

S2 EPISODE 04

[INTRO]

[0:00:09.1] AS: When you're fed up with fighting food and your body, join us here. I'm Ali Shapiro, creator of the Truce with Food Program and your host for Insatiable, where we explore the hidden aspects of fighting our food, our weight, and our bodies, and dive deep into nutrition science and true whole health.

Fair warning, this is not your parents' health care. This is a big rebel yell to those who crave meaning, hunger for truth, and whose lust for life is truly insatiable. Believe me, freedom awaits.

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:46.8] AS: Welcome to season 2, episode 4; Health Breakthroughs from Abandoning Perfection, with Brien Ward. I don't know about you, but I was dressing up in my Wonder Woman underwear when I was five and bolted to my doctor's office to show him how proud I was of my outfit, I instinctively knew I was here to be free and not play it safe. Yet over the decades, that spunk and chutzpah got buried. First under bagels, and then any carb would do. I was eating because I thought perfection or being good or doing things the "right way" was the way.

These words we use, like "the right way" or "doing good" underlie a need to be perfect and perfection is a suffocating disease that hexes us into playing it safe and thus small. If freedom lights you up, then you will love today's episode. I wanted to have my client, Brien Ward on, so you can see the breakthrough results possible when you choose to take health and emotional risks in life versus aiming for perfection.

In tandem with this season's theme of the feminine perspective, the feminine is wild, that archetype. It is not play it safe. Think of nature, right? So, perfection is actually totally against our human nature, and when you can start to align yourself with this, an entirely new world opens up as you learn what's more important to you than doing everything the right way. Yet that's also easier said than done, and Brien has done the work to really embody a new mindset

and she's going to show you how she got here and share so many great insights about how you too can leave perfection behind to be more free and get breakthrough results, because of that freedom, not in spite of it.

As a nurse and yoga teacher, Brien is a wealth of healing knowledge. What I loved about today's episode the most was Brien shining light on one of the biggest cultural myths that keep women overwhelmed and frustrated with their bodies and how she's learned to unlearn that. Her new holistic definition of letting go, and she gives a great set of questions to make sure you're setting the right health goals this year. This is a time we try to focus on perfection, yet Brien's going to give you a couple of better questions I think, that have worked for her so you can get the year off on the right foot.

Also, so you guys know, Truce with Food, my annual flagship program is starting this February 6, 2018. I'm doing a free mini-intro to the program starting the week of January 15th, so sign up at alishapiro.com to get all the details. We have a lot of insatiable listeners in Truce with Food, so if you like these kind of conversations, you're going to love the women that are having them.

All right, enjoy today's episode. It was such a treat. I learned so much myself.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:03:33.8] AS: Thank you so much for being here today, Brien. I love getting to spend time with my clients. So thanks for being here.

[0:03:41.8] BW: [inaudible 0:03:41.9].

[0:03:42.9] AS: Yeah. What I want us start off with is when you first came to my work, Truce with Food, what brought you there and what questions were you asking? Where were you on your health journey? Because being a nurse and being a yoga teacher and into preventive care, you had quite the background and acumen. What were you asking yourself?

[0:04:05.4] BW: Yeah, that's a great question. I think a lot of the questions that were coming up for me at that time were how can I make time for it all? How can I get to this very specific goal

week that I set for myself in a realistic amount of time? How can I put these all on my plate?

Yeah, it was just recognizing that my life was not sustainable, and listening to the podcast, I kept — It resonated with different parts of me, but I felt like I didn't have time. It's like, "Oh, I already do yoga and I meditate and starting to do therapy before our work together." I felt like it was indulgent to work on myself in more and more ways, but I actually went through our breakup and just found that *Insatiable* is my anchor, listening, listening to you guys. So it felt like agreeing to do the work was a way for me to finally move back to myself.

[0:04:59.7] AS: I think that part of the breakup is so important. I think a lot of times we come out of these, they're transitions, right? And we aren't the same person who went into a job of relationship and we come out and we don't integrate, we don't know who we are now. We go through these identity change, and it can really — It turns your world upside down, and I don't think our culture actually honors endings. We don't talk about death. We don't talk anything ending. Like we always want to be positive rather than, "Wait, we can actually learn something here, and what do I want to take with me moving forward?" I think that was so smart of you too to know intuitively that that's what you needed.

[0:05:41.4] BW: Thank you, and I think it was really helpful because I recognized to sustain the relationship. I was willing to hide parts of myself or to deny parts of myself, and after we broke up — And I love what you talked about, our society. Thinking if a relationship ended, we feel like, "Oh, I did something wrong," rather than just it wasn't the right fit or there was a season for it.

Yeah, I recognized that I wanted to recover in a healthy way and not like, "Let's get out and get drunk or just starting dating again." None of those felt like a good fit for me, so *Truce with Food* felt like, "Yeah, this can help me heal in a way that will heal, not just sort of put a band-aid over."

[0:06:23.9] AS: As you said, it just made me realize you're right. Our culture offers like these really unhealthy coping mechanisms, so you can never like integrate or pause or really know what you need to take forward. I'd never really thought about that, because I'm not a big drinker, but most of our culture it.

[0:06:40.7] BW: Yeah. Yeah, you don't learn, like, "What do I need to work on to be healthy, or my next relationship, or why did this relationship not work?" We just assume like, "Oh, I was bad

or wrong or that other person was bad and wrong and that's why it didn't work." Rather than, "Oh! This was a lesson, and I can move into my next relationship [inaudible 0:06:58.6]." Yeah. It's sorts of what works for me.

[0:07:02.7] AS: Yeah, I love that. You had these questions of "How do I fit all of these in? It feels like I'm putting so many things — I'm trying to take care of myself. I'm trying to put myself first." But you have a very demanding job that is really — it really aligns with your values and I think a lot of people like their jobs, but it feels like too much. It's just so much, as well as everything else you're trying to keep up.

Tell us a little bit about what unfolded for you in Truce with Food and what surprised you the most about what you kind of thought your issue was versus what it actually turned out to be.

[0:07:39.3] BW: Yeah. I think Truce with Food helped me to form questions that would actually support me to sustain myself and feel good about my life. Instead of, "How can I find time for it all?" Became, "What do I want to make space for?" Or, "How can I reach my goal week?" became, "Is this actually a health week for me and for my body?" Then questions like, "How can I fit these in all in my plate?" became, "Am I saying yes to this request to avoid the discomfort of having to settle in it or having to ask for more time?"

Yeah, even if I do decide to say yes, being honest with myself, what is the cost? Time and energy. Am I going to make all the decisions that aren't aligned with my values because I'm trying to make space for this other thing. Yeah, it gave me a different set of questions, which I feel like a lot more helpful and it helped to realize I was obviating so much in my life because I didn't want to take risks.

So I was very much — I was the oldest of four children. I was always the good girl, got good grades. So I was so used to being praised for performance and for being polite. I've realized that as an adult, I still very much clung to that identity for safety, but it was keeping really me small and quiet in a way that didn't feel good. At work when I had a different view point than my coworkers, sometimes I would think like "Everybody else seems so into this idea. Why am I not?" If there was a project that I felt like was just put on my plate, I never thought to have a — Or not never thought to, but never felt empowered to have a discussion with my program

director, “How else can we make this work?” Or strategizing in my scheduling. So I feel like I was always kind of just pedaling and trying to stay afloat. I wasn’t making this space to think what at work really lights me up? What gets me so excited and what actually gives me energy back? I think I was just trying to move through all the tasks and the work always seems so overwhelming, but Truce with Food helped me to get really clear on the things in my day that give me energy back and to think about my energy management, not just time management.

Yeah, it has allowed me to make my work day so much more fulfilling. I work with nurses who work with families throughout Philadelphia and me setting limits. I realized like it’s modeling for nurses too how we can set limits with the families we work with. We can’t always be available. It’s not healthy to say yes to every request. A lot of it is about having a discussion about a solution or a plan that can work for both people. I think I have a lot — My relationships with my staff are a lot healthier, because I’m more clear on what works for me and modeling how to have those conversations.

[0:10:41.3] AS: Yeah, you just said so much that I want to like kind of explain a little bit for listeners. But one of the big things that I think you illustrated so well is in Truce with Food, we go from what we call the good girl mindset, which just isn’t a mindset of trying to be good, but it’s an orientation towards kind of just accepting that life is happening and you don’t have any choices.

People will say they’re all or nothing with food, but we also tend to think we’re all or nothing with what happens in our lives. The good girl mindset — And I loved how you said “I was trying to be nice and stay small,” because there’s a strong metaphor there. We want to lose weight to be smaller. But you kind of have to drop the breadcrumbs for people.

People listening, we unconsciously have this orientation. I think we maybe know deep down inside women are conditioned to want to be wanted, and we want to please people, we want to be nice and the things that patriarchy tells us are important. But what we really do is re-orient that lens towards being a better discerner of our own wants and needs, which is a lot more complex than it sounds, and it’s not selfish either, right?

[0:11:48.3] BW: No.

[0:11:49.6] AS: I think what you're talking about with the nurses, a lot of my clients — I know a lot of our listeners, they're people who do like to help, are people who like to fix, who like to be generous with their spirit and time. Yet, I think one of the biggest things for women — And I don't want to categorize all women, but I think for our community here, is to realize that sometimes we enable people when we're saying yes all the time and all that kind of stuff. I think what you've described so beautifully is how you can actually by looking for what will work for the families and us, everyone becomes empowered. I think that in this turning point in humanity, we really have to ask like, "Let's get clear on what everyone needs, including ourselves, right?"

[0:12:33.3] BW: Absolutely, and coming to it knowing that we can't know what someone else needs. If we're not asking them in a kind and compassionate way, then we're not encouraging to think about them to think about what do I actually want and need here? Even with the families that we work with, if they make a specific request, it's like what do they actually want to happen and are we thinking about different ways to make that happen instead of like, "Oh, well this was their request. I have to fulfill this specific request."

[0:13:02.4] AS: Yeah. I think what's really interesting you put about that is a lot of times there's this fine line between putting myself first. I see a lot of people on social media, they're like, "I have to put myself first." I'm speaking for myself here, like my life is all about me being first. Yes, my work is great. I am trying to be more active in politics. I donate money. But my whole life — And I don't have kids yet, but like is about me. A lot of times when people are saying we need to put ourselves first. We are putting those good girl identities first or things that benefit us.

This, what we call the boss mindset in Truce with Food is really getting clear on what we need and the other people need so that you get a greater outcome. It's not just like someone else loses, you win. It's like, "Wow! We can create something wonderful if we understand what everyone needs." So you end up at the end of the day much more fulfilled, and so it's like you don't need that nightcap of wine at night, or all the food, right? Because you didn't get any meaning out of the day and you're depleted, right? I think that was a big thing you discovered, is just how depleted you were.

[0:14:09.9] BW: Oh, absolutely. Even this work has made me reflect back on decades of my life, and I remember being in college and if we were out at a loud crowded bar, I would go to the bathroom. I didn't need to go to the bathroom. I would just go in the bathroom and I used to think I'm such a weirdo. Why do I do this?

I realized it was because I should have just gone home. I was done. I was so drained, you know? I'm an introvert on that spectrum, and even now in my mid-30s I recognize some nights if I was going out and having a glass of wine, knowing that I didn't really want to. It's because I just shouldn't have been going out at all. I was tired. I was done. I didn't want to interact anymore. I need to go home and read a book and rest. Yeah, let the day be over.

I love what you said too about — It sounded like you were talking about interdependency, just recognizing like we are wired to depend on each other and putting our self first, in a way that is actually indulgent. It doesn't feel good. It feels good to co-create with people and be needed and need people in a healthy way. Yeah, I loved what you mentioned that putting ourselves first in a way that's not considering other people. It doesn't get us what we're actually looking for anyway. Does that make sense?

[0:15:31.0] AS: Yeah. What also made me think of like if you put yourself first, it doesn't mean someone else is second. Everyone can be at the starting line together. Everyone at the table, there's no hierarchy. It doesn't — This is not kumbaya, that everyone is always going to get what they want and what they need, but it's not this like big gap in power often that we think is going to happen, like, "Oh my god! That person is going to be so upset." It's like, "Oh. No, they actually don't mind or care for all of us."

Like you said, with your families and the nurses. Oh! Wouldn't that be great if everyone comes replenished and gets what they need, because the work that you're doing is long term progress, right? It's like we can't just —

[0:16:14.1] BW: Absolutely.

[0:16:15.9] AS: We can't just have energy for like a year and then it's like, "No. This has to be sustained. It has to be tweaked. It has to be we're learning as we go." All that kind of stuff, because each family is probably different.

[0:16:27.2] BW: Oh, absolutely, and it's so interesting. I did the work directly with families and now I lead a team of nurses. Some of the nurses will ask me, "How did you do this?" I don't encourage them to do what I did, because I ran myself into the ground, because I thought that's what you have to do. Doing the work for three years left me in a place where I knew like I believe in this so deeply, but something has to change or I'm not going to be able to keep doing this work in a way that's actually like healing and moves forward in a way that I believe it can.

Yeah, just thinking about the effectiveness. I feel like we can be so much more effective when we do give ourselves that space to recover and be discerning and strategize.

[0:17:21.3] AS: I think it's also — We have a lot of people in the healthcare field who listen to this podcast. People who are obviously interested in a more integrative holistic model, and a lot of my clients are nurses, doctors, therapists themselves and I think it's so important of like — What's that quote? Like "healer heal thyself." I include myself in this as well. I'm always learning more about what I need to do. But you have such a — When we can really walk our talk. Again, there's no idea of perfection, because it's always evolving. When we can really embody wellness, I think everything shifts and changes. I'm assuming you would agree with that, because I can see your face. Can you show some of the ways that that's changed and how you approach your work and the nurses you support?

[0:18:06.2] BW: Yeah, I think that's a great question. The first thing that comes to mind for me is being open about my health journey. Whereas before, I used to be afraid. People would think it was indulgent, and then I would be perpetuating the myth of like the privileged white girl who's really concerned about organic food. But I've recognized how much it has connected me with my coworkers. Bringing the food that I want to bring to work every day, and I do eat and work in an office that does eat super healthy. I feel like I found my unicorn of a job and a collaborative of women, because I remember being in the hospital and just being like, "I don't understand it." I worked on a neurosurgery unit. So we would be taking care of patients who had comorbidities and usually came in as a result of a stroke and people will be going into the break room and

they'd be having pizza and pretzels. It was just so confusing to me, like, "Wait! We're out here seeing the long-term effects of these lifestyle habits, and we're doing discharge instructions, counseling people on healthier habits and then we're coming in here and like showing our faces," and it was really confusing to me. Anyway, it feels great to be in an environment where that's not the case.

But co-workers who are trying to work on their habits, they'll say things to me, like, "It's been really motivating to see bringing your salad cilantro today," and they'll ask me questions and then they'll get excited to maybe tell me about a meal they tried or a meal that you would try. I always bring in my kombucha, and now people in my office are like, "Oh! I tried it and I loved it." So just seeing how being myself so thinking about we do a lot of parenting education, talking to the parents. It's like, "It's about what you do, not what you say." You can tell the child, "We don't throw our shoes on the floor, we don't do this." But like you have to model these habits. I think, yeah, with my staff that's been a big thing, just like I said modeling from what I'm eating and then being willing to have really challenging conversations.

Whenever I hear myself gleaning or feel myself getting really triggered by like maybe a project that was recommended. I'm like, "Oh my gosh! This is just one more thing. We're putting more work on the staff." I, instead of reacting, I'm not able to take a step back and say, "Okay. Why is this so upsetting to me? What do I want to do about it?" Sometimes the answer is like what I want to do is nothing right now, because I'm mad and I don't want to react. Yeah, being able to come back at things and just be really honest about where I am and what my concerns are has just like opened up a beautiful space for us to that with each other.

At meetings and things like that, where before maybe I would have either discharged or stayed really quiet, because I was mad. I'm not able to in the moment or maybe at the next meeting say like, "Hey, here are some things that concern me and here's what I'd like to offer."

Yeah, I feel like I'm much more effective with problem solving and giving options for what I can offer rather than maybe being mad, because I feel like something was put on my plate that I don't feel like is something that I really value or feel that I have the time or energy to do well.

[0:21:34.7] AS: I love that. For people listening, if you're like, "How was these all related to food?" Listen to the second episode in this season where I talk about the auto-eating spiral, and I'll just give you a brief cliff note of that series of what happens there. But Brien was talking about, again, this comes back to not being a victim to triggers and to what things are happening to you, but rather saying "What are my choices?"

What happens and why we overeat is the auto-eating spiral, the quick anatomy of it is you've got a trigger which is some sort of emotional. Maybe someone at work gives you something, like Brien was saying, and there's an emotion that is triggered. After the trigger comes a story about that feeling, and usually we feel why it's bad, why it's wrong. Then there's a stress response that occurs, because we feel defensive, and then there's behaviors that come from that original trigger, and all of these can happen in an instant when you're caught off guard or it can build — This auto-eating spiral can build all day and then you overeat at night or it builds all week, and on the weekends. But this is how this is related to food, when you can take a step back and reflect and see that you have choices, because it's actually often not the trigger. It's feeling like we're powerless over it and that we don't have any choices is what drives us to eat and drink.

Definitely check out that episode, but that's why this emotional awareness and being able to really — What Brien is describing she did is actually pretty kamikaze, because it's all invisible until you see it, then you can't unsee it. But until you see it, you just feel like you have no choice in life and it's just happening to you and that you're always stressed and overwhelmed versus turning the ship around and it takes time. So just wanted to kind of plug that right there.

[0:23:23.9] BW: Yeah. I love that you did, and again just thinking about healthcare providers and the way that we're kind of expected to operate. It's like sometimes that pizza and pretzel are what happens, because that's what there, and you're exhausted and you feel like you maybe don't have time to plan your meals or you don't have time to actually heat something up in the microwave. Yeah, just recognizing how expectations of us lead us to make choices that aren't the choice we really want to make, but we feel like we have to.

[0:23:56.7] AS: Yeah, I also think like you were talking about when you worked on the stroke unit, and having that stuff in the back. I think if healthcare providers had a more holistic understanding of the reason these people have these comorbidity factors is not — Yeah, it's

about what they're eating, but more importantly what is their auto-eating spiral underneath. The same way you don't have time, they don't have time. The same way you feel work pressure, so does the person in front of you.

I think in conventional medicine, people are still thinking this person just isn't eating right and exercising, and there are so many prejudice against people who especially have a lot of weight to lose versus it's like, "Wait. Their systems and structures are working against them. They have their own job pressures." And I think if we knew to ask these questions, first of ourselves, so then we know — Like you said, you have better questions now. We could ask better questions of the patients and the people who are struggling, because we would have that empathy for, "Hey, I know hard it is."

[0:24:56.8] BW: Yeah, absolutely. Instead of sending them home with a list of like, "Here's 10 things you can't do and 10 things you must do." Like, "Hey, what's really important to you? As you go home, what are you really concerned about? What's really important to you and where can we start?" Yeah, just thinking about that partnership aspect between healthcare provider and patient.

[0:25:19.3] AS: Yeah. One of the things I want to circle back is you were talking about like, "Oh! I would go to the bathroom," not because I had to go to the bathroom, but basically you need to go home. Really, a lot of these I think and a lot of the — What I found so inspiring about your transformation and your path is really finding your own rhythm.

I think one of the ways that this has translated from a physical and food perspective is with your period, which you said you are comfortable talking about.

[0:25:46.8] BW: Definitely.

[0:25:48.6] AS: Do you want to share what you've been — I think first of all, what conventional medicine told you and how you're basically not listening in a very mindful way. You're mindfully rebelling against what they told you, because I think our menstrual cycle is so mimic, I mean they're controlled by our blood sugar in our hormones, which mimic the rhythms of our life. Can you share a little bit about what's been — I find this super exciting, and I think you're excited

too, even though sometimes when you're in it, it's not as exciting to someone else outside of it. Tell us a little bit about what you discovered in terms of your period and etc.

[0:26:26.8] BW: Yeah, I would be happy to. Yeah, there's just like so much this brings up for me, right? That like I didn't really understand what was even happening with my period until I went to nursing school. I remember that striking me, right? Like, "Wait. Why is this the first time that I'm really understanding my anatomy and physiology? This is crazy." So just thinking about the number of years that I didn't even actually understand what was happening with my body is crazy, but that's all up in a discussion.

I never had regular periods, and it didn't really start concerning me, to be honest, until one of my healthcare providers was like, "Oh, wow! That's very irregular. Know when I told her how long it was between some of my cycles. I was actually just starting nursing school at the time, so starting to learn more too. Wanting to engage with her, which is something else this brings up, like not feeling empowered to engage with my provider until I had training as a nurse. So interesting.

So the option that I was given by this provider and then by providers for the next few decades was birth control. If you want a regular period, we'll put you on birth control. Even as a young woman, I said, "Well, can you tell me why is it important form the other regular period?" To me, it would seem that the reason I would want a regular cycle is if I was trying to conceive, and that's not something I want to do right now. So taking birth control don't seem to make sense.

So beyond doing some testing to make sure that there was a natural problem, that option of birth control didn't make sense to me. So I was like, "Okay. Yeah, you're right," and never any like that these are some other things that it could be. So I think too just being really overscheduled, it was kind of like, "Well, I guess I just have irregular periods."

It wasn't until our work together and starting to think more about nature and rhythms and, yeah, being really — I don't want to say concerned about my body, but really questioning norms. Like what is normal for my body, and is this normal? I started to think about my irregular periods. They got worse earlier this year, so that clearly elevated my level of concern. So I did make an appointment with a specialist, and before I even had my appointment, I started getting regular

periods and it just struck me like, “Oh my gosh!” Just by getting more clear on what my body needs, so the combinations of fats and proteins and carbs and not restricting myself and actually listening to my cues and not trying to push through when I’m at work and actually feeding myself, or not thinking “Why does my coworker have so much energy and I’m like irritated and drained.” But knowing, “Oh, it’s because my blood sugar is off. I need to go eat something.”

Yeah, all of that started. My cycle is coming regularly. So I thought that was the end, right? We think like, “Yay! I’ve reached the endpoint. Story is over.”

[0:29:41.0] AS: It’s that easy. Not!

[0:29:45.0] BW: More fat and protein to my diet. Now, I’m like, period is irregular. Yeah, everything’s wonderful. So I stopped getting my period for a few months, but it was so encouraging to think like, “Okay. This just means that there’s more I have to figure out. It means that there’s more to this story. Whereas before it would have been like, “See? My periods are never going to be regular.” I kept my appointment with the specialist, and something that was different there too was just the way that I appreciated the recommendations, but really went home and decided, “Where am I going to start? What are the things that I’m going to do right away? This testing that she recommended, do I actually think I need it?”

Thinking about the money piece too, like people say, “Oh, it’s my insurance. It’s not my money.” I’m like, “Ooh! It’s more complex than that.” Just thinking, “Do I need these tests that are going to cost hundreds of dollars?” It felt really empowering to make my own decisions about what recommendations I was going to take and when. I am happy to report that I do — I have gotten to more periods since then. So I’m not attached to this being like, “Oh, great! I’m going to be regular forever.” To just feel really good to know that I figured it out and that it’s okay that I haven’t yet.

Yeah, to go back to my provider, because I was nervous to go back and say, “Well, I know this is what you recommended, but this is what I did.” But it led to such a great discussion. I was able to ask like, “Do you actually think this test is really important, because if you do I’ll get it. But not, this is what I was thinking.” She was like, “Oh, no. I think you’re spot on.” Yeah, I think I took

away — I'm so much less easily discouraged now and so much more willing to trust myself and speak up for my needs and my ideas rather than to trust an "expert" over myself.

[0:31:50.9] AS: I love that. What you were talking about too of like when your period — You got it for a couple of months, so it's like I'm on the right track, right? But that when it stopped again, the fact that you were like there's more to learn. Part of becoming resilient and that auto-eating spiral that I talked about 15 — I don't know, 10 minutes ago, is this ability to hang with uncertainty more. It's kind of like the side effect of like, "Okay. This isn't like I'm broken. It's not working for me. I'm this unique butterfly." It's like, "No." Or unique butterfly. What do they say? Snowflake? I don't know.

[0:32:23.7] BW: Yeah, butterflies are unique too.

[0:32:26.2] AS: Yeah. But it's a trust that it develops. As you start to have more resilience and more agency and know your choices, a trust develops that I know it was not there for me when I first started on this path, like now 16 years ago. I was like, "No. Everyone else knows, and I don't," and it feels — It doesn't feel great to have that — We call it not closing the story loop in Truce with Food, like not knowing the specific answer. Doesn't it feel really freeing to know like I'll figure this out? I can't explain the feeling that — It's something that I am so grateful, I've cultivated within myself, because it will serve you time — Because it serves you everywhere, not just at the doctors, right?

[0:33:09.5] BW: Yes, I could not agree more. It has like completely permeated every aspect of my life. Really ready to meet a life partner, and before it was — Yeah, what do I have to do to be like acceptable that someone would want me? Now, it's like, "Hmm, am I ready? If not, I'll figure it out. I'll figure out when the right time is." Or at work, if I'm really struggling with a relationship or a project that feels challenging instead of like, "Yeah", just feeling like this is never going to work or I just have to accept this as the way it is. I'm like, "I need more information. I need more time to figure this out."

Even in relationships, personal relationships that I'm having. If I'm having a hard time. I have more of the "we'll figure this out" mentality. Like we just need some space. Yeah, it feels so good

to be able to see how this emotional work around food, but not all about food, has — Yeah, really changed every aspect of my life.

[0:34:15.3] AS: I love that. One of the things that I wanted to ask you is what you think is missing, and I hope you'll — all in terms of conventional healthcare and weight and food discussion and I hope you'll bring in, because you are a yoga teacher and you are immersed spirituality and racial justice and you're so aware of the systems and structures that influence what we think about health and all this — What we think about everything. But I would love for you — This is kind of two part. What do you now think is missing from our conversations and our approaches, and also how do you think that also connects to how we view spirituality and what we kind of take — the emotional soul as we try to take from spirituality, but some things might be missing there.

[0:35:09.2] BW: So good. Okay, so let me see if I can put this into words. So the first two things that come up for me for what's missing. Oh! And this is totally going to translate into spirituality. What's missing from our healthcare system? The first is transparency. Just thinking about, for me, how good it would feel to walk into, say, a physician's or any provider's office and for them to say to me, "Listen, I don't have all the answers. I have a lot of training. I have a lot of really great information, but how that's all going to work for you, we don't know yet and like we're in this together. So what I'm going to do is going to listen. I'm going to give you some of my recommendations and then we're going to figure out a plan that works."

I totally understand that there are health providers out there saying like, "Oh, yeah. that sounds great, but how am I going to do that and that in the 15 minutes I have with a patient?" But wondering, "Hey, where can we start?" I know that's not the way our system is designed now, but how can we even start with that? Instead of giving patients a list of all these things to do that may lead both provider and patients feeling like nothing is working. Yeah, what is we were just transparent with each other? That we didn't have all of the answers.

[0:36:33.2] AS: I just want to interject. When you said that, it made me want to cry in terms of if a doctor or a nurse or anybody approached patients, us as patients like that, it almost is like brings up this own experimentation, like, "Oh! I haven't been doing things wrong. This isn't necessarily my fault that I'm having these challenges." It's like it's a mystery, and let's bring

some curiosity.” I feel like the healing starts right then rather than the judgment. That’s so beautiful, Brien.

[0:37:04.7] BW: Thank you.

[0:37:05.7] AS: Will you redo our healthcare system?

[0:37:09.8] BW: I have plenty of ideas, believe me.

[0:37:13.2] AS: I’m sure you’re better than the current pick. I don’t even know who it is, but, “Lord! Grant me the confidence of a mediocre white man.” You know?

[0:37:24.8] BW: I could not agree with you more. But really like thinking about that approach, like I feel really sad for a lot of the healthcare providers, because they’re expected to be the experts and they’re expected infallible. That’s not fair. There’s humans and, yeah, what if as clients, as patients, if we could respect a provider that way and go in there knowing like this is another human who might have, yeah, a lot more practice and knowledge in this area.

[0:37:55.4] AS: To your point, I think it also puts a lot of the responsibility back on the patient, which it should be. Not responsibility, like you’re not working hard enough, but like, “Wait a second. I have to do my research. I have to get in touch with my body.” I’m the one carrying around this beautiful skin for 365 days a year, 24/7. You see me like once every three months. Your data is so small compared to what I have myself. I think it’s letting the patients know that they have an active role in this, because I think — I don’t know about you, but I didn’t know how much power I had when I started in this.

[0:38:31.9] BW: Oh my gosh! Not at all. Not at all. Yeah. I think that brings me to that partnership piece, right? So I think talking about the transparency or the humility. Talking about the partnership and thinking about how that translates to spirituality. So if we’re looking to another human to be like a perfect example of compassion or someone who has figured out, like figured out the human experience. I think we’ll always be disappointed.

When we're looking to spiritual teachers recognizing like, "Hey, yes. They may have earned wisdom and they may have studied for a long time," but being willing to have a perspective of what can I take away and what things can I learn. Instead of yeah, "How can this person fix me or how can one thing that they say to my entire life. Thinking that if we try to walk their paths, that that's how somehow going to heal ours. I think that partnership piece in healthcare relationships and then — Yeah, when we're looking at spirituality, just recognizing relationships, I think with spiritual teachers who embody their wisdom can be very healing.

I believe we're ultimately our own healers.

[0:39:54.6] AS: Yeah, we are the medicine, right?

[0:39:57.2] BW: Absolutely, and we need guides. We definitely need people we can learn from. Yeah, it feels really good now to — I, in the past did, maybe looked to yoga teachers, "Oh! If I just keep practicing what this one teacher, I'll understand or it will help me heal." Yeah, there have been yoga teachers in my life who have been very healing, but it's been really helpful to recognize they've gotten there through practice and they're still human, and I respect teachers [inaudible 0:40:31.8] to that.

[0:40:33.2] AS: I think the more we can be with our own humanity, we can be with other people's and not put them on those pedestals, right? The more you can see the lens you bring to life, the more you realize you're putting that on to everybody else. If we have this fixed mindset, which we call the safety mindset in Truce with Food, where everything is all or nothing or black and white and high stakes and there's no middle ground. Then of course we're going to put the spiritual teacher at the top and us so far at the bottom, which is what we do with our physicians, with our healthcare system, like, who are we to know?" Meanwhile it's like, "Wait —"

[0:41:07.4] BW: Yes.

[0:41:08.3] AS: Eliminated the hierarchy and made a circle and we're a council. I think it's so important to do that. One of the things that you talked about, you used the word embodied, and I think that's so important, because I think the times we're living in are really looking for this embodied perspective. One thing that you — That when we were preparing for this interview,

that you said so beautifully, was about how you've learned to let go and what that means now to you from a more embodied sense and that you've made it your own.

Because I think what you're also describing in spirituality is we can have these teachers, but ultimately to embody it, we have to integrate it into our own selves, and that's the embodiment process, not just kind of taking what they've said, but how does that relate to my experience.

Can you talk a little bit about what letting go now means to you? Because I hear that a lot from clients. There are a lot of people like, "I just need to let this go. I just need to let this body image issue go, or I just need to let this — That I'm frustrated and d at this person go, because you're not going to change," or whatever.

I feel like you have a very different definition now, and it's beautiful, so I love if you can talk about sharing it and the process that you've got to it.

[0:42:18.9] BW: Yeah, thank you. I think the word that you just used, process. Like I feel like before, I didn't give myself room to allow the end of something to be a process. So now I understand that letting go, if we think of kind of what happens with nature, with like our cycles of nature and we think of maybe that same cycle in our relationship. Death happens over a period. So now letting things go, whereas before I felt like it was something I had to force. Like I had to — Maybe trying not to want something or to, yeah, decide something was over and then try not to think about it.

Now I'm able to see how was I've gotten more clear on who I am and what's a good fit for me and who I am and who I'm not willing to be. I've gotten more clear on the things that I have to let go of, but that hasn't meant shutting people out or ending things abruptly and angrily, and that there have been times where that's absolutely happened in my past, but where I am now, I think I'm able to let go much more gracefully. Recognize, like there was this space for this thing in my life and it meant so much to me, and I learned so much from it and really hurts to let it go. So like letting myself feel all the feelings.

So whether that means being angry or crying, but not holding on to things, because I'm afraid I don't have the strength to get through all the feelings that it brings up to let go and also not

thinking that because it's time for something to end, that it's because there's something wrong with me. Before, it was like my worthiness was tied to keeping things going. Maybe even things that weren't a good fit for me or weren't right for me. I think, yeah, now not being attached doesn't mean anymore not wanting healthier relationships or not wanting certain things in my life. It means being willing to go through the process of letting them go.

[0:44:34.6] AS: That's just so beautiful, because I think, again, we live in a very extreme culture. So it's like either I'm totally enmeshed and codependent and this person is completing me, right? Jerry McGuire ruined the whole generation of relationships.

[0:44:50.1] BW: I always hated that line. I will be honest with you, the first time I saw that movie.

[0:44:54.4] AS: Yeah. For you millennials and whippersnappers, go watch it. You'll see what we mean. But it's also not this like, "I don't care. I'm better than you." I kind of feel like I was sort of taught some of that, I think, in those like sassy magazines and YM. I'm kind of dating myself now. Millennials, again, go Google those if you don't know whippersnappers. Not that magazines have changed that much, but I feel like that what you're describing is this perfect paradox of balance between softness and strength, and softness is strength.

When you're at the polar opposites, that's where truth is and it's this really beautiful place where you can be open and discerning and really get the most out of experiences, because that doesn't mean it's always easy, like you've said. It's just knowing that — I just loved how you said in the email and just now of like I feel strong enough to be able to be that open and that present for my life.

[0:45:57.9] BW: Totally. Yeah.

[0:46:00.4] AS: It's awesome. It's awesome, Brien.

[0:46:02.9] BW: Thank you.

[0:46:04.0] AS: One last question. There's one final question we're asking everyone, is what is your radical truth, but because you are into your very aware of the healthcare system, you work in the yoga world. You work in racial justice work. What cultural narratives and myths have you had to challenge to feel more settled in the dynamic nature of our bodies and how we need to eat and how we need to feel?

[0:46:30.3] BW: Yeah. I think one that definitely comes up for me is around women and sacrifice. So, I feel like throughout my life I have received in so many different ways. The information to be a good woman or to be a successful woman or to be a good friend, sister, all these roles we play, that we needed to be willing to sacrifice ourselves, which I took to me to ignore my needs, to — Yeah! To be honest with you, to not even know my needs. To be so concerned with meeting everybody else's, that I didn't even know my own. I feel like as I've seen now, as I get so much more clear on my needs and how to meet them and I'm willing to meet them, I'm so much more able to be there for the needs of others. Before, it was maybe from this place of depletion or even sometimes resentment, because I felt like I had nothing left, but I was still expected to give.

Yeah, I feel like this makes me think of what you were saying earlier about enabling too, relationships that were dependent on a co-dependent dynamic, are ones that I'm no longer willing to be a part of. If I'd had to show up in a way that's not true to me and that makes the other person mad. That's their stuff and I can't work through it for them.

Yeah, just — Oh my gosh! So much in our society I think rests on women believing that we have to sacrifice ourselves if we want to heal and take care of others, and I don't believe that. I'm not saying I don't believe in sacrifice in some forms, but when I think about things that I maybe had to give up to make more space for things that are important to me or things I believe in, it didn't feel like a sacrifice, because those things weren't really good for me anyway. To me, like when I'm choosing to do something, because I believe in it so much. Yeah, I don't know.

I think, to me, I'm like, "We need a whole new narrative around that," because I don't believe — Yeah! I don't believe that to work, be devoted to something that you want, it has to feel like you're losing something.

[0:48:53.6] AS: I love that. I think if we would have really changed that, like women would get paid for raising kids. There wouldn't be a 70 cents on a dollar — That's for white women. I think it's 69 cents for African-Americans and like 10 for Hispanic. I don't know. It's horrible. These are things that I think trickle, really trickle out in many, many ways if we were to realize that sacrificing doesn't mean that we're giving more. It means we're — It might mean sometimes that we're giving less. Not all the time, right? There's no black or white, but I love that. That's such a clear myth that I think we need to unlearn.

[0:49:33.7] BW: Definitely. Just to clarify, I said it doesn't feel like we're losing something. Sometimes I do think we lose things if we're choosing something that we really believe in. Maybe we like lose acceptance or approval, but something that truly has value to us. Yeah.

[0:49:52.6] AS: What I think what you discover is we still need recognition, but we just don't need it from everybody. We need it from the people that share our values, because we do need to be seen, but I think we're taught that everybody has to, first, give us attention, which is different than recognition, but just like you have to please everybody and it's like actually the handful of people that really see you every day and align with your values — doesn't have to be entire village.

[0:50:19.6] BW: Yeah. Absolutely. It feels so good. I feel like I'm more able to move for the world that way now. Whereas before, it was always like, "What if so and so doesn't like me?" Now, I still have those thoughts sometimes and I'm like, "That's okay. They don't have to like me."

[0:50:37.3] AS: You're like, "Do I like them?"

[0:50:39.0] BW: Right! Absolutely. If the answer is no, it's like, "Okay. How come we still work together or do whatever together in this respectful way?"

[0:50:48.2] AS: Yeah, that's the big thing. I was working with a woman, a client on just the truth serum process, and she was saying she wanted to go swimming and she's like, "But there is these group of women and they judge everybody who walks by." She goes, "So I know if I swim, they're going to judge me." I was like, "Does that mean that you can't go swimming?" She was like, "I never thought of that. I can still swim." It reminds of like people, we may not be BFFs with

people. It doesn't mean we can't be effective coworkers together. It doesn't mean that we can't have a respectful relationship. It doesn't have to be all like, "We love each other all the time!"

[0:51:28.1] BW: Absolutely. Sometimes too, just thinking about like if we are realist people and we can connect that way, then all of a sudden maybe some of the assumptions that led to us not liking each other in the first place will fall away. Maybe not? Maybe we still won't like each other? Yeah, I don't know. I think I found that people — I try to protect myself and say like, "Oh! Well, they're not my people anyway." If there's opportunity to be one on one and have a real conversation, it's like, "Oh, wow! Just such a reminder, such a reminder," on how we project on people.

[0:52:01.1] AS: We do, and they project on us. Again, I think we are all like 5 and 6 year olds running around in these adult bodies trying to communicate. The more we can become aware. I had found that the more — I think what you were saying as well is like that I take care of my needs. I have the capacity to be with other people's emotions and discomfort, because it's not triggering me. So then they're not triggering me, I'm not triggering them, and it leads to such more productive, beautiful interactions for everybody.

I've had enough privilege, and yes I've done the work, but I've had the privilege, so I feel like I like being able to help people through that and working with that through them. It's so fun for me.

[0:52:44.8] BW: Yeah, it sounds like you're now realizing that like helping people actually means just like being there and walking with them rather than like, "Let me fix it," or "Oh my gosh! Help me stop crying or let me like give you all these tissues and give you a huge hug to make myself feel better." Because when you think about it, like when I'm upset, I don't want anyone to fix it. I want you to listen and be like, "Hey, that sounds really hard." I don't want them to tell me how the same really challenging happened to them. There's definitely space for that, but there are times where we're just — We just want someone to hold the space.

[0:53:20.4] AS: Most people want to rush you through it, because they're uncomfortable with it. I mean that happens in like 80% of the time. They haven't — Their own, it's like, "Oh my god!

This is so uncomfortable,” because it’s also uncomfortable for me. What are you going to do? Again, they’re projecting on to the person with the problem often.

[0:53:37.7] BW: Definitely.

[0:53:38.7] AS: You came in kind of how can I do all of these. I think of it, like the food metaphor is like you see a buffet and just like everything keeps getting schlapped on your plate and it’s like, “Oh my god! It’s too much. Maybe if I could space this out or what not.” What questions are you asking now and what does putting yourself first look like now? Do you have space for everything? That’s what I’m curious about.

[0:54:01.0] BW: Yeah. That is great. I think I mentioned earlier some of the questions I’ve been asking are just asking myself what do I really want to make space for? Rather than trying to get it all in, like what are things that are really important to me. How do I sustain myself? Rather than how do I have energy to go, go, go from 5 a.m. till 10 p.m. It’s now, “Okay, right now I do feel over-committed in my life.” It’s like, “Okay. What were the things that I am going to finish up? What practices do I need to take care of myself in a way that I can be there for them, not just physically, but like emotionally and mentally as well.”

Then in 2018, like I really am going to allow more space, because I’ve realized how much. Again, it is a privilege. I have the privilege of looking at my life and thinking what can stay and what can go, but feeling like what leads to so much harm in our society, and this is all tied into white supremacy, but is this belief that like there’s not time for it all and we just got to rest through things and we just have to keep going. So recognizing that if I really want to work towards the healing and justice I want to see that I have to allow space to understand what that means and what that looks like.

Right now, I guess the best answer I could give for do I have space for it all is no, but it’s been an awesome practice of prioritizing. With everything, I used to think it’s so ridiculous. I used to think that I had up all of these answers and now my question is what’s my next step. How can I possibly know what this project or what this commitment is going to look like, but I can identify, “Okay. What is the next step and how do I want to move forward with it.”

[0:56:00.6] AS: That comes back to trusting. I don't need to see the whole picture. I will figure it out as I go, just like my health. I love that. What about Irish dancing? I know that you have that back in your own lineage in terms of — Can you tell us a little bit about that?

[0:56:17.9] BW: I would love to. Yeah, I love that you brought that up, because it was — I just finished my second yoga teacher training, which is a really funny example of like avoiding taking risks that I mentioned earlier. Instead of taking a teacher training and starting teaching, I was like, "I'm just going to keep taking all of these other trainings," and Truce with Food helped me realize like, "Oh, no! I actually just need to practice teaching," and that's what's going to help me be a more effective teacher, not all these trainings.

Anyway, part of the project was doing a 10-hour practice that was related to — 10-hour project related to our practice in any way, and what came out for me was Irish dancing. Yeah, it was just such a beautiful example of how all of this emotional work through yoga, Truce with Food Therapy has brought me to this place in my life. So I started Irish dancing when I was young, and I gave it up when I was 12. It was because I was at a point in my life where I was being bullied and I had always been really social and like easily made friends and was always super empathic. But this bullying experience. I guess, yeah embodied that for me, like what did it feel like to be marginalized?

I was willing to do whatever it took to be like re-accepted into the group, and I gave up Irish dancing, because that was different. To do things like softball and cheerleading that I look back and I'm like, "Oh my god! That was so not me. That was so not me." The individual Irish dancing was like right up my alley. That's one part that I wanted to reconnected to the 12 year old and be like, "I'm so sorry I abandoned you." Now doing it because I think too there was a fear of I was at an age where if you're moving forward with Irish dancing, it was a serious commitment, and I think that fear of not being good enough or maybe not being the best.

Starting to practice again has been really exciting, because it's for me and it's a way to move my body and it doesn't matter that I haven't danced in over 20 years and it doesn't matter what it looks like and it doesn't matter how well everyone else dances. I can see that's a way for me to connect to myself and then also my dad. We lost him earlier this year, and our relationship the last six years of his life were really, really challenging for me. And I feel lucky I was at a place

where I was able to look at his life and recognize things, his wounds, and the things that had led to his wounds. A lot of our ancestors are from Ireland and I think there was a part of me that was like the Catholicism and the alcoholism and all of these things are part of our family's history that that really hurt my dad. I don't think he ever had the space to like process it or unpack it.

Since his death, I've really been wanting to connect with like, "Okay. What are the beautiful parts of that family history and Irish music and dancing and meals?" My dad really loved sharing that with us. Irish dancing was also a way to, yeah, reconnect with him and to kind of say, "You now what? I'm accepting you in the fullness of your humanity. There were parts of you that were really challenging for me and there were parts of you that, yeah, gave me these gifts of things that I can continue to celebrate and practice and hopefully introduce some to my own family someday."

[0:59:58.8] AS: I love that. That's so beautiful. That I think is a perfect encapsulation of when you start this boss mindset and start identifying your own wants and needs. Things become more clear and surprise you often of what you want. I know that truth is very important to you, like it is for me as well. It's freeing as you discover that.

First, let me ask, is there anything that I'd left out that you think is important for people to know as we — Well, as we release this at the beginning of 2018, when people are thinking about new health goals, new ways of approaching things. Do you have anything you'd like to say or that I forgot to ask —

[1:00:38.9] BW: Yeah. I'll take a minute to think about it. I want to say I don't think so. But yeah, let me just make sure there's not something I feel like is important to share for the new year.

[1:00:49.5] AS: I even feel like the new year — Like I used to think like, "Oh! I'm a going to be a new me." But I'm like — Now I know like — What I'm thinking, you can have a fresh start, but not a clean slate. I think we're still us, right?

[1:01:04.7] BW: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, I guess one thing that's been helpful for me is instead of like, "Okay. Yeah, how on January 1 am I going to start everything new and be this whole person?" Is what is really important to me in the next year and how can I make this space to

create that? Whether it's like putting a personal day to every month on my calendar or like a long weekend every quarter, just to make sure that I have space for whatever that turns out to be.

Yeah, I think just if you're looking to walk into the new year and feel more fulfilling and close to yourself. I guess I would just offer maybe just think about what you want to create in the new year and what's the one step you can take, one.

[1:01:55.0] AS: I love that, and I love that question, what do you want to create? Because, again, it takes you out of this passive role of life just happening to me, versus, "Wait! Create." And that sounds so fun, like creativity and stuff.

So last question, what is your radical truth now that you've been on the healing path for some time and where you are standing today, what is your radical truth?

[1:02:18.3] BW: Yeah. I have to tell you I absolutely love this, this is such a great example. Right here in this moment, how far I come. I forgot that that was going to be a question; what's your radical truth? So the past me would have been like, "Oh my gosh! I haven't done enough thinking about this. Like, I don't know! What it is?" I was like, "Huh! Right now, in this moment, what is my radical truth and what comes up for me? I have to give my fellow yoga teacher trainings, yeah, a shout out, because this came out of many conversations among us.

My radical truth is there's nothing to fix. So there can be changes that you want to make. Again, there can be things that you want to create, but I think there are so much harm in thinking that will need to be fixed, anything about us. It's not about fixing. Yes, maybe it's about healing and it's about practicing. Yes, about making different choices and it's not about fixing.

[1:03:17.8] AS: That is so beautiful, and what a profound paradigm shift to enter 2018. Like you don't need to fix anything. You just need to understand it. That's pretty profound. Wow! I just felt like a weight lifting off, like given the state of the state of the world, nothing to fix, just understand.

[1:03:39.3] BW: Totally. I'm not saying there's not immense shifts happening.

[1:03:44.7] **AS:** Oh, you of all people.

[1:03:48.9] **BW:** But I don't think any of us are going to get there, yeah, thinking that we or anything else needs fixing.

[1:03:54.9] **AS:** I love that. Thank you so much for your time today, Brien. I will have more about Brien in the show notes at alishapiro.com/podcast, and if you want to approach food and your body from not fixing anymore, remember Truce with Food starts February 6th, and there's a free intro to Truce with Food starting January 15th. Sign up at alishapiro.com to opt into that.

Brien, thank you so much for your time today.

[1:04:22.3] **BW:** Oh! This has been such a pleasure. I love our conversations and I feel like they can go on forever.

[1:04:27.9] **AS:** I know. I like love you and I tell all my clients, "Guys, this is who I get to hang out with. This is amazing."

[1:04:36.1] **BW:** You draw us in. You can give yourself some credit too.

[1:04:39.4] **AS:** Oh, it's all of us. It's a community effort. Thank you, Brien.

[1:04:44.7] **BW:** Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[1:04:49.4] **AS:** Thank you, health rebels for tuning in today. Have a reaction, question, or want the transcript from today's episode? Find me at alishapiro.com. I'd love if you leave a review on Apple Podcast and tell your friends and family about Insatiable. It helps us grow our community and share a new way of approaching health and our bodies.

Thanks for engaging in a different kind of conversation. Remember always, your body truths are unique, profound, real and liberating.

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