

## Food, Stress, and Healing Your Nervous System with Stacey Ramsower – Insatiable Season 13, Episode 5

[INTRODUCTION]

**[0:00:05] AS:** You went vegetarian, then paleo. You stopped restricting. You're trying to love yourself more, but nothing seems to be working fully. You might feel hopeless about ever feeling good in your body. Every time you fail, you trust yourself less. As the larger world feels increasingly in peril, caring about how you feel in your body may feel frivolous and even more hopeless.

We are at a time when our individual and collective stories about what to do for our bodies, health and the world are crumbling. Because these stories we have, they aren't working for how our bodies, or our world actually works. I believe, centering our bodies, all bodies, not just thin, white, or “good bodies,” and what all of our bodies need to thrive will help orient us in a better direction.

There is no one size fits all diet, exercise, or way to biohack. Good health is much less about willpower, or discipline and more complex interweb of our societal structures, food choices, emotional history, environmental exposures and privilege. There is a great loss of certainty and safety when we initially have to face what is real, versus the half-truths we've been fed. The loss of these stories creates an opening. If this opening is pursued with curiosity and discernment, we can discover our awe-inspiring ability to create and embody a new body story for our physical and political bodies and the earth.

I'm Ali Shapiro, and I host the Insatiable Podcast, so we engage in the type of conversations that will lead us to radically new body stories for ourselves, each other and the earth. To do that, we



discuss a more truthful approach to freedom from cravings, emotional eating, bingeing and being all or nothing. We explore the hidden aspects of fighting our food, our weight, and our bodies and dive deep into nutrition and behavioral change science and true whole health.

Fair warning, this is not your parents' health care, or the conspiratorial crazy of the wellness world. This is a big rebel gathering, to those who want to hold nuance, context and complexity in order to lead the way to a healthier future for all, because our lust for life is truly insatiable.

[OVERVIEW]

**[0:02:46] AS:** Hello, everybody. Welcome to Season 13, Episode 5, Healing Your Nervous System, Food and Safety with Stacey Ramsower. Let's just provide some context here in our first four episodes of this season, with our theme of food and safety. We've established the origins on the food safety connection, that the root of our stress eating is our stories that make us feel unsafe, or separate from others and what we most want in life. Then we talked about how puritanism and Protestantism, a division of Christianity, for lack of a better word, is the major influence on how our stories about who we are and need to be, to be good, including what good bodies are, have formed.

Even if like me, you don't consider yourself religious, these religious beliefs are heavily influenced in your relationship to food and your body, because in Western culture, they form a lot of our ideas about normal. Then in episode four, we talked about various protection strategies we use in our stories, or with stress, that often, we've used them for so long, they think they are who we are, like emotional eater, or perfectionist, rather than emotional eating and perfectionism being a protected strategy.

Once you can see your story and your protection strategies, then you can actually change your story. This is the point in Truce with Food, where we start learning to show up differently in our stories, to cultivate psychological safety, which is getting our emotional needs and wants met.



Because if we don't make a conscious effort, we are mostly reacting to the past, in the present moment, where our needs weren't met in decreasing our psychological safety.

This is how our psyches work. They are trying to protect us from real past harms by picking up on clues that we may, or may not be at risk for things like judgment, rejection, criticism or failure. It's not a defect. It's actually a brilliant belonging strategy, until it's not. A big focus and practice in Truce with Food is to make sure we are responding in the present with our stories, instead of reacting to the past, where our needs and wants were never met.

To do this, we first tend to our body, specifically cultivating safety in our nervous systems. Because as we will talk about today, the flight and freeze nervous system reactions that our stories can trigger often lead to the fantasy of diet starts tomorrow, and/or total helplessness and collapse, which can then often lead to bingeing, or the bingeing leads to feeling helpless and collapse.

Truce with Food and my Truce coaching certification is a truly integrated approach. We tend to the physiology and psychology of change, because it's so extremely powerful when you do both. It's also hard to find people who can understand the intersection of this integration. However, our episode one guest Stacey Ramsower does. She's a guest teacher in my Truce Coaching Certification, and will also be guest teaching in our 2023 Truce with Food Group Program, which opens for registration January 9th, and we begin January 25th.

This is my signature small boutique group program, that one's once a year. In my Truce coaching certification and Truce with Food, we cover all the various stories, nervous system reactions and practices to regulate ourselves. For today's episode, we're going to focus on flight and freeze as these are quite prominent when it comes to our relationship to food. Stacey is an Ayurvedic lifestyle coach, a holistic perinatal consultant, somatic sex educator and mother. She supports women through their transformation and motherhood, through ritual practices, hands on work and private coaching. She's currently pursuing a doctorate in clinical psychology.



Stacey's really rooted in developmental theory, which is the evidence-based theory that informs my Truce with Food and Truce coaching certification model. She lives in Tucson with her husband and two kids. I think you're really, really going to find today's episode eye-opening and useful. Enjoy.

[INTERVIEW]

**[0:07:06] AS:** Welcome back, Stacey.

**[0:07:09] SR:** I'm so happy to be here. What a treat.

**[0:07:11] AS:** Well, thank you. Everyone loved your first episode to kick off this season. I just so appreciate how you understand the physiology and psychology around safety, which is really rare.

**[0:07:29] SR:** It's something that I often take for granted, because naturally, that just naturally occurs to me. When I learned somatic experiencing, it was like, "Duh." I take for granted that that is not the case for so many people, including like, I'm not just talking about folks. I'm talking about trained professionals with advanced degrees in psychology and other fields, that we still primarily exist in this Cartesian worldview, in spite of even decades of research to the contrary. Speaking on this topic is really a point of passion for me, and I love talking to you about all of the things. Thank you so much for inviting me back. I can't wait to dive in.

**[0:08:18] AS:** Yeah. Before we get into the nitty-gritty of our nervous system and relationship to food, on this note, I want to start by differentiating the brain and the mind, and how this relates to change and getting your thoughts on how to think about this difference. Because, I guess, I straddle the coaching world and I think a lot of people would put what I do under coaching, and I'll just go with that.



My background is actually in change, which can be different, they overlap. Sometimes in coaching, we're just getting people to actually not just do more of how they think they should be. In a lot of the coaching world, it's this mind over matter, change your thoughts and this is how you change. Then often in the somatic world, and we're actually just talking about this in my coaching certification, my Truce coaching certification, and I was like, "Well, Stacey's going to come and teach us." You're teaching in that, in the certification, and in Truce with Food, but they were talking about how the somatic world, it's often like, no, change your physiology. Story follows state and you need a down-up approach.

I think, this really gets to this question of if we're trying to change and we're trying to create safety to change, what actually goes into that? I think asking what are your thoughts on the brain versus the mind and how you differentiate that can help people start to think differently about needing to address both.

**[0:09:46] SR:** Well, the way I conceive of it is the brain is so complex. It's an infinitely complex organism that neuroscientists still are learning about. What is known that I think is relevant to this question is that the brain is sending information to the body to monitor and regulate necessary processes for survival. There's just a constant stream of communication from the brain to the body. However, there's also a constant stream of information from the body to the brain, that's actually happening four times faster.

When we give this precedence, or put the brain at the top position of the hierarchy, it's really interesting, considering so much more of the power, so much more of the feedback, so much more of the demand is coming from the body to the brain. As it relates to pattern change, or even pattern recognition, I think you can't do either of those things without having a deep and abiding respect for the body.

**[0:11:04] AS:** I love that. That four times is – I mean, that's to use quantification.



**[0:11:10] SR:** Yeah. Well, and this again, too, the numbers and the facts and the structure is a big part of how everyone's brain functions, but so is feeling and nuance and subtlety. I said, feeling, but on that deeper level, emotion and need. The need for care. It's really, it all matters. It's also the feminine-masculine balance. The way that water flows is through a structure, or the best flows, right? With some support, with something serving a direction. I know we'll get into it more, but I just think of it's one thing to know the pattern that needs to change. It's another to be able to feel, or experience viscerally the terror, the fear, the grief that's keeping you from making that change.

**[0:12:11] AS:** Yeah. For those of you listening, you can think about this on a really basic level of your mood changes based on the weather. Your body is picking up cues of what it prefers. If we were to use Stacey's background of Ayurveda, I am more Pitta. Summer to me makes me overheated, and is not my best season. Other people may love it, but it adds this level of irritation and exhaustion that I don't have in other seasons. There's nothing I can outthink. It's learning how to work with that, right? Or different geographical locations, right?

Your body is picking up on all these other signals to try to regulate itself. That's a, I think, part of what I wanted people to understand, because I remember, just flippantly in a grad school paper, this was 10 years ago, writing about the mind, about how we change and the mind. My professor was like, "Well, how are you defining the mind?" I was like, "What do you mean?" She's like, "Well, no one has ever located the mind." It's an invisible projection of our body and brain. Now 10 years later, I also know our environment is part of that, that body projection.

I just want to establish this, because I think a lot of people think they can just white knuckle, muscle, intellectualize their way out of change. Part of cultivating safety, to your point, is feeling into it, and feeling what's actually present, versus what we think should be present.

**[0:13:46] SR:** Yes.



**[0:13:47] AS:** We're going to zone in on the nervous system today. Specifically, how we may not be aware of that and yet, it's often controlling how we think about food, how we eat. Before we get there, though, for our listeners new to the nervous system, can you tell us what the social engagement nervous system is and why it's so important?

**[0:14:10] SR:** Yeah. The social engagement nervous system is the first part of the nervous system to come online. It starts forming, or functioning really, at about eight months gestation, and is the most, I don't know if I want to use the word sensitive, but at any rate, it is in its nascent developmental stages, while we are still in utero. As per our first conversation, how we're born, the environment we're born into, the cues that we're picking up on in those first moments of life and body life are really critical in shaping our perception of how the world is and how we need to be in order to survive in that world.

It is also how we co-regulate. You can imagine, for a newborn, there's not a lot of prefrontal cortex, neocortex work happening. We're not solving problems. We're trying to stay alive. We're orienting to the indication of you're safe, you belong, you're not alone. We get that through facial expressions, because newborns don't see very well. The way, another part of our survival and nervous system function is being touched. The skin is, for all intents and purposes, an externalized portion of the nervous system. And facial recognition, different facial expressions, give our brand-new baby brains, the amygdala, the indicator of you're good. It's okay. I'm here. I see you. I love you. I'm with you.

That never goes away. Certainly, those very early days, weeks, months of life, again, they create imprints that shape our ongoing perception of the world. Our whole system is oriented to efficiency, and so it can guide us in one direction or another. The world is dangerous and that's what we see most easily in situations and relationships, or the world is a safe place, and it's okay to be me. That's how we see the world and relationships and circumstances.



**[0:16:40] AS:** Some of the responses as we have grown out of, I believe it's the mother-baby dyad. Still to this day, are the fit in and fond responses, right? If we feel like we don't belong, and it's not safe to be us. Talk a little bit about the fit in and fond protective strategies.

**[0:17:00] SR:** Yeah. As I said, being held, and having loving attention is a huge part of how we survive. Being adaptive creatures that we are, the best way to get that need met is to be pleasing. We pick up on that right away. It's an interesting dynamic, because there's the acting out behavior that is also about getting attention. The dynamic is so specific in that mother-baby dyad, the need to be held, to be cradled is so significant, that anything we can do to be kept closer, the closest possible if we're not getting that is going to fall in line with the fit in and fond behaviors.

**[0:17:57] AS:** I'm thinking about how we extend that metaphor to when we're adults, and if we don't feel held metaphorically, how that leads in our stories, how that leads to feeling like we need to fit in and fond, or obviously, fight or flight, or freeze. The nature ripples out physical, emotional, metaphorical, which is spiritual to me.

**[0:18:22] SR:** Yeah. It's worth mentioning, I think, just getting curious about the ways that this need diverges in us. This is maybe getting into some more nuanced territory, but it can be a matter of self-sacrifice in order to fit in, through shaping yourself to fit the gap in a group, or a community, or a partner, or a habit of self-sabotage. Because the story of I don't belong, nobody wants me is so strong, it goes back to this principle and phenomenon of recapitulation, putting ourselves in situations that mirror some of our earliest formative experiences related to belonging and safety. Either moving through it with a new perception, or compounding the imprint and the story by creating the circumstance that leads to our rejection, or being fired, or being arrested, or whatever it is.





**[0:19:32] AS:** It's almost like proving the story, because even though that feels, in my mind, at least how I would interpret it, even though it feels like self-sabotage, it's self-protection in a way. It's like, I know, I'm oriented here. I know how to show up here.

**[0:19:46] SR:** Yes, exactly. An immunity to change, right? It's more comfortable to be in this old story, rather than try something different.

**[0:19:55] AS:** Yeah. Especially if you already don't feel like you have the capacity. If your current story tells you don't have the capacity, it's like, what in my right mind would make me think that I'm going to try something new, which requires a whole other level of capacity, just the newness of it. the unpredictability of it.

**[0:20:13] SR:** Yeah. Which brings its own set of its own quality of loneliness.

**[0:20:18] AS:** Yeah. I've been thinking about this new – When I think about health, I think of how so often, whether it's food, or health, or body, it's like, we think of like, “Well, if I'm reducing symptoms, or I'm feeling better, or I'm not dieting, I guess.” It's like, we get to zero. There's this whole other continuum of wellbeing, I think, where you don't have to just get to zero. What we can think of is almost just surviving. You can thrive.

I've been thinking about this parallel continuum of like, I don't want to be separate. I don't want to be separate. That gets us to zero. Then there's belonging, which is what you were saying, I was like, I can be me. I feel like, there's this whole other end of the continuum, that when we often talk about belonging, it's like, we often realize that when we're in our stories, we're trying to just not be separate. We're not necessarily on the track to belong. If we have to fit in and fond, we may never get that satisfaction of the belonging we're looking for, but we don't feel separate and they're not the same things.



**[0:21:24] SR:** Totally. It goes along with that ideal of a fixed point, like a fixed narrative that doesn't exist. As long as we're living and breathing, we're constantly in a state of adaptation. It just fundamentally doesn't work to strive for this end point. I finally fit in. Finally. You might for a while, but then what happens when you experience something was different from your friend group and suddenly – I think a lot of us experienced that in the last two years like, “Oh, I thought this relationship was whatever.”

So many of us were, I think, all of us, but to varying degrees, we were able to move through this invitation into adaptation, and almost starting from scratch with relationships, which even as an adult, how many of your adult friends – it's difficult to make new friends when you're an adult. It's difficult to make new friends after you've become a parent and the other relationships don't hold you anymore. This adaptation is very, very vulnerable, because you're untethered, suddenly, which is not how we survive. It's not how we are designed to live. Having some sense of larger belonging, or implicit belonging, just by virtue of the fact that we're here, to me, that's the heart of my spiritual practice, and even it's very reminiscent with the heart of Ayurveda and those teachings.

**[0:22:58] AS:** Yeah. I think about how, as we become adults and the immunity to change model, a lot of what self-authoring as why it cultivates psychological safety, so then we don't need to turn to food is because we're belonging to ourselves first. It's like, what are my needs? What do I value? Then finding that alignment. Doesn't mean everyone, you fit in the same, but it's people who can respect that, versus thinking you just have to fit in or find your way to be cohesive in the group.

**[0:23:34] SR:** Yes. I think it's worth saying, within relationships, how difficult it is, or would be for someone who hasn't unraveled that belief system within themselves to allow for another person to be in their natural, adaptive state. We are very uncomfortable when others change.



**[0:24:06] AS:** Yeah. I never actually thought about that. It's like, "Oh, what does that mean about me?" I often think that when people say like, "I just got married. People are already asking me when I'm going to have kids." I'm like, I often think that's about them. They follow this path. Now I'm like, you know that they're doing the right thing. Or if you have only one child versus everyone's like, "We're going to have another one, right?" Because it's like, they had two. They want to confirm that they're okay. I think about that, in that context, how often we want to have that mirroring as if it's like, "Oh, we're both doing the right thing."

**[0:24:41] SR:** I don't even know that it's that conscious. I was having a conversation with a couple and they brought up the funny thing of people wanting to, if they have kids, they want to make sure all their other friends have kids, so they're not alone. They made the joke, misery loves company. They don't want to be alone in their suffering. I would argue that it's really subconscious.

**[0:25:09] AS:** Oh, yeah. I think it is.

**[0:25:11] SR:** To your point, the mirroring is so significant, it's such a significant part of our orientation to safety. Even that, there's a meme going around about how you parent, how you parent, you don't need to make anybody else happy, or comfortable with the way you parent. You need to make sure your child feels safe and at home in their family. It's really hard. If you have a different approach to parenting than your parent friends, it's really hard. Just to hold that tension of like, here it is. Here's the essence of the change. Why it's so difficult? It's, you have to know it. You have to be able to see the structure of the story, this narrative that's false, but also, be able to sense and tune into how it's real and very alive in your nervous system, in your sense of safety.

**[0:26:10] AS:** In the work that I do with clients is I'm like, I'm not actually even concerned if your story is true or not. How are you relating to it? Because I'm thinking about when you're saying like, I'm thinking about food, right? Since we're talking about this. We were talking about this



before we got on. Food actually is super neutral to me. I mean, I care about health and that is really important to me. I'm thinking about how holding the line of almost being moderate, but not moderate how most people to find moderate. Because I follow accounts that are like, I would say more mainstream. They're more geared towards anti-diet culture. It's like, let your kids eat whatever they want. Put no rules. Blah, blah, blah. I'm like, okay, but our food system is designed to hijack our children's taste buds and our taste buds and the first five years of metabolic health is so important. Then the other accounts I follow, I mean, I laugh, like the Montessori accounts that they now called her sad beige.

**[0:27:11] SR:** Werner Hertzog infinite clothing.

**[0:27:14] AS:** Yeah. It's so puritanical. I'm like, I can't keep that up, either. Because I love my work and I'm not – I also don't think being puritanical is great. I think about SS day care, I mean, they have pizza Fridays. We let them do that. Then they have their own snacks. He gets his own lunch and stuff. It's constantly like, "I wish they did have better snacks, but then also, doesn't matter." It's like being in the middle. I feel like, it's just so hard. I see why people want to be in either camp, I guess. Because it feels like a constant negotiation.

I mean, I've done enough work, where I don't feel like my food choices define my belonging. I know a lot of people can feel like, I have to fit in with what everyone else is eating, or I've had friends who have wanted to do different health choices. A couple of them like, I just feel I'll be judged by other parents. I'm like, "Well, I don't have that problem." I love to "educate people on my decisions."

**[0:28:15] SR:** I know. It's so interesting. It's so real. It's so real. I'm in this conversation within my family, our community of support. I want to stay neutral in terms of like, yeah, we can go to a birthday party and eat this or that, and at home, we eat these other things. There are things that are given to my kid at daycare that I would never, ever have at home, and things that my



parents have at their house that I'm like, I don't have that in my home. Sometimes holding the line with a toddler.

**[0:28:56] AS:** Its own nervous system.

**[0:28:58] SR:** Exactly. It's like its own thing. It's its own thing. Comes back to that relational support, too. Depending on how we relate to certain things as a source of safety or not, and being established in that relationship, or that way of relating, I think, it could be more or less of a trigger to have those moments when you're out of control with it.

**[0:29:29] AS:** Yeah. Social engagement nervous system starts, like you said, oh, my God, eight months utero, I did not know that. Is so based on tone, eye contact, touch, all these nonverbal cues, which can be why our sense of belonging, or not, and separateness really feels so extreme by the time we become an adult, because we've taken those same inputs and made it mean this we belong or not, we belong or not, over the decades, right? If we try to fit in and fond and that doesn't work, then we move to fight or flight, correct?

**[0:30:03] SR:** Mm-hmm.

**[0:30:05] AS:** Then, if that doesn't work, we go to freeze. That's the overall, for people listening, a verbal visual of the nervous system. We also though, as we've been talking about our body has – picks up on cues that we may not even know, to your point, four times as much information is coming in. I was just talking with a former client, since friend, and she was saying how December brings up a lot – she's feeling a lot of grief. She's like, “I felt it last December.” I'm like, I wonder if the season your body's picking up on all these same cues, or bringing up an echo of grief from last year.

Our body picks up on these cues, especially if we have stories around them. For everyone listening, we have talked about stories throughout the season, and Stacey's first in immunity to



change. Stories are these very quick thumbnail. They're the facts of what happened, plus the meaning we've made about ourselves extend. Often, our stories, if we sense we're in a story, or we feel we're at risk for separation and not belonging, we can pick up on similar triggers.

For example, I was bullied as a fifth grader. Before I was conscious, groups of women would trigger me. I didn't know that. I thought I was over it. That's an example of your body picking up on things that you might have mentally filed away as, "I'm over that." I'm just using those and examples of how your story, of our stories can trigger certain emotional reactions, but also, physiological reactions that are in this infinity loop. Is that clear so far, Stacey?

**[0:31:49] SR:** Totally.

**[0:31:50] AS:** Okay. The first discussion I want to talk about is how the state can generate thoughts like, diet starts tomorrow, or when I'm X amount of pounds, I can do X. How this even actually be a nervous system reaction, which to me, I would intellectually categorize this as a fantasy. I said this to myself for 18 years, diet starts tomorrow. This is a thing. Your diet has never started tomorrow.

When I'm X amount of pounds, or when I get to this weight, I can do this. Losing weight does not give you the skill set to actually pursue what you want in life. That's a fantasy that it's just going to magically happen, but I believed it. Could this be a flight reaction that someone's actually having? The flight reaction is happening, they're in their story, and it's like, oh, diet starts. Then they go to eat. Then they tell themselves, diet starts tomorrow, because they don't actually know what's happening in their nervous system. Yeah, I'll get to more questions, but I'm just going to have you respond to that.

**[0:32:56] SR:** Well, any of these responses is a means of getting around the discomfort. I love this equation of the flight response being expressed through the diet starts tomorrow, or I can do that later. It's tricky with when I'm this amount of this many pounds, I can do that. I don't



know that I would necessarily put it in the flight category. It's almost like in that bypassing category. A little bit of flight, just, I'm going to rise above it, put myself in a state of mind, tell myself a new story that ultimately, doesn't have legs literally to stand on, and so it collapses at some point and we're back at square one doing the same old shit.

**[0:33:55] AS:** I like that differentiation. This is part of what we were talking about, even in my Truce coaching certification today of like, do the protective strategies that we have clients identify, which are compete avoided accommodate map with certain nervous systems? I'm like, no. I'm like, I don't have the expertise to say yes or no, but I doubt it. Because I think everyone is so unique in how their systems react. Can you tell us what it feels like inside a flight reaction, which maybe if once people hear this, they can start to say, doing that, which is why these thoughts are being generated, these fancy thoughts?

**[0:34:32] SR:** Well, flight response is quite literally like, get the fuck out of here. I've got to get away from this feeling, from this experience that's giving me this feeling. While it's subject to an individual's experience, of course, just, I immediately feel like from my breastbone down, there's no body. Just out of the feeling, out of the viscera of your body, the heart, the pelvis, the genitals, the feeling really sensitive parts of the body, we're usually – Into your point, making a fantasy, so we're in the head and it's spinning thoughts. Sometimes even like, just I don't want to say avoidance, but making an excuse for why it's not possible to do something different.

**[0:35:26] AS:** I love that distinction, because what you're saying is it's not possible to do something different, versus I can't be with this discomfort. Because I think, again, and this requires, and I just encourage everyone to listen to the whole season, because in Truce with Food and the Truce coaching certification, there's an order to things. It's understanding that often that feeling of discomfort is a story. It's so uncomfortable, because it's this meaning we've made about ourselves, versus what's actually possible. What Stacey is saying is something actually different is possible, but we don't feel like it can't be. Did I capture that?



**[0:36:05] SR:** Yes, totally. It's like, the mind has run off away from the body. That's the flight typically, the story. We've just run away from the facts of the situation.

**[0:36:20] AS:** Yes. What's real. I love that. I love that. It's not being tied in reality.

**[0:36:27] SR:** Yes. I mean, all trauma responses are based on perception. Sometimes our perception aligns with reality, but generally, in a recapitulating trauma response, it's nowhere related to reality.

**[0:36:46] AS:** Do you think it can also be non-trauma related that we still have a flight?

**[0:36:51] SR:** Yes. That's a protective tactic, but there's also a relationship to implicit memory. The definition of trauma and trauma responses is tricky, right? Because there are lots of shades of gray in terms of what kicks off these adaptive responses. We've come to use the word trauma, I think, too loosely. I think, we also, most of us have a lot of unidentified trauma.

**[0:37:23] AS:** Yeah. Right. It's both. Well, yeah. I think part of diet starts tomorrow, or in the future, I'll be able to do this, without really, really changing, right? There's a lot of shame that comes with people's food. It's not necessarily the shame of the food, but it's what they think – how they think that makes them separate. I do think a lot of, especially of dieting has been chronic, it's a little T.

**[0:37:48] SR:** Yeah, for sure.

**[0:37:50] AS:** Yeah, your need for nourishment, your need for acceptance has been basically, again, it could be the perception. Often, it started in something in real, but then has grown in perception.





**[0:38:02] SR:** Well, and also the way that food actually feeds our nervous system, there is a relationship between what we're eating, how we're eating, when we're eating, why we're eating on our nervous system.

**[0:38:18] AS:** Yeah, for sure.

**[0:38:21] SR:** It can be another example of recapitulation. In my personal story, the experience of restrict, restrict, restrict, restrict, mind is spinning, mind is spinning, feeling so out of touch, out of control, and then binging and then that feeling of slowing down, or feeling so heavy and burdened in my body. It's like, oh, yeah, here's the thing I'm escaping from with all the restriction. The heaviness, the sadness, the rumination, the beliefs that I'm disgusting, it's a cycle that feeds itself.

**[0:39:12] AS:** Yeah. I mean, you're familiar with Immunity to Change and I find that in Truce with Food, I tell people, your story is playing out in food. It's also playing out in the other vulnerable areas, because when we're in the socialized mind, we don't know that we have a lens. We just think this is how it is. Relationally, we're using all the same, "I'm responsible. This is what responsible people do. I'm a hard worker.", When you have a hammer, everything looks like a nail, I guess, to use the coaching maxim.

Yeah, how we're eating is also how we're being often when we feel vulnerable. It's like the metaphor as well. It's metaphorical as well, I guess, because it's a relational way of being. I love that you brought up the nervous system, because in Truce with Food, the whole framework I use is around nervous system harmony. It's based on Dr. Nicholas Gonzalez's autonomic nervous system balance. I found, over 10-plus years, it to work pretty well and help people figure out what kind of foods work best for them. Because our nervous system is the top – although, we're not doing top and bottom. The Cartesian hierarchy, although he just separated the mind and the body. Now I'm getting off on a tangent.



This is not making sense. Back to reality, Ali. Back to the here and now, what is real. Yeah, I think understanding our nervous system and how that even influences what foods we eat is a way of cultivating safety. Then we can deal with the reaction, the nervous system reactions from our stories, versus already being in a deficit and unregulated, because of the foods we're eating. You had mentioned that, like fantasies aren't always flight.

I had a question here is about like, what else can they be? Or just moving away from discomfort is how you would categorize – Was it from discomfort, or what is real, the flight. That includes trying to bypass the reality of our relationship with food, the reality of why we're eating, which is more often than not, psychological safety. Are there any other reactions that people find themselves in a fantasy of like, "Oh, maybe my spouse will just die." I know, that doesn't sound a fantasy, but it's a way out of conflict.

**[0:41:37] SR:** Again, it's the mind separate from the body. It is a singular track of thought. In that, I guess, when I said not all fantasies are flight, what I mean to say is, it's possible to fantasize in a way that is generative. Fantasies can be quite healthy. When we are fantasizing in a way that is just spiraling up, up, up and out and further and further and further away from reality, that is flight to be sure. That is definitely a response to an inability to be with what is. Feeling also, not all of these things are so explicit. These processes are very nuanced. It's also arising out of, as we said, our bodies are sending information to the brain four times faster than the brain is sending information to the body.

Getting into patterns of thought, generates patterns in the body, in our posture, in our movement, in our being, our way of being, which further impacts the brain and our thoughts, because of how the afferent nervous system works. If you're stuck in a position, like anyone listening, I'm certain has had this experience, where you're on your phone, looking at an app, trying to figure something out, reading a story, suddenly, 20, 30 minutes have gone by and you just feel utter hell, because you've been in this crouched, head down, tucked in position, totally checked out from your body, or what needs to happen.



A deep breath, a little stretch movement, or having the experience of being in your mental spiral downward, or upward. You go for a walk, and you get a change of scenery. It's like, "Oh, today isn't the worst ever. I actually feel great." Patterns of, I think about relationships. If we're in a relationship dynamic, where we feel really polarized, or isolated, we're going to move in a particular way in that environment, which is going to deepen thoughts and patterns of behavior, because of how we're actually moving, how we are embodying our perceptions.

Think about, I don't know, just the – I can certainly speak to personal experience with when I was really deeply entrenched in my disordered eating patterns, it was like, someone hit play on a tape player and I just did the same thing every time. I felt like an automaton. The whole sequence was automated, predetermined. Yeah, same shelf, the same dish, the same seat in the house, the same whatever. Just a little bit of a pattern change and interruption in the pace even, can be the difference between feeling out of control and just recognizing the pattern, rather than being completely swept away by it. I think I went off on a little bit of a tangent there, but –

**[0:44:59] AS:** Well, no. But I think it's useful. I think what you're saying and again, because sometimes we're stuck in all or nothing, it's like, it doesn't you just once you have to switch the pattern. The automatic, people often call it – my clients, the automatic pull to the chips, or to the – Because I think bingeing, especially has an energy to it. Because to me, it's the stories, right? How much our stories feel activated is in proportion to how intense our food is.

In Truce with Food, we're always measuring, is the intensity going down and the frequency, right? It's not like, we measure our calories, or anything like that, but it's like, is the frequency and the intensity, that's over the long haul. I think that what you said is just important for people to realize, each time if you can interrupt the pattern, and that was one of my questions I had around, specifically the flight response, what people can do, because again, I'm now, I'm combining two questions, but the flight response was protective at one point, correct?



**[0:46:04] SR:** Yes, yes. Absolutely.

**[0:46:07] AS:** Yeah. That's really important for people to realize. You might just say, often we say it in derogatory, "I'm so flighty, or I can't have comfort, or whatever." It's like, that served you at one point. Now, it may not be serving you anymore. As the coaching maxim says, what got you here will not get you where you want to go. I think that's so important for those of you listening to have compassion. The more we can water that compassion, the more this dissolve shame, which then we can actually take an honest look at like, is diet really going to start tomorrow? I wish I would have said that to myself. For 18 years, it hasn't. I was mirrored in so much shame that it was like, I had to believe that it was that, because I had no concept of reality.

**[0:46:56] SR:** Yeah. There's also a condition there, right? You're only good if you are doing XYZ, as opposed to, you're good right now. You're perfectly fine, lovable, safe in this moment. I mean, if you really needed to be on a diet, the diet could start right now. I'm being facetious on purpose, but I feel like, there's something about the strategy is, it's a maxim. In Ayurveda, opposites cure each other. If your trauma response, your stress response is flight, literally feel the ground underneath your feet. Move your feet, stretch your feet, touch the ground, get your energy connected to Earth.

If the fight response is very predominant, there's a bit of, I think, discharge of that intensity that's really useful, that almost always, when we find a safe way to do that, almost always gives away to a softening and melting release of big emotion. If finding how that agitated, aggro, outward explosive energy becomes watery. We can only go so far, in terms of inviting these oppositional energies on our own. It's something that's really best practiced, at least in part, in a relationship. It's not enough to know these things, and then again, be fully responsible for all of it on our own. Because these patterns didn't show up in isolation. These patterns emerged from relationships.



**[0:48:47] AS:** Such a good point.

**[0:48:48] SR:** These patterns will not heal in isolation from relationship, whether that's a trusted friend, or your spouse who's a safe enough place to talk about what you're going through, or a counselor. That's why therapists exist. Hopefully, they are actually a safe enough person holding that space for you to be complete already. I think, giving space for the appropriate, by which I mean, titrated, what your nervous system can actually handle, what your neocortex can actually hold the appropriate amount of adjustment, that just subtle interruption of a deeply entrenched pattern. It has to happen slowly. You slow the train down slowly.

**[0:49:36] AS:** I love that Chinese – I think it's Chinese medicine, or the Dao De Jing paradox of like, to go fast, we go slow.

**[0:49:45] SR:** That's like, oh, my gosh. That's postpartum and it's so many healing journeys.

**[0:49:51] AS:** Oh, my God. Slowness is actually the spiritual lesson of my life. It's why I have to keep telling myself that. Just to circle back in terms of a way, an idea, or a tool, when someone feels themselves in that place, I just need to get away. I just need to move away from this discomfort. You're saying a really important step is to ground into – What you're saying, correct me if I'm wrong, the oppositional force is presence, is grounding, is staying with what's –

**[0:50:21] SR:** Yeah. Again, just getting still, or going into meditation, that's jarring for the system. One of my favorite techniques is just mimicking the act of running by very slowly and deliberately moving and stretching one's feet.

**[0:50:42] AS:** Oh, interesting.



**[0:50:43] SR:** To indicate to the nervous system where mobile, we can move, we can go somewhere. But you don't have to run away and your mind escaping reality. Because, again, these are adaptive strategies. Flight is a healthy, like you said before, it is a healthy strategy, until it becomes a pattern that actually doesn't match the situation you're presently in anymore.

**[0:51:13] AS:** Beautifully said.

**[0:51:15] SR:** At one time, it was better for you, for your chances at survival, psychological or physical to get out of there. Now that we have a more fully developed neocortex, now that we have a certain level of maturity, now that we are even curious about change, there's room for the introduction of some gentle changes.

**[0:51:41] AS:** I love that you said gentle.

**[0:51:42] SR:** Oh, it has to be. Yeah.

**[0:51:44] AS:** Yeah. It's the how, right? There was a rupture of too much, too fast, too soon, slow has to be. I'm visual, even though we're at an audio. You're saying, someone could even if they're feeling at their desk, or they're at home, and they just want – they're like, "Diet starts tomorrow. I'm going for whatever." You're saying, a first step, you can still eat, everybody. Before that, do – You're saying, basically, almost mimic running while you're sitting with your feet.

**[0:52:18] SR:** Yeah. You can be sitting at your desk, if you're listening, and you have the space to do this now, feet flat on the ground, one at a time, lift your heel. You're pushing the ball of your foot and your toes into the floor, then lower, and do it on the other foot, slowly just rolling through that full range of motion in your foot. Lift your heel, lower. Lift your heel, lower. Then once you get that initial, just gross mechanical aspect of it, close your eyes and breathe with it,



coordinate it with your breathing, notice your shoulders, notice your belly, probably some tears are going to come up. It is critical to give a little bit more time for that down-regulation to occur. When I say more time, I mean, 90 seconds, a minute and a half. I'm not talking about spend the whole day here. It's more than just up, down, up, down, up, down, ugh, didn't work.

**[0:53:17] AS:** Especially in flight, because, well, probably our sense of time will heal quick.

**[0:53:24] SR:** That's a beautiful observation. Totally. Yeah, the sense of time and a stress response is really compressed. Once you have, again, just done a few mechanical rounds, like, okay, got this, then you can start to stretch it out taffy, feel more of it. Here's another entry point, right? The emotions are to a certain degree, intolerable. We open up, we open the door to that possibility, by the tuning to sensation, physical body sensation that's conscious, that's deliberate. Not the thing that's this creeping feeling in my stomach that I really, really hate that triggers fear and worry and whatever else happens so fast. Turn your attention to the sensation of your foot moving in this way, the stretch of your skin. I really like it when I push down on the ball of my big toe, or I like it when I go in a rhythm.

Then that enables us with a resource, or resource of something like control and even a pleasant experience to then acknowledge and even tend to the really uncomfortable emotions and/or thoughts, without feeling we're just throwing ourselves off a cliff.

**[0:54:52] AS:** We've built some safety in our system, so now we can –

**[0:54:55] SR:** Exactly. There is actual ground underneath my feet. I mean, this is one of the things I use most and give most to clients I work with. Yeah, it's exactly what you said. I want to repeat it. We've established a sense of safety in the present moment, a factual relationship to the present moment. I am in fact safe. I can choose what I do in this moment. Now, let me tend to the thing that feels overwhelming and maybe creeping from my past, or the future anxiety, knowing that in this moment, I'm actually tethered.



[MESSAGE]

**[0:55:38] AS:** Ali here, popping in to let if you're enjoying the season's Food is Safety theme, and feel in a place you want to take action, which is where transformative results unfold. Come join me and other intrepid health rebels who hate small talk for my free Food is Safety Gathering Series. In this series, I'll share practical application tools for your own stress eating and workshop a few participants stress eating challenges, and we'll continue the conversation that these episodes have sparked.

The next gathering, which is on a Zoom call is on Wednesday, January 4th, 2023. We've already had two gatherings. When you sign up for the January call, you can access the past gatherings. The feedback has been amazing, as usual, on these calls. If you really want 2023 to be different for you in terms of food, and really the way that you feel your body has held you back, I suggest checking them out at [alishapiro.com/foodissafety](http://alishapiro.com/foodissafety). The link is also in the podcast show notes wherever you listen to your podcast.

Again, these gatherings are free. They're casual, come as you are, and so nourishing. I wish I could read all of the feedback I've gotten from these. Really, they're so good. In part because of the conversations we've had from those who have joined. Even showering is optional. These gatherings answer the, where do I start to have a truce with food? Are designed for those of you feeling the call, or curious about Truce with Food to know where to start. Truce with Food 2023, my signature boutique group program opens for registration on January 9th. There's an early bird special to save \$500 that runs from January 9th to the 16th.

I'll also be offering a workshop on January 11th about the research that shows how smart goals don't work for eating and exercise goals and what to do instead. I'll also be hosting a Truce with Food open alumni open house, so you can hear from past participants about their experience and where they are now. If you join our food safety gatherings, you'll receive all this information to sign up for all this free stuff. You can also join my list at [alishapiro.com](http://alishapiro.com) to receive





invites to all the fun stuff going on in January. Truce with Food opens once a year. If you feel called to this adventure of a lifetime, I hope you'll join us. Okay, now back to our episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

**[0:58:03] AS:** Thank you for that, Stacey. I think, people are going to really understand themselves and their physiology, because we all go through flight. We're not a culture that encourages us to lean in towards discomfort. Especially, I'm thinking we're recording this during the holiday season and it's like, how much drinking, shopping, eating can we do to get away from the discomfort that this season brings up? I mean, I'm laughing but it's not really funny. Humor is healing, right?

**[0:58:34] SR:** Well, and then not to get too Ayurvedic, or Eastern medicine, but the impact of all of those activities on our nervous system.

**[0:58:45] AS:** So much overstimulation.

**[0:58:47] SR:** Just overstimulated. We're wearing out our liver. Our liver is trying to do so much, actually, in order that we might feel vital and awake and present, regulated. Our whole system is just overloaded, overtaxed. We're staying up late. All the things. It's just exemplary of our culture's extremism, where it's like, you hear people just like, "Oh, just enjoy it. Go along. Have some fun. Don't worry about it." Other people are like, "No. Resist. Don't indulge. Don't give in." Surely, there's a middle path here. Come on, folks. There's nothing wrong with sitting around a fire and having a hot chocolate and a cookie and laughing your ass off with your loved ones. I just don't believe that's wrong, or bad. Six nights in a row, probably going to start to feel like hell.

**[0:59:49] AS:** Yeah. Well, and then I'm thinking as you described it, I never thought about the liver, all the stuff. Because again, I'm pretty moderate with the – I mean, none of us get



presents for each other, because we're just like, whatever, we can buy stuff that we want. It's like, the food is not a deal for me. I'm clear with my boundaries it. I'm thinking though, for so much of that, this is just a – I love this time of year, also, because I'm Pitta and it's cool up.

Again, this was not always the case. I totally understand what it's like to not feel that. Then I'm thinking about the fantasy of all this stuff happening. Then on January 1st or 2nd, you're suddenly supposed to feel renewed to make these changes. It's like, “Nah.”

**[1:00:36] SR:** Yeah. We give ourselves permission. We cut down our boundaries and go full bore and wear out our system and then expect to be in perfect control on January 1st, with no support.

**[1:00:50] AS:** I think we need everyone in America fake running at their desk. All right, so the other thing I want to talk to you about, because I feel like, this is lesser known, and it's so important for people to understand is the freeze reaction, and its relationship to bingeing. Can you talk a little bit about the freeze reaction and what you understand its relationship to bingeing and how we're regulating through bingeing and the freeze reaction?

**[1:01:20] SR:** Yeah. The freeze is essentially checking out a neutral, no action. The whole thing, I almost feel like, as I understand it, and this is primarily experiential, so much of binge behavior comes as a consequence of hyper vigilance and control.

**[1:01:48] AS:** Not just around food. It's also in the sequence.

**[1:01:51] SR:** Everything. Everything and anything, so that it's almost like a walking freeze response in that hyper-controlled state. Then this uncontrolled spastic energy in the body of just moving, almost like you're a puppet and someone is moving your body for you, but your mind is completely blank and checked out. The freeze, the freeze is – a lot of these, because of the way that we're talking about response to stress and not actually a physical threat, it can be



a freezing of the mind, as opposed to a physiological freezing, specifically related to binge behavior, because binge behavior can be quite frantic.

**[1:02:48] AS:** Mm-hmm. Oh, mine was. It was like, this, I felt possessed.

**[1:02:51] SR:** Right. It can also look like, staring blankly into space, just robotically moving one hand to your mouth. So much of your body is frozen. The difference between the two, we could probably get into some really nuanced, neurological things, but I don't know it's that useful. Just recognizing the way that we internally and subconsciously strategize to get the need met of discharging energy from the body. I think it's actually, if not more compelling, just worth discussing that binge behavior as a consequence of a moving freeze, where we're just – our stomach has sucked in, only allow this much of that in and only allow ourselves so much leeway of any expression. Then the body is just needs to just move, but then the mind shuts down.

**[1:03:53] AS:** When you say shuts down, I'm thinking, it's also solely focused on food. That's shutting down in a way. It's the symbolism of –

**[1:04:00] SR:** Yes. Yeah. It doesn't matter. Freeze is connected to that collapse response, or it's just resignation. Your mind is totally resigned to, this is happening. I'm going to eat the whole fucking gallon of ice cream. I'm getting in my car and I'm going to get another pint. I'm going to do whatever. The mind is in resignation, even while the body can be quite active. Not active in a sense of we're doing jumping jacks, or whatever.

**[1:04:29] AS:** No, but active in like, how can I control this? Yeah. I love that you bring up that distinction between the mind, because that's really – I know you say, it's so important for people to realize. That's why you have to address the psychology and the physiology, because there might be two different states going on. I'm thinking like, if physiologically you're like, “I got to move away from this discomfort,” and then the mind, which is the body and the



psychology, this is what I always do. Then you flee, and then just to freeze and collapse. Not to confuse people.

**[1:05:10] SR:** Another thing, they have to work together. I think, really, these are great examples of how the split can show up in behavior.

**[1:05:23] AS:** Yeah. You almost use both responses when the flight is okay, you need to move away from this discomfort. To your point, I still need to discharge all this energy. I love that you said resignation. Can you talk about what the emotional weather feels like inside the freeze reaction? Because learning to me, that freeze feels like resignation and hopelessness, I think that saved my birth when I had to go into the hospital, which the disappointment of being there, not wanting to be there, the smells, the lighting, I mean, it took me right back to me having cancer, being a 13-year-old girl.

If I didn't have, again, the intellectual ability to say, of course, I'm going to go back to freeze and collapse, and how do I mobilize and stuff? Had I not known that, I think I would have just thought, I can't do this. I can't advocate for what I want. I can't have the birth I want. I really want people to understand what it feels like inside a freeze reaction, and that that perception is not necessarily reality.

**[1:06:30] SR:** Yeah. Well, the freeze response is, of course, designed to be temporary, a way to ensure our survival through something that we perceive as being unsurvivable; imminently threatening. When it becomes a default state, not that we're in it all of the time, although some people are, but we go there with frequency, and it doesn't match the reality of the situation we're in. It can have very detrimental effects of not being able to see the people who want to connect with you. Not being able to feel the support that is readily available to you. The freeze response is an all, but shutting down of our sensory system, so we can survive generally a very painful, life-threatening experience.



**[1:07:28] AS:** Do you think shame puts us into freeze?

**[1:07:32] SR:** I think it can. I think to a certain degree, as you're saying that I have this visual in my mind of just certain parts of our body going offline, just a blackout in various parts of the body. I can feel that in my own body. I think, absolutely. Yeah, shame is definitely an overpowering emotional experience that triggers a perception of imminent threat.

**[1:08:01] AS:** Because I think one thing that doesn't get talked about a lot, and I don't know if this is a rabbit hole to go down, but shame – I mean, the way that it's – we talk about it and experience, it is often really unhelpful. Yet, shame also was used to keep people's behavior in line. Again, protective. I was joking. I can't believe I'm going to share this. We had one of the pipes from our toilet outside of our house was broke this week. Yeah. It was the pandemic, and we were new parents who were overwhelmed. I was like, "I'm going to try to fix it myself. I'm going to try to fix it myself." We couldn't deal with it. Then all of a sudden, poop, and all this stuff was coming out onto our driveway. I'm like, this shame is helpful. We are calling somebody to –

**[1:08:52] SR:** Yes.

**[1:08:52] AS:** It was just like, okay, we need to take action on this. We cannot put this up anymore, because we have other toilets that we were –

**[1:09:01] SR:** Well, I did a course years ago. It was on a particular yogic text. I remembered distinctly, my teacher speaking about healthy shame. If we didn't have shame, we would be cheating on our partners. We would be overtly hurting other people, taking things that don't belong to us. There is such a thing. Shame is a boundary. I think of that as, I don't know if this is even a thing, endogenous shame, right? Shame that arises out of a deep knowing that this is a violation of just the rules of nature, versus being shamed and internalizing that from an – being



shamed from an external source for something that feels quite natural and even life-giving, like eating a birthday cake, having sex, whatever, you know what I mean?

**[1:09:56] AS:** Well, that's the problem, right? In our culture, the people who should have some more shame, don't. The people who have so much shame shouldn't have any.

**[1:10:05] SR:** Yeah, yeah. Honestly, it gets so manipulated. I mean, it is the most potent tool for manipulation, period.

**[1:10:14] AS:** If we're and often, not always, but sometimes we feel shame in our stories, we can feel shame around our bodies. To your point, whether it's eating cake, or having sex, episode three –

**[1:10:23] SR:** Two of my favorite things.

**[1:10:30] AS:** Yeah. Well, they're very like, I think about the feminine being associated with pleasure. Pleasure in puritanical culture is shame, which is episode three was all about. Tune into that, people.

**[1:10:39] SR:** So good.

**[1:10:41] AS:** I think about bingeing also, we talked about the energetic release. I love that. That is so true, when you're just trying to – you have all this almost energy stored, because of how you're controlling things and you're not tuned to your senses, or your instincts – You're just managing it. How also, I'm thinking on the physiological level. Because to me, everything is, the more I get into this work, I think everything's telling the same story. It's just a matter of, can you decode it?



I mean, not the same story, I should say, not the stories we're talking about with immunity to change. It's a bigger symbolism, I guess, is what I'm trying to say, is this all roads point to the same things that we have to work on. How does bingeing also give us an endorphin high, but it also numbs us out to stay in that hopelessness inertia? If it's advantageous for us for some reason to just go through the motions and be that frozen, functional freeze, not rocking the boat, whatever freeze we're in, but doesn't bingeing also numb us out from that hopelessness and that inner show? Because most people are not bingeing on kale, right?

**[1:11:58] SR:** Yeah, for sure.

**[1:12:00] AS:** I mean, I never did. It's the stuff that gives us endorphins.

**[1:12:05] SR:** And carbs. Just generally, there's like, I don't know. I am curious now. I actually haven't thought about this very extensively. When we're bingeing on refined sugars and refined carbs, typically high salt things, high fat things, fast food, things that just hit your system fast and hard, it's like, we've reached the point of intolerability, and almost panic. It's like a drug addict. I need this hit now. I will do anything to get it, just to get a moment's reprieve. It's like, even if you're eating a "reasonable amount" of fast food, there's still a crash. You don't need to eat much of that stuff. It's just the usually, I'm not usually bingeing on a balanced meal.

**[1:13:09] AS:** Yeah. No. There's no fun in that.

**[1:13:10] SR:** It's just the extremity, almost your body is going for that feeling in extremis. Here's where I really love Ayurveda and what we're learning from reaching for the sweet taste, which is grounding, building and safety, and the nuances and the different tastes of things. Generally, we're bingeing on things that are grounding and stabilizing, because that hyper-vigilant control aspect that tends to lead to bingeing, the perfectionism, the stoicism, the holding it all together, is pretty ungrounded. We're not connected to our body and our needs. It's ungrounded in the sense that there's no relationship to Earth and subtlety and – I mean, Earth



is feminine as well. There's a lot of subtlety in feminine and grounding. Earth is what allows water to flow. There's still movement there. It's not just structure and holding. Its softness, too. Our ability to be soft depends fundamentally on feeling the ground.

**[1:14:25] AS:** Going out again, right? I think about how I feel that way, and when I'm around the mountains.

**[1:14:32] SR:** The loneliness that often coincides with binge behavior, and certainly did for me. Just feeling so alone, so isolated and giving something a feeling of fullness contact to my body through eating.

**[1:14:52] AS:** I never thought of it that way.

**[1:14:53] SR:** There's just so much. I think, it's a really – It's worth getting curious about. It plays into this relational component of our healing and our behavior, regulating our behavior just to be able to – It's pretty difficult to imagine being able to share with someone what you're doing, your behavior around food without being shamed, or rejected, or ridiculed, or whatever. So much of it happens in isolation, which deepens the imprint of shame. Deepens the feeling of helplessness. Being able to bring it out in the open, speak about it, I mean, it's so vulnerable. It's such a huge courageous act, I think.

**[1:15:47] AS:** Especially, because so many people struggle with it. Yet somehow, we don't believe that. We think we're the ones struggling. That's part of, I think, that shame and the isolation that that story creates, right? I'm alone in this. No one else has this crazy stuff. It's like, no. I think, 80% of the population does.

**[1:16:09] SR:** Yeah, totally.





**[1:16:10] AS:** What about overeating? Do you think this dynamic is on a continuum? The less alone we feel, the less – As we build our capacity to connect in our vulnerability, to belong, how we are, how we are, who we are, how we are. Because I've noticed this with my clients, right? Again, we measure, is their eating going down in intensity, so that like, “Oh, I can't stop that pattern.” Versus, “Oh, I have a little more distance and frequency.” Am I “falling off eating out of alignment with my goals” more and more and more and the frequency of not? It feels like, this is on a continuum as we build capacity. What do you think about that, in terms of getting – almost we go – We can sometimes go from freeze to functional freeze? Or is that not how –

**[1:16:59] SR:** There's something in overeating for me that is like, we can't feel our bottom. We cannot sense our physical, actual boundary. We just keep feeding this feeling of void. In relationship to another person, if it's a remotely healthy relationship, it's much easier to feel a sense of like, I just didn't take the opportunity to say this word, because I feel so cool saying it, satiety. Being satiated. If you have in isolation and shame, it's a groundlessness, it's a bottomlessness. It's almost like, who cares? We just keep trying to fill the void that is necessarily filled by others by being in connection to another.

Here's where it gets real tricky to that previous point, if we're so deeply entrenched in a pattern that we can't see the support that actually is available to us, That was true for me for a long time. I was so deep in my flight and my freeze that I just couldn't even – it wasn't safe to sit still long enough to feel that I was connected and I was really loved and there were lots of people who would have gone out of their way to help me.

**[1:18:23] AS:** That makes me think about the challenges of flight and freeze, because you said, I couldn't feel it. You weren't in reality in terms of, there are people here who want to help me. There is a lot of these.

**[1:18:36] SR:** Moving through all of these responses is normal and healthy. It's just a healthy muscle can engage and relax. A healthy nervous system can charge and discharge. It's not to say



that we should never feel like fighting, or running away, or collapsing. These are expressions of a healthy nervous system. It's when, again, just to reiterate the point, it becomes a default response that doesn't match the situation we're in, or we can't repair from an instance of mistakenly fighting, or attacking.

**[1:19:14] AS:** I'm so glad you said that, because I'm just so aware of how purity culture is in fucking everything. I think, people think there can be some perfect pure state where you're perfectly co-regulated. It's like, look, different parts of the body can be in different nervous system reactions. It's so much more complex than just, I am perfectly calm. I'm glad you said that.

**[1:19:38] SR:** Yeah, yeah.

**[1:19:41] AS:** What is a way, or an idea, or tool that we can start to mobilize when we're maybe in a free state, brought on by or stories, or shame, or we're discharging? I know for me, in the hospital, just crying and knowing that crying was – I mean, safe and that Carlos was safe, and that that would help mobilize me. I mean, granted, I had done a lot of preparation and stuff, but it was like, that helped me get back into the mind space I needed to be for labor. Crying and connection are my go-to things, because they work really well for me. Do you have any – I love the running that you gave for flight. Do you have anything similar to that with freeze?

**[1:20:23] SR:** Yeah. Well, any amount of movement is super helpful. The breath is a natural and essential expression of movement for the body. Bringing attention to the breath and working with a really simple breath. We'll call it practice, like a box breath, inhale for four, hold for four, exhale for four, hold for four. If the holding feels too much like freeze, just be inhale four, exhale for four. Get some relationship to implicit movement.

Then bringing that, I think freeze is really internal. It's shutting down all capacity receptivity to the external environment, because it's so unsafe, it's so threatening. Bringing gentle touch to



any part of the body, either with your own hand, or with a comforting object or material, just waking up the skin in any way. Then lastly, in the energetic structure of the body that I'm referring to, which is the chakra system, shame is associated with the solar plexus chakra, often the lower three chakras really. Any pelvic rocking, or subtle undulation in the trunk, pelvis, midsection. Just any way to restore, or invite a sense of aliveness. Any amount of movement and waking up of our sensory body. I think engaging any of the senses. I think of coming out of a deep sleep. We use smelling salts to wake someone up after they've passed out. The smell of something beautiful going for a walk and smelling a flower, or giving your – if you have an oil, or something you love to smell, I would absolutely grab my kids blanket and take a big whiff. Feeling into your sensory body.

**[1:22:31] AS:** I love that. It made me think of, again, I saw it on Instagram, so it doesn't mean it's true. Why twerking is actually really healing.

**[1:22:44] SR:** I love this. Continue.

**[1:22:46] AS:** Because it is. It nurtures that first and second chakra. It's movement around that. They were explaining the indigenous wisdom of twerking. I mean, we've obviously – it's been filtered through the capitalistic lens and all these –

**[1:23:01] SR:** Yeah. It's become something other than –

**[1:23:04] AS:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. I was like, “Oh, my God. Decolonizing my mind.”

**[1:23:10] SR:** Well, totally. You can just attune to, if you have ever given yourself the pleasure of twerking. It's just joyful. It's so joyful, and you're moving energy and body parts that are typically held still in stationary. Even just, forgotten about similar to the body work that I do, like why is it normal to go and get a massage where they touch every part of your body, except your pelvis and genitals? It's not to say that everyone should feel they could just go anywhere



and – There's context and boundaries at play in this conversation for sure. What are the implications of cutting off this part of our body from touch and contact and even therapeutic attention?

**[1:24:03] AS:** I never even thought of that, because I love massage.

**[1:24:08] SR:** Again, even with a massage therapist, maybe we would benefit from having more of a sense of, like it needs to be a particular person and I want to be able to have a consent-based conversation about what I'm available for and what I'm not. There's lots of ways that touch could be used to greater effect in our culture, including these transactional experiences of getting a massage.

**[1:24:33] AS:** Yeah. Something else you said about when we go into freeze, we have to shut down and be so internal, because the outside world feels so dangerous. I think about how often our stories trigger the perception of danger, when it's not really there. Even your own your own share of so many people wanted to help me. I couldn't reach it. I feel like, clients often use that language. I just can't feel it. I can't reach it. I think, if people are feeling that, be curious about freeze and try some of what Stacey talked about.

One final question, because a lot of the clients who I work with tend to be more parasympathetic dominant. When I look at that personality-wise, tends to be more of the healing professions. More into the abstract and more into [inaudible 1:25:27]. Are people who do better often with more paleo diets, and they've – because their system is parasympathetic, so they need that sympathetic charge. We're the people who have tried to be vegetarian, tried to be plant-based. It's like, "Oh, yeah. That's not going to work." I mean, often, you could too, and all your cravings versus like, okay, "I'm just not eating for my nervous system."

Youth, I have found, especially now that I am in – I've gone through perimenopause and menopause, and my body's just sensitive in a different way, that I don't know if I'm necessarily



more prone to freeze. If I don't move and activate that more sympathetic response, I can easily just get more tired, get more hopeless. I wouldn't call it a freeze. Do you think people who are more parasympathetic dominant are more prone to that – Even skipping over the fight or flight, or even the fit-in or fawn, and just, if they don't get enough stimulation for this to put them in a healthy, sympathetic, parasympathetic exchange?

**[1:26:34] SR:** Yes. I'll use this example. It goes back to this is Ayurvedic maxim. Opposites carry each other. When we are in imbalance, we're going to lean – it's like immunity to change. It's more comfortable to be with this thing that is familiar, even though it's not actually helping me. You talked about before we started recording, the broodiness of Pittsburgh weather suits you. I feel similarly, I love to get all broody. Sometimes it's like, I feel like a vampire when I walk outside and too soon I'm like, "Ah, sun again." I love the rain. I love it, love it, love it.

I think that there's something to be said for just the brilliant design of nature and our tendency as humans to be in currently, our culture, or lifestyle, supports in balance. It allows very much for us to choose our own adventure, which is like, well, I'm going to choose the easy way. I'm going to choose the – I don't have to do that. I'm not going to do that. A little antagonism is actually where it's at in terms of keeping our organism healthy and functioning. For a person who's more parasympathetically inclined, our mutual friend and teacher, Kimberly Anne Johnson, talks about the elastiness quality of tissues, which is ethnic. There's ethnic evidence. People who live closer to the poles are more elastininess in support of the weather being really, really cold, so they naturally are just more flexible. Because otherwise, if it was rigidity on top of rigidity, that wouldn't be sustainable. People who live closer to the equator are more collagenist, dense body types that are less naturally flexible, or hyper mobile.

Nature has given us this polarity to support us. Then we've moved around. We've done all manner of things, just for satisfaction of a whim, or our mind, or keeping up with the Joneses, whatever you want to call it, and it's not actually serving our physiology. When I was teaching



yoga full time, only the super intense, hypervigilant, type A folks we're going to the 90-minute hot power yoga class.

**[1:28:58] AS:** They're the ones who don't need it.

**[1:29:01] SR:** Right. They never showed up in the yin yoga class, or restorative yoga, or God forbid, a gentle hatha yoga class that was only 60-minutes long. That's just not how it goes. It takes a deeper level of awareness of like, I can't even conceive of how balanced might feel. This is what I know. This is how I've identified myself. This is who people see me as, so got to keep it up. That's largely operating unconsciously. The intensity becomes normal, so we just feed the intensity.

**[1:29:37] AS:** Our culture rewards it, right?

**[1:29:38] SR:** Oh, for sure. Yeah, yeah.

**[1:29:40] AS:** Until you come up into some optimal conflict, like food battle, birth trauma, that we were like, "All right, I got to examine this."

**[1:29:49] SR:** I got to examine this. My life isn't functioning and I want to understand why.

**[1:29:53] AS:** Yeah. Yeah.

**[1:29:55] SR:** It's still really uncomfortable. I mean, jeez. It shows up in all other ways. We're such clever creatures in terms of how we get that itch scratched. I know that I need to do less of this, so I make this change in my life. I'm going to take on this, this and that in order to keep my schedule so completely busy that I run myself ragged. I'm speaking on my own specific experience. I got to prioritize rest, or healing. We've got two small children. I'm like, "But I'll do



grad school and I'm going to say yes to this, this, this, this and that.” Yeah. I'm in a moment of reckoning, so I value this conversation on many levels right now.

**[1:30:35] AS:** Oh, yeah. Well, when we first met in our group with Ash, I mean, I was in the reckoning of – I mean, I thought I was at the bottom of, okay, I'm slowing down. I get it. But there was many more levels to drop, so I don't really get it. I understand, Stacey.

**[1:30:55] SR:** This is our journey as humans.

**[1:30:56] AS:** Yeah. Yeah. I'm trying to always discern, what's my enthusiasm? Or what's my enthusiasm mixed with anxiety?

**[1:31:03] SR:** Oh, my gosh. I saw the greatest thing. It was a moment when the Internet was so great. It was a meme said, “Does it resonate? Or does it affirm your implicit bias?” I was like, “Oh. Oh, damn. Oh.”

**[1:31:22] AS:** I love that the we're putting out content that. Because some of the stuff I see people sharing, I'm not going to say this is one account. It's hugely popular. I'm just people are sharing this stuff. I'm maybe, maybe not. It's just, yeah. I mean, we often share on social media of what affirms how we want people to see us.

**[1:31:45] SR:** Oh, yeah.

**[1:31:48] AS:** That's its own fascination. Stacey, is there anything that you want to add that I didn't ask you before we wrap up today? I think you've given us so much to think about, and so much to take action on moderate, titrated action on.

**[1:32:05] SR:** It's such a pleasure to talk to you, Ali. I appreciate the deep dive that every conversation with you is – I just wanted to read. I've been reading this book. Started reading it



for school and fell deeply in love with it. There's just this tiny little passage that I love to read. I know it could be its own rabbit hole. It also is a summation of what you've outlined here for our conversation today, which is the necessary combination of a body-mind approach, that it is somatic, as much as it is intellectual. It is a choice as much as it is a physiological state to change. With your permission, I'd love to just read this short passage.

**[1:32:51] AS:** Please.

**[1:32:52] SR:** The book is called *The Heart of Trauma*, and it's written by Bonnie Badenoch. "14-year-old Jordan came to us, because her parents were concerned that she had so few friends and seemed to be sad most of the time. With a previous counselor, she had talked about feeling like she was fundamentally uninteresting, and could find no reason for anyone to befriend her. With every intention of relieving her suffering and building on his experience that she was indeed interesting, the therapist talked with her about changing how she thought about herself, and gave her some exercises, affirmations and social coaching."

"Always seeking to be an obedient child, she practiced diligently and left therapy about two months later, because she felt like a failure when her inner experience and her outer life didn't change. When Jordan arrived at our center, her counselor was grounded in the awareness of how thoughts arise from implicit roots and can then continue to hold those perceptions in place. To begin with, cognitions and behaviors, as though they are independent of implicit memory, might generate a new set of neural nets, but would not address the foundation of worthlessness arising from Jordan's deep implicit stream."

"Attending from this angle of vision seemed to make room for her to begin to speak of her sadness, that her father didn't seem to like her. He wasn't vicious or mean, but rarely looked at her direction at all. With her counselors' support, she could feel a core of emptiness along her nurturant canal in her body. Together, they could hold the embodied and emotional experience of being ignored, along with the thoughts this repeated relational experience in gender.





Honoring both the implicit root and the beliefs made room for the possibility of a disconfirming experience. In other words, change.”

**[1:34:45] AS:** I love that it ended, in other words, change. Because I think there's a big difference between learning and changing, often. We often confuse the two.

**[1:34:55] SR:** I loved the acknowledgement early in the passage of her first counselor having intentions to relieve her of her suffering.

**[1:35:06] AS:** She couldn't do it herself.

**[1:35:07] SR:** Yeah. Well, and the intention was there. So many of our approaches are just one-sided. They're simply incomplete. It's the awareness of the complexity of our system that enables, I think, the most holistic approach. Really allowing all of ourselves to factor into the challenge and to the change is so important. I could spend another half a day with you, Ali. Let's do this again. I can't wait to be in Truce with Food. I'm so honored and thank you again for the opportunity to come back on the podcast.

**[1:35:48] AS:** Oh, my God. Yeah. I mean, this is going to help so many people. Thank you, for you, and how you are in the world and your own curiosity and rising to the challenge to end with another one of my Instagram meme I like of – I forget who said it, but it was this idea of my favorite people are people who come out of the fire and bring buckets of water back for other people. That's you.

**[1:36:14] SR:** That's awesome. Yeah, yeah. For sure. Thank you, Ali.

**[1:36:21] AS:** Yeah. Where can people find you, Stacey? We'll link to you in the show notes as well. If people's in the first episode, they know. But for people who are finding you just on this episode, where can people find you?



**[1:36:32] SR:** Thank you. My website is a great place. [www.staceyramsower.com](http://www.staceyramsower.com). Stacey is spelled with an E-Y. I'm also on Instagram, [@sacredbody\\_staceyramsower](https://www.instagram.com/sacredbody_staceyramsower). You can just type in my name.

**[1:36:55] AS:** Yeah, sacred body is first. Yeah, Stacey said you can type in her name.

**[1:37:03] SR:** Yeah. I am primarily working with one-on-one clients right now. I have a couple of small offers coming out. You can contact me directly through my website, set up a consult if you're curious about how I work and what it would be like to work with me. Thank you, Ali, again.

**[1:37:22] AS:** Yeah. Thank you, Stacey.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[1:37:27] AS:** Thank you, health rebels and visionary storytellers for tuning in today. If you know someone who would benefit from this episode, please share it with them. Remember, we have transcripts of our episodes that [alishapiro.com/podcast](http://alishapiro.com/podcast) for your non-audio friends and family. If you can, I'd love it if you can leave a review on Apple Podcasts. It helps more people find the show. Both actions, reviewing and sharing with others helps us change the cultural narrative around food, weight and our bodies. Thanks for engaging in a different kind of conversation. Remember, always, your body truths are unique, discoverable, profound and liberating.

[END]

