

## Week 8 Practice

Several years ago, not too long after the morning of the lump, Aidan pulled a television down on his leg. The stand scraped along his ankle, pulling off a layer of flesh about four inches long. It was gruesome. But the prospect of taking his first shower after the injury was even *more* gruesome. As the hot water began to wash over the wound, he cried out in agony, and I asked him to trust me. I asked him to do five things:

1. *First, begin breathing slowly and deeply (by deeply, I don't mean big—I mean taking a normal amount of air deep into your lungs... it will feel like your stomach is filling with air).*

2. *Now, start taking the air in through your nose, and slowly begin breathing it out through your mouth (pretend you're blowing off soup on a spoon). Pay attention to the breath.*

3. *When you have developed a rhythm, on your next breath, focus on your pain, feel it fully, and imagine breathing the air directly into your pain, filling the pain with your breath.*

4. *Then, imagine slowly blowing the pain out through your mouth.*

5. *Finally, continue doing this until you are completely comfortable feeling the pain.*

At first, Aidan refused. The idea of *focusing* on his pain seemed crazy. But he finally agreed, and after several iterations, breathing into the pain and then blowing it out, he visibly relaxed. He opened his eyes, smiled, and said, “Hey, it worked.” Aidan’s pain had not changed, but he had discovered he could *approach* it, walk *through* it, and he didn’t need to be afraid of it anymore.

We can approach our psychological pain in the same way, and I’m asking you to trust me on this. Our feelings are called feelings for a reason—we feel our thoughts in our bodies. Sometimes they are expressed through a headache, or a weight on our chest, or muscle pain, or stomach cramps, and so on. We can approach this pain, breathe into it, and learn that our pain is something we live through, not something to avoid. Feelings come at us like waves on the shore—when they are crashing they can feel overwhelming, but if we can stay present to them, we also get to watch them recede and enjoy the calm between waves.

During this week (and future weeks), if your stillness creates the space for you to notice your pain in the form of any thought, feeling, or memory, take note of where in your body you experience the discomfort and pain of those experiences. Then, using the practice I walked through with Aidan, breathe your way into your pain. As you do, you’ll also be breathing your way toward your truest self.