



“SOMETIMES WE HAVE TO PUSH OURSELVES, GO BEYOND OUR COMFORT ZONES AND TRUST THE PROCESS.” -DEB SMITH

THE OXYGEN MASK: YOU FIRST PART TWO

PART TWO

We have all heard that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Yet that second step can be just as difficult to take as the first. So let me say thank you for allowing me to join you on this journey and congratulations for having the courage and commitment to continue on this path to personal growth and development.

SO HERE WE GO!



Hopefully you have had the opportunity to make some positive shifts in the areas we explored in part one of ***The Oxygen Mask: You First***. Maybe you are now more mindful of what you are putting in your body, of what you are drinking and of your body and brain's nutritional needs. You may have created a more relaxing sleep routine, started walking regularly or looked into volunteering.

But what if these areas seem out of your reach?

What if your relationship with food is unhealthy? What if you use alcohol to help you relax so the racing thoughts stop and you can sleep? What if the thought of connecting to other people is as terrifying as it is exciting? Then let's get to work!

LET'S START WITH FOOD



Food is not only essential to our physical existence, it is central to our cultural and social experience.

Have you ever been invited to someone's home for a walk between 5 and 7 pm? Probably not. Instead we are invited to share a meal during these hours. And if it is a holiday meal there is an expectation of specialty and tradition. Unless you are vegetarian, you wouldn't expect to be served carrot soup for Thanksgiving and if it were served you would probably be disappointed.

We have come to expect cake on birthdays, dinner on a first date and a fresh ham to bring

in the New Year. Food has meaning and symbolism well beyond its biological requirement. But what happens when we use food to soothe our emotional pain? How often does Hollywood portray the broken hearted woman as the ice cream glutton?

We have all been there at one time or another. Not really hungry but feeling like we could just use a little something to quench our emotional thirst. That occasional binge typically doesn't present a problem. It's when we find ourselves engaging in this behavior more often than not that we may need to look at our eating habits more closely.

At this point I often ask coaching clients to be mindful of these habits and their connection to our emotions. Meaning simply being aware of them. Aware that the nights bring a sense of loneliness soothed by dinner's leftovers, the holidays bring a sense of loss and isolation soothed by pizza and chips. Aware that the local fast-food drive thru clerk knows your order and maybe even your name! Aware that stress is often soothed by a bowl of ice cream. Aware that you feel horrible after eating unhealthy foods but you do it anyway.

It is this awareness that will lead you to making healthier choices and healing the emotional pain that is its source. As we said in **PART ONE**, start by replacing those unhealthy foods with healthier choices as you use them. If the chips aren't in the house you are less likely to use them as a soothing technique. Find a nutritional practitioner, someone who can help you with this process. Your local health food store staff is generally very useful and supportive with this task.

ONE ON ONE SUPPORT

If you realize this problem requires more support then reach out for it. Join a supportive group – either a face to face program like

Overeaters Anonymous or an on-line program like **Bright Line Eating**.

FOOD JOURNALING



Start a food journal – one that not only includes what you are eating but also how it makes you feel. So often we overeat

leaving us with a feeling of heaviness, lethargy and brain fog. When we eat sugary foods we it can leave us with a sugar rush only to crash hours later. So take the time to really explore your relationship with food. The benefits are worth the effort!

CREATE A SLEEP ROUTINE



Just as food is essential to our existence, so too is sleep. **Sleep deprivation is an actual form of**

torture! And anyone who has experienced sleep deprivation knows why.

Neuroscientist Christof Koch explains in the article, *Sleeping While Awake* published in the *Scientific American* (November 2016), that when humans are sleep deprived they become what he refers to as “sleep drunk” and inherently seek out sleep, with the brain demanding that we obtain brain rest and a sleep state; this can occur when completely awake and not actually sleeping.

If after you have created the routine, the optimal sleep environment and still you can't sleep – head back to the health food store. There are many supplements on the market that are both safe and effective.

Meditation is effective for sleep with breath work. By that I mean breath focused exercise. During this technique there is no fighting with yourself nor fighting with your thoughts. Simply breathe – focus on the in breath and the out breath. You can also utilize the belly breathing technique outlined in **PART ONE** as well. If thoughts enter your awareness simply acknowledge them and shift your focus back to your breath. It takes a little practice but once you have mastered the technique it can be a very useful tool.

Bi-lateral sound is effective for sleep. My favorite is **Bill Harris's Holosync Meditation Technology**. You will need a CD player with a headset and a comfy pillow! It is brain wave training set within soothing music. Sometimes our brains need to have their reset buttons pushed and this is the CD that will do it.

Other techniques that will help you achieve a relaxed state for sleep include – acupuncture/acupressure, massage therapy, chiropractic care, cranial sacral therapy, guided imagery, bio-feedback, self-hypnosis, progressive muscle relaxation – to name a few. Try them all – find the one that works for you. And as we discussed in **PART ONE**, turn off your electronics at least an hour before going to bed. They interrupt melatonin production which then interrupts your sleep pattern.

If after all of this you continue to have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, see your primary care physician. There may be an

underlying physical issue or you may need a prescription sleep aid. Don't suffer – the impact of sleep deprivation on your emotional health can be devastating.

Forging ahead, I guess we could debate the importance of exercise to our existence. Maybe it isn't essential to our existence like food or sleep, yet it is vitally important not only to our existence but also to our emotional health. Our bodies were designed to move.

BUT IF WE LACK THE MOTIVATION, THE DRIVE TO DO SO HOW WILL WE REAP THE CHEMICAL BENEFITS OF THIS MOVEMENT?

Benefits like endorphin release – that amazing chemical that bathes our brains during exercise reducing symptoms of depression and the perception of pain; sometimes we have to help ourselves 'help ourselves'. **Yes you read that correctly**. We have come to expect the magic pill, the magic strategy ... I hate to be the bearer of bad news but there is none.

Sometimes we have to push ourselves, go beyond our comfort zones, and trust the process. You won't know if you don't try. So I suggest starting slowly. Just go for a walk. A short walk. Observe how you feel while you are out there – are you nervous, anxious, feeling alive, feeling good? Then observe how you feel after your walk – relieved it's over, tired, energized? When you are ready step it up a bit, consider joining a walking group. Groups have a tendency of motivating, encouraging and supporting each other. Similar to the honking geese! They aren't up there honking to annoy the humans below them. They are honking to encourage each other, to keep the momentum of the group through inclusion and mutual success.

The next one is a tricky one – **being socially connected**.



There are many reasons why we can't seem to connect, can't seem to find intimacy – some too extensive to address here. Trauma

and addiction issues are two that will be addressed in a separate series, but for most of us, our social anxiety blocks us from connecting, our feelings of inferiority, lack of social flare or plain and simple fear. I don't know anyone who hasn't experienced these feelings at one time or another. The problem presents itself when we allow these emotions to stop us from doing what we truly want to do.

SO WHERE AND HOW DO WE START?



We start by identifying and regulating our emotions. What do I mean by that? We start by first identifying our feelings and then

the thoughts connected to those feelings. Very few of us realize that our emotions are actually messengers and we need to listen to them!

Often the problem lies in how we process these feelings. Generally we take them at face value and believe them to be accurate and true, however, can they be accurate if they are rooted in inaccurate or faulty thoughts?

Take the person who feels inferior yet is the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. They may be thinking “I am a fake. I'm winging it. I can't

hold a conversation that isn't business related. One day everyone will figure that out and then I will be out. So let me isolate myself to avoid the pain that will inevitably come.”

Or the single mom who feels unlovable after a brutal divorce. She may repeatedly hear the criticisms of her ex-husband replaying over and over - “You let yourself go after the kids. You can't hold a conversation unless it's about diapers and wipes. Do you do anything right?”

Over time these thoughts become beliefs and thus feelings about ourselves emerge from them. The key is to identify the feeling and then identify the thought that is behind it. Ask yourself if that thought is accurate and if it is complete. There are times when the thought might be accurate but it isn't complete.

Let's look at our CEO. Maybe he is winging it. Maybe his father put him in that role prematurely. But is that the end of the thought? No! What if that CEO is enrolled in an MBA program – Is he truly winging it? Is he truly a fake? No! Once he realizes he has only told himself half of the story he can more accurately identify his feelings. With a more accurate thought he may now feel confident, empowered and even worthy of his role.

And our single mom – maybe her body has changed after the birth of three children. But let's complete that thought – Of course it would! How could it not? The faulty thought was her ex-husband's. Once she realizes that these physical changes are natural and normal she can start to appreciate and embrace them. These new thoughts bring with them new feelings. Feelings that allow her to love herself and view herself as lovable and valuable.

Do you see how this works? Our thoughts create our feelings and thus dictate our behavior. So the key here is to evaluate our thoughts for accuracy and completeness which

will bring about a more accurate feeling and thus a more fulfilling behavior.

I am not in any way minimizing the pain of fear and anxiousness. I am telling you there is a way out of it. Start with the truth, then help your nervous system with relaxation techniques (Breath work, yoga, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, guided imagery, body work etc...), healthy food (free of preservatives, additives sugars etc...), adequate sleep – coming full circle.

And as we stated earlier – don't suffer! When feelings of anxiousness and fear stop us from enjoying those things we want to do and the techniques we talked about just aren't helping – get back to the health food store; there are natural supplements that can help. If those don't help – see your primary care physician or an appropriate prescriber. If you have high blood pressure you take blood pressure medication. So if you have high anxiety, you may need to take anxiety medication.

Don't let another day go by without feeling connected, fulfilled and part of something bigger than yourself! Make the commitment to find the answers, explore the beliefs. Make the changes necessary to create the happiness and wholeness you are innately entitled to! I have witnessed this journey first hand with hundreds of people. I know it can happen and I know it can happen for you.

If you found this E-Series helpful and would like to dive deeper into healing yourself and your relationships, be sure to continually return to my website, www.debsmithhealingarts.com to download additional segments of this and other series.

I wish you the best of luck on your healing journey toward personal growth and development.

You are worth the time and effort needed to give yourself the tools to live a happy and fulfilling life!

Love and Laughter,

Deb