

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT



EPISODE 296

How to Have an Extraordinary Relationship with Your Body

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How to Have an Extraordinary Relationship with Your Body

How would you describe the relationship that you have with your body? If your answer is anything less than extraordinary, this episode is for you. Let's dive in.

Welcome to the School of Self-Image, where personal development meets style. Here's your hostess, master life coach Tonya Leigh.

Hello, hello, gorgeous friends. It is a good day because I am finally back in my office and just excited to record this podcast. I'm excited to work on some really fun projects that we have going on. And I'm actually excited to leave tomorrow to celebrate my best friend's 50th birthday.

I was packing yesterday for this trip and received a text from her assistant that said, basically, "Hey, don't forget to bring your swimsuit. There's going to be a hot tub." And I remember a time, you all, where that one text would have sent me into a spiral.

For years, I did not want to wear a swimsuit. I had a very negative relationship with my body. And looking back now, I can see how I missed out on so many incredible moments because of my own body shame.

I remember taking my daughter to the pool when she was little and her saying, "Hey, mom, get in the pool with me." And I was over there wrapped up from head to toe because I didn't want anyone to see me in a swimsuit. And all of those little moments, I missed because of my brain, and basically that was what was happening.

It was my unmanaged brain telling me that I wasn't good enough, that my body wasn't good enough, which then caused me to try to hide my body in shame. Now, I am the first person to put on a swimsuit. And my body is not perfect by society's standards.

I have a C-section scar, so a little bit of my belly hangs over. I have a lot of stretch marks and a little bit of cellulite, and don't care. And it's all because of the work that I've done around my body image.

And if you are in the School of Self-Image membership, be sure to check out June of 2021. We did a whole month on upgrading your body image. But what I can tell you is, if you are a woman who struggles with her body image, this is some of the hardest and the greatest work you will ever do.

I am so proud of myself for never giving up on having this kind of relationship. It's almost like the woman who's had bad relationships with men and she just refuses to give up on love and

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she keeps showing up, she keeps going on the dates, and then finally she meets her soulmate, the love of her life. That is what it was like for me to create a love affair with my body.

I failed over and over again, and there were moments on that journey where my brain wanted to tell me that it's not possible, you're forever going to struggle with this. But I'm here to tell you all, that is not true.

If we commit and we decide that we want to have a loving relationship with our bodies and we show up and we practice doing the work to create such, eventually that is what you will create.

For years, I had a very conditional love for my body, meaning when I thought my body was doing what I thought it should do and was looking the way I thought it should look, then I would extend my body some love. And when she wasn't cooperating, I would withhold love. And the way that I would withhold love was by withholding respect, withholding good words, encouragement, and basically by punishing myself.

And the way I would punish myself was to overeat and then beat myself up for doing so. And I realized one day, I was like, this approach is not working. And I'd heard people talk about body acceptance. But I had this huge fear that if I were to accept my body as she was, then I was accepting the fact that I would never lose weight. And I wanted to lose weight.

And so, I thought the answer was to beat myself up, be a dictator with my body in order to create the results. And the truth is, I did get results a couple of times with that method. But guess what? I was miserable when I lost weight that way. And inevitably, I would put the weight back on, and the reason being I'd never created a healthy self-image and a healthy body image that would allow me to maintain those results.

Because as you know if you've listened to this podcast, you will always work to prove your self-image true. And the same goes for your body image. You will always work to prove that true on a subconscious level.

So, for me, I had put myself in this situation that I just could not win because I was telling myself that I could only love and respect my body when the stretch marks had disappeared, I had lost the weight, and that my body looked like the women on the cover of Sports Illustrated. And that was never going to happen.

And by withholding love and respect for my body, I ended up creating results in opposition of what I really wanted. Because guess what? If you're someone who wants to get healthier, you want to be more fit or you want to lose weight, love and respect for your body are the two core ingredients to creating those kinds of results.

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So, I want to share with you all some of the things that I did that have helped me create an extraordinary relationship with my body. And her and I are still getting to know each other because as I get older and my hormones fluctuate and things change, there's this new layer of understanding and empathy and compassion that I want to extend to my body.

But the first thing that I had to do was stop escaping my body. I think when you don't feel good in your body, you feel like your body has become foreign, it's normal to want to get out of it. You don't even want to be there.

And I see this a lot with people who have experienced trauma, especially as women, sexual trauma as children. One of the last places that we want to be is in a body that was victimized, or women who have gained a lot of weight and they feel so uncomfortable they want to get out of their body, or women who have chronic pain. Your instinct is to get out of the thing that is experiencing the pain.

But it requires being in that thing so that you can heal, so that you can understand, and so you can love. And so, for me, I was very uncomfortable with the emotional pain that was happening in my body because that's where we experience feelings, right? We feel them in our body as vibrations.

And so, I would just escape if I was feeling anxious or sad or depressed, I would want to escape the vessel that was holding those emotions. And so, I would do that by going to eat. I would eat more than my body wanted or needed.

And so, then what would happen is I would add a layer of physical discomfort. So, now there's emotional discomfort because I haven't processed the emotions and now, I have an extra layer of physical discomfort, and so that would cause me to want to escape my body even more.

But there was a moment where I knew that I had to have the courage to stay with myself, to not escape myself, to check in and see, how are you feeling? And I remember doing like hourly body scans in the beginning because I was so used to not being in my body. I was like, "What is this even like?" So, I would set an alarm to go off so I could check in with my body and ask her, like, "How are you feeling right now, physically and emotionally?"

And that started the process of me practicing being in my body, to understand, number one, how am I feeling right now? Because if I keep escaping my body because I don't want to feel an emotion, I'm never going to diagnose why I have that emotion in the first place, so that I can create a life that I don't want to escape from, so I can create a body that I don't want to escape from.

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And what I discovered, you all, when you learn how to process your emotions, you're not afraid of them. You won't need to go and eat or overwork or over-whatever it is you like to do to not feel. You just feel the emotion and you understand it.

And also physically, in the last decade of my life, I dealt with lower back pain and I realized, listen, if you want to try to understand it so you can fix it, you've got to spend some time in it, understanding how your body is feeling. And then I started to have conversations with my body.

I would literally ask my body, what do you need right now? And sometimes she would say, "I need you to get up and move. I need a bite to eat. I need to go rest. I need to get up and dance." But our bodies have this wisdom that if we are willing to inhabit her and listen to her and have conversations with her, she will reveal to you.

There are two beliefs that I deeply believe. And they came as a result of doing this work. And I realized how much I'd missed out on because I was always trying to get out of my body. But the two beliefs are, number one, the body wants to heal. The body wants to be in harmony. And it requires you being in your body to understand if you're out of balance, and to listen to your body so that you can get back into balance.

And then, the second belief is that your body has a knowing. There's an internal GPS system that resides in our body, that's always trying to guide us. I like to call it hot/cold. You can feel it when you're moving towards where you want to be, towards – you can call it – destiny, towards your North Star.

And you can also feel it when you're moving further away. It feels cold. You're not heading on your path in the right direction. And so, in order to get to know this GPS system and understand it, you have to be willing to inhabit your body and have conversations with her.

So, those were two things that I did initially. It was a practice, and it was uncomfortable. It was way more comfortable to go and eat instead of just staying with my body because it was familiar. But it was a discomfort that I decided to embrace on purpose because I knew it would lead to comfort later on.

Now, there are some more practical things that I did to create an extraordinary relationship with my body. One of them being wearing clothes that fit the body I had and that flattered the body that I had. For years, I dressed to hide my body. It was a reflection of the shame that I had around my body.

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So, you can see, I just kept perpetuating this idea that something was wrong with my body by the clothes that I chose. So, I spent time figuring out, how do I dress this body that, at the time, was not at my ideal weight, in a way that is flattering and respectful of the body that I had right then?

So, it required me learning about body types, my body type specifically, and beginning to choose clothing that flattered my body. But then, the craziest thing happened. When I would look at myself, I would feel a little bit better about myself.

I'd be like, "Oh, you look sort of cute today in this dress." And that made me feel better. And that result was me wanting to treat my body with more respect. And so, I started to spiral in an upward way instead of spiraling downward in a way that was having a negative impact on my life.

The other thing that I did to create an extraordinary relationship with my body is that I started to practice eating for pleasure, not eating to escape.

Now, sometimes clients will tell me, "But I love food so much. It's so pleasurable." But I think about the Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus when he says that, "Pleasure is the absence of pain." And once you step over the boundaries of moderation, pleasure no longer exists. You are back into pain.

And the way I was eating was causing me a lot of pain. I was eating when I wasn't hungry. I was eating foods that didn't serve my body, didn't feel good in my body. And so, after going to France for the first time and seeing how people had such a beautiful relationship with food.

I mean, they were eating delicious whole and nourishing foods. I didn't see a culture of people that were depriving themselves. I saw a culture of people who were truly savoring and enjoying food. And all along, I thought I had been enjoying food, but that's not what I was doing. I was using food as a way to escape my life.

It wasn't pleasurable and I was lying to myself by telling myself so. And this was a practice that took years. And the reason why it took so long was because I was also simultaneously learning how to experience emotion inhabiting my body. And it was not comfortable because a lot of the emotions that were revealed to me that I'd spent so many years escaping were negative.

But as long as I kept escaping them, I wasn't addressing why I had so many negative emotions. So, learning to eat with pleasure was one of the most uncomfortable things I ever did. But I am so grateful for that experience because it literally has led to the life that I have today.

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By learning to eat when my body was hungry, learning to choose foods that feel good in my body, and also are delicious – the two can coexist, believe it or not – what that really allowed me to do was learn how to sit with uncomfortable emotions.

And if you think about creating success, whatever that looks like for you, it's going to require that you don't run from uncomfortable emotions, that you don't try to escape them. Because anything that you want that you don't yet have is going to require a level of growth, it's going to require you to do things that scare you. So, if you spend your life escaping your body, escaping emotions, turning to food, you're never going to be able to access the greatest version of you.

You can see how learning to have an extraordinary relationship with your body is about something so much bigger. It really is about you discovering the greatest version of yourself, your most extraordinary self.

So, when it comes to food today, I eat when I'm hungry, I stop when I'm elegantly satisfied, for the most part 95% of the time, 90% of the time I choose foods that feel really good in my body. Sometimes, I'll eat things that don't feel great in my body. And sometimes, I eat a little bit more than I should.

And guess what? I never beat myself up for it, ever, because that does not serve you. And that's the cycle that a lot of you all are in. You might overeat or you'll choose something that you know doesn't feel good in your body, and then you beat yourself up for it. Versus giving yourself some grace and realizing you're not here to be perfect, you're not always going to do it perfectly, it's just not possible in this human experience.

And instead of beating yourself up, in those moments, learning to understand yourself and to love yourself no matter what allows you to get right back into your body and inhabit her and love her and respect her.

The other big shift that I made that was huge and continues to have such a positive impact on my life is I stopped exercising to lose weight or to look like someone in a fitness magazine.

Instead, I started to exercise because I wanted to do good things for my body. I wanted to feel better physically. I wanted to honor and love my body, and movement is one of the ways that we can all do that. Because if you tie exercise with weight loss, here's what's going to happen.

For sure, you're going to go and exercise and, in the moment, you're going to feel good about yourself, you're going to feel proud about yourself, but then you're going to step on a scale at the end of the week and you haven't lost a lot of weight, and then you give up.

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But when you tie exercise with a way to show your body love and to respect your body and to love your body, it becomes about the process, not the outcome. And then, the outcome happens, but you're not so tied to the outcome because you are loving the you that is engaging in the process of loving your body.

Another thing that I did to create an extraordinary relationship with my body is I started to tend to her physically in how I groomed myself. Things like exfoliating my body, using beautiful lotions, taking the time for baths and putting essential oils in the bathtub. I was like, I want to give my body a break because God knows I have been rough on her, and I felt like she was in a period of just needing some TLC.

So, I remember during this time, I would make a conscious effort to really take time to put lotion on. I would take time in the bath to really scrub myself well and it became like a ritual. But what I was really doing was telling my body, "Listen, I love you and I'm sorry that I've abandoned you for a bit but you're awesome for sticking around. And I just want to do this as an act of love for you."

I know it seems weird to talk to our bodies like that, but our bodies hear. They feel things. And that period was so healing for me, just taking the time to be conscious about putting lotion on, or in the bathtub, just paying attention to how the water felt and exfoliating really well. It doesn't seem like a big deal. But when it's done with the right intention, it can be so healing.

I also decided that I was going to practice seeing my body as an instrument and not an ornament. I think, as women, we are raised to see ourselves as an ornament that's supposed to be beautiful to other people. And then, when you look around and you see images in magazines that don't look like you and they're telling you that that is the definition of beauty, you can feel like you're a failure.

You can feel like, "Hey listen, I'm not good enough for other people's eyes." And so, I took the attention off of that and I'm like, "Listen, number one, my body is here for me, not for other people's enjoyment." And so, that caused me to ask myself, how can I enjoy my body more? And it wasn't by beating her up and ignoring her. It was about getting in touch with her, inhabiting her again.

And then, the other shift that really did help was my body is here as this amazing vessel to support me in living the life that I want to live. My body breathes me. I don't have to breathe her. She does that for me. She allows me to get from point A to point B. She allows me to dance. She allows me to hold my daughter. She allowed me to give birth. She allows me to laugh and to cry.

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And when I started to see my body in such a way, it was so transformative. I had such an appreciation for my body that I had never had before. And then finally, the one thing that I did that has allowed me to create an extraordinary relationship with my body is by monitoring my talk to her.

Like, if you think about someone you love, like you deeply, deeply love and you look at how you speak to that person, you look at how you behave with him or her, you look at how you want to spend time with that person, and then you look at your relationship with your body, is it similar?

Or do you want to get away from your body? Do you speak horribly to your body? Are you a little abusive to your body? And when you answer these questions, do not beat yourself up if your answer is, "Yeah, I abuse myself," because that doesn't work.

You have done the best you could with what you know. There is never an upside to beating yourself up. But with that knowing, if you want to love your body more and have an incredible relationship with your body, it's going to require that you practice being in a love relationship with her. And that comes down to many different things. But at the core, noticing how you subconsciously speak about your body when you look at yourself in the mirror.

What do you say to your body? Do you tell her she's not good enough? Do you tell her she's too fat, she's too skinny? Do you tell her that her thighs are too big? Do you tell her that she's out of shape? How do you speak to your body?

Then, just for a moment, imagine that you had a loving relationship with your body, and your body hasn't changed, she's still exactly the same, but how would your dialogue with your body be different? Be more loving?

Now listen, I know it is very hard, if not impossible, to go from, "I don't like my body," to, "I love my body." That is a big jump that brings up a lot of cognitive dissonance because you've been practicing one thought over and over, so you're not going to believe that you love your body yet.

But what are some thoughts you can believe that feel better? Maybe, "I'm just grateful that I have a body. My body has allowed me to give birth. My body allows me to walk around every day." Maybe it's like, "I like my eyes. I like my legs." Finding points where you can place positive thoughts and that you can believe, instead of allowing your brain to go to the default negativity about your body.

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And over time, here's what's going to happen. You're going to start to feel better, which then will cause you not to want to escape your body as much. And then, you're going to start feeling better. You're going to start taking different action. And you may find that your body begins to respond. Your body begins to change.

But I don't want you to do this process with the hopes that you're going to have that outcome. I want you to do this process just because you're a woman that does not want to spend the rest of your life hating on your body.

I want you to do this process because you want to be a woman that has an extraordinary relationship with her body. But my experience has been that the results do come because the body is always responding to your thoughts.

So, imagine if you started to practice the thoughts of, "I'm going to learn to love my body, no matter what. I'm so blessed to have this body. She has supported me through some difficult times. She never leaves me, even though maybe I leave her sometimes, she's always there. And I just want to love and honor her.

Starting from that place, just notice how that feels, how that maybe compels you to treat her differently today, how it compels you to want to listen to her, be in her fully. Notice how it causes you to feel in your day when you're not at war with your body.

There is no upside to warring with our body. And unfortunately, it's a default for a lot of women. But it doesn't have to be so. I am living proof, you all. I went from a full out war with my body, to now someone who really loves and appreciates her body and all that it allows her to do.

So, I want you to answer this question; what would an extraordinary relationship with your body look like? What would it feel like? What would you be doing differently? And begin to practice that.

And it takes practice. But remember this; you get good at what you practice. And it is so worth the practice of committing to having an extraordinary relationship with your body. Have a beautiful week, everyone. And I will see you in next week's episode. Cheers.

Hey, have you grabbed your free copy of the School of Self-Image Manifesto? If not, what in the world? Head over to schoolofselfimage.com/manifesto and get a copy that teaches you how to think and show up in the areas of mindset, style, and surroundings so that you can transform your self-image.