her own nose" would become "I can't see past my own nose." You take the other person out of the sentence altogether and make it all about you. "He's so pigheaded" becomes "I'm so pigheaded." Then you'd find three examples of how you are or do what you accuse another of being or doing.

Spiritual teachers from any number of traditions emphasize seeing others as the mirror. What drives you crazy in them is what drives you crazy in you, so it behooves you to check out how you do what you're faulting them for doing. You may balk at this when the other has that quality or does that thing way more than you have or do. But really, that doesn't matter. What matters—what truly serves you—is to find how it plays out in you and clean that up. So if their version of some flaw outdoes yours by a long shot, just think of the other as the funhouse mirror: to stay with *pigheaded* as our example, your father may be a grotesque, squashed, stretched, ridiculously exaggerated version of *pigheaded*, while you get that way only a wee-little hardly-ever bit. Perhaps you get pigheaded especially in relation to him when you dig in your heels to oppose him. Seeing it so blatantly in him—the magic of the funhouse mirror—may be just the thing that makes you serious about clearing up whatever vestige of *pigheaded* remains in you (but not to be righteous, or more righteous than he is—only for your freedom).

You may also find, by turning around *pigheaded* (or whatever) to yourself, that you're willing to give

yourself permission to be that way on occasion—for example, to make sure you bolster yourself to keep him from manipulating you. It actually makes sense for you to make space for that. This will help you to give another permission to do the same. He's in charge of when he allows himself to be pigheaded; you're in charge of you.

This is a good one for you if you still believe self-care is selfish (if you have what I call a false equal sign between self-care and selfishness). Maybe when you're mad at someone else for being selfish, you can turn it around to yourself and find how you're selfish—even if the other is the Queen of Selfishness and you just dabble, and that with a good measure of guilt. Maybe you could give yourself permission to prioritize thinking about yourself sometimes, calling that selfish if you must, and leave the other to her selfish ways as well.

For the record, the third classic turnaround, when there are two people in the sentence, is to do what I call switching the characters. So “They drive me crazy” becomes “I drive them crazy.” You may find it useful to acknowledge that it goes or may go both ways.

Can I just say that the turnarounds are brilliant?

There's an interesting misunderstanding that happens with turnarounds that I'd love to clear up. Because *The Work* begins with looking for how a thought isn't true then finishes with looking for truth in opposite thoughts, people get the idea that they're supposed to see the original thought as having no truth and the turnaround as embodying truth. Not

so.

The original thought very likely does have some truth in it, or you wouldn't be thinking it at all. But when we think stressful thoughts, we tend to get hyperfocused on them and see nothing else. Believing he's pigheaded, focusing on that, you're not going to see where he's open and flexible. You're not going to see how you can be that way too. The turnarounds simply allow you to walk over to the other polarity way across from your thought and check out what's true over there too. Since you've reviewed any amount of evidence to validate the truth of the original thought, Katie asks you to stay with each turnaround long enough to find at least three concrete examples for how this new thought may be true as well—perhaps even truer than the original thought.

In no way does this mean you need to reject the original thought categorically or set up camp in the other polarity. It's more like stepping back far enough that now you get a wide-angle view on reality that encompasses both the thought and its opposite, and everything in between. Katie suggests that you use the turnaround as your prescription for how to be with a situation differently. But this doesn't mean you'll never find truth in the original thought again—and you don't have to feel crazy when the original thought does seem true. Still, it's not the whole truth, and you don't have to take it so seriously. You can visit the turnarounds again, if you need to, to remember what else is true. Once you've done The Work, the turnarounds may revisit you on their own

and provide spontaneous perspective.

This inquiry process is a fabulous way to get free of a thought and not be ruled by it as if it dictated reality—it most certainly does not. But don't expect inquiry to make a thought go away, and don't expect the associated pain-body sensations to dissolve at once just because you can mentally stretch your perspective. Let the pain body catch up when it will, keep minding the pain body, and keep questioning your thoughts as needed.

Let's go back to that list of stressful thoughts. In between the two extremes of simply noticing your thoughts aren't true and doing full-blown inquiry on each thought, you've got any number of options. You might go through the four questions and turnaround for one thought (choose the zinger, or the one you'd feel most relieved to shed) then do a simple turnaround for the others or even for one or two others. Or you might go through the whole list and just ask, "Is it true?" about each list item. You might go through and quickly turn each thought around—though, remember, the task associated with the turnaround is always to find at least three concrete examples of how the new opposite statement could be true, and it behooves you to do just that.

Let's say you're turning around the thought *I'm missing out on the joy of living*. Don't stop at saying, *I'm NOT missing out on the joy of living*, but add at least three reasons this could be true:

1. I had my favorite breakfast this morning, and it worked fine to eat at the computer—I tasted it and enjoyed it.
2. Even though I didn't get much time with Corey last night, we laughed really hard about his shoes-in-the-pond story at bedtime.
3. When I finished the proposal part of the project, I had a huge sense of satisfaction. I really felt bolstered by how nicely that turned out and remembered why I love this work. That helped me move right on to the next part.
4. I keep noticing the vase of flowers in the kitchen when I go through there. It's such good timing that those landed here while this is going on—they really do brighten things up.

### ***Other methods for tending the mind***

There are any number of ways to tend the mind that don't require any inquiry process. I use The Work of Byron Katie in my life and my practice because it's far and away the most potent thing I've come upon that can truly address and clear out the thoughts that keep you from your joy, peace, well-being, loving essence, or personal power. Not only does it move along specific thoughts that aren't serving you, but with repeated use it actually changes your relationship with your thinking. You come to know that any thought can be questioned. You learn not to take your own thoughts so personally, because the very same thoughts are a lot of other people's own thoughts too—they're really not that personal.

I was fascinated when my thoughts started

showing up hand-in-hand with *Is it true?* Or they showed up with their turnaround already pointing me to more possibilities and greater kindness. Some thoughts are tough, stubborn, deep-seated ones that aren't so willing to cozy up to their own undoing. For those, I found that at the very least I stopped simply swallowing them whole as truth just because I felt something strong when they showed up.

So while *The Work of Byron Katie* is a great way to tend the mind and offers the added bonus of changing your relationship with your thinking, you might also write in a journal, talk to wise friends, take it to a therapy or coaching session, work with positive affirmations or otherwise choose your mental focus, make gratitude lists, consider the worst-case scenario and notice how far you are from that and whether you could handle it if that's where you ended up, think of other people in other places who'd love to trade in their problems for yours, and so on. See what else you can come up with.

However you do it, do tend the mind. Otherwise, it will have its way with you, and you'll walk around unconsciously believing any number of things and choosing (or failing to choose) your life based on those thoughts.

Mind the pain body, tend the mind. They'll both be active whether you give them good attention or not. You may as well bring it all to consciousness. You may find a whole lot of pain and confusion gets dislodged and released when you do.

## (Quit Telling Me to) Breathe

In my defense, when I first noticed it was a thing for people to exhort each other to *Breeeaaaathe*—wasn't that in the eighties?—I was properly irritated. *What is this New-Age bullshit? Obviously, I'm breathing already or the reminder to breathe would fall on deaf—no, dead—ears. Take your vapid rainbow unicorn advice telling me to do what I'm already doing and ...* So how did I become someone who keeps telling people to breathe?

Well, I didn't. I actually tell people to bring consciousness to the breath. That's different. I even sometimes explicitly acknowledge: You're breathing anyway. So breathe with awareness, watching the breath go in and out, all the way in, all the way out, and insofar as you can with no straining, direct that breath to the place in your body that hurts while you're thinking what you're thinking and feeling what you're feeling. That is, direct it to the pain body. And as you do this, you may well notice that this conscious breathing translates to slightly longer, fuller breaths, and that therefore, a) you quickly find this to be calming and anchoring, and b) you become the witness of your pain body and slip out of identification with all that messy stuff going on in there.

Is breath the way to freedom?

In case you're already bored with breath, let me amp up the entertainment factor. This paragraph is brought to you by *Star Wars*. My son recently had a helper ask him to take long, loud breaths that no self-respecting seventh grader would ever go along with. He calls them Darth Vader breaths and, when no one else is looking, imitates for me (with what I can only call puke-face) what it would look and sound like if he actually went along with Darth Vader breathing. Which, as a self-respecting seventh grader, he most certainly does not. Please know that I'm not asking you to take Darth Vader breaths. Just breathe consciously— you're breathing anyway—directing the breath to the place of pain, and let the breath expand if it will. But don't force it. No puke-face.

I just got interrupted from this writing by Dana, calling from an airport to talk about the tantruming toddler that's taken over her currently activated pain body. With the aim of disentangling the inner child from the pain body while acknowledging their obvious kinship, I asked her to hold the pain body (awareness and breath) while she holds the tantruming child (awareness, maybe visualization) to teach her small self that this pain is containable, it's bearable; this situation is manageable, and her adult self is managing it. But Dana, don't put the child in charge of your relationship (or Reader, your whatever), or even in charge of the next step in that realm. Do breathe.

Why bring consciousness to the breath—never

mind talk about it, write or read about it, remind people to breathe? Breath is (far) more powerful than we give it credit for. I once had the pleasure and privilege of attending a workshop on the psychic structures of the nine personality types taught by Russ Hudson, a (I want to say *the*) preeminent elucidator of the Enneagram. I was fascinated to find that Russ kept bringing his discussion back to the breath as he moved through the types and explained how we can trump the tendencies of our particular personality style. Connecting to breath allows you to witness yourself. It can assist you to choose more consciously where you go next in mind and body.

Let me digress for two paragraphs here to note that the Enneagram is a personality typology system that I use in my coaching practice because it's such a gorgeous, complex, elegant system. Unlike other models, it's not a listing of separate types, but draws clear interconnections among the types. It therefore makes sense that the Enneagram is depicted by a round diagram with nine points and lines that connect the types to one another (the more detailed reasons for which I won't get into here). We're all ultimately all the types, but one particular type with a neighboring wing explains our personality strategy for managing life. (By "neighboring wing" I mean the number right next door: I'm a Four with a Three wing, while a friend of mine is a Four with a Five wing. We share core issues and tendencies, but because of our differing wings, for starters, she's far more reclusive and her image consciousness is less overt. The time I suggested we do a radio show

together, she laughed—basically told me to take my Three wing and go fly solo.)

You don't need to know a thing about the Enneagram to understand what I write about in what follows. If you're curious about your type, there are free tests on the internet or in any number of books. I'm a particular fan of the Enneagram Institute (put it together and add dot-com and you've got their website address). Besides a free short test, they also offer a longer test of higher validity for only 10 bucks as of this writing. (Note that you're the purest version of your type in your mid-twenties, so if in doubt, answer the questions as you would have then.) Back to the breath.

For the sensitive types—though all types have their own sensitivities—the emotions can be supported and contained through grounding with the breath. The problem isn't being too sensitive, Russ explained. The problem is the fact of not being grounded in the body. The heart's sensitivity must be contained by the body, and we facilitate this through feeling our feet on the ground, embodying our hips, and bringing consciousness to (you've got it) the breath.

Thus, groundedness gives Fours the capacity to contain their alarming emotions without getting sucked into despair or believing that all of life boils down to what they're feeling in the moment. It gives Nines the confidence to meet life's problems instead of shoving them down and shutting them out. It gives Sixes the ability to get out of the mind's futurizing *what-ifs* and make a good choice for right now. All

the types benefit from grounding through the breath. Whatever your type, the breath is your ally in grounding so that you can bring yourself back from your habitual tendencies—whatever unhealthy tactics you default to when the going gets rough.

Why is that? Russ helped me more clearly connect the dots between breath and presence. (Hmm, didn't the phrase *Be here now* come into vogue round-about the same time everyone started saying *Breathe*?) To stay with the examples given above, the Four isn't present when sucked into those compelling emotions; the Nine isn't present when pushing out the inconvenient, intrusive world; the Six isn't present when mentally spinning all the options and their terrifying potential outcomes.

Shall I go through the other types, too? Please skip ahead to the next paragraph if you don't care to consider each one. The Two isn't present when reaching outward to take care of others without first checking inward for self-care needs or personal wants. The Three isn't present when pushing through all barriers to the glorious finish of a project that every red flag in the vicinity is waving to call a stop to. The Five isn't present when ducking back inward because, once again, relating with the beings who populate the world out there turns out to be less than obvious. The Seven isn't present when jumping mentally to the next activity, the next encounter, the next rush. And Eights and Ones just aren't present when requiring others to get behind what they want (8) or what they consider to be right and good (1).

Is breath the way to freedom? Maybe. I'm pretty

sure you can get free only here and now (not irrevocably into forever as fans of enlightenment often strive for), and you can't get free here and now if you're not here, here and now.

Do you want to be present? Do you want to bring consciousness to all you do—or even to some of it sometimes? You need to be grounded to be present. Like a good writer, you need to connect to the senses and the sensory details of the moment. You need to be aware of your body and breath.

If you want to roll your eyes when someone says *Breathe*, go ahead and roll away. Plenty of us will join you. And then—since you're breathing anyway, and only if you want to get grounded or be present or scooch toward a bit more freedom from your habitual tendencies, only for right now—do nothing with your breathing but to give it your awareness (all the way in, all the way out).

## Managing Pain by Bringing It Closer

Some years ago, life gave me the most amazing teaching through a harsh kitchen burn. It taught me a new way to be with physical pain. Eventually (this bit took me a while), I learned how to apply the technique to emotional pain—which, like physical pain, expresses as sensation in the body. The pain-body work that's become so central to both my personal process and what I walk others through really began for me that night.

I don't remember what I was cooking or how I burned my finger, but the memory of the ramifications is vivid. It wasn't sufficiently serious to warrant a trip to the emergency room, but bad enough that no amount of ice or aloe eased the pain. I couldn't sleep. I was so tired, and kept dozing off, but this screaming event in my hand kept jolting me back to being fully awake. Then I was miserable and distressed and dreading the rest of the night and the next sleep-deprived day. (I was not present.) Finally, the hour got late enough and the misery great enough that I came to and decided something else needed to happen here. Somehow, I understood that I needed to meet the pain more directly. I needed to be present with it, and see what gift it might have for me.

I have no idea what, beyond the pain, prompted

me to do such a thing. This was well before I began to habitually meet everything in life as a gift. But I found the gift, and with it a three-part formula that I've come back to again and again: Let it sear, let it fade, let it go.

First, it came to my attention that I was adding to my discomfort by avoiding the pain. All my muscles were tightened up with dread, and the pain that I dreaded was already here anyway. I relaxed, as best as I could. I decided not to ward off the pain but to welcome it. I decided, in fact, to move into the pain, drop right in. I brought all my awareness to the burning sensation in my hand and gave myself over to feeling it.

Initially, the pain got bigger. I somehow managed to notice that it wasn't so big I couldn't bear it. I actually got curious about its parameters, or its potential: how big could it get? I decided to expand it further. I focused my awareness and let the pain climb as high as it could possibly go. I stayed with it. Because it was a burning pain, this allowing and expanding phase phrased itself in my mind as *Let it sear*.

At some point, in much less time than I might have expected (though this wasn't what I'd expected), the pain began to shrink. It was dying down! Finally! It was moving back out! I was so amazed and caught off-guard that joy slipped right in. I felt a bit elated, maybe just to be in this process of discovery. And it made so much sense: Where else can pain go once it reaches its peak? Nowhere for it to go but down.

Again, it baffles me that I even thought of this next thing (*grace*, anyone?), but the moment came when it struck me that I was still trying to maximize the pain, and that this was no longer called for. That part was over. Now was the time to notice the pain was dissipating, and to bring my attention to that. The right action at this stage was to *Let it fade*.

Here, memory fails me as to my actual process that night. I don't know when I came up with the final piece, *Let it go*. What I came to understand was that pain fades, but I find myself still telling the story of the pain, thus keeping it present mentally. (Who knows how I phrased it to myself then. Those are Katie-like words, and I hadn't yet encountered The Work of Byron Katie and her talk of telling and dropping a story.) What's needed, once I've let the pain fade, is to let it go completely. It has no intention of being permanent unless I make it so with my mind.

The memory of the kitchen burn came to me one day as I was coaching a client in meeting her moments of big emotional pain—as she moved through an important and sometimes terrifying life transition. I notice again and again that we human types don't like to be still with our pain. We don't like to meet it fully. We seldom invite it to sit down and stay awhile. I believe this is because we fear it'll move in forever. But truly, it never does. Pain never has the intention of coming to stay. Only the mind can try to pin it down in permanence.

We also fear pain when we expect it to get so big it will take us over. It will engulf us. It may even be

the end of us. One of my memorable takeaways from Byron Katie's nine-day School for The Work is that pain is never more than I can bear. If it ever were, then I'd be unconscious, or I'd be dead—and something's going to kill this body one day, I'm certain. Until it comes to that, I can take whatever comes. And I can take it much better if I meet it fully, let it be exactly what it is, invite it in to bring its gifts. Then, more likely than not, after it sears, it will fade, and it will go.

My purpose in this chapter is to help you look at pain-body work from another angle and to consider again that physical pain and emotional pain are much more alike than they are different. Mentally, you can pretty much treat them the same way. So let me close by offering a way you can accelerate your work with the pain body through a practice of tuning in regularly to what's happening in your body. If it's easier for you to tune in to what you perceive as physical pain unrelated to emotion, then create a habit of scanning your body and bringing direct awareness and breath to any place that hurts. There's usually something.

As you do this, you'll find the line blurs pretty quickly between physical pain and emotional pain, as your scan might alert you to some disturbance in the belly that will turn out to be anxiety or dread or that spoonful of shame that went down with that weird little encounter with You-Know-Who, and—ah—it still hasn't been fully digested. Scan at bedtime, for starters, or before you get up in the morning. Take a

break to check in during the day. Tune in on the bus, since you're just sitting there. Watch for what's happening in your body and, even briefly, give it your awareness and breath.

This will help you work more effectively and more immediately with the pain body when it activates, because the disturbance will feel odd (you'll be used to feeling more clear as an ongoing way of being), and will therefore come quickly to your awareness. When pain is normal, it's hard to notice it, never mind respond to it appropriately. This practice of noticing pain and momentarily expanding it, strangely enough, denormalizes it. Pain becomes something you no longer unconsciously carry around, like excess weight, but an intrusion that gets your attention and invites a proper response.

Let it sear, let it fade, let it go.

## Good Tears versus Bad Tears

What is a good cry, anyway? Can crying be bad? At some point, for myself, I came to understand a distinction between good tears and bad tears. It sounds absurd to put those labels on tears, but there's actually a distinction worth making here. It's important, because it parallels the distinction between pain and suffering—pain being something you can simply allow, that runs its course and moves along, and suffering being something that takes you over, or feels like it will, and that you inflate and get stuck in by believing it means you're not okay.

Good tears are free-flowing. They move through, and they move on, like the rain. Once they're gone, you feel relieved. It's like the calm after the storm: everything just smells better, and the colors are resplendent. A natural pause comes in, and you breathe into that, and it's over. Something has been washed clean: good tears.

Bad tears don't have this flow or this effect. They take hold and churn you around—it's more like being trapped in a malevolent washing machine. Pauses happen, but then you reach for the story and crying takes right up again, with a vengeance. Whatever the tears are expressing— that life is against you, that there's something terribly wrong with you, that no one will ever love you the way you want to be loved—

whatever it is reasserts itself, grabs you and shakes you and whispers it won't ever let go. When you're done crying bad tears, you don't feel done—you feel toxic.

What makes the difference between good tears (or pain) and bad tears (or suffering)? Story. There's plenty you can do to work with that story thing, and the first tactic is so simple that its power is vastly underrated: just notice the story as story. Notice the fact that you're in a story. I'm not even talking about true or false, here. Even if the story were 100 percent accurate, it would still be a story. You need to move away from the story making you cry in order to cry cleansing, clearing tears.

The noticing itself is enough to pull you one degree out of total immersion. You can step further out by moving consciously into witness mode. (Remember, go for accessing the compassionate, dispassionate witness.) This simply involves watching—watching your feelings, your thoughts, your behaviors, even your hands—so that you feel less identified with it all. If you can watch a story, you can know you're separate from it, even if it brings you to tears. You can tell yourself, *I am not this story*.

Watch the story. Hear the words that tell it, catch the repeating themes. I'm a great fan of writing thoughts down: this diminishes the threat that they'll engulf you; it lets you see clearly what the mind is up to; and with your thoughts spelled out and clearly visible, you can begin to question them. At the very least you can recognize them as thoughts (you can

tell yourself, *They're just thoughts*), instead of believing that your mind is narrating objective reality.

When you believe and hold on to a sad, self-defeating story while you're crying; when you grasp for the story and call the tears back in after they subside into natural pauses—that's when the tears are bad. The word *wallow* comes to mind. Wallowing isn't inherently wrong—but it will make you suffer. Otherwise stated, it's a way you perpetuate your own suffering.

Start noticing when the feelings flow through as needed and do their marvelous stormy job of rebalancing your emotional electrons. Notice in an approving way: good tears are so good.

Start noticing, too, when the crying feels off, and let that *off* feeling be your cue to check out whether you're in a story. If you catch yourself there, no need for self-flagellation. You're doing nothing wrong—only being human. Would you like to be human in a more conscious way? Just begin by noticing the story. Look for the story and, if you're brave enough in that particular moment, get it down on paper. (Again, best to work with short, simple sentences in list form.)

All of this supports you in minding the pain body and tending the mind when you need to cry. All of this allows you to kindly give yourself a hand up when distress tries to take you down.

As a certified (I used to think *certifiable*) Enneagram Four type, I used to have a dark relationship with crying bitter tears. I would give

myself over to weeping copiously, and it gave me a weird satisfaction to suffer so deeply. Then there came a point in my life when my body wouldn't have it anymore. I'd wake up the next day with horrible dark puffiness around my eyes and a sick headache as if I'd been on a drinking binge. A twelve-step type I knew dubbed it an emotional hangover, and there was no denying that's just what it felt like. At the time, I was learning how to take responsibility for anything I was feeling (learning to stop being a victim, in other words), and the consequences of crying the toxic kind of tears made it really clear to me that this indulgence wasn't worth whatever I thought it did for me.

Now, when I cry, I've got this very helpful piece: I look away from story. I allow the crying fully but only for as long as it wants to move through as a cleansing phenomenon. I'm fascinated and amazed by how quickly it passes. Every once in a while, I've been disappointed by the brevity: *Aw, is that all?* But I like it much better this way, and the next morning, I'm fine. In fact, right after crying, I'm fine. When you let crying be what it's supposed to be, it's very cleansing indeed.

## Getting Out of Overwhelm

Overwhelm is not a given, ever. Not when there's a lot going on and you have no clue how you're going to manage it all; not when you're up against a deadline with one task lined up after the other and not a moment to spare; not when you're in an emotional pressure cooker and life feels frightening and out of control. In such moments, things may indeed be inarguably full. You may benefit from being very diligent or focused, or both. You may choose to accept some discomforts (less sleep than feels good, less peace or leisure than you typically enjoy) to get what you're after (maybe to simply keep your job or take care of your children, or both and then some ...). You may have some strong emotions to field. Still, in all of that, overwhelm is optional.

So how do you get out of overwhelm when you find yourself in it? How do you learn not to go there when it all feels like too much?

I've found a grand solution to overwhelm in Byron Katie's three kinds of business (which she presents in *Loving What Is*). This is quite relevant to me personally. My two most often repeated declarations used to be "I'm overwhelmed" and its close cousin, "I'm exhausted." After *The Work of Byron Katie* came into my life, it dawned on me at some point that anytime I felt overwhelmed, I was

out of my business. I started checking for whose business I was in whenever I felt overwhelmed or heard myself say I was. Invariably, I was out of mine—truly, every single time. I started wondering: Could it be there's no such thing as overwhelm if you live in your own business?

Let me go over Katie's three-part model. (I touched on it in "Mind the Pain Body, Tend the Mind.") In your thinking, there are three kinds of business she posits for you to be in: yours, theirs (anyone else's), or the Universe's (she says *God's*; I have a client who calls it *the world's*, which seems to amuse me no end, probably because he managed to get every last drop of *woo* out of it). When Katie talks about the three kinds of business, her emphasis is on self-abandonment: when you're out of your business, you abandon yourself. This is important—crucial—because people tend to correlate the concept of leaving their business with a harsh admonition or that rap on the knuckles: *Bad girl! Bad boy! Mind your own business! Get out of my business! That's not your business!* Katie's approach is meant to be kind: Come back to yourself. If you're not in your business, you've left yourself; you're no longer here to attend to yourself.

I find that people are often struck hard when they realize the self-abandonment of it. Noticing how far afield they habitually go, they get very serious about getting back to their own business. The way Katie speaks it, when you're out of your business, you've absented yourself to go tell God how to run things or tell other people how to live their lives, so no one's

here for you. (Katie's conceptualization of God, by the way, is very open-ended, non-patriarchal, and not based on a human image— certainly not the white bearded guy in the sky. For her, God is reality. Reality rules: what is, is.)

The best metaphor I've got for being out of your business is treading water. You exert yourself trying to apply agency where you don't have it, so nothing happens. At best, you keep your head above the surface. You exert, exert, exert until you exhaust yourself (*I'm overwhelmed, I'm exhausted*), and at some point you may well feel like you're drowning. When you're in your business, taking care of what's yours to take care of, applying agency where you've actually got it, your efforts are productive: swimming!

A premed student gearing up for MCATs, for example (somehow I've talked to more than one of these, living as I do in an Ivy League college town), could slip out of her business in any number of compelling and torturous ways. If she brings to her test preparation how much time she's got to prepare (is it enough?); the score she needs (what if a *good* school doesn't want her?); the actual score she'll get (outcome!); the competition (horrendous in the med-school world); the steps yet to follow the dreaded test (including potentially terrifying interviews—and what will they think of her? ... she gets so weirdly inarticulate in such moments); how she'll cope as a resident functioning on interrupted sleep while absorbing crazy amounts of life-and-death information; and how in the blazes she'll manage to

cultivate a solid and juicy relationship so she can somehow gracefully juggle family and work one day—holy hell! Is this manageable?

If she comes back to her business, she's down to one thing: prepare as best she can for the test in the time she's got left for preparing. That much is manageable.

Let me ask an obvious question because it bears asking. Which maximizes the chance of a good outcome? Staying in her business and simply preparing as thoroughly as she can, or going out of her business to theirs and the Universe's, then carrying and processing (in her poor, overtaxed pain body) all the anxiety this produces? And while I'm asking the obvious, one more: which is more likely to keep her out of overwhelm?

It's mostly pretty clear when and where you go into other people's business, but there are any number of times you might go there without quite realizing you're not where you belong. This may happen with your *should* concepts, your wonderful ethics and great ideas (I mean truly wonderful and great ethics and ideas) about how people ought to treat one another, drive safely, talk to their children or siblings, get out of codependence, run meetings more efficiently, buy local, calm down—you name it. But if you're not the one doing the treating, driving, talking, getting out, running, buying, or calming, you're in someone else's business, visiting your sacred concepts, as Katie calls them, on others.

And are you clear about staying out of their thoughts of you? It's common, perhaps universal, for

people to very much want to manage what others think of them. The idea that doing so takes you out of your business isn't Katie's brainchild. Folks in the 12-step world love to declare some version of, "What other people think of me is none of my business." So are you clear? Are you willing to come back to approving of yourself when you're concerned about the approval of others?

I've found that the their-business-my-business line blurs for people most where their children are concerned, with spouses or primary partners coming in a close second. The argument for children usually includes some refrain about being responsible for them. I agree that there's no inarguable black-and-white demarcation, and the line, wherever it is, changes pretty drastically from one year to the next as kids keep growing up. I acknowledge that people have varying parental philosophies that would yield a variety of calls as to whose business this or that may be. Let me venture briefly to propose that there may be a lot more room for calling it their business than parents typically call it. Children have their own journeys and paths, they have their own personality types and tendencies, they are a product of their generation, not their parents'. The things parents do in the name of keeping their kids safe and supporting their growth as good human beings often amount to too much control or to getting involved with more of the kids' business than need be.

This whole topic is a book in itself (and if I were the writer, there'd be a hefty confessional component about my grossly overcontrolling early parental

misadventures), so the short version might be this: I invite you, parents, to consider more often whether you might let go of the thing you're trying to control. I invite you to take the long view and trust that the kid will work out the thing you're concerned about over time, and that perhaps you didn't have that one worked out by that age either, and you didn't need to. I invite you to trust the tremendous power of your own modeling (whether kids acknowledge valuing what they see you do or not). I invite you to keep the lines of communication open, because if they're talking to you about their choices and messes and thoughts about what they're moving through, and you're not seeking to control their perspective (their business) but listening to it and offering yours when it's wanted, you get to have a lot more influence than when you're angry at them for not being you, or for not being fully formed, or for experimenting with some of the multitudinous arenas for exploration on planet Earth.

Let me add a final word about worry where your children are concerned. You're most certainly out of your business when you worry about your kids, and you do them no good whatsoever in sending angst their way. As Tosha Silver describes worry, "Imagine a black Express Mail envelope marked 'Thinking of You' filled with muck, mildew and a few skull bones." Bad idea! Allow your children to go through pain, sorrow, failure, disappointment, feeling bad about their lives—because anything that could happen in a human journey just may happen to your children. Don't teach them they're not equipped to handle life.

I especially like saying such things to parents contemplating divorce, or agonizing over a split that's already done. Your kids will deal with their own hard decisions and relationship troubles. Throughout their lives, they'll go through sorrow and loss and having to let go of what changes in this impermanent reality through no fault of their own. They may as well have some serious practice runs with you still there, loving them through it, talking about it, allowing whatever emotions come up, and persisting in believing in their resilience and their ability to heal and grow.

Give up worry (move away from it when you catch yourself there) and give your energy to believing in them, holding up positive mirrors for them, predicting good ends, telling them you trust them to work it out over time, asking angels to keep them safe (if you're into that), having real conversations with them about safety issues and (ideally, without being moralistic) about the consequences of choices. You're definitely in your business as a parent doing any of those things. I love Abraham's emphasis on pointing our kids inward, to their own guidance systems. Because my kids talk to me, I'm able to point out to them when the way they're telling it indicates something feels off *to them*. This is very different from telling them they're out of line with my values! Do you hold the exact same values and set of experiences (thoughts, emotions, sensibilities) your parents had? Neither will your kids. Leave them to their business.

The argument for spouse types is more about how

we're undeniably impacted by what that significant other does—and isn't there something called *our business*? Well, sure, and maybe you and your partner want to work out some agreed-upon territory about what constitutes your shared business. I'm not sure how much energy I'd put into that, but this could be useful for a recurring issue. Better, you might engage in loose dialogue over time about how you as individuals have an impact on each other and on that greater you, the couple. You might stay open not to nailing down all the various pieces that don't need to be perfectly in place for a relationship to stay on solid ground as two people move around and make space for each other's differences. (Next chapter is on getting comfortable with your discomfort!)

Let's look at the Universe's business. In short, this is whatever no one can control, certainly not you. I like to flag outcomes and time as the two classic categories here that are likely to get most anyone in trouble.

The concept of outcomes is pretty self-explanatory: how it all turns out. You can't know until it's revealed at the end of the story. What you can do is locate the ways you can appropriately influence the end result, or cast your vote toward a certain end. Ask yourself what's actually yours to do to move toward your desired outcome (or your vision, as we'll conceive it in part 4). That action-toward-desired-outcome is your business. Beyond where you have power to influence outcome, let go. Give it to the Universe (put it in the God box, if you

will).

Your sphere of influence may be a big fat chunk or a tiny sliver: identify what that actually is, focus your efforts there, and see about cultivating detachment for the rest. This could look like catching yourself in a worry or prediction about outcome and coming back to *now*: *now* is always your business. What's yours to do here and now? Come back to that, and remind yourself that the Universe holds the rest.

Time includes timing—that is, how long it'll take, when you'll get there, how quickly all the pieces not yours to manage come together. Any facet of timing that's out of your control just isn't your business. When emotion will ease up is a great and unexpected example, because you can't control that: it's the Universe's business when rage, sorrow, or grieving will release its grip on you. (But you can certainly mind the pain body, for as long as it's active, from the perspective of the compassionate, dispassionate witness. You can tend the mind, questioning the thoughts associated with your strong feelings. Minding the pain body and tending the mind—under the rubric of self-care—are always your business.)

Time also includes the past and the future, as, again, most of your business happens here and now. Note that in-your-business time travel (such as going to the future in order to plan and prepare, to troubleshoot, to coordinate efforts with someone else, or reviewing the past to rectify something) won't land you in stress. If you're stressed out while mentally visiting past or future, and if there's no action required on your part, you're almost certainly

out of your business. If you're imagining a future you'd like to create or usher in (visioning!), revving up the good emotions you'd feel if this were your reality, there's no problem whatsoever, and no need to check in with the three kinds of business.

People love to make much of planning to argue that the future is in fact their business. Well, consider how much of your time spent in the future is to plan and how much is to worry, make bleak predictions, declare what will never happen, hash over various outcomes and worst-case scenarios, and so on: that productive-planning part (your actual business in the future) usually entails a pretty slim slice of the pie. And by the way, you could be in your business looking at worst-case scenario if you're doing that to get clear about whether you could handle it—to assess risk factors for clear decision-making. You know the difference between valid ventures into the future and pointless forays—the kind that scare the bejesus out of you. Again, stress is your reminder that you're out of your business.

Where the past is concerned, you're out of your business there when you're going over it in ways that aren't useful, revisiting what just doesn't need to be revisited *again*. A useless foray into the past is often characterized by blame, regret, sorrow, longing, or believing that what's over and done should still be happening, that whatever happened shouldn't have happened (or at least not the way it did), that anything or anyone gone should still be here, or that you'd somehow be better off now if that thing hadn't gone down or if this moment still held what is no

more. If you're visiting the past in therapy, for example, in a way that yields ease, insight, forgiveness, letting go—you're in your business. If you're reviewing the same scenes with your shrink five, ten, twenty years later ("Please," a new client said to me, "not one more word about my father!"), you're out of your business again and may well benefit from another modality or a different therapist. If you're visiting the past with joy and gratitude, you don't even need to wonder whose business you're in (nothing to fix in that scenario).

Finally, I want to flag that you're in the Universe's business when you declare limitations or character flaws as if they were universal laws. I especially find myself pointing this out to people when they're in self-judgments, which for many people are far more harsh than anything they direct toward others. You can't do that, you won't get there, you don't get to, you're not capable, you're too flawed? Who are you to declare that about anyone, even yourself? There's no universal law that says you can't create, thrive, and fulfill your potential alongside every other human being. Come back to your business, which is to determine where you want to go and head that way; let the Universe show you what you can and can't get to.

In terms of overwhelm, it's crucial that you stay out of the Universe's business. Do I need to tell you that you're not equipped to do the job of the Universe? If you'll excuse the G-word here, must I remind you that you're not God? (In parenting, sometimes, I feel relief when I remember I'm not

God—just the mama figure.) How could anyone be anything but overwhelmed seeking to take care of the turning of the planets or the hands on the clock, the weather, the unexpected natural disasters, and most anything to do with life and death, war and peace, what is or isn't possible, and the way it ultimately will or did turn out?

So when you're overwhelmed—whether you feel trapped in your car in the midst of gridlock or you're in a wretched hospital environment waiting to learn if a beloved will live or die—ask yourself two simple questions. First, “Whose business am I in right now?” Find where you're out of your business—in theirs or the Universe's: you will surely be in one or the other, if not both. Then ask this follow-up question: “So what is my business here?” Once you locate your business, go there. You'll be right where you belong. You might feel instant relief. Even if your actual business isn't a comfortable place to be for the moment, you'll still be equipped to manage it. You can calm yourself in traffic. You can be with the sensations of grief taking over your body and look into whatever set of eyes shows up to meet yours. A premed student is entirely capable of spending an evening preparing for a test. She isn't capable, that same evening, to manage her entire schooling and career while coming to grips with how to manage the balance of work and home life in such a demanding profession.

Two questions: “Whose business am I in right now?” and, if you're not fully in yours, “So what is my business here?”

Sometimes your first order of rightful business, when you come back to it, is simply to mind the pain body that got activated when you left. Be with yourself kindly and gently. Access that compassionate, dispassionate witness. Soothe yourself. And from there, take care of anything else that's yours to take care of, carrying that pain baby with you.

It's certainly possible for what's actually your business to be quite sizable and daunting. If that's the case, trying to manage all of it at once puts you right out of your business again. You can't swallow the whole ocean. You can, however, pull out one bucketful and do something with that. (I don't actually recommend swallowing it.) So take large tasks or situations and make it your business to break them down into bite-sized, manageable bits, then show up now and now and now for each task before you. You can only do one at a time anyway—whatever's up right here and now. (Okay, sometimes you can multitask. Do that if it makes the most sense and keeps you in your business. And note that you can only multitask so much. Let's get Zen about it: When you multitask, just multitask.)

If there's a long string of tasks with a deadline looming, be clear about how much time you can allot to each one. This may mean relaxing your standards a bit. Is your mind going to what your boss or client will think of what you present, or whether you'll get done on time or not? You're out of your business, unless you're reevaluating how you want to proceed. Worry (or any stressful emotion) is a clear sign—use

it as a reminder— that you're out of your business.

Then there's the phenomenon I call straightening the button drawer. Don't order and color-code the button drawer when it's time to move through the whole of a project. Somehow this idea came from living with a kid who for years loved to let a room get to alarming levels of chaos before dealing with it. She'd then declare a day of cleaning, and when I checked on her three hours later, she would show me some painstaking task she'd conquered in the realm of minutia (*Look, all the buttons in this drawer are arranged by size and color!*) while chaos reigned all around. It's a good idea to move through any momentous task in an unpolished way from start to finish, then go back in and tweak toward perfection as time allows. This, too, helps with overwhelm.

There's no *staying*, in life. As with everything else, you can't stay in your business. You can't stay out of overwhelm. You can, however, hold the intention to live in your business, free of the idea that it's all more than you can bear, free of the sensations related to that idea coursing through or lodging somewhere in your body. With the intention in place to live without overwhelm, catch yourself there. (You'll land there again, so be willing to catch yourself kindly.) Check out again whose business you're in. Having found that you're out of your business, you can then simply come back to what's actually yours to mind. That's as good as it gets, and it's plenty good enough.

## Get Comfortable with Your Discomfort

Discomfort is here to stay. Or rather, it's here to pass through periodically, and you must step through it on your journey, sometimes daily. Are you willing?

You'd better be. When you set up your life to avoid discomfort, there's so much that has to be shut down, so much to be denied, dreaded, warded off. You're also likely to have an irritation response, anger, or a sense of something gone wrong anytime discomfort shows up. In other words, in failing to embrace discomfort, you increase it.

It's not that you need to go looking for it—discomfort gladly comes to you. Nor do you need to make an ascetic religion of never setting things up for comfort: creating comforts and minimizing discomforts is part of self-care and care of loved ones. Hyperpreparing, though, to be ready for any eventuality, makes you a slave to avoiding discomfort. Believing it shouldn't happen and being upset when it does puts your focus in the wrong place. The trick is to trust that plenty of comfort comes to you, and be willing and able to meet discomfort whenever it passes through.

And pass through, it will: a chill wind, a sheet of wet rain, a season of heavy pollen; the food that sits wrong in your belly (and more, ugh, how much did you eat?); the shameful memory, out of the blue; the

mom being horrible to her kids at the store (and you think, *I'm never that bad*, but the problem is she's just an exaggerated version of your most exaggerated fear about your worst self); the outfit that never came together (but you're no longer home when you notice); the niggling thing that you don't deal with, and it won't shut up; the person whose rolling glance in your direction and away tells you, with utter clarity and no actual rudeness, that you just don't make the grade; that overbearing tendency of yours that just took over again, with the volume turned up in that precise moment when some oddly universal lull in conversation descended; those sudden false insights that tell you you'll never have the X, Y, or Z to get through this life gracefully; the tiresome, compulsive second-guessing; the thing happening to your kid that you just can't prevent and can't even see how to address; the realization you're outside of the group, even though everyone's being lovely; the financial predicament you're in, again (or worse, still); those 10 pounds you're so tired of gaining and losing again you're thinking of throwing out the juicer and just succumbing to fat, sick, & nearly dead. Got discomfort? A human being can only answer yes.

So how do you get comfortable with discomfort? Start with allowing it; embrace that it's part of life. When any thought moves through that would suggest it's a problem, notice the thought. Notice the absurdity, the lie of it. If you're in the right space, it could even make you laugh. Your sock shouldn't be twisting into an imprecise ball inside your boot? That's a good one. Your kid shouldn't be using that

tone or that volume or that urgency to express those woes? Another good lie to throw you off and keep you from getting present. ...

Be still with it. Pause when discomfort strikes, instead of moving away from it. Bring it close; expand it. Turn the light back on if you just extinguished it to keep from seeing what's there. Someone recently told me about shutting off the light to keep from seeing her body since she's gained weight. This is as good a metaphor as any and, for plenty, there's nothing metaphorical about it. Maybe the body idea still works for you with something other than weight: for me it's the one more varicose vein that just pushed through to the surface or the next squiggly purple capillary that ruptured there—and Goddess knows I already had a religion of keeping anyone and everyone's eyes off my legs. What if you allowed the light? What if you looked directly toward what you want to look away from? Can you gaze at what you find ugly, right on your own person? Can you find the beauty in it and the beauty in spite of it?

If you tell me I have truly ugly veins in my legs, I'll agree with you. Tell me they're beautiful rivers that flow through my body's terrain murmuring a woman's story of ... okay, I'm getting queasy, and I don't believe you. But if you tell me those veins make me ugly, I won't believe that either. I know they don't, though I still need to work with this in some moments. I can sit with them and walk myself through from *hideous* to *human body doing something human bodies do*. I can pan away from

them, with my legs still in the picture, and see *beautiful human being, imperfections included*. I can scooch toward getting okay with what I used to consider categorically unacceptable, that made me seriously uncomfortable.

How else to get comfortable with discomfort? Again, tend the mind: work with your thoughts. Does fat keep you from creativity or love? Are varicose veins a liability for a single woman who's hit fifty? Only if she's a commodity. Working with my thoughts, I can remind myself that in all my life these legs haven't kept me from love—or sex, for that matter. Why would they suddenly do that now?

This paragraph is brought to you by my love of The Work of Byron Katie. Sometimes I remind clients, Just take a blank sheet of paper and write down every thought you have about whatever the current discomfort is. (“Ah, yes, it's so *helpful* when I remember to do that.”) Remember, when you've got the list of thoughts before you, you can see that your painful thoughts on the topic at hand are finite. You can take in that they're thoughts—just thoughts—not a narration of reality; not truth. You can notice how universal they are (as Katie says, they're recycled). You can imagine how any human being sitting with the same discomfort may have a nearly identical list of thoughts. If you don't have time to question those thoughts or turn them around (i.e., look for how the opposite could be just as true, and find concrete examples of that perspective), then at least you've begun to tame the dragon by naming it: Just Thoughts. Thoughts, Byron Katie says, are the source

of all the suffering in the world. They're certainly the culprit that brings on any suffering related to discomfort.

Another way to get comfortable with your discomfort is to take action. The action we most often take in response to discomfort is either to move away from it or to (try to) make it go away. Either one of these may be just fine as a workable response, but another possibility is to look for the invitation. What's my discomfort inviting me to do? If I'm uncomfortable about clutter, instead of telling myself I don't have time to deal with it, I might take ten minutes to file things away or make two phone calls on the to-do list or consolidate several lists into one, shrinking it as I go by simply dashing off the e-mail instead of making a note about it.

My parents—who have some quaint forms of speech that, like them, originate in Dixie—often use a number we don't have in the Northlands: the fascinatingly imprecise number *toorthree*, which itself has precisely two syllables. They use this number all the time. In their world, hardly anything happens in twos or threes, and innumerable things happen in toorthrees. And truly, there's hardly anything calling for you to deal with it that you couldn't give toorthree moments to in order to do toorthree things to move them along—thus clearing or at least alleviating your discomfort.

Wait—may I speak to procrastination? Let me address this phenomenon directly, as it's the ultimate discomfort that thinks it's keeping you from discomfort. And doesn't it only compound it?

I counseled someone who avoids her art to stop when the discomfort of procrastination shows up. Welcome it; be still with it. Go sit in front of your canvas with no thought of doing art (or in front of your computer with no thought of writing, or next to your phone with no thought of calling). In that space, fully allow the discomfort of *not* doing to take you over. Locate it in your body. Connect to the sensation and give it your breath (the balm you apply from within). Ask yourself, *Is this any harder to face than the discomfort of the blank canvas?* Notice that you can stand the discomfort, even if you don't like it. (It's not bigger than you. It won't take you over.) Being willing to meet the discomfort of procrastination, you may find yourself willing to meet the canvas, page, e-mail, phone call, clutter, financial reckoning, yoga session, or that thing you told someone you'd do that you don't do and don't do and don't do.

The discomfort of procrastination is always (at least somewhat) appeased when you face directly the thing you don't want to face. It's really that simple. When you let something niggle and gnaw at you and vaguely react or protest but don't really put a stop to the thing, I call that swatting the fruit flies.

Let me tell you about a puppy who was starting to gnaw on a colorful, green-minded reusable grocery bag while a woman (my client Molly) was working on a computer and harboring a strong preference to stay focused on the screen. She didn't want to get up and deal with the puppy. And that fuzzy wiggle-worm of a dog-child, with all that adorable cutlery in its mouth,

had gotten its paws on that bag and was all over it. But the computer task ... But the puppy, the bag ...

Add to this that Molly was working hard on not being irritated by things in her day-to-day life, with the greater goal of not feeling victimized by all the small and large challenges she came upon while navigating what anyone would agree was a tricky set of circumstances.

She wanted, in fact, to stop living a struggle.

That's why—since change happens only now, and now, and now—she decided to make a decision in the moment. She stopped typing just long enough to say to herself, *What matters more to me now is completing this task and feeling good about that.*

*I'm going to sacrifice the bag to that endeavor. While I know this officially makes it a no-longer-reusable bag, it also cost something like a dollar, and I'll get another one. The puppy will be blissfully busy destroying it and lying around in the rubble for probably just enough time that I can do what I want to do.* And that was that.

Before that moment, she was trapped in a swarm of fruit flies, and there was little to do in that scene but feel irritated and victimized (by a cute little puppy—oh, the jailers we choose!).

Note that truly eradicating fruit flies, as opposed to swatting them, requires presence (actually attend to the discomfort at hand) and choice (make a clear decision about how to respond to it). When you let things hover untended like fruit flies, you're not choosing. You're not choosing what you want to do, or what you want to give your energy to. You're not

choosing to take action in response to what's calling you. What is it? Pause when you notice some buzzy little pest in your emotional field and make a choice. Your fruit flies could be pertinent to that moment or day, or they might point to ongoing pests like clutter or taxes or that gizmo that doesn't work—you might actually fix the thing or throw it out. Ah, but the fruit flies could also be in your face about the cherished dream you keep not getting to. Whatever it is, pay attention. Attend. Quit swatting the fruit flies.

Please note that I'm still not promoting getting rid of discomfort. I'm not suggesting that it's possible or even desirable to do any such thing. But I do invite you to meet it. Where your tendency may be to push discomfort away or numb yourself to it, instead, come closer. Scooch in.

I used to dread winter. I hated what felt like cruel and relentless cold. Still, I spent a decade on the coast of Maine, and here I am in upstate New York. One winter, I started noticing how much I tensed up against the cold—as if that would make it feel better. I started allowing it instead: nonresistance. I let it feel exactly as bitter and biting as it felt. As I relaxed into the sensation of sharp cold, I started to find it more interesting than uncomfortable. Whenever I caught myself resisting it again—as if I could somehow push it away by squeezing my muscles together—I shifted to feeling it fully. I let go of any physical tension and came back to witnessing like a scientist what this precise cold felt like here and now.

The result has been that winter feels much kinder to me. I keep practicing this (I'm currently writing in

February, with the temperatures dipping below zero), and it keeps working for me. Note that I haven't come to find frigid cold comfortable. I simply keep getting more and more comfortable with the discomfort. I also notice, embrace, and deeply appreciate the contrast when I step from the cold into a warm room.

Sometimes when my clients and I have covered their thinking and their emotions and their action plans, it seems that what's left, if a bit of a furrowed brow remains, is this simple, can't-get-away-from-it truth: just get comfortable with your discomfort. It's okay.

## Why Joy Now?

As a matter of course in my work, I listen to people tell me about how unhappy they are. I hear about how much they hate their job, or how pinched off and dried up they feel in their relationship, or what an impossible financial corner life has backed them into, or how dreadful it feels to be in their body, or what a thankless, joyless, frustrating task it is to parent their particular child or children, or how they would love to create the life they want—of course they would—if only they knew what they really wanted or had any clue how to get that information. ... I assure you there's hope.

No matter how harsh the story or how hard the row before them to hoe, I hold a firm conviction that they, you, anyone can be happy (or happier still). You can move from the life you have now into a life that's most fulfilling to you and offers your highest service to others, because all of life wants to support you in this. We're supposed to feel good and—it's really quite miraculous—life guides us by what feels good.

There's not that much mystery in it: if in doubt or baffled by choices, go for what brings you joy. If you don't see much choice anywhere, find where you have any choice at all and love it. You could do this if you were in prison or in a wheelchair, and you probably aren't. Choose to stay alive for the

experiment of it and love the fact that you keep showing up, even if you can't (yet) actively love your life. What about that shade of azure in the sky, or the mix of grays and mauves with that tinge of cornflower blue? Find what you love, and love it. Find the joy, even if it's the thin margin set against a long narrative of woes. Focus on what brings you joy.

If you go over all the compelling, grisly details of what's wrong, you'll have a very hard time getting to what's right. It may in fact become quite true that you can't get there from here.

They're *really* good aren't they, all those marvelous details about the thing that broke the camel's back and the proof you'll never get out of here alive and the truth-is-stranger-than-fiction did-that-really-happen(!) moment when, of all things, just when you thought it couldn't get any worse. ... The price of going over these details again and again, repeating them to friends and to yourself, and to anyone who'll listen, and to yourself, is that you get stuck in them. That, in a nutshell, is what the law of attraction is all about, but in simple pop-psych-talk (nothing New Agey about it), you keep reinforcing that reality, so you get entrenched in that reality. You keep believing that's what's true, that's all there is, that's all that's possible. The details reviewed become the stakes you pound down, deeper and deeper, that ensure you won't budge from where you are.

Okay, we can all see your point about the perils of getting another degree. Quit swirling around the same eddy that reiterates them. Sign up and invest if it makes your heart sing to get that Master's. Decide

not to if it's just not right at this point in your life, but don't review it, regret it, and tell the story of what you don't get. Whatever that choice represented that you long for and wish to create, the Universe is more than capable of bringing to you in a form that actually fits with your current life. Let go of what you're not choosing. (This requires some trust, or experimenting with trust, in a friendly Universe.)

In reviewing and believing the details of why you're stuck, you believe (and also reinforce) all the underlying thoughts that support those details you choose to tell. I mean the ones you're not even (or mostly not) aware of, which, if you listed them, would go something like this:

- This shouldn't be happening.
- Life is treating me unfairly.
- I'm a victim [of the economy, the insurance mess, my boss's megalomania].
- I still think I am who my parents [or my siblings or my ex or the popular girls/football jocks in high school] thought I was.
- I'm rattling around on my own in a random Universe that doesn't give a shit about me.
- I'll never be okay.
- What works for others to heal and succeed doesn't ultimately work for me.

And so on ... If all of this subtext weren't along for the ride, all those other details, however compelling, just wouldn't matter. They're just the stuff of life.

They're the stuff of a good story.

(A practical aside, at the risk of repeating myself: It really helps to use Byron Katie's trick of simply getting out a pad of paper when you're distressed about your life and to write down everything you're believing. Just give yourself a super-simple prompt, like "I hate living in this house and that means that ..." and make a list of short, simple sentences, one thought per line, that gets on paper what's swarming around in your consciousness. All of the resulting thoughts—or even one of them—can be questioned.)

If you feel bad, just find any small thing that might make you feel better. Whatever you feel bad about, scooch toward feeling good about it. *Please keep reading.* I'm not talking about that old and tired put-on-fake-cheerfulness-positive-thinking thing. (I'm with you. I hate it too.)

Sometimes people tell me that they *try* to tell themselves all kinds of good things, but ... Stop right there. No *try*, no *but*. The moment you move (again) toward misery in your focus, the second you permit yourself to rehearse your woes—right there, that's when and where you veered away from joy; and from there, you could equally head that way again. Just a little bit—whatever you can muster. If a cup of tea is all you can think of to make it all feel even a little better, that's the ticket. Celebrate even a centimeter in the right direction. This is the art of scooching.

Get out of all-or-nothing. Don't try to turn the whole thing around. Bring it to *now*. Don't fix your finances, just notice that right now you actually have all you need to survive—and then some. Don't fix

your relationship, or your single status, but tell yourself (without the words *at least* in it) whatever you see that's good about the partner you have, or about being single. Don't get a whole exercise regime in place, just get to the pool this very morning because you can and you honestly love a good swim and the smell of chlorine. Just right here, right now, point yourself in the direction of what feels good. Life will get you to a better place if you let it—that is, if you keep stringing together one *now* moment after another in which you scooch a bit closer to joy.

If your maddening teenager is doing and saying any number of crazy, infuriating things, it's hopeless between you if that's what you keep reviewing and talking about, to yourself, to your kid, to your confidantes, to anyone. You'll go nuts if you make it your mission to get them shipshape academicallysociallyfinanciallyhealthfully. Can you find what you love about this person? Right now, in the midst of messes and dysfunction and procrastination, can you find one thing you love and admire and hold up a mirror to your teen reflecting that? (This may be the very thing that gets them through, or that rises to the surface and most informs their life when they're out of this insane passage.) Can you articulate what you admire about them? Can you laugh with them about any topic? Can you find one song they listen to that you actually like? Can you listen carefully when they're willing to talk to you about anything, grateful for the opportunity even if you don't get to be wise or appreciated or as carefully listened to in return? All

of this requires letting go of controlling, letting go of the future, letting go of thinking you're the one responsible for whether it all turns out okay. It requires letting go of all-or-nothing and finding just one little something to feel good about right now.

Again (apparently I can't say this enough), don't try to correct the whole picture when it looks like everything's wrong. Bring it to *now*. Don't project a future where it stays wrong. Don't set up a timeline that declares it'll take a very long time to set things right. None of these things is your business. Your business is simple: How can I make myself feel better about this right now? How can I move just a bit closer to joy?

I have a client who stopped going over all the details of what's wrong with her husband and why he's such a disappointment. Life conspired with her by shifting her focus onto some other things in another realm of life that she was excited to learn about and create. She started living in more joy because she was doing what she really cared about. She no longer needed to obsess about what he didn't provide because she was providing her own joy. (Personal responsibility! Victim no more! Gotta love it!) She recently sat across from me with this amazed expression on her beautiful face as she told me the stunning news that it turns out he's the perfect partner for her, and listed all the inarguable, specific evidence for why this is true. We weren't meeting to talk about that. I hadn't asked her to turn her thoughts around. She simply offered all that was being revealed to her now that she'd stopped

reviewing the old story of his failings and started looking for joy—all the ways she was already happy with him (and despite him!). What's funny and fascinating is that all the details of why he's perfect are no more or less vivid, compelling, or convincing than the old details of the utter mismatch.

This is why I laugh when people worry about fooling themselves with positivity. Good Goddess, you do it with negativity all the time, where's the problem? If fooling yourself is all you're doing (and I seriously doubt that), then at least fool yourself in a direction that feels good. Just move toward feeling good. Move toward joy. Not toward fixing your life, not toward making it all better, not toward being sure you're doing the right thing or being a good person. Just scooch toward joy however you see to do that, right here, right now.

You'll move. Guaranteed. You may even stumble, drop, or flow right into the life of your dreams.

## Oh, the Messy Process of Applying It All

When people get excited about clear new concepts and perspectives, about new ways to approach things in life, for some strange, entirely unfathomable reason, they believe they're going to love trying out these new principles. Love it! Somehow, it's going to feel fabulous to face heartbreak next time. They'll have some kind of chill fest when they next run out of gas or trip onstage. Whatever life category they're putting this to, they're going to do it right, and they'll feel righteous and proud of themselves as they show up differently, and just plain show up, for their life.

So right here and now, let me be the one to tell you, you might not like it one bit. And you won't feel righteous, or proud, or possibly even good in any way, because, for example, to learn to come close to a sting requires that there be a sting, and a sting stings. And before you drop into nonresistance and land in total acceptance of the sting, you may have a first reaction of crying out, sobbing, cursing, or feeling that unshakable tail-twitching annoyance that it happened because if only you'd done this or that instead, it wouldn't have, so you blame yourself; and to add another layer, you're furious that you're reacting, and you may decide one more time that you're hopeless before you remember that's just a thought to question while you sit witnessing the pain

of the sting and all it just brought up for you. All of which is to say, the application of anything in the preceding chapters and in what follows will not be fun. Sometimes you will in fact hate it.

Speaking of stings, let me tell you about the day after I made this post on my Jaya the Trust Coach Facebook page:

When something stings, consider that it might be a false sting, a sign of something old that's really not here to sting anymore— like phantom pains for amputees. Pause with the sting and ask yourself relevant questions: Do I even care about this anymore? Did I really want this? Do I truly value that person's opinion? Does this mean anything about my actual worth? Have I not gone over this one so many times that there can't possibly be much juice left in there? Could it be that their behavior (words, opinion) has nothing to do with me? What if I were simply gentle with myself and soothed the sting without getting sucked into some story?

Wise words, right? Reading this, you could imagine a lovely process of witnessing a sting from a lofty, safe, comfortably numb, humming distance and asking questions that have lovely answers and set you as straight as you like to be. Let me give you something else to imagine.

So I went to brunch with my friend Jenna who had invited her friend Marian, letting each of us

know that the other was single. (It turns out we're both unwaveringly into butch women and, one nanosecond into the gathering, we both knew this would not be a romantically inclined connection.) Jenna (clueless to this) gave a careful introduction when we were seated, first putting forth all the things we had in common, which included, among a long list of positive attributes and accomplishments, a few negative points (thrown in for good measure?) (for the love of truth?). From the moment they came out of her mouth, I was never able to retrieve but one, because my mind got so tripped up on it: "You can both be high-strung," she said. I immediately reacted with a (quasi-playful) questioning look and gesture, and Marian immediately—dispassionate, unfazed—copped to it with some shrugging statement of where Jenna might in fact have seen such a thing in her. In other words, she did what Byron Katie says to do: Find it. Don't argue or defend, just find it. I did no such thing but I was able to (temporarily) let it go and be present for our encounter, we all had a lovely time, and later, in the aftermath, what kept rising to the surface was, *High-strung?*

So when I wrote Jenna about the brunch, I included, "I'm still trying to work out your initial description of me today. (Jenna sees me as high-strung and nervous and what else???)" To which she wrote back, "Not nervous [so that wasn't one of the descriptors I immediately lost track of] but can be high-strung. And what about all the positives?" Well, I couldn't deny all those positives, which I'd in fact already pointed out to myself.

But this did not dissolve the issue for me. As time went by, the feeling inside me of hating being introduced as high-strung kept growing. I realized it was growing. I sought to mind the pain body, and I even managed to do so in a slipshod sort of way, with my focus continually veering back to mental obsession. *What does high-strung mean anyway? I hate high-strung. High-strung sounds like what I was called growing up by the people who thought I was too sensitive and weird. It feels like when I was called unstable by people who had it all together when I was floundering through my twenties. It feels awful. Jenna sees me as high-strung? When has she seen me be high-strung?*

At some point, I remembered to just find it, and flashed again to how gracefully Marian had done just that right in the heat of the moment. There was a brief, subtle wave of shame for her apparently being ahead of me in that way in that moment, but I make it a habit to catch such waves and was able to hit the pause button, take a good look at that one, and shift to feeling bolstered by her example—*if she can do it, I can do it too.*

So I found it. I found some moments at various points in my life when I could have been called high-strung. It wasn't hard. That is, it was neither difficult to find examples nor did it feel too terrible to land in the truth of *high-strung* that they revealed. I didn't find them in the A-plus way, which would have involved a) writing them down and b) seeing if I could take my time looking at them without freaking out (the way high-strung people will totally freak).

Nor did I pull this off in the A-minus way, which would have involved saying them out loud to make sure I really took in each example. I did go through mentally and locate some images, and I made up a few points by seeking to get okay with the scenes I visited. I extended compassion to my younger self who was pretty sure she wouldn't make it to thirty, and to my young mothering self who was pretty sure she was doing irreparable damage to other (smaller, cuter, worthier) human beings, and to my more recent mothering self who wasn't sure her daughter would make it to eighteen. That was useful. (It wasn't fun.)

It churned me right along to the next round of mental machinations, which involved the fact that whatever Jenna had seen in me that she might call *high-strung* must have come from her listening to me in my most distressed, most vulnerable moments, when I was entrusting her with my heart and my dignity and the harsh things happening in my household that year, all the while believing that she knew I was in a process and she knew I knew it was messy in the moment, and I never in a million years would have thought she was sitting there making an ugly label for me and sticking it on. *But we all do that. I've done that* (then I went on to find how I'd done that). And then, of all things, she'd gotten that label out to use while introducing me to someone she thought was a prospective romantic partner for me. *Here's Jaya, I'm sure you'll want to fall in love with her, because among her many sterling qualities that scare everybody off, you'll also find this adorable*

*humanizing tendency toward being adorably high-strung.*

Note that in this story, minding the pain body and tending the mind took place over several hours and through many activities. I meandered through many instances of lying to myself then countering lies with truth. I got appalled by what Jenna had done wrong then remembered again and recounted again all she had done right and out of love and generosity (she even paid for the brunch) (she didn't even cancel it despite the fact someone she loved actually died the week before) (she's generous, generous, generous). Didn't she want only to support the well-being and pure happiness of all concerned?

Then, right on the heels of that, I'd find myself saying out loud, "Who introduces people by naming their bad points? Who gives balanced tell-all introductions? *Ever?* In any context?" then thinking *I would never do that to Jenna*, which would briefly tilt the balance to hoist me to a position of superiority, except that she was a vision of serenity and I was—obviously, right now, at least in my mind—nothing but high-strung. (Well, *I can be.*) I meanly tried to find something I might not say about her in some sort of (*insane, I would never!*) attempt at a balanced introduction (*that's not a thing*), and I found an adjective or two, but this felt so mean-spirited I stopped. I even tried to do the opposite. I sat there awhile focusing on beautiful and amazing and impressive scenes of her, which was really easy to do because she is truly an exemplary human being and I admire and love her. And as a devoted and

tireless student of the Enneagram, I reminded myself that every type has negative traits and positive traits—and I think all the types are amazing—therefore every person has both negative and positive traits, including me, including Jenna, including every last human being on the planet, so how could it be a problem to have one of them pointed out?

I had toyed with this particular line of thinking early on in the process, when I was asking myself, *Why should it sting for someone to say I'm flawed when I know and embrace that we're all flawed? Where's the problem?* Actually, most of these thoughts cycled around redundantly, as thoughts do. I noticed and kept coming back to the fact that in no way had Jenna's introduction harmed my prospects for love: even if the very butch of my dreams had been sitting across the table from me next to Jenna, I knew it couldn't possibly have kept me from any form of love or joy that was mine to have. I also told myself in clear terms (and I believed myself) that if this stung so badly and required this much processing, some very painful button had been pushed, and it was my button—it had nothing to do with Jenna. Most important, perhaps some profound undoing was in the works, something that would lead to a new level of healing. (It's interesting to note here that the morning after this brunch, entirely oblivious to how it related to my own current process, I'd posted a reminder on Facebook that **IT COMES UP TO CLEAR OUT, NOT TO SHOW YOU WHAT YOU'RE STUCK WITH**. I wrote it just like that, in all-caps, which one of my page followers commented

on, joking that she'd never seen me yell my message before. Was I yelling? What, to get through to myself?)

And at one point, not understanding why I was mad at Jenna at all, coming back again and again to the face of God thing (I'd uncovered many, many good reasons why the face of God would show up for me this way), I realized that I felt entirely dismissed by her pointing to the positives when I wrote to ask about *high-strung*, and then mentally accused her of evasion, because whether the positives are there or not, I don't want to be introduced to a new person with something negative thrown in that someone has decided about me, even if (*find it, find it, find it*) there is some truth in it. (*If and when we get close to people, won't all parts of who we are expose themselves in due time?*) And when I let someone know it didn't feel good that she'd done that (but I didn't really declare that in clear terms or let Jenna know its import, did I?), I want her not to tell me what she did right but to acknowledge at the very least that she didn't mean to make me feel this rotten (but then the responsibility for how I feel is all mine, isn't it, and ultimately not about her or this incident at all!) and she wasn't trying to humiliate me in front of a stranger (and in fact I never felt humiliated).

(I'm so good at talking back to my thoughts. I just want to take one parenthetical paragraph to speak to that. It's so helpful. Truly, despite the fact that in this harrowing example the talking-back didn't clear it right up for me, as it often does pretty quickly, it still helped in that I didn't just believe all those thoughts

or get sucked into pure agony and possibly hatred. It's an acquired skill, to be sure. I didn't used to be good at this. I also want to emphasize that thoughts still do what they do no matter how good you become at meeting them. None of this is about trying never to have problematic thoughts. Thoughts happen. You can simply learn to notice them as thoughts and respond to them very differently. You will not be saved from having thoughts, but they will decrease immeasurably. The number of times I find myself in mental situations as I'm describing here are few and far between, and for that reason, they really get my attention—and I scooch in close and attend to my process, both the parts I'm managing well and the recalcitrant parts—and invariably something good comes of it. But first and foremost and all along the way, the point is, as I learned from the radical Work of Byron Katie, you don't have to believe your own thoughts. You don't have to take them personally.)

All of this led to looking again at how *high-strung* as a concept figures in my history, and to thinking (and I recognized this as a victim thought, which I love to ferret out, and am religious about not judging), *It's so strange that I just really, truly don't live that way now, and still someone (someone introducing me to a potential lover) describes me in that way.* I do insist on never seeing life as being against me (friendly Universe, all good news!), and I don't believe in being stuck with anything, so I clearly saw this couldn't mean those things. Which led me to look again at *high-strung* in the present—past five years, past year, really recently—and then,

finally, I took a good look at the opposite. Katie's Gift of Criticism exercise asks you to agree, when you've been accused: find it. And once you've drummed up concrete evidence for how it's true, find how the opposite is true as well. This puts you much closer to truth than either defense or denial or even owning the negative trait as if it told the whole story.

I did this. It was comforting to think that my kids—who live with me day in and day out, who've seen me at my worst in moments of exhaustion or at the peak of minding and mitigating their dramas—don't think of me as high-strung. (Then, though it wasn't part of the exercise, I considered some negative things they might actually call me and sat with that, and sat with being okay with that.) I was so stuck on *high-strung* I could barely discipline myself to name its opposite. I flimsily settled on calm and saw, in my mind's eye, many scenes of calm—in fact, the predominance of calm in how I currently live my life and meet its challenges.

(Are you exhausted yet? Please remember that I was in the grips of one of those things that gets you and grabs you and has you. Anything I did to be with it and to respond to it was an effort to scooch toward truth, toward clarity, toward kindness to myself and to Jenna. I wanted to be with what was there anyway, to open to the possibility that there was some gift for me in the exploration. And while I was kicking and screaming at least some of the way, I was also okay with that. This confessional telling has one purpose: to help you be in a process that's both effective and kind; to urge you to get okay with yourself however

you move through that process, even as you seek to try on the best tools you've got—perhaps those I offer in this book—even as you fail, even as you try again to come back to what feels kinder and truer, as you scooch, scooch, scooch at your own pace.)

So while I was washing dishes several hours into this no-fun no-I-did-not-love-it-or-feel-great-about-it process—in which, by the way, I continually reminded myself that I shouldn't be beyond this, because here I was—I somehow suddenly accessed the next level of total aversion to being called high-strung. And a huge breath came in. And I thought, *There it is*. And I saw Jenna's face and thought again, fully believing it this time, *the face of God*.

Here's what I found: Every day in my manifesto (you'll hear all about that in its own chapter in part 4), I recited at the time of this story something deeply important to me in considering the thus-far elusive partner I was mentally inviting into my world. Those words were, *I bask in her energy*. I won't explain the supreme importance of this, but it was and is supremely important to me—crucial, nonnegotiable—that I love what it feels like to be in the presence of my beloved, and the phrase I bask in her energy truly sings to me. And I saw that if you flipped that to her basking in mine, well, who basks in *high-strung*? The pain I'd been in for hours and hours (these were the evening dishes on day two) was the pain of believing myself to be ultimately unlovable, unpartnerable. Because I could heal, grow, evolve, transform; have my own sister start calling me my new name because, she declared, I had

actually changed so profoundly that a name change was in order; have two kids who persist in loving me over years together even with all the minor blips and big bad bumps; heal my relationship with my stepdaughter and keep showing up to heal what next presents itself; have loads of clients who appreciate the power of our work together and send me thank-you notes and give me little gifties and speak highly of me and send people they love to me; move through my community fearless of anyone thinking ill of me and finding any number of faces turned my way with great goodwill—and still, it would all boil down to my being entirely unlovable if anyone came too close. I wanted to bask in someone's energy and what I had to offer in return was energy she might want to run away from as fast as her laid-back self would allow.

So I'd gotten to the bottom of it, that hideous, warped, pressurized thing in the deepest depths, and I knew already it wasn't true, and I could iron it out as I went along, minding the pain body, tending the mind. I cried good tears. I went to bed certain I'd wake up refreshed and ready to step again into this life I so love, and did one of my little healing rituals as I put myself to bed. (I have a good ton of them. What they all have in common is that they're deeply relaxing and calming and kind; they connect me to self and source and all manner of spiritual guidance; they firmly place my focus on all that supports me and all that is love. Thus, I drop into unconsciousness entirely caught and held by a friendly Universe.)



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I love feedback. Write me at [jaya@jayathetrustcoach.com](mailto:jaya@jayathetrustcoach.com).

