

Self-Care

“Nothing happens until something moves.”—Einstein

The process of making a permanent break from The Watchtower has been compared to finding oneself in “no man’s land” by some. I refer to my transition from a fully indoctrinated Jehovah’s Witness to freedom of heart, mind and spirit to walking down “World’s End Swamp Hollow Road”. This is and was both a literal place and a very real transformation.

After the initial feeling of elation and freedom upon leaving had passed, I found myself slipping into depression, a deep downward spiral. I now realize I was going through the process of grieving. Grieving the loss of everything I believed to be true, grieving the loss of my faith and ability to pray, grieving the pain inflicted on my family over decades and generations, grieving the loss of my clearly, conditional friends and grieving the lost opportunities in my life.

It hit me that I had to completely rebuild my life from the foundation up. I had to find a new spiritual path. I had to examine every belief I held and make certain it was my own. I had to examine and redefine my own values. I had to deprogram myself from cult indoctrination and learn to use critical thinking skills. I realized how few coping skills I had and how few social connections I had outside the cult.

Now as I am nearing the end of my walk down “World’s End Swamp Hollow Road”, I would like to suggest that self-care during this journey is key to coming out healthy and whole in mind, body and spirit. I hope to offer a resource that will help you during this transition. Everyone that approaches this crossroad in life comes to it from a different experience and perspective. Some of these ideas will work for some, but not for others. Choose what you like and leave the rest for others to explore.*

All of us need to adopt measures of self-care—anyone dealing with long-term stressors such as shunning, going through an acrimonious divorce with child custody issues, those with chronic health issues, primary caregivers and even those who serve as advocates for others.

Others have written about the value of a good therapist and how to find one. After 20 years in and out of therapy for severe, recurrent clinical depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, I would like to write about what has helped me the most, what has really worked for me and about ways to care for ourselves and learn to trust our own intuition, bodies and minds once again. When the Watchtower takes away all of our Legitimate Rights, they rob us of our confidence and ability to trust our very being.

Please carefully review the following list of your Legitimate Rights, as defined by Marsha Linehan in DBT Therapy.

YOUR LEGITIMATE RIGHTS

1. *You have a right to need things from others.*
2. *You have a right to put yourself first sometimes.*
3. *You have a right to feel and express your emotions or your pain.*
4. *You have a right to be the final judge of your beliefs and accept them as legitimate.*
5. *You have the right to your opinions and convictions.*
6. *You have the right to your experience - even if it's different from that of other people.*
7. *You have a right to protest any treatment or criticism that feels bad to you.*
8. *You have a right to negotiate for change.*
9. *You have a right to ask for help, emotional support, or anything else you need (even though you may not always get it).*
10. *You have a right to say no; saying no doesn't make you bad or selfish.*
11. *You have a right not to justify yourself to others.*
12. *You have a right not to take responsibility for someone else's problem.*
13. *You have a right to choose not to respond to a situation.*
14. *You have a right, sometimes, to inconvenience or disappoint others.*

Do you see how the Watchtower took away every single one of your legitimate rights! This is astounding. Choose one to focus on for today. Understand and express your legitimate rights in a healthy, assertive way starting now.

I would like to discuss the practice of Mindfulness as taught through Dialectical Behavior Therapy, The Now Effect, Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction and other ancient meditative movement practices such as Yoga and Qi Gong.

The cornerstone of Dialectical Behavior Therapy is Acceptance and Change Strategies:

Mindfulness meditation: Mindfulness is about staying in the present moment with full awareness and acceptance. It allows you to make healthier choices for yourself.

In between stimulus and response there is a space,
in that space lies our power to choose our response,
in our response lies our growth and our freedom.
—Viktor Frankl

This space that lies between stimulus and response is referred to by many authors as “The Now”. It is the basic premise of the book, *The Now Effect*, by Elisha Goldstein. If you purchase his book on an e-reader, there are direct links to guided mindfulness practices, which can also be found on YouTube. You can go to www.elishagoldstein.com and sign up for a Daily Now Moment. You will receive one email per day offering helpful reminders and ideas for practicing mindfulness. Often within the Daily Now Moment there is a link to a YouTube mindfulness meditation provided.

Staying in “The Now” and practicing mindfulness helps you to stay focused in the present moment, rather than ruminating about the past. The past is a fact. You can’t change the past. Mindfulness helps you to stay focused in the present moment, rather than anxiously anticipating the future. You have no control over the future, not a minute from now, not tomorrow. Acceptance of this fact allows us to let go of trying to control the things we can’t control. It helps us to live, breathe and relax into The Now. From my experience, and this perspective comes from an extended period of family trauma; when you are in the middle of a firestorm, you may think you have all the facts, but you just don’t. Trust me on this one. I am still filling in the missing pieces (from reliable sources) years later, and the big picture is uglier than I could have ever imagined. Control is only an illusion.

It is important to remember to stay in your body, bringing awareness to your physical sensations. How do you experience your feelings and emotions through your body? Do you experience a feeling of pain, tightness or contraction? Acknowledge it—“Just a sensation.” Name it—“Shooting pins and needles pain in my neck.” How do you visualize your feelings and emotions?

Begin to acknowledge your thoughts in a non-judgmental way. They are merely thoughts. We don’t need to give our thoughts power over us or our present emotional state. We can only change what we acknowledge. DBT is about both **Acceptance and Change Strategies**. Acknowledging thoughts in a non-judgmental way looks like seeing them objectively move through our consciousness, as if watching a cloud move through the sky and then coming back to the present moment. Other examples to visualize thoughts as simply moving through your mind, rather than taking up residence there, are to visualize your thought as if floating away on a soap bubble, playing out in front of you as credits following a movie or packing them up in a suitcase and giving them to an airline attendant at the check-in counter.

In practicing mindfulness we stay connected to our breath. Try sitting in a comfortable, relaxed, yet attentive position or lying down. You may close your eyes, or if you choose to keep your eyes open, allow them to find a place to rest with a soft focus. Take a deep breath in through your nose and allow your belly to expand, hold your breath briefly and exhale fully through your mouth, allowing your belly to flatten. In the beginning it may help to rest your hand on your belly. It has been shown that breathing in a pattern of counting to four on the in-breath, holding your breath for four counts and then fully exhaling to the count of eight actually lowers your

blood pressure, your heart rate and your stress levels. This **4-4-8 Breath** will be referred to later in this document.

Mindfulness can be practiced throughout your day. Whatever it is that you are doing can be done mindfully. We need to **go off autopilot!** We have all experienced autopilot when we have arrived at our destination after driving a distance and realizing that we have no memory of how we got there!

Bring all five senses to the task at hand. Walking mindfully, pay attention to all of your senses—listen to the birds or the sound of water moving in nature, feel the breeze or your own breath on your face, smell the scent of flowers in the air, taste the salt in the air if you are near the ocean, touch the branch of a tree, a blade of grass or the petal of a flower. Staying in our body and out of our head is healing to the central nervous system! Bring awareness to sensations in your body with acceptance. Watch those thoughts drift by, acknowledge them (perhaps thinking, thinking or judging, judging) and bring yourself back into the moment at hand.

I clearly remember that in the depth of my depression, everything looked grey. I was literally walking through life in a dense grey fog. The day my mind opened to the colors and the sounds of nature, was the day I knew I was getting better.

Interpersonal effectiveness: DBT Interpersonal effectiveness skills teach strategies to help you ask for what you need, better cope with interpersonal conflict in a responsive, rather than reactive way and improve the overall connection in your social and family relationships.

Dear Man is an acronym for asking for what you want or refusing a request. This is a very powerful tool for implementing assertive, effective communication. Part of the process is setting your priorities first: Your Objective, your Relationship and your Self-Respect need to be prioritized and will help shape how you approach the issue at hand.

Dear Man: Asking for What I Want or Refusing a Request

Describe: (Mindfully describe and observe. Tell the person exactly what you are reacting to. Stick to the facts. No assumptions, mindreading or threats.)

Express: (I think; I feel.)

Assert: (I want; ask for what you want or say no clearly.)

Reinforce: (Reward the person ahead of time by expressing the consequences both positive and negative for both of you for doing what you want.)

Mindfully: (Maintain your position and focus. Broken record—don't allow the topic to be derailed. Remember to prioritize—Objective, Relationship or Self-respect.)

Appear Confident: (Use confident voice tone, physical manner and make good eye contact.)

Negotiate: (Be willing to give to get. **Offer and ask for alternative solutions** to the problem.)

Emotion regulation: This DBT skill will help you to better identify your emotions, reduce emotional reactivity and help stabilize your mood. It will help you to find inner peace, even under pressure or in the midst of chaos. We can learn to acknowledge and accept our rational thoughts and our emotions and find a middle ground between the two. Finding this balance and coming from that place is called acting from our Wise Mind in DBT.

Distress tolerance: DBT Distress tolerance skills will help you to better tolerate stressful experiences and to be more responsive and more effective in your communication. You can be the one to help calm the storm if you remain focused on the desired outcome of your situation. It is important to thoroughly plan out healthy distraction and self-soothing strategies in advance. Give them considerable thought, and update them with new ideas as they come to you. Carry your personal Distraction and Relaxation plans with you, and post them where you will see them daily.

Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction is a program developed by Jon Kabat Zinn. He originally focused on using mindfulness to reduce physical pain and later expanded it to help in reducing stress. His books and CDs may be purchased at <http://www.mindfulnesscds.com/index.html> or on <http://www.amazon.com/>

MBSR practitioners complete the practicum at University of Massachusetts Medical Center for Mindfulness and offer MBSR programs at medical centers, wellness centers and yoga studios around the world.

Free Webinars on MBSR for individual and health-care providers are offered at <http://www.emindful.com/>

DBT and MBSR are “evidence-based practices”:

“Evidence-based medicine is the integration of best research evidence with clinical expertise and patient values.”
(Sackett D et al. Evidence-Based Medicine: How to Practice and Teach EBM, 2nd edition. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, 2000, p.1)

Since they are evidence based, it is possible that your health insurance will pay for DBT or MBSR.

Qi Gong is an ancient, evidence-based meditative movement practice. It is referred to as “Chinese Yoga”. You can take classes locally, but they are a little more difficult to find than Yoga classes. You can also take a workshop for personal training or become a certified Level 1 instructor. <http://www.chentaiji.com/> There are many forms of Qi Gong. I find Soaring Crane Qi Gong to be particularly beautiful in form. Qi Gong is calming and relaxing, improves range of motion and stability. It improves your overall health and immunity.

Yoga classes are abundant. They can be found at health clubs and in private studios. In my experience, Kripalu Yoga or “Compassionate Yoga” is the only practice I have been able to follow without re-injury and further triggering chronic whiplash pain. I have had three knee surgeries and can still practice using extra thick yoga mats. Simply move off your mat for standing balance poses. Also, the practice of Kripalu Yoga is another form of mindfulness practice.

Here is a description of Kripalu Yoga from <http://www.kripalu.org/>

“Like most yoga styles and traditions, Kripalu Yoga uses classic asanas (though not a particular set or routine), pranayama (breathwork), development of a quiet mind, and the practice of relaxation. What defines Kripalu Yoga is its emphasis: following the flow of prana (life-force energy), practicing compassionate self-acceptance, developing witness consciousness (observing the activity of the mind without judgment), and taking what is learned “off the mat” and into daily life.

One reason Kripalu Yoga has been embraced by so many people is that it is designed to adapt to all body types, ages, fitness levels, and interests.”

Self-care is the key to helping you to get through this time of transition. Here are some ideas for self-care using distraction and relaxation techniques as developed through use of DBT.

Sample Distraction Plan—

1. Volunteer

✚ Some have found volunteering to be a great way to meet good people and form healthy relationships. Of course, your employment might provide an opportunity to expand your social circle. Choose your volunteer activities carefully. Find people and organizations that accentuate and validate your strengths. Choose organizations that focus on a cause that fill you up. Be careful not to deplete your inner resources or over-commit yourself. Always take care of yourself first!

2. Social Connection

✚ Choose people with healthy habits that will help you remain balanced. Carefully allow yourself to trust people by giving them opportunities to earn your trust. Start small, and you will find people that will become your support. Rebuild healthy connections with non-witness family

members. Be careful not to engage with unhealthy family members, such as those with active addictive behaviors. Build reciprocal relationships, making sure there are both give and take involved.

- ✚ Meet your neighbors—borrow something, offer to help them, perhaps by walking their dog(s) in an emergency. I bake healthy muffins for each new family that moves into my neighborhood.
- ✚ Look for local meetings of The Happiness Club, sign up for their newsletter or start your own Happiness Club meeting. <http://www.happinessclub.com/>
- ✚ Find out what is going on in your local community in your local newspaper, at your Community Center or at your Public Library.
- ✚ Be careful not to isolate yourself totally through online social media, blogs and forums.

3. Mindfulness Practices

- ✚ Practice mindfulness in daily life
- ✚ Daily Now Moment <http://www.elishagoldstein.com>
- ✚ Search for Guided Mindfulness Meditations on YouTube or on CD
- ✚ Start an Inspirational Quotes Journal. Find quotes that reverberate within you, that speak to your heart and gather them in a journal that is pleasing to your senses, frame them or make a collage. Here are two of my favorite inspirational quotes:

Excerpts from, *You Were Made for This*, by Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Ph.D

What is needed for dramatic change is an accumulation of acts, adding, adding to, adding more, continuing. We know that it does not take everyone on Earth to bring justice and peace, but only a small, determined group who will not give up during the first, second, or hundredth gale.

One of the most calming and powerful actions you can do to intervene in a stormy world is to stand up and show your soul. Soul on deck shines like gold in dark times. The light of the soul throws sparks, can send up flares, builds signal fires, causes proper matters to catch fire. To display the lantern of soul in shadowy times like these – to be fierce and to show mercy toward others; both are acts of immense bravery and greatest necessity.

Struggling souls catch light from other souls who are fully lit and willing to show it. If you would help to calm the tumult, this is one of the strongest things you can do.

Naomi Shihab Nye (1953-) <http://www.wussu.com/poems/nsnkind.htm>

Kindness (Stanza 3) Before you know kindness /as the deepest thing inside, /you must know sorrow /as the other deepest thing. /You must wake up with sorrow. /You must speak to it till your voice /catches the thread of all sorrows /and you see the size of the cloth. /Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore, /only kindness that ties your shoes /and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread, /only kindness that raises its head /from the crowd of the world to say /it is I you have been looking for, /and then goes with you everywhere /like a shadow or a friend.

4. Exercise

- ✚ Walk or run outdoors in your favorite places
- ✚ Flower or vegetable gardening
- ✚ Play with your pet(s)
- ✚ Yoga classes/home practice
- ✚ Qi Gong classes/home practice
- ✚ Kayaking, canoeing or sailing for upper body strength and balance
- ✚ Strength Training
- ✚ Swimming

5. Nutrition and Personal Care

- ✚ Develop healthy cooking and eating habits
- ✚ Manicure/Pedicure
- ✚ Acupuncture
- ✚ Massage/facial
- ✚ Try a new hairstyle

6. Reading for Pleasure

7. Further your education

- ✚ Take a class at a nearby Community College
- ✚ Research topics than interest you online or at your public library
- ✚ Watch presentations on <http://www.ted.com/talks>
- ✚ Take classes for free at <https://www.khanacademy.org/>
- ✚ Take classes for free at <http://ocw.mit.edu/index.htm>

8. Journaling

9. Explore new hobbies

10. Express your creativity

- ✚ Painting
- ✚ Drawing
- ✚ Sculpting
- ✚ Photography
- ✚ Music writing, singing, playing an instrument
- ✚ Dancing
- ✚ Writing books, poetry
- ✚ Scrap booking
- ✚ Calligraphy
- ✚ Try something new!

11. Organize

- ✚ Clear email inboxes
- ✚ Clear home inboxes
- ✚ Sort mail, Pay Bills
- ✚ Make necessary phone calls
- ✚ Fill out necessary paperwork, Filing
- ✚ Organize cabinets, drawers, closets and bookshelves

12. Get a pet!

Your Relaxation plans should appeal to all five senses.

Sample Home Relaxation Plan—

1. Watch play of light and wind on branches of trees
2. Sip favorite teas
3. Use essential oil drops and sprays
4. Float fresh flower petals in water bowl (Chinese Medicine teaches that water heals heart.)
5. Design and plant a small flower garden around your light post, mailbox or in a window box
6. Arrange fresh-cut flowers in glass jars or vases
7. Open windows to feel the breeze and listen to nature's sounds
8. Take a relaxing hot bath or shower
9. Practice Mindfulness throughout the day
10. Use Guided meditations, for example, The 10-Minute Body Scan
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsCVqFr6j1g>
11. Practice deep breathing (4-4-8 Breath as described above)
12. Yoga or Qi Gong Classes
13. Star gazing
14. Bird watching
15. Listen to your favorite upbeat music or books on tape

16. Journaling or Keep an Inspirational Quotes Journal. I personally have always resisted journaling. I just couldn't bring myself to commit such dark thought to paper. I now see my posts to on-line ex-JW support forums as my way of journaling while reaching out to help others.
17. Express your creativity
18. Play with or groom your pet

Sample Away from Home Relaxation Plan—

1. Walks in nature, running or hiking
2. Walks around your neighborhood
3. Photography, sketching, painting or other portable creative works
4. Listen to favorite musicians
5. Listen to Books on tape
6. Walk through an outdoor garden shop or a greenhouse
7. Bird watching
8. Sit quietly or walk by moving water – beaches, rivers and waterfalls
9. Sit quietly and absorb sunlight. Feel yourself grounded in that moment through awareness
10. Yoga and Qi Gong classes
11. Art Classes
12. Acupuncture treatments
13. Walk around local parks, playgrounds, marinas and piers or other place you may meet new people
14. Browse in local bookstores and shops
15. Have lunch or coffee with friends or family. If alone, observe others around you. People watching can prove to be quite interesting!
16. Recite favorite inspirational quotes
17. 4-4-8 Breath
18. STOP Mindfulness practice—Stop, Take a breath, Observe your thoughts, emotions and body sensations, Proceed with what is most important right now. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhwQvEGmF_I
19. Manicure/Pedicure
20. Massage/facial

*Many of the thoughts and ideas expressed have evolved over the time of my journey down “World’s End Swamp Hollow Road” are based on DBT (Dialectical Behavioral Therapy) and the ancient wisdom of Mindfulness practices as written about in The Now Effect, by Elisha Goldstein and Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction, as taught by Jon Kabat Zinn.

DBT In a Nutshell http://www.nelft.nhs.uk/_documentbank/DBTinaNutshell.pdf

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