

The
BOOK
of
EMOTIONS

Or — how it feels to feel

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Content

A HEART PROJECT & AN INVITATION Anna Linder	5
ANGER	
HELLO ANGER. HOW CAN I HELP YOU? Aimee DuFresne	9
WHAT'S THE COLOR OF ANGER?	13
ANGER Tracy Stamper	15
FREEDOM	
CHASING BIRDS Bretton Keating	21
FREEDOM Tracy Stamper	27
WERE IN THE BODY DOES FREEDOM LIVE?	31
FREEDOM Aimee DuFresne	33
SUPPORT	
SUPPORT... A HAND IN NEED Patricia L. Atchison	39
SUPPORT Amy Barfield Martin	43
SUPPORT Kristina Johnson	49
A RECIPE FOR SUPPORT Tracy Stamper	55
SUPPORT - COMES FROM WITHIN Bretton Keating	63

LEARNING THE LANGUAGE OF EMOTION Lysa Black	71
VULNERABILITY	
VULNERABILITY Casha Doemland	79
VULNERABILITY Heidi Prah	77
VULNERABILITY Tracy Stamper	85
VULNERABILITY Kristina Johnson	91
VULNERABILITY Aimee DuFresne	97
VULNERABILITY Kasia Lindahl	100
HALFWAY BROKEN THINGS Bretton Keating	104
TRUST	
WHAT IS TRUST? Aimee DuFresne	111
DEAR TRUST Tracy Stamper	113
WHAT IS THE OPPOSITE TO TRUST?	116
VOICES AND FACES IN BOXES Bretton Keating & Martin Ferdinands	117
NEXT CHAPTER	129
THE AUTHORS	130

A heart project and an invitation

Sometimes we shut down, turn off our emotions. It might be our way to make it through. Our way to stay sane and keep some parts of ourselves safe.

Almost everybody do it, but some of us have felt the need to tune out for long periods, months or even years.

For me, it became years. The chaos around and within me was too complex to cope with. Without really noticing I pushed my feelings down and away and emotion after emotion was shut off.

And then the day came when I felt safe and secure enough to want to smile and I noticed that I lost the ability to freely feel.

THE BOOK OF EMOTIONS

My wish is to create a book on emotions and feelings. A guide to everybody or anybody who have shut down or lost their own system of navigation.

It would give me, personally, a greater knowledge and support in my journey and I hope it can be of help to others.

THE INVITATION

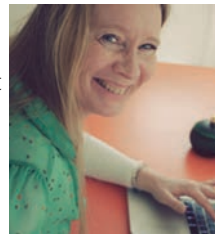
Each month during 2017 the door to explore one emotion will be opened. I will do it with my craft – graphic art and book design. But a books is nothing without words and I am not a writer.

My invitation goes out to all heart leaders, highly sensitives, empaths and survivors that feel called to write and contribute with their perspective on feelings and emotions.

Coming together we can create a small encyclopedia on emotions for anybody and everybody who needs guidance.

If you feel called to contribute you will find information on the website for the project: bookofemotions/annalinder.com

ANNA LINDER is a Swedish based graphic artist supporting heart leaders and soulful women to craft beautiful brands, books and web designs that align their vision and story. The Book of Emotions is her heart project. Website: annalinder.com



ANGER

Hello Anger. How Can I Help You?

AIMEE DUFRESNE

It raged like wildfire, unexpected across my chest, from right to left. A searing sensation I had not ever before experienced. As it raged to exit, it took my breath along with it.

We were filming a series of videos for my healthy eating coaching business. My hands had been plagued with an extreme case of eczema for the last month. I would wake up in the middle of the night to find myself scratching away at my skin, blood seeping out of dry, scaly and painful cracks. Trying all types of creams, lotions and products claiming to be magic potions proved ineffective. Everything from purely organic to completely synthetic and everything in between was applied to no avail.

Grateful it was contained to my hands, I made a request to the cameraman (who also happened to be my husband) to not film my hands directly and focus more on the food. After a few takes, he showed me the shots. Hands. Hands. And more hands. So many close-ups on what I had specifically asked him to avoid.

That's when it happened. As if someone had lit a match and dropped it in a trail of gasoline. It left me hunched over, gasping for air.

Tingling remained where the flames had passed through, tiny embers

still ignited. In the bathroom, I raised my shirt to reveal a bright red welt running the length of my chest.

Visits to doctors, allergists and naturopaths brought no conclusive diagnosis, nor treatment option.

No one knew how much anger I had stuffed down inside me. Not even me. So much that it had reached boiling point and was now bursting through my being.

Stuffing down my anger started innocently enough. Expressing anger as a child was overridden by my need to be liked, living up to my reputation as a 'good girl'. Good girls didn't get angry.

That need to be liked matured into an obsession as I got older.

The day after losing a great love of my life in an accident, a relative came up to me to say how they were scared they would lose their husband one day. *I can't help you with your fear*, I replied. *Not while I'm living the reality myself.*

I was angry. Very angry.

So very angry I expressed my anger at the interaction with a friend. *Give them a break. No one knows what to say, and we're all grieving in our own way.* No acknowledgment or validation of my anger. Still, it continued to simmer under the surface.

And I continued to see things through the eyes of others, completely ignoring myself, believing my views invalid and doing my best to answer questions with what whoever was asking actually wanted to hear, silencing my inner self. Until that day she screamed so loudly to be let out, it left a bright red welt across my body.

Anger had seared its way out of me. I was terrified it would overtake me.

But all Anger wanted was exactly what I wanted: Acknowledgement. Hey, I'm here, don't ignore me! I have something to say! I'm important too.

So now I give Anger the acknowledgment it wants. I know the Anger

Anger comes to remind me of my dreams and intentions when I've lost my way. Anger is a compass leading me back on my path and purpose.

isn't me, it's just a visitor that has shown up to give me a message. Rather than shoving it down, cramming up the space of my inner being, ignoring it until it shouts, or flicking it away with positive affirmations that don't feel true, I get curious. I sit down with it. *How can I help you? What do you need?* Listening intently to hear what Anger has to say.

Anger asks for different things. Sometimes it's a warm bath, a moment of silence, or a deep breath. Anger comes to remind me of my dreams and intentions when I've lost my way. Anger is a compass leading me back on my path and purpose.

My soul yearned to write, but the lifestyle I had created didn't allow me the time. Healthy eating was a big part of my life, but it was not my purpose. Writing, on the other hand, was soul-enriching. Anger came to deliver the message and reminder to get back on track.

Running a business where I was constantly in the kitchen making food was making my hands worse. A forced break from food prep and constant hand washing was in order. With more time on my hands, I finally gave myself the time and space to write.

Once I began writing, the itch in my hands began to subside. The redness calmed. The cracks healed. The dry scaly parts disappeared.

Anger's message was heard and adhered to, and thus, Anger left.

The next time Anger comes to visit you, take time to acknowledge it. Sit with it. Listen to the message it has come to bring you. Learn from it. Adjust your compass. And thank Anger as it leaves you more of who you are and closer to all you are meant to be.

AIMEE DUFRESNE is a Joy Catalyst and soul-shifting creator, coach, traveler, and latte-lover. She offers online guided JOYrides for women ready to shed their shoulders and reclaim their power. She's also the proud author of *Keep Going: From Grief to Growth*. Find out more at aimeedufresne.com.





WHAT'S THE COLOR OF ANGER?

*Anger has no color, it's
translucent and feels bland.*

EMMA

*Anger is dark vibrant burgundy
or an ignoring white. It can
also be a sharp furious hard to
place yellow.*

ANNA

*Red!
Like an exploding volcano.*

KARINA

*Anger is white at the center
and intensifies through yellow,
orange ending in a red edge.*

LOTTA

*Anger is a rolled up black
tangled furry ball!*

SUSANNA

*Fiery red! Blood red.
From a deep earthen space!*

ISABELLE

*The color of anger
pulsates and changes..*

MARIA

Anger

TRACY STAMPER

Anger has been vilified, and he's rather angry about it.

The only ones who have reason to be scared of Anger are those who haven't dared to look him in the eye. Anger shows up as an ally. Only when he is ignored does he call on Rage for backup. Anger comes as a protector. He takes his job quite seriously, and won't leave until satiated.

Anger is action; energy in action on a mission. Anger arrives to tell us that something is amiss. Anger sets us on guard, activating alertness, raising hackles and preparing us to defend our sacred selves from danger. He curls his fingers into fists of force. Knuckles. Angles. Elbows. Kicks. Jabs. Sharp bursts. Action. He grips jaws into a clench, catching breath as the body prepares for fight or flight. And Anger wants to fight. Lava churns, and turns into screaming, guttural vocalizations and talk drenched in vitriol.

This is how you know that Anger has shown up for you.

To show up for Anger means to feel him. See him. Dare to look him in the eye. Honor his divine masculine warrior self.

Anger's purpose is divine protection. The words 'divine' and 'anger' aren't typically found arm-in-arm. Not seeing Anger's divine purpose is

My body's wisdom says that acknowledging and learning from Anger is the only way to authentically show up in the world with kindness for self and others.

how he was vilified in the first place. Fear puts blinders on our eyes and a spoke in the wheel of the flow of emotions. Judging Anger as bad, unwelcome or undesirable leaves Anger no choice but to get bigger and louder and call on his bodyguard Rage. The only 'bad' emotions are those that aren't acknowledged or expressed consciously. Welcoming Anger as our wise guide and teacher opens the portal to accessing so much more of our sacred selves.

Having bought into Fear's fearmongering, I used to want to reason my way out of Anger. I misunderstood and judged him, believing him to be a dangerous stranger hell-bent on doing me and / or others harm. I didn't trust him, and I didn't trust myself in his company. I wished him away when I wasn't busy denying he was there. I had swallowed Fear's lies that Anger wasn't welcome or appropriate or polite. 'Polite society' says that Anger is not acceptable, especially for girls and women. My body's wisdom says that acknowledging and learning from Anger is the only way to authentically show up in the world with kindness for self and others.

Give me the truth of kindness over the phoniness of politeness any day. Expressed Anger guides. Stuffed Anger implodes.

Body wisdom says that what is unwelcome is stifling the expression of Anger by sweeping him under the rug. There, hidden from view and denied the TLC he is begging for, he festers and becomes prey to Rage's unpredictable ways. Rage is caustic, red hot and feisty with an unforgiving smoldering that lights the rug on fire. And when those flames creeping up through the carpet are ignored? Rage burns the house down like a wild-fire that won't be contained, leaving the scene pummeled. Rage abhors being ignored. It's far better to befriend Anger as soon as he knocks on the door, before he calls for backup.

Ignoring Anger until he erupts into a destructive dance of Rage is where the problem lies.

Allowing Anger to consciously move through us is how we rise.

Give Anger space and permission to move through you. This is your relationship with Anger, no one else's. Regardless of the cause of the Anger or the reason that he showed up in the first place, he showed up solely for your benefit. Carve out time for just you and Anger. This is how to keep Anger's expression conscious and safe. Let him in. Let his heightened pulse throb down into the tips of your fingers. Feel him beat inside your ribcage. Don't keep him caged. Scream. Blow off steam. Turn on some music with a driving beat and build up heat. Kick. Punch. Yell. Dance mad. Stomp. Pound on a mattress. Grimace, growl, scowl and

*Let Anger's heightened pulse
throb down into the tips of your
fingers. Feel him beat inside your
ribcage. Don't keep him caged.*

snarl. Move the emotion's energy through you until Anger's angst begins to unfurl its fingers and release its grip. And then... then it's time to listen and learn.

When Anger arises, ask him...

Why are you here?

Why do you feel a need to protect me?

How can you serve me?

How can I serve you?

How can I safely and appropriately express you for the highest good of all?

What boundaries do I need to draw to protect myself?

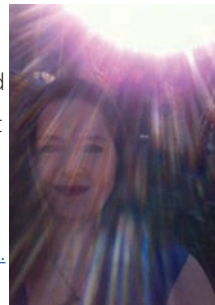
How can I bring water to the embers rather than fuel to the flame?

Anger, how can we dance our way through this together?

Here. Take my hand. Let's dance. I trust you. I will follow your lead.

Eye to eye, with palm to palm in front of your grateful heart, welcome Anger's wisdom and thank him for the sacred service and divine dance.

TRACY STAMPER is a dancer at heart, in mind, of body, and with words. Her writing has been featured in *Rebelle Society* and *Elephant Journal*. Her current favorite colors are purple, orange and glitter. She likes her chocolate dark, her inspiration flowing and her car dances to be uninhibited. Website: [facebook.com/shinesistarshine/](https://www.facebook.com/shinesistarshine/)



FREEDOM

Chasing Birds

BRETTON KEATING

I've been struggling to write about freedom.

Writing of it feels, in many regards, the opposite of freeing.

True freedom is something I've only caught a glimpse of a handful of times. In my experience, it sneaks up when we aren't looking. And then just as soon as we notice it there, it's gone.

Freedom comes the thousandth time we try to meditate or when we unintentionally fall in love. Out between who I think I am and whomever I think the world wants me to be, there is a momentary lightness of being. This, in essence, is freedom.

How do we find freedom, elusive bird that she is? She is found in the most contradictory of ways.

I met a man once who said to me, "You will find yourself in a box."

I found the idea interesting, from a distance. At the time, it was not immediately apparent that it was myself I was looking for. But now I believe differently; I think we're on a constant quest for our true selves here. It's a never-ending process of discovery.

When we met, I was looking for a yoga teacher. I had been practicing for over a decade, and my then-current approach to practice largely

entailed doing whatever I felt in my body on a given day. I wanted to be free to move however I wanted to, and so I bounced between teachers and styles according to my schedule and preferences. Any and everyone became a teacher for me.

This man saw through what I appeared to be chasing, to what I was truly seeking. On the outside, we appear to be seeking freedom. We reject whatever it is that feels constricting, only to then wind up more bound than ever. We're bound by our desire for freedom, which we can never, truly, be rid of, until we stop letting it run our lives and make our decisions for us. There is no freedom on the path of relentlessly chasing liberation. In the pursuit, we become bound by our perception of what freedom is and means. We choose only that which will leave us open ended, which is really no choice at all.

In yoga practice we explore the concept of binding. The physical bind appears in certain postures in the form of catching parts of the body, often with the hands. Doing so has purposes unique to each individual posture, but one thread between them is that it creates a closed circuit through which energy can move.

I've heard it said, "Allow the bind to liberate you." The paradox of this notion struck me. Binds don't always feel liberating when you're in them. In my experience, they can feel quite the opposite.

So how does liberation come from a bind, either physical or mental or otherwise? I believe it has to do with that closed circuit, and the movement of energy within. It cannot be forced. The element of surrender to whatever's happening and allowing the energy to flow is absolutely essential. And then, with surrender, eventually, an opening happens. Normally the physical body mirrors our emotional and mental state. There are no fine lines or borders when it comes to the human being. Each of us exists as one connected entity: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. When we understand this, we can experience something like a deep release in the

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hip, and comprehend that it directly correlates to the emotional breakthrough we happen to be undergoing at the same time. We can break down crying and embrace the tears as a sign that something that needs to go is being released from our story. We are ready to move on.

And in that movement of energy, we find that eventually we stop thinking so damn much and we start to simply be. Until we think about the being and it becomes an analyzed state yet again.

The snippet of time without analysis—for me, that is freedom.

Considering binds as an external construct for creating freedom, I believe that what the man said to me is accurate. Finding ourselves equates freedom. So freedom comes in a box.

A friend of mine pointed out that for evidence of this we can turn to nature. Everything in nature is designed with precise mathematical intricacy. Within the exactness of form and structure, creation happens. We

humans, as part of that very nature, are no different. Everything, when broken down, is composed of fractals, our selves included.

I believe we turn to boxes as forms in which we can understand our true nature and our place in the world. If we see no immediate, external box, we will usually create one with our minds. We humans are incredibly complex, so we're always finding ourselves "stuck" in something. And then we break free of whatever that something was, only to find ourselves knee-deep in something else. But when we can feel free despite the something, we can live with the many something's we encounter, which ultimately equates living with our selves, in our current state or form. And in the living with ourselves, just as we are, we experience lightness of being.

The feeling of true freedom in lightness of being initially came to me the first time I fell in love.

With him, it wasn't so much a falling, as a slow and steady, internal growing. I initially resisted the relationship. I wasn't interested. I didn't want to be "tied down" by him.

But then life happened and I found myself in the relationship, and

*We do not find freedom chasing
after possibility. We find it through
commitment. Through facing
ourselves, as we are.*

when I realized I loved him, we were cycling along the boardwalk of a white-sand beach in the United States. Dusk was twinkling a blanketed arrival, with the fiery ball of a Southern sun having made her decent over the bay on the opposite shore. We were shouting all kinds of crazy-weird things, no care in mind who heard or what anyone else thought. Wrapped in the bubble of a world of our own, I couldn't feel my legs pedaling. My entire body became light. This ability to be, freely, myself, with another person, was something I knew I had experienced before, but not for many years, since childhood, most likely.

In this glimpse of time, words didn't matter, nor did his reciprocity of the notion. Sure, I wanted him to say it, because, like other people, I have attachment to the cold comfort of words. But there are infinity ways to communicate and my heart felt something deeper, and so I didn't feel the need to express any of this. I was fully comfortable in just being. For the first time, certainly in my adult life, but possibly ever.

For me, this is the essence of freedom: fully comfortable in just being. Exactly as we are, with no need to alter or change a thing.

And I would never have found this feeling without some kind of constraint or structure. Within the binds of our relationship, I found freedom.

We do not find freedom chasing after possibility. We find it through commitment. Through facing ourselves, as we are. Through making a choice, and sticking with it. Through the binds that tie us.

I used to think the color of freedom was white. A blank canvas, an empty slate of full potential.

But now I feel differently. White isn't open-ended. White carries a full body of its own.

To me, freedom is the color of the ocean. To one person, it may appear blue, to another green, or purple, or even black, but in reality it's a reflection. It's true color is clear.

Because only when we are able to look at ourselves, honestly and truly,

can we find freedom. And from there, we have the ability to endlessly create, utilizing the fractal forms that we see.

Freedom happens when you can feel free despite being stuck with yourself, in human form, and all the beautiful intricacy and messiness that entails.

Freedom is chasing after birds you know you will never catch, and being okay with that. The chase is what you're after, anyway. Not the birds.

BRETTON KEATING is a yoga instructor for adults and children, barre instructor, Reiki healer, writer, and artist. For her heart-centered writings, please visit her blog (brettonkeating.com). For creative work, including poetry and your fairy tale within, here is her website (whitecottonrose.com).



Freedom

TRACY STAMPER

Freedom has wings and lands in the chest. She befriends, melts into and melds with the heart. She sprouts wings that grow the heart deeper, wider, higher.

To make room for this winged one perched in the heart space, we must expand. Expansion is a telltale sign that Freedom has arrived. Breath expands, creating more room. Like blinds on a window, our ribcage opens up to let in more sunlight and fresh air, and to give Freedom's wings space in which to unfurl.

When made visible, Freedom is a gorgeous, captivating display of streaming light, always moving. Freedom's light show radiates from the center out in rays of clear, bright white light. Sometimes, when the rays catch and reflect the light of the sun, moon and stars, they take on the yellow color of sunshine, moon rays and starlight. Freedom's light sparkles, at times with starburst glints of purple and aqua.

As Freedom's wings first begin to flutter, they can be sensed as tingles, tickles, sparkles, goosebumps, and an uplifted heart soaring. Happy dances, smiles, euphoria and jumping for joy often accompany Freedom's arrival. A sure sign that Freedom has landed is the sensation of our heart

rising. Suddenly, our breath becomes fuller than we can remember since Freedom last left the premises.

Our breath is always a potent barometer of our emotional landscape, moving in different ways when we experience different nuances of emotions. The emotion of Freedom can be sensed quite differently, depending on how she finds us. Freedom can flow towards us from upstream of the emotional river, or we can work our way towards her from downstream. When she flows towards us from upstream, all we have to do is sense the crystal clear water flowing our way. These are the times when uplifting news arrives or opportunity finds us. Imagine receiving the phone call that you got the dream job that allows you to leave a job that is soul-stifling. Imagine the moment of realizing that you are holding a winning lottery ticket that will pay off all your bank notes and still leave you with abundantly ample resources. This Freedom flowing from upstream is the happy dancing Freedom. This is the Freedom that wants to celebrate with fireworks and jumping for joy. She is action-oriented. The thrust of energy is upward. The upper lungs feel as though they have been infused with helium.

When we have to push the river from downstream in order to achieve Freedom, however, the sensation can be different. Imagine having been in a place of angst for weeks while awaiting results of a serious medical test, then receiving the phone call affirming your health. Imagine waiting days to get word that a loved one who was in a natural disaster is found safe and sound. This is Freedom that had to be fought for or earned through the effort of pushing the river from downstream. When we finally arrive into Freedom from downstream, the lower belly floods with breath which then rises up into the upper lungs. Shoulders drop at the same time that the heart lifts. A burst of relief floats up and is then sometimes released through tears trickling down. Our spirit may wish to jump up, but our body suddenly longs to sit or lie down, understanding fully for the first

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expansion and release.*

time how much effort has been expended only once the effort is finally over. The energetic pattern is upward, downward and radial, as breath expands 360 degrees.

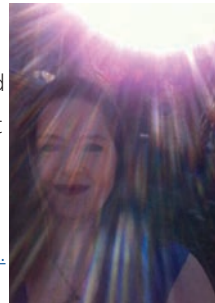
Regardless of the flavor of Freedom, and whether she arrives from upstream with glee or from downstream with relief, she resides in the heart. This is fitting, as whenever Freedom shows up, we are entering into a new relationship with Self. The wings of Freedom move from within to create more room. The movement fans us from within to open up the spaciousness of new energy. Within this open crystalline space is an invitation for a blossoming relationship with Self. There is more room for breath, and whenever our breath deepens, we create more room for inspiration. Freedom helps us breathe our way into heightened creativity. As she flows into us, breath flows through us.

The longer Freedom stays, the more relaxed her signature becomes. Once her wings have unfurled and fully breathed us, she energetically expands into invisible but felt wings wrapping around the body in still-

ness, coaxing the body into the rhythmic pulse of life's cycle of expansion and release. After the initial rush felt when Freedom first lands, her lingering presence is sensed as openness. Spaciousness. Alignment with the truth of who we are and what we want. Relaxed Freedom is sensed as a vertical alignment rooted in the secure foundation of standing in one's truth, presence and power. She takes deep, full breaths, resting in muscles and joints as a sensation of ease that can give way to play at a moment's notice. She is joyous comfort felt deep down on a cellular level. Freedom delights in seeing your vitality grow.

Freedom is sometimes an unexpected yet always welcome guest. She enjoys showing up unannounced and throwing wide open all of the windows and doors. She gives no clue as to how long she plans to stay. The only thing to do when she walks in is to celebrate her arrival, let her know how thankful you are for her presence, and deeply breathe her fresh, nourishing air.

TRACY STAMPER is a dancer at heart, in mind, of body, and with words. Her writing has been featured in *Rebelle Society* and *Elephant Journal*. Her current favorite colors are purple, orange and glitter. She likes her chocolate dark, her inspiration flowing and her car dances to be uninhibited. Website: [facebook.com/shinesistarshine/](https://www.facebook.com/shinesistarshine/)





WERE IN THE BODY DOES FREEDOM LIVE?

*In the belly, allowing the belly
to billow freely, without any
restrictions.*

SUSANNA

In the soul.

NIINA

*My lungs - breathing deeply.
The front of my lungs feeling
the freedom in my heart, the
back of my lungs with a
feeling like wings spreading
out on each exhale.*

JACKIE

*It lives in your chest and
you feel it in the breath.*

MAYA

*In the solar plexus, sometimes
the heart.*

KARINA

In the eyes.

ANNA

Freedom

AIMEE DUFRESNE

Freedom...

The open road before you... whether you be in your bare feet, running in sneakers, rolling along on a bike or racing in a car.

Sinking your feet in the sand as the tide nips at your toes. The blue of the ocean. The gentle roll and crash of waves washing over you.

Swinging on a hammock in a back yard, a balcony or a tropical island. Your nostrils taking in the smell of the sea or the sweetness of freshly cut grass.

Reading a good book, one where you become a part of the adventure, the vivid colors become you. The magic of the story shifts and shapes your perspective, opening up for more.

Listening to an inspiring story, in which you glimpse the hero or heroine that lies within yourself. That seed of freedom planted.

A breath of fresh air, filling your lungs, igniting your cells, enlightening your being.

Painting, sculpting, writing. Creating worlds within to be seen in the world without – for which it is without no longer.

Dancing, your body in rhythm with the beat. Feeling the movement

flush out all that is not freedom, until you are one with freedom.

Laughter with a friend. The freedom of truth told between two souls, heard, felt, and held sacred.

Silence with yourself. Being over doing. Shutting out the noise outside and hearing, perhaps for the very first time, the wise voice within.

Meditation. Mantras repeated. Making space for more. More Freedom.

Hearing the call of your heart, and heeding its desires.

Love. Love of others. And, most freeing, the love of self, no longer needing and feeding off the opinions of other people. The deep knowing you are enough. Just as you are. Right. Now.

Now. Where freedom lies yet often hides from souls who desperately seek it. A perpetual game of cat and mouse. Sucking freedom from cells when frantically they race to find it in the future, or recue and rekindle it

Love. Love of others.

*And, most freeing, the love of self,
no longer needing and feeding off
the opinions of other people.*

The deep knowing you are enough.

Just as you are.

Right.

Now.

from the past. Forever missing where freedom lies...in the colors of the rainbow, the expansive blue skies. The soft earth beneath the feet. The fresh air that fills the lungs. The fire that burns in the belly and churns out the creative work you see in the world. Outside, you are searching too far for freedom my friend. Come back, come back. It's time to come in and play.

For freedom is not a fight. Freedom is ease.

Freedom is not beyond the challenge or the struggle, freedom is within it.

Freedom surrounds you yet you still feel bound, aching to be free.

Freedom is within you, but the door is closed and you keep walking right past it.

Come back, come back, the door is open. Always.

When you tire of the struggle, the pain and anguish the world has given you, the fears it has infected you with, you will be ready to come back.

You will see the door you never saw before, slightly ajar, gently inviting you to step forth and through.

Then, and only then, will you experience the sweet taste, beautiful sounds, and the floating feeling that is freedom.

AIMEE DUFRESNE is a Joy Catalyst and soul-shifting creator, writer, and traveler. She is the proud author of *Keep Going: From Grief to Growth*, a memoir about love, loss, life's journey and the power of perseverance. Aimee is currently writing her next book, *52 Lessons I Learned From My Father*. Website: aimeedufresne.com.



SUPPORT

Support... A Hand in Need

PATRICIA L. ATCHISON

Support... the word itself has a strong, clipped edge to it. Support by way of encouragement, or someone to lean on, comes to a person in many different ways, and for almost anything pertaining to a person's life.

You see physical support everywhere. A walking stick, cane, walker, and wheelchair are all personal means of support. There is also assistance from another when a hand or arm, or physical strength is offered. One example which touched me most was at a funeral. My Dad, Mom, family, and friends stood together at the gravesite of my sister-in-law's father. Her Mom, Maria stood close to the casket as it was lowered into the ground. The mourners each took their turn and time to pass by the open gravesite and to toss handfuls of bright red rose petals inside the area. Maria was left standing on her own, her body quaking with grief, leaning to one side ready to collapse. My Dad immediately moved to her side and placed a strong palm under her elbow to support her twisted body. She leaned onto the strength of my Dad's hand with an audible sigh. The scene continues to replay in my mind as the perfect example of physical support.

If not for a strong hand to hold individuals up at times when we want to crumble, our world would indeed suffer. Maria was ready to fall down

with grief, her body losing the strength to stand upright. Similar to a barn whose luster died years ago, and a gust of wind has almost collapsed it, except for the one beam that still stands strong carrying the weight of the complete structure against it. That is what support feels like to me. It's an encompassing strength which rises from deep within when we have the courage to support ourselves. If all is lost, and that internal strength is nowhere to be found, when we feel ourselves collapsing with pain, then we can accept external support from others to help stop us from falling.

Support comes both internally and externally. The feelings I have when supported differ depending what I seek. A person can receive aid on various levels and from many different people in their lives. A child or teenager's needs may differ from the types of support that an adult seeks. It all depends on the situation and who is offering assistance.

I've been my own best friend all my life. My experiences have taught me that the biggest supporter is myself. I am not saying this is good or bad, just that it works for me. My spiritual path has led me to believe in myself. Support rises from deep within me from my spirituality as a strength. I feel like I will be okay. It will all work out. I can do this. Like the single beam holding up the collapsed barn structure, I find that beam within myself and the feeling of strength rises, supporting my intentions. My body senses this and it too provides the strength I need.

Support from another is a gift. It can be the single stimulus that moves us forward. Besides help during periods of tragedy or grief, approval can come from others in regards to an idea, event, a business proposal, team

It's an encompassing strength which rises from deep within when we have the courage to support ourselves.

comradery, donation, patronage, sponsorship, and even by way of friendship. When another offers me support in my life happenings, it gives me the confidence to move forward. I might even feel euphoric, that I can do ‘it’.

No matter how support is received, it brings great light with it. I think of the help as (and forgive my clichés) ‘light at the end of the tunnel’, ‘finding the end of the rainbow’. When support fills and surround us, it creates comfort and light in addition to strength. The struggle or burden we face diminishes, even if only for a short time. It’s like falling in the deep end of the pool. You can’t catch a breath or you will drown. You struggle to make your way to the top. If you can’t find the internal strength, you could simply give up and let yourself go, floating amid the waters of despair. Suddenly though someone is there, hauling you out of the oxygen depleting pool, urging you to take a breath, pulling you from the depths, helping you succeed in whatever it is that you are struggling with. Supporting as needed during a particular incident.

Support is the color of light. It is also love, because behind every intention of help is the feeling of giving. One can’t honestly give to someone else if there isn’t some positive feeling there. Without compassion, I would find it nearly impossible to show support to someone if I didn’t care in some way, no matter how large or small. When we receive aid, we feel the generous love and light it is given with. On the receiving side, it too elicits feelings of love, light and joy. Support is strength, no matter whether receiving or giving. My body always becomes stronger when I feel supported. I think I even stand taller, allowing courage to fill my posture, leaving me with a ‘can do’ attitude.

I can’t end this passage without talking about the support that you want from others, perhaps need from others, but you aren’t sure if it’s right to ask for depending on the circumstance. Support for a dishonest situation leaves you feeling euphoric initially, but then disillusion seeps in because you know the encouragement shouldn’t have been given in the first place.

Could the feelings that support elicits also be ego-driven? What if I came up with a really great idea? I'm feeling pretty cheeky – that this is the best thing yet! Depending on how my previous ideas have been accepted, I feel proud to share with another. An example is the idea to start a small venture. I talk about it with a partner or family member. If my idea is accepted with approval and comradery, my chest expands and I feel elated. Yes! I've got this. Ego takes off thinking of all the positive outcomes that will be generated by the idea. I just needed a bit of support to validate everything. Eventually it becomes tangible, a goal to strive for. Ego feels in this moment that she has succeeded in creating a great plan. Not all ideas are ego-centered. We could look at why we are seeking support. Is it for validation, or because we really need it to move forward.

Support encompasses so many facets of life and living. I thrive on it, I need it to bolster me, to give me courage, to prop me up in the bad times, to help me soar in the good times. Something as simple as a smile can be supportive in a time of need. My internal beam keeps my body structure strong and supported. My external support comes from loved ones, friends, acquaintances and community, and even from a stranger offering a hand when I need it. Clutching that hand, or leaning into that palm is the strongest support there is. It touches our hearts, strikes a match and allows the light to glow, giving courage and joy to all parties involved. *Support...*

PATRICIA L. ATCHISON shares a love of writing, dancing Nia (Holistic Fitness), and making doll and teddy bear creations. Her children's books, Little Blue Penguin and McKenzie's Frosty Surprise have delighted many youngsters. She blogs and thinks of new books to write while living passionately. Website: patriciaatchison.ca



Support

AMY BARFIELD MARTIN

Pain has a way of making one very uncomfortable. It often shows up in my body via an achy low back and tight hips. I hate how pain can show up out of nowhere and last for what seems forever. Sometimes a steamy hot shower or a couple of Tylenol are enough to save the day. Then there are those days where all I can do is cry for some much-needed relief.

“Seriously, stop with this already! Why can’t you leave me alone? Why must you be so needy?”

For awhile now I have been wishing my pain would magically go away. Persistent, unwavering, my body refused to give into my whiny demands. It was desperately crying out for some much-needed love and support.

“Alright! I give up! Tell me what it is you want. I can’t take this anymore.”

Gentle movement, deep breaths, chakra speak.

I manage to push myself away from my keyboard. Slip into soft yoga pants, roll out my mat, and melt onto the floor.

While on all fours, I begin to rock my hips. Moving forward, back, circling left and right, prying loose the knots that have been trying their damndest to strangle me.

Remember to breathe. *Inhale, Exhale, Release. Observe, Sense, Be.*

The pelvis and hips are the home of the second chakra, Svadhisthana, which is closely associated with one's emotions and creativity. An imbalance in this chakra may show up as a feeling of insecurity and a lack of self-confidence. Creativity is our birthright, and pain in the second chakra area may indicate we are blocking its natural flow.

I roll over onto my back and draw my knees in towards my chest, then slowly proceed to lower their weight from side to side. After a few repetitions, I return my knees to center, content to lie there in stillness. As I sink deeper into silence, anxiety soon engulfs me. Feeling overwhelmed, I roll onto my side in an attempt to distance myself from its intensity.

I find myself wanting to cocoon and longing to hide. While simultaneously aching for a reassuring hug of nurturing love and support.

"Oh God, how I hate this. Make it go away. What do you want from me!"

I want you to listen. I want you to hear what I have been trying to tell you. I want you to stop trying to silence the flow of your creativity.

All creativity begins with desire, the wanting to experience something come to fruition. At the root of it, creativity is nothing but choice. I feel our lives are greatly influenced by choice. Choices in what we want, choices in what we do, along with choosing what we believe.

A memory from when I was around 4 years old surfaces. I am desperately wanting to tell my mom something. I remember fervently patting my hand against her arm trying to get her attention. I remember her turning her head toward me and screaming "What!" I remember being so utterly shocked and horrified at her reaction.

The adult me can look back at that moment and see my mom was having a bad day. The wise grownup in me knows not to take outbursts personally. The sensitive little girl in me though hadn't yet developed this skill and her world was shattered that day.

*I draw my little one into my arms
and lie there with her. I offer my
support through attentive listening,
while she shares everything she wasn't
able to back then. Eventually, our
bodies soften and rhythmic
breathing returns. I feel a warm
golden energy flow from my heart
and into my lower back and pelvis.*

In that moment my little girl determined it wasn't safe to want for anything. She wasn't sure who she could rely upon. She felt it wasn't safe to trust she had the support of others in getting her wants and desires met.

I roll over onto my stomach and assume a protective posture.

“Wow, little one. I am so sorry. I am so, so, sorry that happened to you. Know I hear you and that you are safe. Please know that moment cannot hurt you now.”

I draw my little one into my arms and lie there with her. I offer my support through attentive listening, while she shares everything she wasn't able to back then. Eventually, our bodies soften and rhythmic breathing

returns. I feel a warm golden energy flow from my heart and into my lower back and pelvis.

Another memory from my childhood comes flowing to me. A memory where my mom is saying “*Corkers can do anything*”. I was her little Corker and she did her best to be supportive of me.

I find the contrast of these two memories interesting. “It isn’t safe to want” & “You can do anything”. It is no wonder I have many times found myself engaging in people pleasing behavior in an attempt to be receiving of their love, while at the same time doing everything I could to avoid the possibility of causing them disappointment. If by some chance a deep seated want or desire of my own did manage to make itself known, I was great at dismissing it. I would do this by telling myself it was unimportant and insignificant or what I want didn’t matter.

Though one deep desire from childhood never left me. This was the desire to have a romantic and deeply committed relationship. I am happy

I have come to realize what our dreams need most is to have our own love and support behind them. They need us choose, to commit, to believe. Without this, they can never come to be.

to say I have been married to my deeply devoted husband for almost nine years now. His unwavering love and support have greatly contributed to who I am today.

Yes, I was great at dreaming my ideal love relationship into being. I made it my life goal and I poured a countless amount of time and energy into making it happen. Sadly, though, I never gave myself full permission to dream big in other areas of my life, such as money, career, and creative endeavors. So many times I have found myself stuck, unwilling to move, fearful of making the wrong choice or some huge mistake.

Fortunately, I have come to realize what our dreams need most is to have our own love and support behind them. They need us choose, to commit, to believe. Without this, they can never come to be.

As I rise to my feet, I realize here was my opportunity to choose differently. I could choose to be fully supportive of myself by committing to getting clear on exactly what my deepest heartfelt wants and desires were in all areas of my life. I owe that much to both myself and my little girl. I could choose to believe the universe was 100 percent supportive in helping me make my dreams happen. Plus I could choose to rest in the safety of knowing its love would always be there to catch me.

So what about you? Is your body trying to tell you something that goes deeper than physical pain? I sense the pain in my back was symptomatic of my not being willing to trust that life supports me. While the pain in my hips was indicative of my unwillingness to move forward with allowing my creativity its full expression.

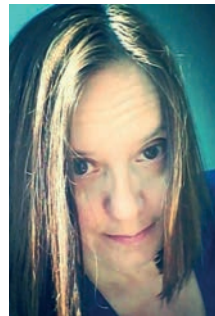
Are you willing to listen to your little one? Are you willing to let yourself dream? Do you believe? Are you ready to be the receiver of your own creation?

Please, please, please say “yes!” I am not saying it will always be easy. Sometimes we may need to let go and get down on our knees. Sometimes it may mean gathering the courage to rise and to greet the choice that

stands before you. It may require us to be present with any so-called messy emotions and to be willing to really listen to whatever they have to say.

Know the universe so loves and supports you, no matter what happens on any given day. Plus know it will always have your back, every step of the way.

AMY BARFIELD MARTIN is a dream seeker and truth creator, residing in the St. Louis area. She inspires others to live life on their terms through honoring and listening to the voice of body sensation, along with allowing the uncensored flow of one's true desires. Let's illuminate your heart's magic.
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Support

KRISTINA JOHNSON

I once read in a college psychology book that no matter what type of dysfunction or despair a child must go through in their life, if there can be found one person who can provide support, offer love and guidance, then that child will be saved. It does not take an army of teachers, therapists, neighbors or friends to cradle and embrace the wounded spirit. All it takes is one compassionate person standing by, holding the light, offering love and suggesting a different pathway to follow. In my young life, that person with the life vest was my grandmother, a woman with steel in her spine and a mountain of kindness in her overflowing heart, who through sheer determination loved the sadness out of a lost child and replaced that big gaping hole with unconditional love, support and hope for a better future. My wish for the world is that each of us, no matter our age or disposition, will find that special someone who sees your beauty and encourages you to find your way out of the darkness and into the light. Amidst the tragedy, I was blessed to have a grandmother who gave me wings, blew softly to lift me off the earth and send me on my way to pay it forward.

There are those of us who have been blessed with parents who saw our gifts and nourished our dreams, believing in the possibilities we might one

day achieve. Parents who stood by us with unconditional support, offering guidance when asked, while carrying a great big safety net when our world collapsed and came tumbling down to the ground. However, in my unofficial study of people I've encountered along the way, I find too many of them, like myself, just didn't fall into that blessed parent group. When my rock, my hero, my sole supporter passed away when I was 19 years old, I found myself floundering and in search of someone to help me bear the weight that life had settled onto my shoulders. My solution to this loss of support was to build a garden of friends, who would be there for me lending their own unique kind of support and guidance, holding me afloat when the tsunamis of life threatened the safety of my home. Quite simply, I took the time to find my tribe. Remember that your tribe does not need to be large, for as I've mentioned before, a single person can change your life, bring you comfort and ease, encouraging you to change your thoughts and inviting you to become the most true version of yourself.

Over the years, I've worked to build this community of forever friends, which oddly enough includes complete strangers whose names I do not recall, who have slipped into my life at just the right moment to deliver a message of hope and support that encouraged me to change and improve my life. Deep thoughtful messages delivered by strangers have left imprints on my soul that will last a lifetime and beyond. Many of these thoughts and ideas about life I've shared with friends or family, and sometimes other strangers, who've gratefully commented that the words I'd spoken were exactly what they needed to hear to help them heal. Somehow these shared words of comfort have taken on a life of their own and made their way out into the universe creating miracles and spreading their wisdom to those who've lost their way and are sorely in need of guidance or raising up. What a precious gift these conversations have become.

How does the dictionary define support? As a verb, it means to "bear all or part of the weight of; to hold up." As a noun, "a thing that bears the

*I was blessed to have a grandmother
who gave me wings, blew softly to lift
me off the earth and send me on my
way to pay it forward.*

weight of something or keeps it upright.” Find the people who are willing to do this for you. Finding your tribe can save your life.

My tribe is filled with remarkable big hearted women of strength and courage. Tribe members who I can call at a moments notice to bemoan the injustices of life or cry on their shoulders. Women who honor my emotions, encouraging me to let those feelings rumble like thunder and crash like lightening, reminding me that every emotion we feel has purpose, should be fully and completely felt and sat with, until it softens, quiets and eventually evaporates. These people are the rocks that ground me and the wind that lifts my wings and encourages me to fly. Without them I would be a crumpled puddle on a cold hard floor, but with their assistance, help, aid, encouragement, approval, comfort, reassurance, backing, confirmation, and solace I am able maintain my sanity and move through the dark places until I once again reach the light. They are the support beams that help me hold this house together.

For those who are currently feeling unsupported. I suggest that you consider an aquatic therapy called Watsu. This form of therapy is often

called The Water Breath Dance, for during a session the body surrenders to the rhythm of the breath as it gently moves in the water, while supported by a therapist, who holds you close to her heart. All sound disappears with the wave of the water, inviting the nervous system to quiet as well. The purpose of this therapy is to drop into the emptiness at the bottom of the breath. Doing nothing again and again, until the body, mind and spirit drift away into nothingness. The treatment allows emotions to rise up and be released. The secret to this release is the fact that the whole body is so contained, so supported by the therapist and the water, that the floater finds it safe to access every level of emotional trauma and set it free. I recently was gifted with this healing water dance by a dear member of my tribe. The beauty of this treatment is that the support felt during this session can be reimagined and relived within the body's memory when the weight of daily life threatens the safety of your own home.

Open yourself up to the possibility of receiving a rare gem of knowledge, a sacred pause where healing begins and grows through the body. The very act of being human means that rock slides of difficulties and overwhelming challenges will sometimes block our path, steal our breath or knock us to the ground, but deep within we all possess the inner

*Deep within we all possess the
inner strength required to regain
our roots and sprout our wings
to fly towards freedom.*

strength required to regain our roots and sprout our wings to fly towards freedom. It is essential to keep a life boat near your shores that will allow you to float in the healing waters whenever a storm surges. Go in search of forever friends who understand these truths. Fill your life with friends who raise you up, who sing your praises and who are willing to shoulder some of your burdens if the need arises. Tribe members who know when to ground you, when to set you free and when to remind you what it means to be unconditionally loved and supported. Seek friends and special strangers who stir sensations of comfort and ease, who warm your heart and who always give you the freedom to be your wild and crazy authentic self. Find your support beams.

KRISTINA JOHNSON is a lover of all things that inspire creativity and invite happiness. In addition to teaching Vinyasa Yoga and whirling her cares away on the dance floor, she makes time to travel the world, create art, do cartwheels in the grass and make play and laughter a priority.



WHAT IS THE OPPOSITE TO FEELING SUPPORTED?

<i>ignorance</i>	<i>free falling</i>
<i>fear</i>	<i>vulnerability</i>
<i>forsaken</i>	<i>unhelpful</i>
<i>worthlessness</i>	<i>coldly abandoned</i>
<i>defeat</i>	<i>vertigo</i>
<i>confusion</i>	<i>alone</i>
<i>loneliness</i>	<i>crash</i>
<i>capsize</i>	<i>discard</i>

*To stand alone, hoping that I
have power within myself.*

GILL



A Recipe for Support

TRACY STAMPER

Support is a beloved who believes in you, cheering you up and on when you falter.

Support is the sensation of being held in a grandmother's ample Love as she wipes away tears and fears.

Support is resting into a nest feathered just for you by someone holding the space for you when your heart feels bruised.

Support is that nudge stretching you to dream bigger, aim higher, and fly.

Support is a friend asking that magical question: *"How can I best Support you?"*

We all long for and need Support.

"I've got your back."

"We're behind you all the way."

"I'm holding you in my heart."

"We're by your side."

"I'm with you every step of the way."

A shoulder to lean on.

A hand to hold.

In good hands.

Someone to catch you if you fall.

When we have it and allow ourselves to rest into it, Support can be such an obvious, palpable, tangible entity. It can also be slippery and elusive. Since it is essential both for survival and for well-being, Support is something well worth understanding.

As a young teenager, I received a lesson about Support that continues to unfold for me now, decades later. My classmates and I participated in the much-anticipated ‘Trust Fall’ teambuilding exercise. As one who is not overly fond of heights, I was not very trusting of this impending Trust Fall.

My wobbly knees, butterfly belly and I were anxious. When it was my turn, I climbed up to the platform above the heads of my classmates whose interlocked arms formed a safety net. And I did it! I fell into the Support of my teammates. And when it my turn to Support, I interlocked arms and helped catch my peers.

As relieved as I am that the literal Trust Fall is (hopefully) a once-in-a-lifetime experience, I have since discovered that Life seems to be a series of one figurative Trust Fall after another.

After deeply struggling for a spell with having felt unsupported in one area of my life, I have been examining and untangling what Support is, where it comes from and what is required to reliably feel it. Due to its

We must choose to allow ourselves to be supported. Without our willingness, Support cannot fully and dynamically express itself.

sometimes elusive nature, I wish to understand the secret of Support so as to be able to call on it when needed.

What I discovered is that Support involves a recipe with three essential ingredients: the presence of Support, willingness and ability to be supported, and knowing where to look.

THE PRESENCE OF SUPPORT

The Supporter must show up and be present. Without my classmates standing below me with arms woven together, falling ‘timber’-style from a platform would have been mighty unwise. My classmates showed up.

A friend of mine recently lost her husband. She is surrounded by Support. Our community brainstormed as to how to best Support her: donating in her husband’s memory to a meaningful cause, meeting for coffee, treating her to a pampering day, etc. Our arms are interlocked. Her Support is present.

WILLINGNESS & ABILITY TO BE SUPPORTED

Being and feeling supported is not merely a passive experience of being surrounded by would-be Supporters. The mere presence of a safety net doesn’t automatically translate into being supported.

Our participation is key: we must choose to allow ourselves to be supported. Without our willingness, Support cannot fully and dynamically express itself. Therein lies the relational nature of Support. It involves an energy exchange between Supporter and Supported.

Imagine if I had stood on the platform and simply stood there until opting out and climbing back down the ladder. Had I not chosen to fall, I would not have had the somatic experience of landing in my peers’ Support.

The friend grieving her husband knows that her Support net is there. In order for her to actually feel supported, she can either take us up on offers or she can simply feel supported in knowing that we are here for her.

Sometimes, Support is around us and we don't have eyes to see it. If we are unable to let it in, we won't feel supported.

Seeing Support as a two-way street involving engagement on both sides of the equation allowed me to become more adept at accepting Support's invitation.

KNOWING WHERE TO LOOK FOR SUPPORT

This ingredient stumped me for years, despite its seeming obviousness.

I struggled with this in a specific area of my life in which I was deeply invested. Within a circle of peers, I hoped to see our community up the ante on Support. I was eager to discover how far we could all lift one another when Support was shared in a free-flowing exchange.

I poured myself into this equation with gusto. And I felt... frustrated. Disappointed. Unseen. Exhausted. Hurt. No matter how enthusiastically I showed up as a Supporter for the whole, I didn't feel the Support fully reciprocated.

I was looking in the wrong direction.

Plugging this into the Trust Fall scenario, I was standing on the platform looking for a community safety net. Some peers were off in a cluster of their own. Some were busy doing their individual thing wholeheartedly. Some didn't offer up their arms into a safety net. And then a small few made noise while kicking up dirt, adding confusion and drama. Although there absolutely were community members offering and receiving Support elegantly and beautifully, it became increasingly difficult to see or hear that dynamic given the dusty, limited visibility and noisy distractions.

Holding too tight to the platform, I kept seeking Support in the form

of all arms interlocked. Not seeing it, I kept spinning my wheels, trying to elicit reciprocity by pouring more of myself into a supporting role. (An often-cited definition of insanity is “*doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.*”)

Finally acknowledging that I was stuck on a platform without all the ingredients for a fully intact safety net, I climbed down.

I walked to a clearing, built another platform, and energetically called in supportive community. I asked, and I received. New faces showed up, as well as familiar faces that had also distanced themselves from the swirling dust. In this fresh air, I clearly saw Support. And my peers saw me when they stood on the platform and I interlocked arms below them.

We were on the right platform looking in the right direction.

Knowing where to look is clear and obvious in the example of the Trust Fall. Life’s lessons, however, don’t always reveal themselves in such straightforward ways. To be supported, we must get clear on where the Support is.

Understanding the interplay of these ingredients sheds light on what to tweak when not feeling supported.

Since not all directions in which we gaze are bound to provide the Support we seek, it is up to us to pursue that Support.

What if we climb onto that metaphoric platform and teammates are nowhere to be found? Support is still there. I must reframe the direction in which I’m looking.

There are times when we must look within and rely on self for Support. We become our own Supporter.

The tactile languaging of Support (shoulder to lean on, feet to stand on, etc.) reveals its physicality. Our bodies can feed us Support in those times when we stand alone. This Trust Fall involves believing that we come equipped with the tools to source our own Support. Thankfully, we do.

TO FEEL SUPPORTED:

Stand, sensing your feet. Rest into the Support of the floor beneath you. Mother Earth is always there to Support you. All you have to do is trust her Support.

Scan your body. Which muscles and joints are holding unnecessary tension? Melt shoulders. Belly. Jaw. Engage only the muscles needed to stand relaxed. Settle into the bones and muscles supporting you. Inhale gratitude for your spine's structural and energetic Support, the conduit for brain and body communication. No conscious effort is required.

Peel away layers of effort. Listen for that audible sigh telling you that you feel supported. Imprint your memory with this sensation. Allow yourself the Support.

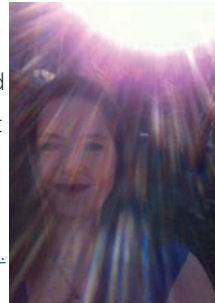
The stardust you are made of is the very essence of Support. Your cells exist to Support you. Your body is brilliantly designed to Support you. Simply by existing in your body, you are supported, just as sure as the sun shines. Trust the Support of your body and of the ones who show up wanting to Support you.

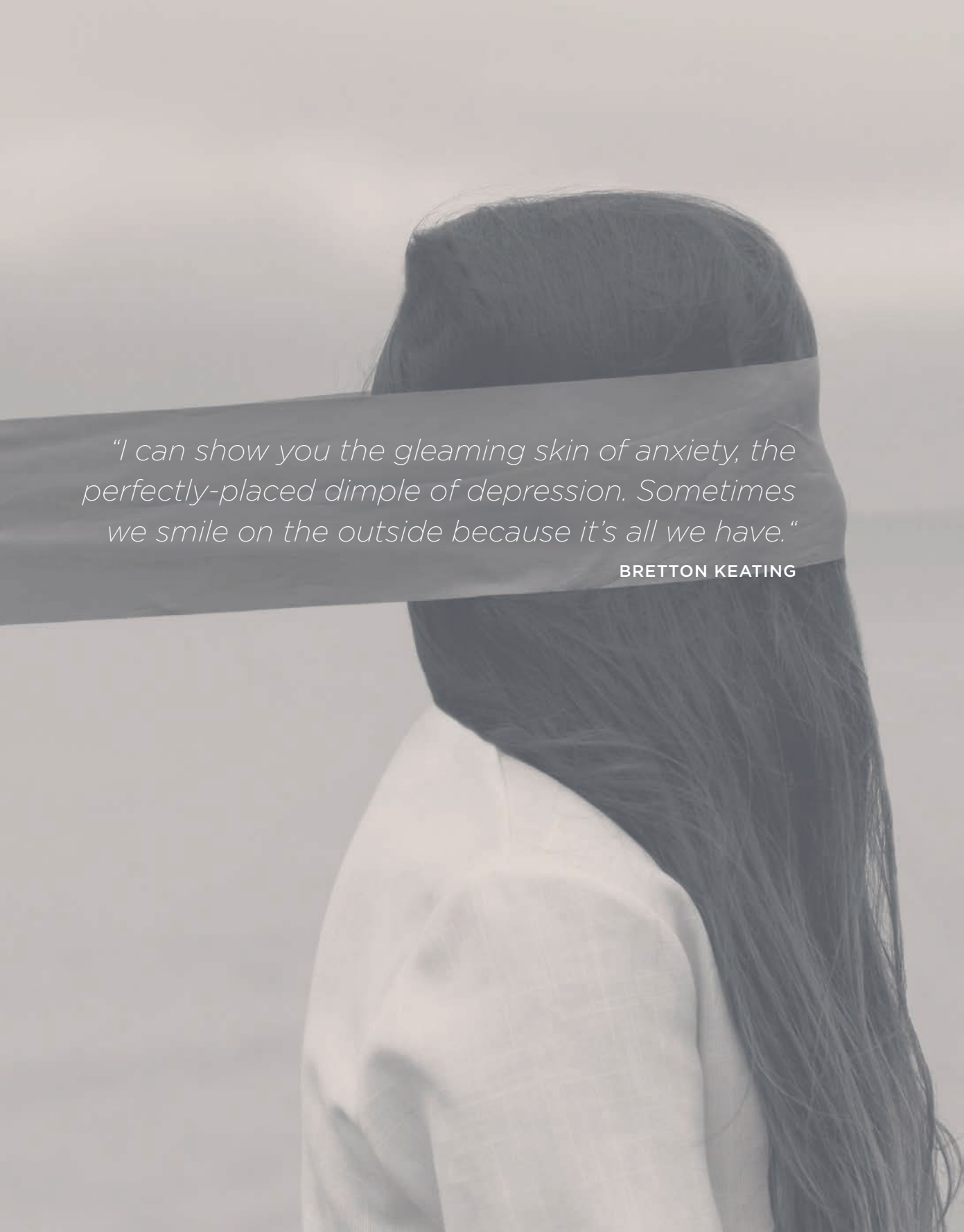
*The stardust you are made of is
the very essence of Support.
Your cells exist to Support you.*

*“You closing your eyes on a sunny day
doesn’t mean that the sun isn’t shining.
It still shines.
It’s whether or not you
will be able to embrace it and see it.
That’s really the trick.
Open your eyes....
maybe even just one eye....
maybe just squint a little bit....
and let it in.
You deserve to feel that love.
You deserve to feel that warmth.”*
~ Aziza Binti

You deserve to feel that Support.

TRACY STAMPER is a dancer at heart, in mind, of body, and with words. Her writing has been featured in *Rebelle Society* and *Elephant Journal*. Her current favorite colors are purple, orange and glitter. She likes her chocolate dark, her inspiration flowing and her car dances to be uninhibited. Website: [facebook.com/shinesistarshine/](https://www.facebook.com/shinesistarshine/)



A person with long, dark, wavy hair is shown from the chest up, wearing a white jacket. A horizontal grey band is positioned across their face, completely obscuring their eyes and nose. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey. The overall mood is contemplative and mysterious.

"I can show you the gleaming skin of anxiety, the perfectly-placed dimple of depression. Sometimes we smile on the outside because it's all we have."

BRETTON KEATING

Support – Comes from Within

BRETTON KEATING

I believe others can meet us only as deeply as we've met ourselves. So for many years, this meant I largely felt alone. Perhaps for this reason, support was a sentiment that, for this chapter of my life, felt nearly impossible to find.

I was living a life of falsity. I lay frozen in a river of rushing colors I refused to see. My eyes were closed wide shut. My ears blocked from the outside in.

And in the pinnacle of falsehood, the universe conspired, as it does, to set me out alone. I moved into my own place against intuitive warnings that I would not be happy doing so, and no less than a week later, felt my heart ripped out from under me and shred to pieces. I lay broken on a stone-cold floor, among cracks of black mold lining tiles bleached a starking white.

I had been living a future life, with blatant disregard for my present state of blindness. And when the fairy tale came crashing down, I had no choice but to find myself again.

In order to do so, I needed to distance myself from nearly everyone.

I remember realizing one night that many of my relationships were

one-sided. I was exhausted from crossing the river, feeling as though I was forever travelling upstream. I felt so lonely, so unsupported, so unseen. Because deep down, I wasn't supporting myself. That evening I opted for a different route. Floating the other direction, I wandered around an art store in a state of lostness.

I found myself amid the chaos of untapped potential.

As soon as I stopped seeking support outside myself, I found a deep-seated strength to support myself within.

I remember reaching a point where I was so happy being alone in my messy studio-slash-apartment, covered in paint and cooking five things at once, that I opted to spend days upon nights on my own. In the past, I had lived a neverending quest for distraction. Now, I began to recognize what I was truly seeking, and my actions started to support that internal quest.

As I grew in my relationship with myself, which, up to then, I had mostly disregarded, I gained clarity on who I am, what gives me life, and how I feel supported.

Today the level of support in my life amazes me. Yes, sometimes I experience dark moments. But I am getting better at communicating with others how they can support me both inside and out of the darkness. It's a constant practice. And in order to communicate outwardly, I need to consistently come back within, asking myself—what feels supportive in this moment? And then again, in this next one?

Perhaps the most interesting thing about support is how it changes. What feels supportive in one instance becomes a hindrance in another. It boils down not to what shape or form the support takes, but rather the feeling beneath. When somebody offers support from love, we can sense it deeply. And ultimately, this is the truest form of support available.

Sometimes we think we act from love, but really our ego holds other surface-level intentions. I want to keep you close, because I'm afraid of what may happen when you leave. She helps me because it makes her

As soon as I stopped seeking support outside myself, I found a deep-seated strength to support myself within.

look a certain way. He likes the attention he receives when he plays the role of knight in shining armor.

There's always the involvement of ego; it's impossible to live without it. But it's trying to offer support from a deeper place, regardless of what the ego wants or says or does, that's what matters. It's the showing up, fully raw and present and available to the person in front of you and their respective rawness. It's holding each other up, even when it means you may be dragged down.

My pastor spoke recently about selfless love, and how it means to give part of yourself for another's wellbeing. And how *challenging* is this, especially in the new age world of pseudo spirituality and all its emphasis on boundaries and filling your own cup first. Healthy boundaries are important, don't get me wrong, but there's a certain magic that happens when we reach over the wall to someone in need. We often have no idea the impact doing so can have on another person.

I know people who only talk to me when I'm happy. When I'm smiling, they flock.

Truth is, I've battled depression on and off throughout my life, often

hidden behind a smile. I've always felt deeply, living primarily through my emotional body, except for in the moments when I numbed myself because all the feeling became too much.

Many people often have no idea what or how much we're feeling.

I can show you the gleaming skin of anxiety, the perfectly-placed dimple of depression. Sometimes we smile on the outside because it's all we have.

Last year, I experienced perhaps my deepest bout of depression yet. I reached a point where I no longer wanted to live. I didn't actively consider suicide, yet I didn't see how I could possibly fit in the world. I wanted out.

The day my puppy and I found each other, that changed. I wanted to live again.

She was so *small* when she came to me, I could fit her in the crook of my arm. I was afraid to sleep with her in the bed because I thought I might roll over and crush her.

Her mother had rejected her on the streets of India. She came with bite marks on her head and the biggest appetite for life. She still lives this way. I've volunteered at an animal shelter, and I notice this pattern with

*She sat with me and my messiness
And in that simple gesture, she showed
me the beauty and ability of support.
To see.*

the runts of the litters. The smallest of the batch often have these feisty, unstoppable spirits. They give life their all with every ounce they've got.

And so my 2-kilo puppy supported me back to life. I had to become a fighter. People could no longer stampede over me, because now it wasn't just me, there was another creature involved, and it was the two of us together. I decided I would no longer accept the toxic situations I had lived with in the past. I would fight for a life in which she I could live, healthily, together.

It hasn't been easy. Travelling with a puppy is one of the more difficult paths I've tread. For six weeks, we lived in a seaside village on the west coast of India. I didn't know anyone; the only friend I had there left after a couple of days. Regardless, I still found the universe offers exactly the support that I need in each moment.

One night, after spending weeks trying to figure out how my puppy and I would get to the next place, which involved piles of documentation and a wild goose chase through ambiguously specific rules...not my forté, I broke down sobbing when puppy wouldn't listen to me and come inside. I had just spent an hour pulling ticks off her body, after chasing two giant spiders off the wall. All I wanted was to sleep. I was afraid to leave her outside because of leopard attacks on dogs in the neighborhood.

While screaming my head off at a scared pup who understands human emotion on a deeper level than I can comprehend, my neighbors, a Ukrainian couple, came outside, sat me down, gave me warm lemon water, and rubbed my back. I kept apologizing for the scene I had caused. Throughout my life, I have been taught to apologize for my emotional outbursts. Feeling as deeply as I do is unacceptable. Unless it's happiness, of course. Anything else best be swept away with the spiders on the wall.

After my third or fourth apology, my neighbor turned to me and said, "So, you're emotional. Many talented people are." And that was it. No trying to change me. No telling me I needed to get a handle on the highs

and lows. No sending me links to articles on emotional balance, anxiety and depression. She offered none of the responses I've been conditioned to receive. Instead, she sat with me and my messiness. And in that simple gesture, she showed me the beauty and ability of support. To see.

Love means seeing another person, as he or she really is, and then walking alongside him or her on their respective journey. It means being intuitively in tune with the level of support that person needs, moment to moment.

When we're seen, our true selves shine through. And these true selves, they can overcome anything. From spiders on the wall and a tick-covered fur ball, to the depths of depression and heartbreak.

When we support one another with love we become unstoppable.

BRETTON KEATING is a yoga instructor for adults and children, barre instructor, Reiki healer, writer, and artist. For her heart-centered writings, please visit her blog (brettonkeating.com). For creative work, including poetry and your fairy tale within, here is her website (whitecottonrose.com).



EMOTIONS

Learning the Language of Emotion

LYSA BLACK

Learning the language of emotion allows us to hear and learn from our own soul within. The part of us that existed before life on earth and the part of us that will go on after our physical body has died. Tuning into our feelings and interpreting the language of your soul can become the single most powerful act to return to the sovereign authority on your truth, identity and purpose. This language is intended to allow us to know our own soul. This powerful language of emotion can communicate to us the most valuable, accurate and reliable information that we need to feel guided, supported and safe in this world. If we do not know who we are, then we cannot authentically respond from our truth in the myriad of situations that arise in life.

For me, emotions are the language of the soul. A language I was never taught... a language I never heard and a language I never saw anyone else speaking when I was growing up. For me it was attention-demanding internal pain that I could not define which invited me to learn this unknown language.

I started with: *pain* which I now know means — Pay attention. Pain was the first ‘word’ I learnt within the language of emotion. This pain I

was introduced to was initially a bit like screaming, I realise now that when the strange whispers and unknown dialogue within remained unheard for too long the volume increases until by sheer force it captivated my attention! I was captivated by this new language and sought through experience to uncover the meaning behind every emotion.

Fast forward ten years and I now know that emotion is the language of the soul. While it's easy to be captivated by the voices outside of us that subtly or overtly intend to: teach, dictate and compel us to their own set of rules and instructions... Our emotions are the sacred language of our own soul, offering us guidance on the truth of who we are, what we are here to do and how we can respond to each moment living from our truth.

We have been unconsciously taught through the behaviour of everyone around us that our feelings are meant to be stopped, shut-off, disregarded, hidden or ignored. Feelings are feared in modern society. We fear being seen as vulnerable, weak or insecure if we allow ourselves to display our feelings through our face, words or body. So a necessary social facade has been erected; where we train the muscles in our faces to stay still despite the deep surging and movement of our emotions within us. Under such repressed conditions our private emotional expression can become more volatile and explosive. Many have used this experience to confirm the 'danger' of emotion and our need to 'control' and 'repress' them at any cost. We live in a society that is compulsively driven by emotion altering choices that lead to addiction: coffee, alcohol, media, food, sex and spending are all tools we have been taught to use to alter our emotional state. As Dallin H. Oakes says "You can never get enough of what you don't need."

When we do not know what we feel, why we feel it we feel compelled to control our own emotional state using any one of the many methods listen above. This means that we can end up masking our ability to

*We live in a society that is
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emotion altering choices.*

actually know ourselves on a soul level. I believe every emotion carries sacred information from our soul that we can learn how to interpret for ourselves. Here are my personal interpretations for you to reflect on and consider. Please tune into yourself to perceive if these are accurate and relevant for you?

PAIN = PAY ATTENTION WITHIN

When we use our pain to tune in and listen within, we are heeding the call to listen. This allows the pain to soften and commences our inner tutoring (Awakening our *in-tuition*).

ANGER = I HAVE BEEN DISRESPECTED

Learning to interpret the message of anger from our soul supports us to comprehend the boundaries we require. The limitations of what others

can and cannot do to us. Anger guides us to the precise clarity we need to know about ourselves personally so that we can freely communicate ‘this’ is OK and ‘this’ is not to everyone we encounter. The communication of our boundaries allow us to self-honor; and the outcome of sharing these boundaries with those around us is an opening to new levels of being honoured (or removing ourselves from those who cannot honor us).

SADNESS = I HAVE LOST SOMETHING OF GREAT VALUE TO ME

Learning how to interpret the message of sadness from our soul supports us to comprehend what is of true value. We only feel genuine sadness when something that was genuinely precious to us becomes lost, taken or otherwise becomes inaccessible. Sometimes we think something is precious and it’s actually not, and vice versa... we can be careless towards people, experiences and things that we are surprised to find actually do hold tremendous value to us. Sadness is the emotion which communicates such value – although it will only be felt once an item, person or experience has gone.

Sadness can be one of the most repressed emotions because the common societal assumption is that ‘what’s gone is gone’ and we need to just ‘get over it’. Unfortunately this perspective actually causes these ‘sad’ feelings to sink deeper within us and become embedded in our experience — meaning we will actually feel increasingly more sad because we refuse to acknowledge our sadness. Eventually the feeling then becomes more pronounced and loud as it is seeking to be heard, understood and deliver its message. The actual benefit of truly acknowledging what we have lost is that we can clarify and confirm within ourselves what is actually really valuable to ourselves on a soul level. We can release the societal expectations of what we’re suppose to value and surrender the expectations of trying to live up to having or enjoying what others appear to enjoy and get into alignment with our own truth. Sadness allows us to uncover what

is truly valuable to us so that we can seek to fill our lives with everything that is of true worth.

JEALOUSY = I SEE SOMEONE GIVING THEMSELVES SOMETHING I WANT THAT I WON'T LET MYSELF HAVE YET

Learning how to interpret the message of jealousy from our soul supports us to comprehend what we truly desire. Seeing someone else experiencing something we do not have alerts us to a remembrance that we may be forgetting a sacred desire within ourselves. When desires arise in our hearts, it is not always the ideal time to bring them to life, so it's common for us to shelve these desires and wait for a more ideal time to bring them into fruition. Unfortunately in shelving some of these desires we can mistakenly forget them, and they can become forgotten. When the feeling of jealousy emerges, it is a kind and loving reminder from our soul that we have a desire that wants our attention.

GRIEF = A DEEP LOSS OF SOMETHING THAT I TRULY LOVE WHICH IS IRREPLACEABLE

Learning how to interpret the message of grief from our soul supports us to comprehend that love is eternal. We only feel grief when we have truly loved another soul. The truth about grief is that it represents the equal component of the love and devotion we felt for our beloved. The depth to which we have loved another soul marks the depth to which our grief needs to be expressed and felt.

FEAR = I AM ENCOUNTERING SOMETHING THAT IS UNKNOWN

Learning how to interpret the message of fear from our soul supports us to comprehend what we do not know. As we progress, age and expand, we always reach an element of non-knowingness that many shy away from. Fear can be so uncomfortable for some that they try to avoid it by

staying within their 'knowingness'. The value of fear is that we can recognise that we are touching the edge of our knowingness, which means from that point onward we can encounter newness, opening and expansion that we have not previously known.

Our souls speak to us through emotion, inviting us home. Home to a land where you can belong, where you are the sovereign Monarch.

I hope that you can be willing to learn this new language and give yourself permission to tune out the voices of must, should, now, here as we learn how to turn within and listen to our own souls.

LYSA BLACK is a Heart Healer who uses her gifts to help you return to the magic of your own heart. The more we can trust ourselves the more we can trust our gifts: the gut knowing, inner wisdom or intuitive guidance we all receive. If we listen, our hearts will help us to find the clarity, calm and magical healing shifts we need.

Lysa has been coaching and teaching women to remember the magic of their own hearts for eight years now. Healing her own heart allowed her to overcome anxiety, binge eating and a series of romantic break ups. Lysa believes that we all have magical hearts that want to guide us to experience more peace, love and joy!



VULNERABILITY

Vulnerability

CASHA DOEMLAND

*“Do not equate my softness for
weakness when my heart has
always been my greatest strength.”*

I am a woman who lives a life led by her heart; a woman who loves unconditionally through and through. I believe in compassion and living life raw, honest and in the light of vulnerability. Yet, living like this often creates heartache, disappointment and sometimes an abundance pain. I have had my heart shattered and the ground beneath my feet give way. I have loved unapologetically only to be told I would never be loved in return. I have experienced the intolerable pain of losing something you hold so dear to your heart.

Through the tears and the aching, I have been told to harden my interior, to peel my heart off of my sleeve and to tuck it safely away within the

comfort of my rib cage. And each time I have the same reply for it does not matter who is on the other side of those words.

“No, thank you. I am privileged to have my heart, to love as deeply as I do and to see the beauty in the world that most tend to overlook. My heart, as fragile as it may seem because it is sewn together and bandaged up like a rag doll continues to beat vivaciously and with a ferocity so intense a great hurricane could not compete. I have lived more authentically and lush than individuals twice my age and I would not trade that for a polished heart and hubris.”

CASHA DOEMLAND LA-born, Georgia-bred and one-half of a set of identical twins, Casha spends her days writing poetry and prose and exploring the world. She’s a classic film enthusiast, runner, dog walker, and collector of quotes and tattoos.

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Vulnerability

HEIDI PRAHL

I used to think vulnerability was a word that implied weakness, gullibility. It felt risky and exposed. And I didn't want to be any of those things.

This word, rather the definition of this word, holds a particularly special meaning in my life. That wasn't always the case. In fact, it wasn't even part of my vocabulary for many years, as I lived my happy go lucky life as a wife and momma to four beautiful children. When life is good, who really thinks about vulnerability

Certainly not me. Until I was forced to. Until my vulnerability was taken advantage of. My cocoon of happiness shattered, shards of broken dreams littered around me.

Just like that, being vulnerable takes on a whole new meaning. Protection, safety and emotional stability become priority one. *And vulnerability becomes a liability.*

And then life goes on, with or without you. So you stop letting yourself feel vulnerable, but at least you feel safe.

But safety can become an idol. Something you protect at all costs. Something you even end up laying your life down for.

Because the truth is that a life without risk is really no life at all. That's comfort zone, self protection, guarded living. There's no room for beauty and growth and change in a life that's sole focus is survival without pain.

I've been there. I've lived the stifled life that says it's too risky to be vulnerable, for almost a decade now. Shutting out perceived danger and threat feels like the right thing to do after you've been hurt, blindsided, devastated. But then we also shut out the possibilities of what may be when we choose to live a wide open life. Deep love, connection and even our very soul retreat to the shadows in our efforts to self protect. The truth about vulnerability is that it's one of the main ingredients to a rich and meaningful life.

Real life is bittersweet. Vulnerability opens you up to both the bitter and the sweet. It's a dance, a rhythm. You can't really enjoy one without the other.

These days I'm counting the cost of being vulnerable, susceptible, open to being hurt. I've seen both sides of this coin now - living vulnerably and living protected. And if I'm being honest, there's no comparison. The freedom of a wide open life wins every time. But I can't un-know what I already know. I can't take back the hurt. I can't un-feel the wounds. And when I start to weigh all of that it feels too risky to be vulnerable again.

But then I remember the thick blanket of dark clouds I've been living (*surviving*) under as the banner of safety. The light of this very life can't peek through this wall I've built. My heart is hidden behind a bullet proof window and there is no "break in case of emergency" clause to this glass. Sure, maybe I'm safe from perceived dangers, but I'm also blocked from truly, deeply feeling the good things in this world, or, truly, feeling anything at all sometimes (as an overly sensitive person, not feeling anything can be it's own type of prison).

There is no real way to live in this world and guard yourself from the possibility of all pain. But that illusion is sometimes enough to keep us

*Real life is bittersweet.
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stuck there. The reality is I know that I want to embrace vulnerable living again, and each day I'm fighting to inch my way back.

I'm learning that we need to redefine vulnerability, see it differently. It doesn't have to imply weakness or susceptibility. Vulnerability, at its core, is actually very beautiful. To be vulnerable means to be real and authentic. Vulnerability is the very breath in our lungs and it is what makes us human. It connects us to others and allows us to feel things deeply. Being vulnerable is the opposite of weak, in actuality, it's very brave and takes great courage and strength. It tells those around us that they matter, they're worth the risk. Vulnerability burns truth within us

and forces us out of our comfort zone and into real life. Life that is rich and crafted with meaning. Vulnerability says that we recognize that life will be messy, relationships are hard, we will have to fight the urge to run and hide and self protect, but in the end we understand that it will be worth it. That we're worth it. That the we have something to offer the world and in response, the world has something to offer us, and we don't want to miss it.

Taking the time to see vulnerability through new eyes, yields to the understanding that there is power and life and truth there. I'm choosing that life. I'm choosing freedom. And I'm realizing that *VULNERABLE* is exactly who I want to be.

HEIDI PRAHL is a Chicago based writer and photographer who appreciates and cultivates honest conversation around difficult topics.

She is a lover of Jesus, her family, beach glass, good coffee, exceptional books and is an absolute foodie at heart.

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VulnerABILITY

TRACY STAMPER

VulnerABILITY is Strength not wearing its armor.

Vulnerability can show up as a state of fragility. In the beginning of my relationship with Vulnerability, Vulnerability always expressed itself solely in this way. It involved feeling unsafe. Exposed. Susceptible. At risk. Helpless. Hopeless. Small. Teary. Weak. Its shoulders were caved-in and hunched over. Vulnerability and I curled up in corners, protecting a hurting heart. Vulnerability was a bird with a wounded wing, exposed to the elements and to danger.

Back then, when Vulnerability was one-dimensional for me, it was stuck in the strict definition of woundedness. The Latin root of the word Vulnerability fits my early experiences of this emotion. This was before I discovered that Vulnerability can be a wellspring of deep strength.

The word is derived from the Latin root word ‘vulnus,’ which translates into ‘wound.’ The adjective ‘vulnerabilis’ found its way into the English language as ‘vulnerable.’ The root speaks to susceptibility to being wounded, physically and/or emotionally, whether by attack, harm, damage or criticism.

This ‘wound’ at the root of the word is merely the beginning of the

story. VulnerABILITY wishes to co-author with us a story that is so much more dynamic and empowering than the setting of the scene in the first few pages of our story. ‘Wound’ is the root, the roots of the tree in the darkness underground. This is simply the opening chapter.

Tree roots dig down into dark soil. Branches reach for sunlight. Just as trees grow and mature, this word has evolved. Until I dug down into my own roots and found a willingness to surrender into Vulnerability, my experience of this emotion remained flat and fragile.

Then, the word redefined itself for me.

Times of Vulnerability are asking us to feel to heal.

Vulnerability is an invitation into vulnerABILITY.

VulnerABILITY is the ability to remain open to growth born of fragility.

Especially when it first arrives, Vulnerability lands in my bones as fragility. Now, however, I also sense Vulnerability’s arrival as an invitation to sink into my roots, amp up my self-care, regain the security of feeling grounded, and fortify. Vulnerability can become a portal into Strength. The open space of vulnerABILITY holds vast room for transformation. When I am ready, I can step into the invitation to explore how to shift from fragile Vulnerability into the Strength of vulnerABILITY.

Several years ago, the words ‘Vulnerability in Strength ~ Strength in Vulnerability’ began dancing in my consciousness. I could sense the interplay of these energies, yet couldn’t fully grasp or articulate their relationship. This dynamic dance was always on the periphery for me, piquing curiosity.

My moment of discovery came during an apprenticeship to become a Trainer of Nia, a mind~body holistic fitness and wellness practice. Part of the process involved guest teaching training sessions and assessments with my mentor.

One of the sessions I guest taught touched on moving emotional energies through our bodies. This aspect of Nia has been so life-changing

*VulnerABILITY is the
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and life-giving for me that I experience it as nothing short of pure magic. Speaking to the power of this practice often moves me to tears of enormous gratitude. That is the case to this day, years later, and it was no different as an apprentice. I cried while speaking of my journey of reclaiming health.

When my mentor checked in with me after this session, my self-evaluation began with a critique of my delivery. I was critical of an aspect of how I presented the material. To clarify, she asked: “Is it because you started crying?”

The confidence and certainty in my immediate response to this question took me by surprise: “No! Being moved to tears while standing in my truth is when I am most in my power.”

Whoa! There it was. I hadn’t yet realized this truth until speaking it aloud to my mentor. She nodded.

I had not yet fully consciously realized the power and magnetism of seeing someone – and certainly not *being* someone – who is able and willing to fully show up within vulnerABILITY. But my words struck a chord

for me: “*Being moved to tears while standing in my truth is when I am most in my power.*” Yes.

This heart-to-heart with my mentor marked the moment that the words ‘Vulnerability in Strength ~ Strength in Vulnerability’ lit up for me: I felt these words in my body. While delivering this session, I had owned my story of traversing challenging emotional terrain of a decade plus of severe depression. Through tears, I stood in my strength and used my voice to speak my Truth. I spoke to a time of intense Vulnerability in my life, and I spoke to my healing journey. The Vulnerability of sharing such a personal journey blossomed into the vulnerABILITY of choosing to share my story from a place of healing. By remaining open to my desire to shine the light for others who may travel similar terrain while opening up about a tender time, I felt the word vulnerABILITY expand. It became multi-dimensional like a gem that reveals its many hues, depth and sparkle when viewed through different facets. That was the moment in which the meaning of the word Vulnerability completely shifted.

*I felt the word vulnerABILITY expand.
It became multi-dimensional like a
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When Strength arrives dressed in vulnerABILITY without armor, its power is positively electric. It is palpable. This is the Strength that doesn't wear armor. It doesn't need armor: it wields Truth. Empowerment comes through the immense courage it takes to remain open in the midst of it all. On the other side of courage, the cloak of vulnerABILITY lined in silken Strength awaits.

Wedding our words with authentic expression of vulnerABLE emotion – no holding back or making our feelings or self small – results in this magic. Showing up in this way shifts the energy in a room. When I see others do this, it reaches, teaches and moves me. And in that moment of reflection with my mentor, I was able to see and source my own power.

My power arose from what once felt wounded me in.

Honoring the root of the word, vulnerABILITY speaks to a 'wound.' What is a wound but an opening in one's protective layer of skin? In time, a cut on the skin heals by the body's miraculous ability to form a protective seal or scab. Likewise, an emotional wound asks for healing. In the initial fragility of Vulnerability, can we find a way to bravely remain open or regain openness?

As with our skin, the healing of this wound happens in natural time. There is no forcing healing. Sometimes we must first curl up and lick our wounds. Sinking into the darkness and regaining Strength is often how we find our way back into the light. Stories always begin with Chapter One.

Can we find our voice and begin to tell our story? Whether that voice moves fully and evenly into the space with clarity and density or quivers forth from wobbly knees and a butterflied belly, it fills the space with resonant Truth. This is a Strength that comes from the depths, right out of the crucible of the fire of transformation.

Often, this is Strength training in a manner we would have never asked for. It is the Strength training of a wounded healer. And those who have healed their own wounds are the ones I trust to help guide the way.

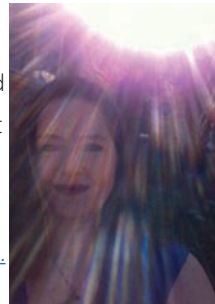
Tears that cascade down the cheeks of wounded healers are the diamonds formed by the intense pressure of having walked through the fire. Tears glisten to decorate Truth.

VulnerABILITY. 'The ability to remain open to growth born of fragility.'

VulnerABILITY transforms us by arriving with this question...

While feeling fragile, can you root down, open up and enter the portal of transformation by living and speaking your Truth?

TRACY STAMPER is a dancer at heart, in mind, of body, and with words. Her writing has been featured in Rebelle Society and Elephant Journal. Her current favorite colors are purple, orange and glitter. She likes her chocolate dark, her inspiration flowing and her car dances to be uninhibited. Website: [facebook.com/shinesistarshine/](https://www.facebook.com/shinesistarshine/)



Vulnerability

KRISTINA JOHNSON

TAO

Verse 22

*If you want to become whole,
first let yourself be broken.
If you want to become straight,
let yourself be crooked.
If you want to become full,
let yourself be empty.
If you want to be reborn,
let yourself die.
If you want to be given everything,
give everything up.*

I stand alone and vulnerable at my kitchen window staring out at the darkening sky. A winter storm is rapidly pulsing it's way towards us. Rotting leaves rustle in the rising wind scattering noisy fragments and debris into the fading light, the sounds deepening the fear already churning in

my belly. Tiny shards of frozen ice begin to pelt the window in a rhythmic pattern. The symphony of sleet sends shivers up my spine, reminding me why this specific month haunts me. This is not my story. It is the story of my grandmother, and the sadness and vulnerability she experienced every year of her life when the month of February swept in on icy wings. We all have family stories that travel through time, one generation to another. Stories that we share so that we will not be forgotten when our bodies vanish from this earth. Tales that contain lessons that must be taught to those we love so that they will learn how to dance with the dangers and survive.

Each year when the snow, ice and freezing rain of February returned to chill our bones, we would find my grandmother sitting at her kitchen table with a cup of camomile tea grasped in her pale weathered hands and a far a way look on her face, quietly announcing, more to herself than the rest of us, that “February is the cruelest month.” In the beginning, I did not understand. February is a month filled with love, sweet Valentine notes, my sister’s birthday and above all else, big red boxes of delicious chocolates to give and to devour. What’s not to love? My young mind could not comprehend why she was unable to embrace the frivolity and light hearted playfulness of the shortest sweetest month of the year.

As an adult who has also suffered bone crushing loss and heartbreak, I now have a deeper understanding of the sadness that squeezed her heavy heart, but even as a small child I recognized the sadness and vulnerability that seeped into her bones each February, weakening her voice and threatening to suck the life from her spirit. Our children watch us closely, waiting to see how we decide to be in the world. They see our weakness as well as our strengths and carry forward the invisible messages we imprint on their souls. To watch my grandmother expose her raw emotions frightened me. She was the warrior that kept our family safe. I would later learn that warriors come in many shapes and sizes and the bravest of them all

In silence, we clung tightly to each other, welcoming the healing powers of connection and compassion. Exposed and hidden wounds once filled with darkness and despair were magically repaired and renewed.

wear their hearts on their sleeves and are willing to express their emotions and expose their vulnerability when necessary. This lesson, however, would take time to fully unravel.

In those early years when February arrived intent on destruction, I did not ask for answers. I merely crawled into my grandmother's welcoming lap and melted my tense body into her softness. Her warm embrace calmed my nerves, comforted my fears, a nest of safety and security in which to rest. In silence, we clung tightly to each other, welcoming the healing powers of connection and compassion. Exposed and hidden wounds once filled with darkness and despair were magically repaired and renewed. Bound together, breathing as one, we found the strength to face our fears and carry on.

When my grandmother deemed me old enough to understand why she sometimes allowed emotion to overcome her, she shared the story of how one merciless day in February death came knocking on the door of her childhood home demanding the lives of her two younger sisters,

Mamie and Ida. During the early 1900's, diphtheria epidemics ravaged the United States and physicians watched in dread, for they were helpless to combat the rapid and fatal course of this awful disease. Life taught my grandmother that unrelenting heartbreak and despair would be a part of her existence, but it had also taught her that along with suffering, there would also be survival, recovery and hope for a better tomorrow. I am reminded of a lesson taught by the Tao. "To become whole, first let yourself be broken." Falling apart and allowing ourselves to be wounded and vulnerable can actually be the very thing we need to heal and become whole once again. Though I doubt my grandmother ever read the book of Tao, I do believe she embraced and understood the importance of being broken. She was fearless in befriending her weaknesses and embracing the difficult emotions. Her willingness to expose her raw nerve endings to the world was an act of courage that I will never forget. A person who is willing to open and expose the naked vulnerability of their heart is a true warrior. Release the warriors!

She was fearless in befriending her weaknesses and embracing the difficult emotions. Her willingness to expose her raw nerve endings to the world was an act of courage.

*Be scared, but be willing to go for it.
Speak your truth with integrity and
honor your broken places. Liberate
yourself through your vulnerability.*

The author Brene Brown has much to say about vulnerability and the importance of owning our own story, but she also warns us that embracing our vulnerability can be both risky and frightening for most of us. Vulnerability, she states is “the willingness to show up and let ourselves be seen.” The problem, however, is that too many people fear being seen and fear being vulnerable. They worry that sharing their stories, revealing their mistakes, errors and imperfections to the world comes at too great a cost. Hiding and pretending to be someone they are not becomes a safer place to exist. Brown reminds her readers that, “Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of light.” If we are brave and let people see our authentic self, warts and all, we open ourselves up to possibilities, not endings.

When researching the definition of vulnerability, words like unprotected, defenseless, danger, exposed, and open to assault jumped off the page and punched me in the gut. Further descriptions included; a weakness, helpless, in a precarious position, open to criticism, being wounded or hurt, and susceptible to emotional injury. Honestly, none of those

things sound inviting and actually feel quite painful, so why in the world would someone willingly step into the space of emotional vulnerability. It sounds terrifying! Wouldn't it be better to build a giant wall of brick and mortar with barbed wire on top to keep the sadness out? Though building such a wall to surround and protect us might at first seem beneficial, the simple fact is that those walls also keep out the joy.

Tear down your walls. Be wild and free. Lean in. Show up. Boldly expose your authentic self to the waiting world. Have the courage to be imperfect and allow yourself to get a few scars. This connects you to the rest of the suffering world. It's ok to be frightened. Be scared, but be willing to go for it. Speak your truth with integrity and honor your broken places. Liberate yourself through your vulnerability.

Live with the heart of a warrior.

KRISTINA JOHNSON is a lover of all things that inspire creativity and invite happiness. In addition to teaching Vinyasa Yoga and whirling her cares away on the dance floor, she makes time to travel the world, create art, do cartwheels in the grass and make play and laughter a priority.



Vulnerability

AIMEE DUFRESNE

The flutters in your stomach...

The rush of adrenaline...

Sweat pouring...

Breath tight...

Mouth dry...

Mind blank...

Cells shaking...

Bursts of red...blue...black...

Darkness.

The darkness before the light.

Across the ocean of vulnerability lies the love, compassion, and connection I crave. I sit on the shore, shielding myself from diving in. Why is it so hard to swim across? Sisterhood sits there, patiently waiting for me to join the ranks of highly powerful, creative and conscious women.

I dip in a toe. Wading in a further, wondering how long it might take to master this ocean. The land across the water looks so inviting. So I set out to swim. But too soon I'm flailing, failing. I'm halfway there but I'm floundering. The land seems further with each stroke ahead.

Fear seizes. It chokes down my authenticity. Fear puts the mask over my face once again. It washes me back to the shore of status quo. It tells me to pretend. Act as if I'm the success I wish. *Don't show your weakness*, Fear whispers. *It's not safe. Show it and you'll never succeed*. The tidal wave spits me back to the beginning. And I stay safe on shore for a while. But it is boring. My heart longs for more. Adventure and fulfillment are across that ocean yet Fear keeps hanging on me like a heavy wet blanket. It reminds me my many mistakes. *YOU'LL NEVER MAKE IT THERE*, it shouts as I tiptoe to the water again, hoping to go unseen by that which holds me. Reaching the edge, Fear shakes its head. *This is a bad idea, You'll regret it. You'll never make it across. You'll drown in vulnerability. Stay safe. For god's sakes, stay safe. On the shore. Shun vulnerability. You don't need it.*

But the shore beyond beckons. Love lies here. You are welcome here. You belong here. Its sweet voice of hope seep through the split seconds of silence between the lyrics of Fear.

I dive. Sharing myself with the sea. The darkness embraces me.

Intention kicks in. Action follows. I *will* make it.

Vulnerability cradles me. It is not the vicious enemy Fear had me believe. I float in its gentle arms.

Vulnerability cradles me. It is not the vicious enemy Fear had me believe. I float in its gentle arms.

More surprising still, I feel the arms of others in the ocean of Vulnerability. The circle of sisterhood starts here. We support one another. Those closer to shore offer assistance to those further out. Spinning, swimming, thrashing, bashing, floating, flowing. Within the uncertainty, one thing becomes clear: whatever happens, it was worth the ride.

Finally, feet meet sand.

Planted on the shore of freedom, the sweet spot I had been eyeing and envious of for so long is now mine. I shield my eyes from the beaming sun and look back across to the shore from which I started this journey. A dark mist shrouds the sands there. Fear remains, yet it can no longer steal my joy, my love, my life. I am free. At last.

Thank you, Vulnerability.

AIMEE DUFRESNE is a Joy Catalyst and soul-shifting creator, writer, and traveler. She is the proud author of *Keep Going: From Grief to Growth*, a memoir about love, loss, life's journey and the power of perseverance. Aimee is currently writing her next book, *52 Lessons I Learned From My Father*. Website: aimeedufresne.com.



Vulnerability

KASIA LINDAHL

*Come closer.
Show up.
Skip the masks.
They mean nothing to me.
I long to get to know the true YOU.
To SEE you.
To see your true LIGHT.
In your light I will bathe my naked face.*

Vulnerability is the courage to be authentic.

It shows up when my urge for deep connection with another human being is stronger than my fear of being judged for my flaws and shortcomings.

After years of shallow encounters and playing safe in relations I lost interest in people pleasing. More correctly I lost the energy, I got burned out, and then I simply had to find another strategy of interacting with the surrounding world.

Authenticity was the only answer. As it always is.

Authenticity is the sexiest thing in the world. Next to a plate of sautéed

*Strangely, none of this comes
naturally to most of us.
It requires courage.
And a lot of practice.
Plus being present in the moment.
Try it.*

asparagus with few drops of extra virgin olive oil and salt flakes. And my husband.

Writing this text is an exercise in vulnerability. I reach out and I hope that what I have to offer is enough. More: I do the best I can, I engage in a subject which is important to me and what happens later is not up to me anymore. How my words will be received by anybody is not my story anymore. I will survive either way. Because I showed up. I did my part.

And I will do the same tomorrow. In a grocery store, at a job interview or a dinner party.

Me. The only thing you get when you meet me, is me. To the best of my ability. And when I meet you I want you. I can help you to carry your distress for a while, I can hear your stories but I don't want you to hide behind your drama, or your masks.

Strangely, none of this comes naturally to most of us.

It requires courage.

And a lot of practice.

Plus being present in the moment.

Try it.

It is very refreshing after years of pretending to have it all covered.

After *trying* to have it all covered.

After years of chasing perfect...

Please, keep in mind: This will not save you from pain or disappointment.

It might change your relation to it though.

I came to realise that the idea of being *hurt* lies all together in my own hands. I am in charge of my own pain. In other words: you will not hurt me if I won't let you. I will learn plenty about myself and about you, but I refuse to be involved in dramas of our egos.

Thanks to this I came to understand that vulnerability is not even risky. It is necessary. It is the only way.

And when the person in front of you is not there yet?

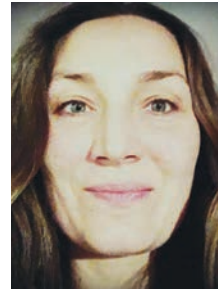
Serve them with a good example, show them some of your most shameless moves, your truest self.

Let them see that it is totally safe. And then release them.

In worst case you are just becoming someones hilarious story at a dinner party.

KASIA LINDAHL An explorer of the human being, with all too long experience of human doing. Practising awareness and connection of the physical body and mind with help of yoga, meditation, plant based mindful cooking, writing, breathing, observing the nature, anything basically.

Website: zebrazone.se



*Love is the companion of vulnerability. It holds the
fragility and dares vulnerability to show itself.*

KIRAN



Halfway Broken Things

BRETTON KEATING

So much has broken in the six months I spent in India. I've gone through three purses, three pairs of sandals, two rings, countless clothing items, a dog leash, a puppy carry case, two pairs of glasses, a laptop charger, two phone chargers, two scooters, a couch, a coffee mug, and more that I'm forgetting at the moment. Everything that has broken has been something I needed to replace. You can only walk barefoot for so long. It's too strange to be coincidence, too striking to go unnoticed.

The last thing to break was my shattered-glass heart.

I wasn't looking to be swept off my feet. Most days it felt like I was only looking to survive.

Yet swept away I was, and in the whirlwind I forgot to lock the door behind me. I left the entire thing ajar.

Some moments the past spins circles around us. It's easy to say I should have listened, in retrospect.

He said we wrote a fairy tale, but I had to disagree. Because the thing I discovered, albeit unintentionally, when I began writing fairy stories to begin with, is how *not* to separate myself from it all. I can travel through the twisted trail of a tale, wind up back on the other side and nothing

has changed yet nothing stays the same. I can try to focus on memorizing moments, knowing that nothing wraps itself in happily-ever-after, the end. I can lose myself, in each and every particle of time, each and every story, and last but not least, in our strange little fairy tale, but then at the end of the day, what does it matter? I have no control over any of it. It's already been written.

I told him I wouldn't for a second trade my imagination land for the ability to be intimately understood. I had no idea when I said those words, how deeply they would cut, the very next day.

For me, this is the essence of vulnerability: that which we must trade for the ability to be intimately understood.

Some of us appear vulnerable on the outside, but really we're hiding. We bare our hearts on paper but it means nothing because none of it is true.

When lightning strikes sand, it sometimes causes glass to form. I first heard of this phenomenon in a movie, and never questioned it until last weekend, when I understood what I've always known: that certainly, my heart must be made of glass. So, I investigated further. Turns out, the magical illusion in *Sweet Home Alabama* does, in fact, happen, but not quite as depicted in the film. The glass stays hidden beneath the earth for centuries after the strike, until enough erosion perhaps brings it to surface, to see the light of day. And so it goes: the epitome of nature's unique strength.

That which we deem most breakable has, in fact, weathered the masses.

The sky flashes purple, but only for a second. Too quick to notice, most of the time. The aftermath lies hidden beneath layers too complex to count.

Things are replaceable, but the heart isn't. I've left halfway broken things in bins inside and in front of dozens of temporary homes.

The next time, I tell myself, will be different. I won't be so open to the heartbreak. I won't invite it in. I will stand on guard and I will watch,

*Sometimes we become so
surrendered, we allow life to
sweep us off our feet even as it
steps on our toes in the process.*

ready and waiting for the eventual dagger of a free-fall. But even as I write this, I know its untruth.

Because I believe in people too much.

Goodbyes become easier even as leaving is hard. Sometimes we become so surrendered, we allow life to sweep us off our feet even as it steps on our toes in the process. We make a game of words not realizing that words are swords. The simplest of which break hearts each and every day.

You can fall in love in four days, you know. Or even less. I've fallen in a matter of minutes.

A dear friend warned me this would happen. He told me to be careful. Because, in his words (not mine), "Your heart is too big." I don't think my heart is any bigger than anybody else's, but I do know that it lies, open and bleeding, most of the time. For others or myself or a combination, I'm not so sure.

And so my heart continues to drip dark blood on a moonlit shoreline as she dances the green-toed possibility of next-time. The next time she lands somewhere, it will be in the place where the waves come to crash. For that is the only place she has ever belonged.

The further we dive into vulnerability, the stronger we become. It's cliché because it's true. You may break my heart into a thousand pieces but one day it just may make sense and I will keep on walking the entire time regardless. Even when I find myself absolutely floored. Writing these words brings tears to my eyes because right now I'm in a space where I don't believe that they're true.

Trusting in timing sounds nice, but timing is a liar. The only truth is the moon.

So here's why I'm done being vulnerable, with people, today: plain and simple, it hurts.

But in the end, it's not like I ever had any choice.

I've learned this before, but life tends to sound itself in similar notes until we start to listen. Whenever anyone is interested in the story of me, they are searching for something that I can't give. Because we all know I didn't create this story or any others. They just traveled through me.

Traveling through—what an immensely tiring way to live. But then it's the only way that makes any sense. The zipper closes shut and all the half-way broken things left behind in bins. I smile through tears and decide, yet again, that in the next place, I will be more on guard.

I let my guard down too soon, and that is always my biggest mistake.

BRETTON KEATING is a yoga instructor for adults and children, barre instructor, Reiki healer, writer, and artist. For her heart-centered writings, please visit her blog (brettonkeating.com). For creative work, including poetry and your fairy tale within, here is her website (whitecottonrose.com).





*Vulnerability is felt in the heart,
but can be noticed in the eyes.*

JEANETTE

TRUST



Trust lends a hand to help you up.

Trust encourages you to keep going.

*Trust takes you to places outside of
your comfort zone.*

*It extends a hand inviting you in to
places unknown.*

What is Trust?

AIMEE DUFRESNE

What is Trust?

Trust.

Pema Chodron writes about becoming comfortable with groundlessness. Accepting groundlessness.

Trust.

Leaping without knowing what lies ahead.

Trust.

My husband and I put trust to the test when we left any home base behind for a life of travel. The first night we arrived at a hotel en route and they had lost our reservations. Seeing the fear in my eyes, the man behind the counter comforted me, "It all works out in the end. Everything works out in the end."

Trust.

Is love truly love without it?

Trust.

Trust is what lies in the groundlessness.

Trust is the blanket on a cold night. An umbrella shielding you from the pounding rain.

Trust gets you through the tough times. Trust tells you it's going to be okay.

Trust whispers comforting words in your ears when your eyes are blurry with tears.

Trust lends a hand to help you up.

Trust encourages you to keep going.

Trust takes you to places outside of your comfort zone.

It extends a hand inviting you in to places unknown.

Trust is your private benefactor, reminding you of riches to come.

Trust holds your hand as you let go, again and again.

Trust promises more, better, bolder, wiser.

Trust is there, its sweet voice tempting you to savor every moment.

But will you listen?

Will you take the hand of Trust?

Will you heed its messages to let go, to rise again, to keep going?

Will you embrace the groundlessness, believing in Trust?

How different your life would be if you did...or if you didn't.

Trust awaits your decision.

AIMEE DUFRESNE is a Joy Catalyst and soul-shifting creator, writer, and traveler. She is the proud author of *Keep Going: From Grief to Growth*, a memoir about love, loss, life's journey and the power of perseverance. Aimee is currently writing her next book, *52 Lessons I Learned From My Father*. Website: aimeedufresne.com.



Dear Trust

TRACY STAMPER

Dear Trust,

Thank you for those times when I thought you had failed me, for they eventually taught me that you hadn't failed me at all. Thank you for teaching me to return to the greatest teacher I have: my body.

Thank you for being there...

... when the bottom dropped out.

... when the rug was pulled out from under me.

... when I feared I would fall into the abyss.

... when I didn't know who to turn to or where to turn.

These are the times when we need to call on you.

These are the times to actively seek you out.

These are the times to flex and strengthen our Trust muscle.

These are the times to peel back the layers and dig down into the Truth of what is Trustworthy.

Truth and Trust travel hand-in-hand.

As the saying goes, the body always knows.

When you seemed to be nowhere to be found, dear Trust, I learned to root down into and through self. And there you were, right there beneath

my feet. Always. I realized that when all else failed, Mother Earth was there to catch me and hold me. Always.

From this remembering came a great sense of Trust that I can find support at any time. You taught me that you are always one sensation away: all I have to do is sense the soles of my feet to reconnect to the Truth that I can Trust the support of Earth beneath me. And when the proverbial manure hits the fan and I need the most immediate, direct reminder, I lay belly to Earth in order to ground and nourish my Body, Emotions, Mind and Spirit with this somatic knowing of Mother Earth's support. When it feels as though all else has been stripped away, this Truth I can Trust.

Thank you for being yet another reminder that all spiritual work is an inside job. Every single pondering of whether or not I can Trust so-and-so or this-and-that is simply a reflection of the Truth that my only jurisdiction is self. I can never know another as assuredly as I can know myself. That deep knowing is the root of Trust. Therefore, I can most deeply Trust myself. Thank you for this invitation to connect on ever-deepening levels to self. Trust is really not about the other. When I find myself asking who or what I can Trust, I see your mirror leading me back home.

*I can never know another as
assuredly as I can know myself.
That deep knowing is the root
of Trust.*

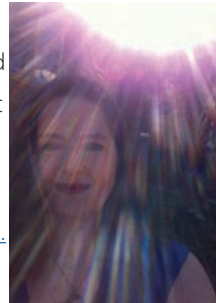
As our dance continues, may I become more and more highly attuned to the moment-to-moment messages that you speak to me through my body. In honor of our bodies' knowing Truth more immediately and deeply than the conscious mind, may I practice becoming ever more perceptive to reading my body's signals and Trusting my body's bone-deep knowing. Listening ever deeper to my body allows me to bypass the mental laps my mind can run in circles, and go straight to the heart of the matter of Trusting my heart's Truth. May I relax more and more fully into Trusting the Truth of my body.

Home is where my heart is and Truth is the language my heart speaks.
Home is where my feet are planted.

Home is that circle of Mama Earth I Trust to hold me in this moment.
The invitation to Trust is an invitation to return to the Truth of my body.

The Truth of my body invites me home again and again and again.
In this, I Trust.

TRACY STAMPER is a dancer at heart, in mind, of body, and with words. Her writing has been featured in *Rebelle Society* and *Elephant Journal*. Her current favorite colors are purple, orange and glitter. She likes her chocolate dark, her inspiration flowing and her car dances to be uninhibited. Website: [facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/](https://www.facebook.com/DancingPenTracyStamper/)



WHAT IS THE OPPOSITE TO TRUST?

distrust

fear

anxiety

chaos

uncertainty

insecurity

suspicion

horror

reactivity

extreme sensitivity

critical scrutiny

panic

detached

unawareness

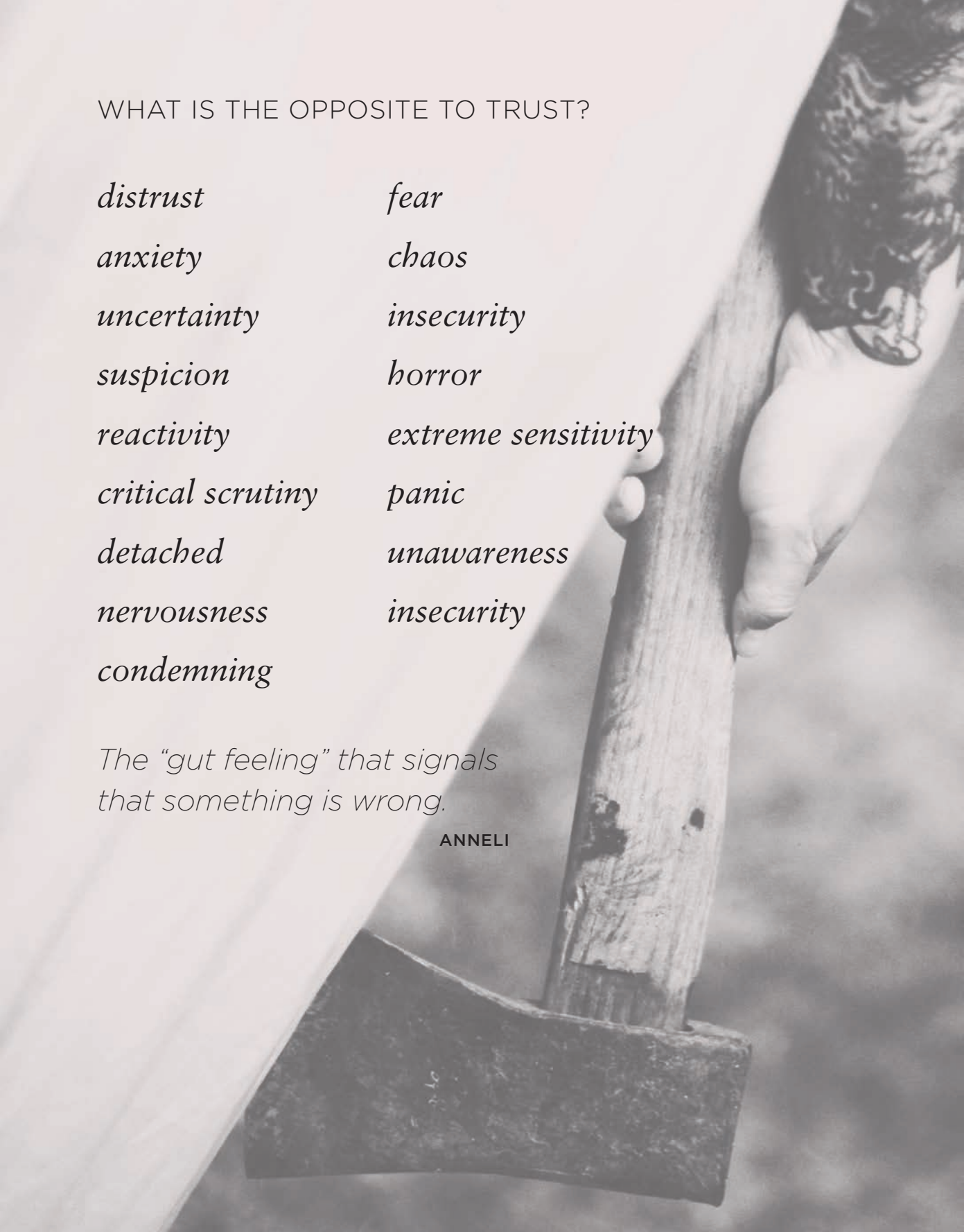
nervousness

insecurity

condemning

*The “gut feeling” that signals
that something is wrong.*

ANNELI



Voices and faces in boxes

BRETTON KEATING &

MARTIN FERDINANDS

In this piece, the two authors reflect on trust within the framework of a story. All names, characters, events and incidents are products of the authors' imaginations. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

VALERIE

The Dutch word *weltrusten*, meaning “sleep well,” albeit unintentionally, rather poetically contains the word trust sandwiched inside.

I say poetically because what better display of the ultimate level of trust than to lie asleep? Eyes closed to the universal workings filling both outside and in, so continues the intricate dance continues of what-will-come-in-the-morning-will-come.

Such was the nature of our relationship.

It's funny because he slipped me his invitation at the pinnacle of my inability to trust anyone. I had very little hope in the world, yet in the same breath, hope was all I had.

The divorce looked clean from the outside, as far as divorces go. Friends would tell me over lunches I could no longer afford on my art

teacher's salary, how they didn't understand. He hadn't cheated, what did I mean by we *fell out of love*? Didn't we know marriages don't actually require love—well, yes, surely we did know that, but what they do require is a willingness to work, and both of us were quite simply, in the full complexity of the notion, no longer willing.

I knew the marriage was over a full three months before he did. And even after he knew, and I knew that he knew, it still took us another nine to admit it out loud. Twelve months of keeping the side door shut, so as not to smell the carcass that lay rotting on the tracks we so blindly chose to live beside. The blast of the horn in the night no longer woke me with a start, as it had in nights prior. During those nights, I didn't manage to fall asleep to begin with.

So the divorce happened, and we both got through it matter-of-factly, at least by external appearances, for the sake of the children, and then a year later (so a full two from the death of the marriage), my mother sent me three plane tickets, because, as she so eloquently phrased it, children need things like the kept-up appearances of holiday.

I found myself sitting at a glass table in a seaside resort in Sint Maarten (the Dutch side, as my ex had claimed the French in the settlement papers), mulling over how Aubrey had grown less stealthy in her ability to push food around on her plate, and how little Timmy's nervous stammer only seemed to worsen despite vocal coaching, in the past two years. Two years, not one, because children, like dogs, always know from the beginning.

We finished lunch and Timmy stuttered something barely decipherable but which I understood, about going for a swim. I said I would meet him there after signing the check, and to my too-cheerful question of whether she would like to join, Aubrey only sulked before returning to the shining screen of her iPhone that my ex-husband had purchased for her, despite our former agreement that ten years was far too young

for such a thing, because, in his words, per usual left perfectly unsaid, all children of divorced parents need a cell phone.

The waitress gave me the check, and in my distracted haste, I almost missed the scribbled note, slipped inside, “Meet tonight? At the bar, 10pm. –The man in the green shirt”. I glanced up and met a soft smile, kind eyes. My heart skipping a beat, I knew, against every hesitation and reason not to, that yes, I would meet the man in the green shirt at 10pm at the resort bar.

And that was how I met Mark.

MARK

Nervous. Incredibly nervous. When she saw the note, I thought her expression confirmed what I had hoped—she would come. *But would she really? I mean, why would she?* These doubts quickly turned on myself, bringing on the usual avalanche of self-criticism.

But then there she was. And it was different. I had been travelling for quite a few months now, been away from what used to be home, and had had my times alone, in the comfort of my own solitude, and my meetings with other travellers. I enjoyed those meetings, too. In fact, I had started to take real pleasure in talking to people, getting to know them, learning from each other’s experiences—I felt much more outgoing than how I had always been at the place that used to be home. But here she was, Valerie was her name—of course, I first forgot, then got it wrong, and then had to ask (awkward!). With her, things were different from different.

Of course, the conversation that first evening was the same conversation travellers always have. Where are you from? (She’s from the Netherlands. I’m from the UK.) How long are you travelling? (A quick 10 day stay at the resort for her and her children, paid for by her mother. For me it is the weather conditions that forced me into this overly luxurious hotel—I should have been outside, surfing and teaching surfing classes,

as I have done for four months and will do for I-don't-know-how-many-more-months.) What do you do back home? (She teaches art classes. I gave up my position as an underpaid assistant professor in continental philosophy in Cambridge to find out how it feels to live outside of libraries, amongst people who don't keep up appearances.) But underneath the exchange there was a sense of comfort I have only seldom felt in my life, a sense of acceptance that I cannot give even myself. It seemed we weren't just getting to know each other; it felt like we were catching up.

We continued catching up over the next few days. The presence of her children meant the only moments we had together were the margins of the day. Early morning conversations over tea before her children came down. Perhaps a conversation by the swimming pool, if for once Aubrey left her iPhone (and thus Valerie) alone to go for a dive. And every night. Every night we would find each other again and again, as if we always had, as if we belonged.

We seemed to belong together, naturally. Our conversations grew longer and more intimate. Our silences did too. Our goodbyes before going to bed got longer too. And every time she would whisper to me that word I didn't know, it sounded like "will trust..."

Although it sounded like something good and worthwhile, and intimidating too, I never found out what "weltrusten" means while we were both in Sint Maarten.

It was the first thing I asked her about the next time we spoke, both of us diminished to a face on the screen and a voice from the speakers. Blessings of modern technology! Her explanation of the word was so striking that I could not respond of the coff. I came back to it a few days later when we were finally both online again...

Mark: Hey Valerie! Have time to talk today?

Valerie: Well, I'm in the train so I can't do a call. I can chat if you'd want to... what's up?

[13:57:13] *Mark*: Well, I really wanted to tell you that I thought your explanation of “weltrusten”, how you linked trust to sleep, was beautiful.

[13:57:42] *Valerie*: Oh thank you!

[13:58:17] *Mark*: I was also thinking how it is interesting how on the one hand sleep is one of the easiest things on earth... while also sometimes when it is hard to fall asleep, there is no way. You're just lying there, wide awake, turning left to right, right to left... you know how it goes.

[13:59:55] *Valerie*: So when you're tossing and turning... is that because of a lack of trust? Hmm... I don't think so?

[14:00:14] *Mark*: No?

[14:00:17] *Valerie*: But what's your experience of it?

[14:00:28] *Mark*: I thought your analogy actually extends that far.

[14:00:36] *Valerie*: I think you're right! Because if you're in your thoughts (unable to sleep) it shows a lack of trust in life. Trust is being in the moment.

[14:01:38] *Mark*: Yes, wow.

... But I also think it is a particular way of being in the moment. I mean, fear is also a way of being in the moment, but it has a totally different orientation. Or perhaps, rather, it is a way of not being in the moment.

[14:03:04] *Valerie*: Well there are different types of fear. There's fear in the moment like when there's actual danger. That is actually very rare. The rest of fear is probably some kind of projected future danger.

Wait... were you implying fear is the opposite of trust?

[14:05:20] *Mark*: I think that is a really good question, whether fear and trust are opposites. I think they are definitely related, but not necessarily mutually exclusive.

[14:05:36] *Valerie*: You can fear life but also trust it.

[14:06:24] *Mark*: Yes, the human heart is endlessly complicated, and trust is usually relevant exactly when there is fear.

[14:06:54] *Mark*: If there is no fear and nothing to fear, trust becomes idle...

[14:07:10] *Valerie*: Oh, interesting! Do you mean that fear heightens trust to some degree?

[14:07:34] *Mark*: Let me think how to make this thought concrete... okay, to use a mundane example, say I am back in school and have a test coming up, and I am studying for it. I may still be afraid that I won't do well, but then I can reflect back on how much I prepared. Then I will feel confident. And confidence, really, is another form of trust. In Chinese the word for confidence is *zixin*—literally, self-trust.

[14:09:51] *Valerie*: Really? That is so interesting! Because you know, in Dutch, the word is “*zelfvertrouwen*.” It is made up in exactly the same way: “*zelf*” is “self” and “*vertrouwen*” is “trust.”

[14:10:08] *Mark*: Ha! Us and words! :)

[14:10:08] *Valerie*: All about the words!

*If there is no fear and
nothing to fear,
trust becomes idle*

[14:10:30] *Mark*: Anyhow, if, on the other hand, I am totally not afraid of failing the test, then there is no reason to reflect back on how much I studied, no reason to trust in my own abilities and preparation.

[14:11:19] *Valerie*: Yes, so fear provides an opportunity to pay attention to trust.

14:11:25] *Mark*: Yes! ~~~methinks.

[14:11:38] *Valerie*: Whenever you say the word fear, I always think of falling backward into a backbend in yoga practice. There's fear in the moment, but also trusting that I'll land. It's an opportunity to overcome fear by trusting.

[14:12:50] *Valerie*: But then, without fear, is trust still there? Because without fear, you just fall back no problem... is it still trust in that case?

[14:13:26] *Mark*: What do you think?

[14:16:21] *Valerie*: I think it becomes less necessary. Perhaps people who aren't fearful just have a deeper instilled reserve of trust in themselves and the world.

[14:17:01] *Mark*: That makes sense.

[14:17:15] *Valerie*: The rest of us are still working on our trust—ha!

[14:17:24] *Mark*: Interesting, because in English, too, I think we would call those people confident.

[14:17:38] *Valerie*: Confident or naïve... or unharmed. Who knows...

[14:22:44] *Mark*: Yes, I think that is right: people who don't fear may simply have a large reserve of trust and confidence... whether that is true confidence or naïveté. But at the same time, I think what I was originally getting at is a more phenomenological perspective—that is, what it feels like, when it feels, how we trust.

And when we are stepping into new things, uncertain what they will bring, afraid, even, of what they might bring, it is right then that we actually can feel trust and feel what it means. It is right there in the contradictions of the heart.

[14:25:14] *Valerie*: The contradictions of the heart—what do you mean by that?

[14:30:51] *Mark*: Well, it'd be easiest to explain what I meant if you'll allow me to use an example that might a bit vulnerable.

[14:35:50] *Valerie*: Yes, please do give your example.

[14:36:51] *Mark*: Well, when we first decided we would meet again, we were telling each other how excited we were... but also nervous... and yet, in going ahead and doing it, there is trust... and some kind of fear (in the form of us being nervous).

[14:42:26] *Valerie*: Yes! There's much trust involved in meeting again.

Especially now that I'm having a difficult time with my children. It is easier to trust when things are going smoothly. And there's always the question of inviting in new love... is it the right time? Is it too soon? All questions you are familiar with as we've discussed them before.

But if I'm to be perfectly honest, what I'm going through now feels a bit easier because I have the prospect of us meeting again, even if it does involve the conflicting sentiments of trust and fear (for both of us).

[14:45:47] *Mark*: Thank you for saying that, in two ways actually.

[14:46:16] *Valerie*: ?

[14:46:46] *Mark*: Well, first for your honesty just now: expressing that you do have a harder time with trust in your current situation. And I appreciate that you say that—it makes me feel more trusting if anything, because of your willingness to honestly express the truth. This then also opens a new pathway for conversation: trust and honesty.

(The other one is that your situation is more bearable because at least there is me coming to look forward to.)

[14:49:13] *Valerie*: Thank you for saying that. On a different note, you took a leap of faith when you passed me that note in the hotel!

[14:50:43] *Mark*: Happy I leapt, trusted one voice in my head over another... complicated contradictions of the heart.

[14:51:08] *Valerie*: Why is your heart contradictory? I'm curious what you mean by that.

[15:31:38] *Mark*: oh... ehm...

[14:52:31] *Mark*: I mean when I said that before, I meant how we may have one or another fear... and at the same time we also have this sense of trust, that especially in that case trust is powerful (and so needed!).

[14:52:54] *Mark*: But were you asking specifically about passing you that note?

[14:53:00] *Valerie*: Yes—both.

[14:54:28] *Mark*: When I passed that note I did doubt myself and had many second, third, fourth, fifth, and even millionth thoughts running through my head (and heart, ha!). There was my usual fear of new situations, my self-doubt, feelings of unworthiness. I had met many new people during my travels... but passing that note to you, that was new. I wanted to and yet feared doing it. And yet, I couldn't help myself. There was a silent place of trust inside too. I knew I was inviting in the Unknown—such a general condition of life!! And it felt like I could trust it, as if there was a very natural movement towards growth.

[14:54:40] *Valerie*: Oh! We're approaching Leeuwarden... gotta run! Speak later!

[15:41:20] *Mark*: Oh... yes, we'll chat again later. Have a great day!

[15:42:15] *Mark*: Also... I really want to say thank you! Look forward to talking to you next time; and to seeing you next month! Time flies. But I wish it flew faster!

MARK

Time had flown during our conversation. Although there were plenty of intervals in between our messages, I had not used that time to prepare the surfing class I was to teach later that day. As I was teaching, I found myself distracted, thinking of Valerie and feeling the rush that comes with

thinking of her. It felt just like being in high school all over again. Didn't we all experience it there? That we would have a crush on some boy or girl and find ourselves unable to focus during class. The only difference was that now, I was the instructor, the center of attention—all eyes were on me.

None of those eyes seemed to notice my absent-mindedness. After class, I asked one of the students, if he had noticed anything about me. "No, you seemed as confident as ever!"

Confident as ever... What a joke! I thought... I am never confident.

Confidence, trust, love. The ideas were buzzing through my head as I went to sleep that night. At first I was kept awake by happy memories. Memories of our late-night solitary dances to the concerts of silence and rain and oceans breaking on the beach in Sint Maarten. I lay wide awake with a smile.

But then my mind started wondering. Was Valerie upset? I had admitted my original doubts around the note I passed her in the hotel. Is she disappointed in me? Is that why she never responded to my goodbye, didn't give any affection as she went offline?

I worried. I doubted. Myself. Her. What was, is, and what will be.

Then, in a moment of silence that allowed me to hear the waves again, I felt Valerie's presence, heard her whisper "Weltrusten, dear." I fell in a deep sleep.

VALERIE

Prior to our conversation, we had decided to meet again, perhaps against my better judgment but sometimes the heart knows best. But then speaking to Mark only confirmed the decision, in both mind and heart. I had never fallen for someone the way that I had with him. With others, there was attraction, and a bit of excitement, perhaps... but this felt different. It felt like a conversation with an old friend. It felt like we could talk about

any and everything. He felt like someone I could trust the bleeding bits of my heart with, and he would not only be there to listen and accept them, but would gladly care for them as his own.

In the stillness that comes with the distance between us, I found myself never once doubting his intentions. Sometimes there were entire days when he was surfing and we couldn't connect. The time difference when he was travelling didn't help. But even with silence, even in the night, I slept peacefully. I slept in a way in which I trusted not only the pending morning, but also the surrounding darkness. I trusted the unknown. Because in certain, rare moments that you know must happen by intricate design, the unknown feels known.

MARK

When I woke up, I was in a particularly philosophical mood. Instead of entrusting these words to my journal to be re-read later and deemed superficial after all, I offered them up to Valerie as an email.

Valerie, goedemorgen (that is how you say it in Dutch right?),

Woken up to trust and curiosity on my side of the ocean. I was thinking a bit more about trust and wanted to share my thoughts—I hope you don't mind a monologue from me. ;)

Remember how we related trust and confidence yesterday? I realized something about my own lack of confidence and how I've tried to compensate... often I give myself challenges—like surfing some large wave or exercising for a long stretch of time without breaking—and expect myself to meet them. I push myself hard if needed. When I accomplish a challenge like this, I feel I am worthy of my own trust. Passing my own tests makes me feel confident.

So, this morning I was going to set myself some ridiculous challenge again. (I won't even mention it. You'll just laugh at me and my macho

masochism!) But then... I realized that I am human. (Yeah, imagine, right?) We can trust in the law of gravity—except if you are Rupert Sheldrake perhaps—or the law of the excluded middle—unless you belong to the likes of Russell. It will always be true and dependable.

But with myself... I am human. I can do the best I can and then I might succeed. Or I might fail. And sometimes I can't even try the best I can. I can't trust in myself as a law, but I can trust in my own humanity; I can have confidence in my own heart, my qualities, my capacity for growth, even as I accept that I—me with my contradictory heart! —may not be predictable.

And then in that sense... you know, I think saying "I love you" is beautiful and I mean it when I say it. But perhaps what may even be more beautiful would be to say "I trust you." And, really, I do, although I cannot hold you captive in my hopes and expectations (nor in my fears and anxieties), I can see the beauty of your humanity and have confidence in who you are and will be.

I trust you.

BRETTON KEATING is a yoga instructor for adults and children, barre instructor, Reiki healer, writer, and artist. For her heart-centered writings, please visit her blog (brettonkeating.com). For creative work, including poetry and your fairy tale within, here is her website (whitecottonrose.com).



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Next chapter

The Book of Emotions is an ongoing project and every month will be focused around one feeling and become one chapter in the upcoming book. Each month a digital sneak peak of each chapter will be released – free for everyone to share with the world.

UPCOMING EMOTIONS

Anger and freedom was the focus for Janaury and Feburary. March was about Support and April gave us Vulnerability and this chapter is about Trust. The feelings for the upcoming months are:

June: Hope

July: Shame

August: PEace

CONTRIBUTE

If you feel called to contribute you will find information on the website for the project: bookofemotions/annalinder.com

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