

Opening Story: Emily

Five months ago, my girlfriend of twelve years, Emily, died. In the days after her passing, I was in deep grief. At her memorial service, a well-meaning person came up to me, put a hand on my shoulder, and said, *“Everything happens for a reason.”* (Pause for a moment.) Notice what happens in your body when you hear those words. In that moment, those words felt like a door slamming shut on my heart. I know they meant to help. But what I needed wasn’t an explanation. I needed permission to grieve, to cry, to feel the pain of losing someone I loved. Instead, it felt like a spiritual Band-Aid placed over a deep wound. That moment revealed something important: we live in a culture that is deeply uncomfortable with emotion. We rush to fix, explain, or move past feelings, especially painful ones.

Reflection: *What if our feelings aren’t problems to solve... but sacred signals to listen to?*

Take a breath. Let that question settle.

What We Were Taught

Many of us were trained—quietly and consistently—in emotional suppression. *“Don’t cry.”* *“Stay positive.”* *“You’re too sensitive.”* *“Be strong.”*

These messages taught us that emotions are inconvenient, embarrassing, or dangerous. So, we learned to manage our emotions, to minimize them, and to move past them as quickly as possible. Often, we dressed this up in spiritual language, using gratitude to bypass grief and positivity to avoid pain. These strategies were usually taught by people who loved us and wanted to protect us. But the cost has been enormous.

When We Suppress Our Feelings...

When we suppress our feelings, we lose connection with our inner wisdom. We can’t hear intuition because we’re constantly talking ourselves out of what we feel. We struggle with authentic relationships because people only know our edited version. We become exhausted because suppression takes tremendous energy. We were taught that spirituality meant rising above our emotions. But what if true spirituality includes embracing our full humanity?

Where Do Emotions Go?

They don’t disappear. Psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk named it clearly: *“the body keeps the score.”* When emotions aren’t felt and processed, they get stored in the nervous system, muscles, and tissues. This is why tension lives in our shoulders. Why anxiety churns in the stomach. Why unexplained pain shows up in the body, like a pressure cooker, suppressed emotions build pressure. And eventually, that pressure leaks through as anxiety, depression, numbness, or explosive reactions.

The Paradox

The more we try to control our emotions, the more they control us.

Carl Jung said it simply and powerfully: *“What you resist not only persists but will grow in size.”*

We cannot think our way out of feelings. We can only feel our way through them.

Emotions as Sacred Signals

In many spiritual spaces, difficult emotions are seen as failures, proof that we’re not evolved enough. But look at Jesus. Jesus wept at Lazarus’s tomb. He expressed righteous anger in the temple. He felt anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane. If Jesus experienced the full range of human emotion, then feeling cannot be unspiritual. *Our emotions are not interruptions to the spiritual path. They are the path.*

We Are Not Our Feelings

This is witness consciousness. *“I am noticing anger”* is different from *“I am angry.”* You can honor your emotions without becoming them. This is holding space for yourself—the same gift you so freely offer others.

Two Ways We Cultivate the Courage to Feel

1. Staying Present Without Rushing to Fix

Our first instinct with emotion is to make it go away. We analyze it, explain it, spiritualize it, or distract ourselves from it. But feeling is not about fixing. Staying present means allowing an emotion to exist without immediately trying to solve it. It means saying, *“This is here right now, and I can stay with it.”* This is not wallowing. Wallowing is getting lost in the story. Allowing is staying with the sensation. Presence creates space—and space allows emotions to move.

2. Feeling Without Judgment

The second practice is learning to feel without judging ourselves. Notice how quickly the inner critic appears: *“I shouldn’t feel this way.”* *“I should be over this by now.”* Feeling without judgment means meeting emotion with kindness. It means saying, *“Of course I feel this way, given what I’m experiencing.”* Self-compassion doesn’t make emotions stronger; it makes them safer to feel.

The FEEL Practice When an emotion arises:

- **F – Find it in your body**

Where do you feel it physically? Chest, throat, stomach, jaw? This brings you out of the mind and into the body.

- **E – Explore without story**

Notice the sensation without the narrative. Is it heavy, tight, warm, sharp? Stay curious rather than analytical.

- **E – Express it somehow**

Emotions are energy in motion. Write, talk, move, breathe, or sound it out. Expression allows release.

- **L – Let it move through**

When allowed, emotions rise, peak, and pass—often within minutes. Trust the process.

Healing Begins When We Stop Running

When we stop running from emotion, three shifts occur:

- **Compassion appears** – toward us and others
- **Clarity arrives** – emotions reveal what matters
- **Connection deepens** – vulnerability builds a real relationship

And something else happens, we reclaim enormous energy once spent suppressing feelings.

Eight Practices to Build the Capacity to Feel

1. **Start small and gentle** – Capacity is built slowly, not forced.
2. **Ask, “What am I feeling right now?”** – Truth over *“how I should feel.”*
3. **Scan the body** – Emotions live in sensation.
4. **Name the emotion** – Naming reduces intensity and increases regulation.
5. **Move the body** – Movement helps emotions move.
6. **Journal honestly** – Write without editing or fixing.
7. **Be gentle with resistance** – Resistance is protective; meet it with compassion.
8. **Find safe people** – Healing happens in the presence of safety and support.

This Week’s Practice

Once this week, notice an emotion without trying to change it.

For 60 seconds: Find it in your body, Name it, Breathe with it. No fixing. No explaining. Just presence.

My Blessing for You

May you have the courage to feel. May you trust your emotions as sacred signals.

May you know you are held, even in discomfort.

May you say yes to your full humanity and find wholeness there.

And so, it is. Amen.

Affirmation: *My feelings are sacred signals. I honor the messages of my heart.*