

Chapter One

BE Wherever You Are

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Let yourself be wherever you are and know that it's always going to be all right. . . .

LIFE IS FULL OF UPS AND DOWNS. WE WOULD NOT BE HUMAN if we did not have certain difficulties in our lives to guide us into growth and teach us how resilient we really are. If we face our difficulties with the energy of resistance, we are starting a battle with reality that we will ultimately lose. We must work at noticing where we are and honoring ourselves wherever we are in our process. At a friend's wedding a few years ago, about six months after my last IVF, I was seated with a gushing new mom, my friend (who I had just learned was pregnant that evening), and an older mom of four. Given my infertility situation, it was a recipe for deep sorrow, as well as deep learning. I stepped outside to get a break from all the "mother talk" and sympathetic looks, only to be forced back inside by hordes of biting mosquitoes. Upon walking back in, I heard one woman ask the other, "What do you think it takes to be a good mom?" I'm thinking, "Seriously?" My resistance was strong. As a result, the conversations of motherhood went on and on that night, worsened by the fact that I was bleeding and feeling very hormonal, which of course only intensified my emotional state.

I was livid and angry with the Universe. What the hell, God – really? I wanted to blame God and be the victim of the terrible situation I was in, of the lack that I had in my life and feelings of being out of control at the boring wedding that droned on and on. I wanted to run away and not experience what was happening. I didn't, at that time, want to take responsibility for what I might be bringing to myself as a result of my victimhood. I just wanted to sit in it. As I look back on that night, I realize that my victimhood was ultimately fed by my resistance to the overall situation; I was not letting myself be wherever I was, even if it was sitting in lack. I was not being patient with myself, only judging my current state of victimhood. Eventually, I got back to the present and remembered the importance of compassion and allowing myself to be wherever I was without judgment.

Allowing vs. Resisting

In allowing, I open up my perspective of the situation for what it might be doing to help me learn. In resisting, I only create more lack and frustration with my situation and myself. Anytime I choose to focus on the viewpoint that I have an unfulfilled need, I am vulnerable to pain, lack and emptiness. Being present with wherever you are is about learning to watch how your thoughts affect your perspective and thus openness or resistance to any situation. Letting yourself be present wherever you are aids you to tolerate feelings without reactively making a judgment about them, running from them, and/or pushing them down into your body. We are quick to move away from feelings and situations we deem negative; yet, if we slow down and sit with the experience, even for a moment, we can always begin to build more tolerance and strength within ourselves. We bring about more movement when feeling our emotions instead of resisting them.

If we try to change where we are in a certain moment, we are likely in resistance mode. Lao Tzu, a philosopher and poet of ancient China, stated, "Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes. Don't resist them; that only creates sorrow. Let reality be reality. Let things flow naturally forward in whatever way they like."

Leaning into Resistance and Letting in Emotions

It makes sense that we try to resist life's difficulties because we have been conditioned all our lives to avoid these experiences in favor of having good emotions. Positive feelings can put a skip to our step and make us feel uplifted. Negative emotions, on the other hand, can feel painful, exhausting, and difficult to process. One reason positive feelings are so coveted is that when things are going our way, we can feel like we are in some sort of control. The truth is that all the control we really have is only within ourselves and how we choose to think and feel. If we work to be wherever we are, in the positive or the negative, and allow ourselves the full range of human emotions, we can live in more peace. I have learned much from sitting with and experiencing my negative emotions. When we move away from avoidance and resistance of our feelings into a more curious and non-judgmental approach, we find deeper layers of our self. With mindfulness and present moment awareness, our unconscious begins to bubble up to our consciousness in beautiful ways. It is then that we learn our power – that there is nothing to fear. Our negative emotions are nothing to fear. They are there for guidance and self-understanding; to know our limitations and false beliefs. You might find that “negative” emotions are only what we have defined for ourselves through our experience and perception. Certainly, I would not have had such a bad time talking with mothers that evening if I had a child of my own or vehemently did not want children. As I move into continued acceptance, though, I can sit openly in those conversations feeling the beautiful and sorrowful feelings of motherhood.

Every emotion is there to teach us and to help us move through difficulties – they can be our guides and our gifts if we can receive them as such. To fear these emotions only brings more walls, strife and limitations into understanding ourselves and our true strength. If we are truly utilizing our emotions as a tool, we are working to feel through whatever feeling arises, taking in the information that our experience is giving us and then forming words to verbally communicate them to ourselves and others as needed. Many people, including myself, fall prey to playing a victim of circumstance. Life has its ups and downs, and the downs can be tough at times. Many try to stop terrible experiences by preparing for and resisting them. We all can work very hard in a state of unconscious resistance in the vain attempts to keep the bad away. This component is a huge part of the pain people are currently experiencing in their lives. People will function to the point of exhaustion to avoid certain thoughts or emotions. The reality is that it takes more work to avoid negative feelings than it does to accept and experience them.

Learning Emotional Tolerance

Sitting in an attitude of neutrality with whatever comes up, wherever we are, can aid us in learning how to be with what we are feeling for a time, without changing it or trying to modify our experience in any way. Over time, we can learn how to move through the foreign experiences we have avoided for so long while also taking care not to overwhelm ourselves. A little bit at a time, we begin to increase our tolerance, strength and resilience for whatever comes up and observe our experience from a detached loving stance instead of from a place of reaction, resistance, judgment and withdrawal.

Being trapped at that wedding is a great example of how resistant I was to my situation and how I fell into playing the victim. Then I was choosing to feel powerless in my situation instead of just being in it without judgment, letting the feelings flow through and then pass. Part of the issue was that I had limited distractions for a time. The blessing was that the wedding ended early and I was home distracting myself with Saturday Night Live by 10:45pm. Those intense feelings somehow moved through and settled down. The negative emotions moved through, even though at the time, it did not seem as though they would ever end.

People have a tendency to push feelings away out of fear of the intensity of their emotion. Yet, the more the feelings are pushed away, the less tolerant we can be to them. We live in a culture where intensely expressed emotion is not valued and people fear being criticized. For me, particularly at that wedding, what I was most concerned about was expressing intense sadness and tears in what was supposed to be a joyful setting. I felt out of control, and that is a scary feeling to have. What I realized later is that my thought, "I am out of control" was not really true. I was merely very sad at the time. I was upset and needed to take care of myself in a compassionate, loving way; as one needs when feeling sad. I was in such resistance at the time, that it took a day or two for me to come around and get a better perspective on what had happened.

Hindsight is always 20/20. There is always another chance to practice the next time we are tested. Please remember that what we resist tends to persist. If we are resisting reality, the condition or problem that we are resisting ends up only being perpetuated. Our experience keeps showing up and we continue to feel frustrated as we learn a similar lesson over and over. So be it. If it takes me 200 times, at least I will learn over time – we all will. The point is to keep trying and practicing compassion for yourself and others along the way.

Guidelines to Be Wherever You Are

The first step to be wherever you are is to move away from your resistance and discover the state of your present moment. Just notice your present experience of resistance without judgment. In this moment, what does resistance feel like in your body? What is it telling you? What is it that you are even resisting? Name it if you can. In my experience, the energy of resistance is like a pulling, negative attitude and/or a hopeless voice that lulls me to inaction. I feel it in my heart and it feels heavy. I can feel less motivated at times and at other times incredibly aggravated.

I've had to ask myself, what is it that I don't like about the feeling or situation that I am resisting? At times in my past, I have told myself that it's wrong, that I'm bad for having whatever feeling and to push it away, avoiding the whole experience. What I've learned is that for us all, there is a time for resistance and a time for acceptance. If we can remain kind and refrain from judgment no matter where we are, we are more likely to move into a state of acceptance.

When you do notice the feeling of resistance, don't try to fight it or tell yourself it is wrong. Identify and validate any experienced feeling for yourself, as you would likely do for a friend or loved one (it's so much easier to do from an objective perspective). Let yourself be wherever you are and know that it's going to be alright. Resistance is part of the human experience, yet it can exhaust us. It takes a lot of energy to resist a perceived reality. With awareness and acceptance of the present, we learn that it is much easier to move with the flow of the moment.

The next step to being wherever you are and moving away from resistance is acknowledging, normalizing and validating your experiences to yourself so you can learn more about them. We must trust in this natural flow of nature and allow ourselves to be wherever we need to be. In this place we can stay curious and understand that all emotions are part of our humanity. As we practice sitting and working with our experiences through mindfulness meditation and being in the moment without judgment, we learn peace, we learn patience, we learn deeper wisdom and we learn to accept whatever is and work on creating what is to be. We also grow stronger in tolerating difficult experiences and become more curious about ourselves and our emotional world. This leads to more opportunities and more openness to create and embark in the world.

Another important step to be wherever you are and to address resistance is to sit in detachment of your emotions. This doesn't mean numbing or checking out, it means staying objective and observing ourselves in the present moment. We no longer react to the emotion, but instead we sit with an aware, curious state, breathing and taking in the situation. To sit with our experience and observe it is not an easy task – it's a life-long one at that. With practice, this task will begin to get easier and easier. If you struggle feeling detached due to intense emotions, let yourself be wherever you are. This state is not easy to develop and maintain.

If you can sit in detached awareness and curiosity, you are learning more about the nature of who you really are. Consider the law of attraction – if like attracts like, then the same energy is drawn to itself. If we focus on lack, we are likely drawing more lack to ourselves. If we focus on abundance, we get more abundance. This is not a secret, it is the truth. When we live in a state of victimhood, of lack, or resistance, we must be prepared to understand the consequences for us in our life. The energy we give comes back to us in return. When we stay curious, we receive more knowledge and awareness about ourselves.

Set an Intention for Where You Want to Be

When we accept wherever we are, we can then begin to set a goal for where we want to be. We cannot accomplish any change in our life without intention. After that night at the wedding, I set an intention to work with my resistance about not having a child. I worked to view my situation from a more balanced, objective, and loving perspective instead of focusing on lack and falling victim to my circumstances.

As I mentioned earlier, there is much abundance in my life. To focus on lack was a form of resistance and manifested more lack and painful sorrow. I began to focus on the blessings in my life and set intentions to have more peace within myself with what was happening now in my life instead of frustration of what was not happening.

As you move through the chapters in this book, consider what you would like to work on accepting. State an intention to work with your feelings, thought patterns and experiences that you notice around your struggle, even if you can't see a way out right now. Just observe and be with it, as a child enjoys the quality time with its mother. Be with it as the trees sway with the wind and rain in a lovely dance. If the tree resists, it becomes rigid and will ultimately break. Be flexible in your observations and keep breathing. Surrender to the flow of what you notice in your body and your heart around the issue you are working to accept.

Our emotions reside in our body and our thoughts in our mind. Always stay aware of this. Begin to notice anything you find there, be it frustration, impatience, peace, love, relaxation, or resistance. Start without pressuring yourself to change anything. Ask yourself, what does it feel like in my body if I'm resisting something? What does it feel like to accept? Allow yourself to be wherever you are. Consider something that was once difficult that you were able to accept over time. Imagine yourself overcoming your struggle and feeling more at peace around it.

Reflect on that process of your shifting mindset. Allow circumstances to flow and surrender to the present moment for a time. Practice without a high expectation for sudden change. All change transforms in various ways at its own pace. The more compassion and love you give to yourself in this process, the more transformation you will see.

When you find resistance, try to summon some patience and love with it. If the experience becomes overwhelming for you, remember to use your distraction techniques (you know them well). They will always work. Hit pause, and then un-pause. We can't change things until we understand them, so begin to explore your inner world as an experimenter might explore his/her research data. By allowing yourself to be wherever you are, you will, no doubt, learn something incredibly valuable about yourself.