

Glenn Livingston, Ph.D. and Howie

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Dr. Glenn: Hey, this is the very good Dr. Glenn Livingston at NeverBingeAgain.com and I'm here with one of my favorite people, Howard Jacobson, Dr. Howard Jacobson from PlantYourself.com. How are you, Howie?

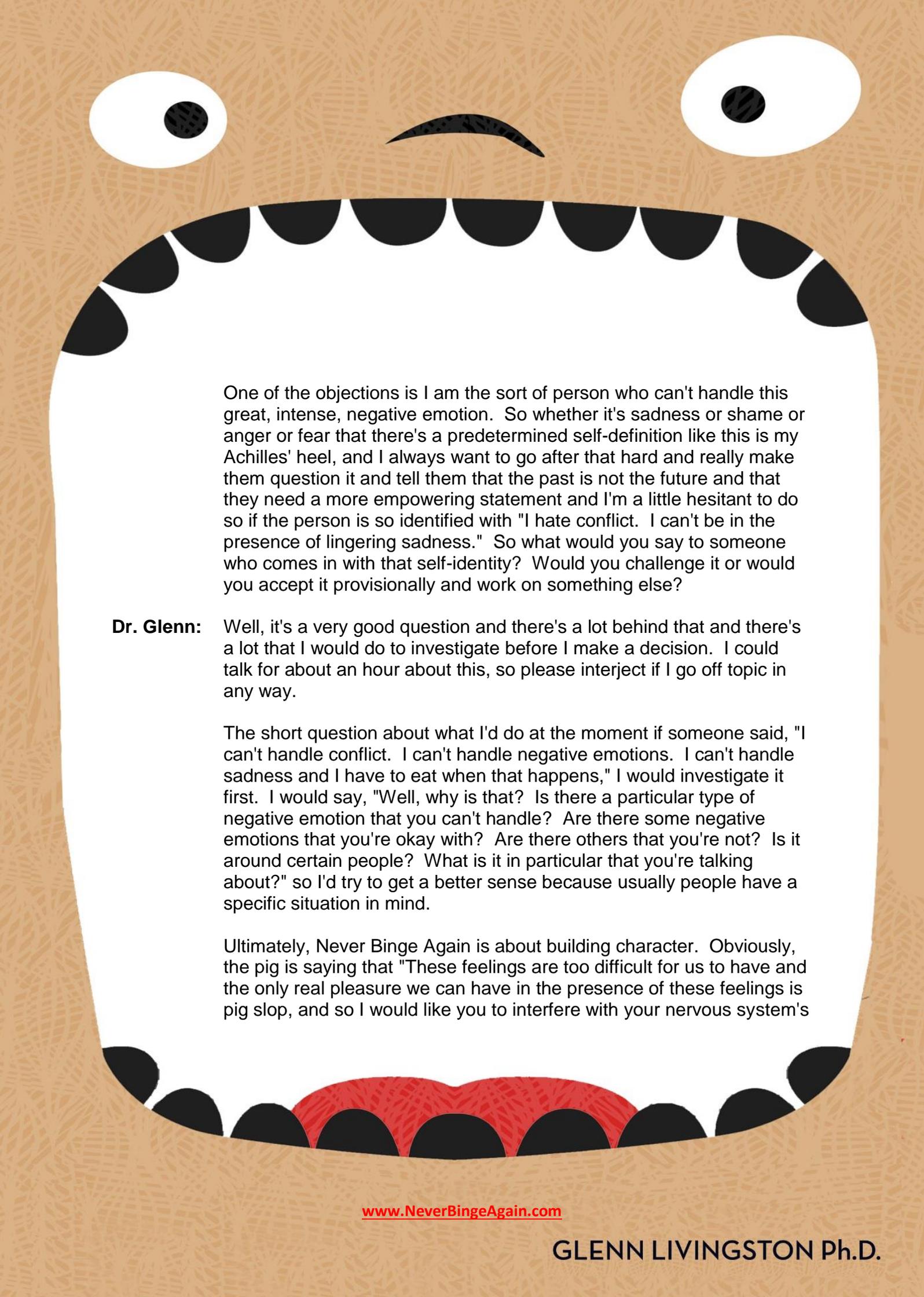
Howie: Very well, happy to be doing this again, Glenn Livingston from NeverBingeAgain.com.

Dr. Glenn: Okay, Dr. Howard Jacobson from PlantYourself.com.

Howie: Are we talking about branding today?

Dr. Glenn: Insert product placement here. No, we're not talking about branding. Both you and I wanted to have a more detailed talk about the role of emotions in overeating and how to deal with people when they feel that they are emotionally driven to overeat and what that complex relationship is all about and how to simplify some things and how to never binge again no matter how bad you feel. Make sense?

Howie: Yup. I'd like to begin by just presenting this case which has all these good objections to it. And rather than present the whole case, I'll just give you the objections to protect the privacy of the person who brought it to me.



One of the objections is I am the sort of person who can't handle this great, intense, negative emotion. So whether it's sadness or shame or anger or fear that there's a predetermined self-definition like this is my Achilles' heel, and I always want to go after that hard and really make them question it and tell them that the past is not the future and that they need a more empowering statement and I'm a little hesitant to do so if the person is so identified with "I hate conflict. I can't be in the presence of lingering sadness." So what would you say to someone who comes in with that self-identity? Would you challenge it or would you accept it provisionally and work on something else?

Dr. Glenn: Well, it's a very good question and there's a lot behind that and there's a lot that I would do to investigate before I make a decision. I could talk for about an hour about this, so please interject if I go off topic in any way.

The short question about what I'd do at the moment if someone said, "I can't handle conflict. I can't handle negative emotions. I can't handle sadness and I have to eat when that happens," I would investigate it first. I would say, "Well, why is that? Is there a particular type of negative emotion that you can't handle? Are there some negative emotions that you're okay with? Are there others that you're not? Is it around certain people? What is it in particular that you're talking about?" so I'd try to get a better sense because usually people have a specific situation in mind.

Ultimately, Never Binge Again is about building character. Obviously, the pig is saying that "These feelings are too difficult for us to have and the only real pleasure we can have in the presence of these feelings is pig slop, and so I would like you to interfere with your nervous system's



ability to conduct those emotions please by go getting us a big, hairy binge." Obviously what you want to do ultimately is help the person understand that that's their pig talking and that life is not a pain-free experience and that if you have six problems and then you overeat then you're going to have seven problems and that building a tolerance for feeling all of your feelings and remaining present in reality is the way to bring your ego strengths to bear on all of the problems you're experiencing in your world and it's the best way to manage reality, et cetera, et cetera. But before I would just jump in and push someone to that level, I really want to know why, what specifically is it about the situation that is making them feel like that and what specifically is their pig saying that's unbearable about that.

The other thing I want to make sure that people understand is that while there is a correlation between emotional triggers and binge eating, that doesn't mean that there's a cause and that the pig says that we must eat to get analgesia for these feelings so we don't feel the feelings, so we can escape and numb out so to speak. What's also going on is that the pig slop itself has a life of its own, that the person is getting high from the foods that they're binging on because the foods that they're binging on are things that didn't exist in the tropics, didn't exist in the savannah where we didn't have chips and pretzels and pizza and cookie. We didn't have that as we were evolving.

It's more than just numbing out. It's not like taking novocaine. It's a tremendous pleasure that they're seeking a short-term, artificial, pleasurable experience, which is akin to getting high. So I want to reframe that for people so they understand and they don't just excuse the pig and say, "Oh, poor baby, I'm sorry you're suffering. Here, let's get you some pig slop to comfort you." That said, I do ultimately want to help the person to tolerate those emotions more. Once they



understand conceptually how this all works, I want them to be able to tolerate the emotions more. The way that I will do that is to ask them to describe an example and rather than what a lot of other therapists might do, which is to ask them to sit with the feeling or exaggerate the feeling or tell me where they feel it in their body or something like that, I will just ask them to describe all the details of the situation that they can and while they are talking about it, I will ask them some factual questions that take them out of their ego.

Here's what I mean by that. You could think of every question that you ask someone on a continuum from a question that will get people more involved with their insides to a question that will get them more involved with things outside of them. When you ask people to tell you more about their insides, you're also engendering feelings, more intense feelings, and you're engendering fear of judgment. If I just learned that my mom died and I said I have to go binge and you ask me why, you're bringing out more of the feelings of grief and shock and you're putting me into a state where I can start to think in the back of my mind of, "Is it okay that I'm having these feelings? What is Howie thinking about me feeling this grief and shock? Is he going to be okay if I cry? What's going to happen between us interpersonally if that happens?" There's a great deal of anxiety and ego stress that occurs when you ask those questions.

However, if you were to say, "When did you find out? Where were you when you found out? Where did your mom live? How old was she?" you're asking me about objective facts that take me outside of my ego and outside of my feelings for the moment. It's kind of like giving people a natural pause in the relationship. You have to be genuinely interested in these things, by the way. If it feels like a technique, it absolutely does not work. You're giving people a natural pause in the



relationship and a pause from the intensity of the feelings, and then they will naturally want to continue to tell you more and they'll express a little bit more about what they're feeling and thinking, but they'll do it with a greater level of comfort.

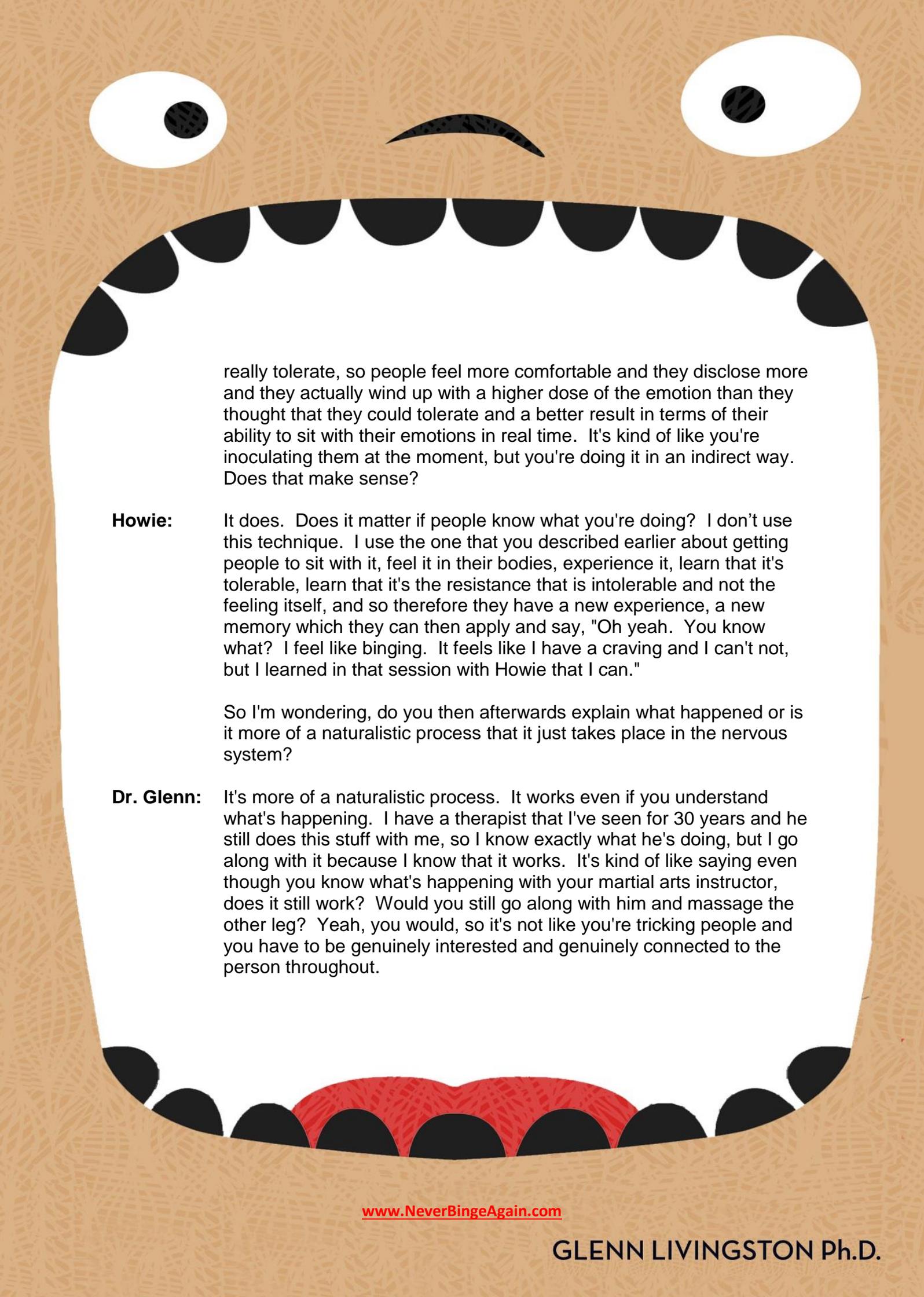
It's almost like if you were a personal trainer and you're trying to help people to stress their muscles more but the way that you did it was to hold some of the weight for them and help them push the bar up so that they could work out harder because the bar was not going to push them to failure. It was going to be just hard enough for them to take it.

Howie: Right. Actually, my martial arts instructor does that. He came over this morning. We were working together and he's trying to help me stretch my back out, and so I've got one leg up, cross legs, and I'm trying to reach down. I'm feeling terrible pain and instead of saying to stretch, he says, "Okay, massage your other leg." I'm like, oh, okay. "Use this hand. Get all the way down to the calf," so I'm massaging a leg and I'm like, "What did that do?" He says, "Well, it took your mind off the stretch."

Dr. Glenn: Exactly. That's exactly what I'm talking about, and he didn't say go home and stop working out, right?

Howie: Right.

Dr. Glenn: He just took your mind off it for a little bit so that you could continue to get the benefit of working out without it being overly stressful or mentally annoying. That's mostly how I work with it. As a result of that, people feel more comfortable to disclose more to me. I'm always monitoring their anxiety level. I'm always monitoring their fear of judgment. I'm always monitoring the level of emotions that they can



really tolerate, so people feel more comfortable and they disclose more and they actually wind up with a higher dose of the emotion than they thought that they could tolerate and a better result in terms of their ability to sit with their emotions in real time. It's kind of like you're inoculating them at the moment, but you're doing it in an indirect way. Does that make sense?

Howie: It does. Does it matter if people know what you're doing? I don't use this technique. I use the one that you described earlier about getting people to sit with it, feel it in their bodies, experience it, learn that it's tolerable, learn that it's the resistance that is intolerable and not the feeling itself, and so therefore they have a new experience, a new memory which they can then apply and say, "Oh yeah. You know what? I feel like bingeing. It feels like I have a craving and I can't not, but I learned in that session with Howie that I can."

So I'm wondering, do you then afterwards explain what happened or is it more of a naturalistic process that it just takes place in the nervous system?

Dr. Glenn: It's more of a naturalistic process. It works even if you understand what's happening. I have a therapist that I've seen for 30 years and he still does this stuff with me, so I know exactly what he's doing, but I go along with it because I know that it works. It's kind of like saying even though you know what's happening with your martial arts instructor, does it still work? Would you still go along with him and massage the other leg? Yeah, you would, so it's not like you're tricking people and you have to be genuinely interested and genuinely connected to the person throughout.

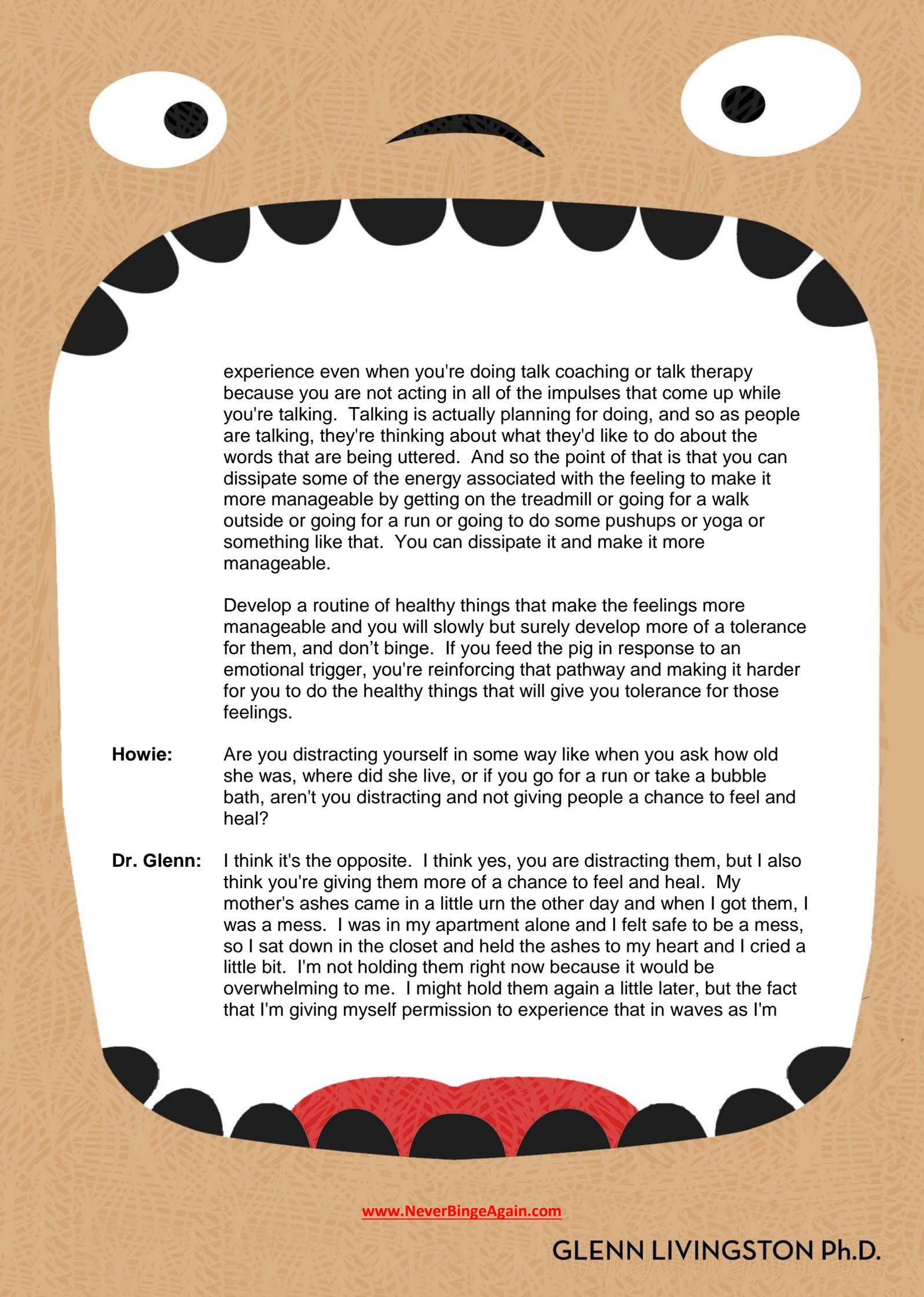


There are almost no techniques in coaching which work if you're not authentic. People smell when you're trying to do something out of a textbook. I remember my ex-wife. She went to see a therapist, not a coach. She went to see a therapist and she talked to him and he got all excited and he said, "This is exactly what it says in that book!" and he ran to the bookshelf and got the book and showed her the book, and that just doesn't work. You've got to be present in the room with people and emotionally available and connected to them.

Howie: So the person who's listening to this -- we're now doing shop talk for coaching and helping. How does a person who's on their own trying to deal with their own binges take this insight and run with it to their benefit?

Dr. Glenn: You could describe the details and ask yourself the same questions. You can tell yourself that for example, in the instance of grieving, which is on my mind because my mom actually did just die, experiencing your feelings is a process, not an event. In the movies, we see these cathartic scenes where somebody was hiding from their feelings and all of a sudden, there's this moment where they break down and hysterically cry or scream or hit the pillow or something like that and then everything is better going forward, but that's not really how it works in life. Feelings come over you in waves and every time the wave comes over you is another opportunity to sit with it a little bit more.

And so tell yourself that it's okay to take yourself out of those feelings by focusing at some factual details in your environment or focusing at some factual details about what happened, writing them down, going to exercise. Feelings are actually a physiological experience. Not many people understand that coaching or psychotherapy is a very physical



experience even when you're doing talk coaching or talk therapy because you are not acting in all of the impulses that come up while you're talking. Talking is actually planning for doing, and so as people are talking, they're thinking about what they'd like to do about the words that are being uttered. And so the point of that is that you can dissipate some of the energy associated with the feeling to make it more manageable by getting on the treadmill or going for a walk outside or going for a run or going to do some pushups or yoga or something like that. You can dissipate it and make it more manageable.

Develop a routine of healthy things that make the feelings more manageable and you will slowly but surely develop more of a tolerance for them, and don't binge. If you feed the pig in response to an emotional trigger, you're reinforcing that pathway and making it harder for you to do the healthy things that will give you tolerance for those feelings.

Howie: Are you distracting yourself in some way like when you ask how old she was, where did she live, or if you go for a run or take a bubble bath, aren't you distracting and not giving people a chance to feel and heal?

Dr. Glenn: I think it's the opposite. I think yes, you are distracting them, but I also think you're giving them more of a chance to feel and heal. My mother's ashes came in a little urn the other day and when I got them, I was a mess. I was in my apartment alone and I felt safe to be a mess, so I sat down in the closet and held the ashes to my heart and I cried a little bit. I'm not holding them right now because it would be overwhelming to me. I might hold them again a little later, but the fact that I'm giving myself permission to experience that in waves as I'm



comfortable with means that I don't have to develop a whole bunch of avoidant behaviors. It means that I'm committed to going through it. I want to have those feelings. I embrace those feelings at moments. And in other moments, I need to function and take care of my life like my mother would want me to. She wants me to go out in the world and have some of the things she taught me spread around as opposed to holding the ashes for an hour or two at once to try to get it all over with.

We don't eat everything at once for the week. Our body has a natural rhythm to processing it. We don't go to the bathroom just once during the week.

Howie: Especially if you eat like we do.

Dr. Glenn: Especially if you eat like we do. Oh my God. Yeah, I'm in the bathroom all the time. I'm really lucky that I work right next to the bathroom. I'm really lucky about that because I don't know what to do if I had a regular job. I probably wouldn't eat like I do if I had a regular job. Does that answer your question, Howie?

Howie: Yeah. As I'm thinking about it, it's a very trusting, organic approach that healing will come in its own way on its own terms and the way we sabotage it is not by just doing something else or taking a break to do a crossword puzzle or have a light chat with a friend or go for a run or garden. The way we sabotage it is by essentially looking for a giant dopamine hit. Is that the distinction whether it's drugs or alcohol or sex or Facebook or gambling or pig slop? But exercise is a dopamine hit, so how do I understand that?

Dr. Glenn: It's a dopamine hit that doesn't do you damage. So if I eat donuts instead of working out, I would still at some point have to experience



the pain, but then I have less of an ability to process the emotions because I've got the digestive inabilities for hours after that because all of our neurological energy is going to digestion. And then I also divert my mental energy towards, "Oh my god, how am I going to stop eating donuts?" So instead of being open to the process of the morning when it comes, I have to solve this other problem. And so it takes a disproportionately more mental and emotional energy to recover from the distraction of the donuts than it does to recover from the distraction of exercise.

And I would argue that exercise actually strengthens your ability to experience the emotions because you're detoxifying your lymph and you're strengthening your neurological connections and you're changing your hormonal balance and you're strengthening your muscles and you're doing all of these things that make your body function more efficiently and effectively whereas eating the donuts create disease and disorder, so you're going to have less of an ability to deal with the emotions as they hit you. So if you choose constructive distraction rather than destructive distraction and you remain committed to feeling your feelings in doses that are tolerable then you're going to not only get through, but you're going to emerge a stronger, better person on the other side.

Howie:

Awesome! I have another question, but I don't think this stands alone and I think the other question might take us an hour. I'm very grateful for your insights. I think it's going to help me in my coaching with people whom I feel aren't ready to go as deep as I would like them to go. And I think partly on my own part, there's like a 'get your money's worth' bias like let's do something really brave and transformative and emotional like if you come out of a coaching session with me and you



feel like you were just beat up, that's good as opposed to -- I wouldn't feel like such a hero if I'm saying, "So how old was she?"

Dr. Glenn: Yeah, right, and what I want people to come out of a coaching session feeling is that they have new thoughts that they would not have had without me. They worked harder than they could've worked without me, but they're looking forward to the next one, so it's not so painful that they want to avoid the next time.

Howie: Right. There's an ego thing for coaches, which is I really want them to say, "Wow, you're such a great coach," when in fact that's probably the worst thing they could come out of a session saying because it means that they've given the locus of control of healing over to you.

Dr. Glenn: Yeah, and this technique is not sexy. This approach is not sexy. People will feel like you're a great coach. They'll have an emotional experience of being more stable with you than they were with anybody else, and so they'll be more bonded and connected to you than they are with other people because of this because nobody really listens to them with this type of an ear for their anxiety level and tolerance for emotions and how to build it up slowly. It's very, very different and it's very stabilizing. People come out of it not feeling high, not feeling like they just went to a primal screaming marathon or something like that, but they start to feel more capable in their life and they start to associate that with talking to you.

I find this much more powerful. I've studied all of the cathartic techniques. My mother was a bioenergetic therapist and my father was a Gestalt therapist and in the beginning, I was studying hypnosis and I was studying a lot of the more dramatic, aggressive interventions, but at the end, I found that this worked better than anything else.



Howie: How do you close? So you've gotten them talking about their mother, about the details, some inappropriate amount of emotion comes out, then what? How do you send them on their way?

Dr. Glenn: It depends what the context is. I think you're talking about general coaching as opposed to Never Binge Again. For Never Binge Again, they would have a very specific goal and we'd be working on how do they stay committed to a very particular food rule. And in the situation you're describing, emotion would've been interfering with their ability to comply with that food rule.

Howie: Right, so this person then goes through, has the discussion about what the triggering event was, and we talk about some of the less emotional details, and then they're still going to be in that emotional situation. It's an ongoing dynamic. How do we help them with the next ten days to face it?

Dr. Glenn: "How confident do you feel that you're never going to eat chocolate on a weekday again?" or whatever the rule was that they're having trouble. And if they don't say 100 percent, I'll ask them why and they'll give me some particular pig squeal. If that pig squeal is still about the emotion, I will ask them what it was that's interfering with them believing that they could ignore that and I'll keep going until they feel 100 percent confident.

If it was more general coaching, I would ask them if they want to make another appointment, ask them what their plans were for dealing with the situation during the week. If they jump back up into their higher self, what's their best and highest plan for dealing with the situation and tell them we'll work on it next time.



Howie: Great!

Dr. Glenn: I'm not a very dramatic coach or therapist. I'm a very effective coach and therapist and I'm not a very dramatic one.

Howie: Well, if I want drama, I'll go to the movies. If I want to stop eating the damn cookies, I'll go to you.

Dr. Glenn: Yeah. There you go. Stop eating the damn cookies, Howie.

Howie: Your next book.

Dr. Glenn: Okay.

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