

The Done Bingeing

PODCAST

EPISODE 3: SELF-REGARD

What do Sex and the City and kitty litter have to do with you and binge eating? Keep listening!

Welcome to the Done Bingeing podcast, where you'll hear about powerful life coaching strategies that empower you to end binge eating.

Binge eating is no joke. So explore all your options. If you're functioning well in your life and you want to explore a non-clinical approach to stop bingeing, coaching might be perfect for you. Life coaching isn't therapy, but it may help you on your journey whether you also choose to do therapy or not. Trust yourself, take good care of yourself, get the support you need, and see what works for you. If you want to hear how life coaching can help free you from binge eating, you're in the right place! You have more power than you know. Why not take it back? And now, your host, Life and Weight-Loss Coach Martha Ayim.

Welcome to Episode 3 of the Done Bingeing Podcast. Thank you for being here with me.

Last summer, I was catching up over lunch with a dear friend. I'd known Beata for more than a decade. We sat on this cobblestoned back patio with huge trees shading us. Glints of sunlight danced across our plates when the wind fluttered the leaves.

We each ordered steaming blackened tilapia drizzled with cilantro-lime-butter sauce. It was amazing.

And as we ate, I told her I'd become a life coach dedicated to helping people end binge eating.

Beata's fork had been half-way to her mouth. She lowered it now, a flakey morsel of fish still speared on the end.

"Did you used to binge?" she asked.

There was a hint of something frozen on her face. But into what expression . . . I couldn't tell. Shock? Fear? Alarm?

I checked Beata's eyebrows. I always go to eyebrows when I can't detect an expression. But her eyebrows weren't raised. Darn it.

Next, I checked Beata's eyes. They were directly on mine.

“I did binge,” I said. “For more than thirty years.”

Now her fork clinked down on her plate and her hand dropped to her lap, but her eyes didn’t move.

“I didn’t know that,” she said.

“I worked hard to hide it,” I replied. “I was ashamed. Most binge eaters are.”

The fork was back in Beata’s hand now. We both watched as she swirled the piece of fish ’round and ’round in the creamy sauce on her plate.

’Round and ’round.

Then her eyes lifted to mine again. “I binged for 20 years. I never told a soul. Not even Simon.” Simon is her husband.

I didn’t know about Beata. Beata didn’t know about me. Two friends. Ten years. And not one word about the bingeing.

Shame is a classic silencer of binge eaters. Shame has us eating the cookies on the toilet because that’s the only privacy we have at work. Shame has us making sure tonight’s grocery store clerk isn’t the one who rang through last night’s cake. Shame has us pulling up to different drive-thrus so the cashier who works the window at Fifth and Main doesn’t recognize us. Worst of all, shame can push us to keep secrets and make us afraid to get help.

But it doesn’t have to be that way. If you want a guide on the journey, I’m here. Being a binge eater for more than 30 years taught me so much. Most of all, that I would never be free without one key thing: self-regard. And that’s what this episode begins to explore—harnessing the power of self-regard *especially* in the face of binge eating.

So . . . what does self-regard mean? Self-regard means to honor who you are, where you are. It means to view yourself with dignity, to treat yourself accordingly—and to tolerate nothing less.

Now, interestingly, self-regard is a tough sell. But why? Why is it so hard to view and treat ourselves the way we’d want to be treated by someone else?

Well, let me give you an example. If you were a fan of *Sex and the City*, you might remember one particular episode with Miranda and a chocolate cake. There’s a scene where Miranda pulls a hunk of chocolate cake out of the fridge and starts to eat it. And you can tell she’d told herself not to. Then, immediately disgusted with herself, she throws the cake in the garbage and walks out of the kitchen. She’s done. But a beat later, she’s back—eating a piece right out of the garbage. The only thing left to do so she won’t eat that cake is pour dish soap all over it.

Miranda’s garbage eating was not a self-regard moment. She was fed up. And I could totally relate.

When I was a binger, my favorite binge food was vanilla cake with vanilla icing. I'd buy a McCain's Deep'n Delicious frozen cake. Then I'd buy an extra tub of Betty Crocker's Rich & Creamy, Creamy White frosting so that I could spread icing on the sides of each forkful before I'd eat it.

There was always this profound dissonance between how I wanted to eat and how I did eat. I felt like a pack of sumo wrestlers couldn't pull me away from that cake. But I also felt desperate to stop eat eating it.

So, I'd throw the cake the one place that'd make me stop: my cat's litter box. And, just FYI, it wasn't freshly scooped. I thought that should be gross enough to do the trick. And I'd walk away confidently, just like Miranda from the garbage. And then, sure enough . . . I'd tiptoe back in. "Hello, cake in the litter box!" I think you can guess how this story ends. Let's just say that that was my lowest moment as a binge eater.

Now, if you're grossed out, know that I'm erring on the side of TMI to let you know that if you've done something like this, you're not alone. I think pretty much every binger has been to some equally desperate place.

Maybe it was you in a car in a parking lot outside a donut drive-thru. Maybe it went down something like this. The donut box lies open on the car seat next to you. A few multi-colored sprinkles and toasted coconut bits stuck to the odd smear of icing. The strawberry jelly that splotched out of bottom of one donut as you bit into the top is now a dead give-away on your favorite cream blouse. You check the rearview mirror. White powder lines your lips and dusts the tip of your nose. You look into your eyes. Everything blurs. Again.

Your belly aches and your heart aches, too. You didn't even want to binge but you didn't know how to stop. You could've used the extra few dollars in your pocket, especially since the binges have been coming more regularly now.

So the question is, how could you, and why would you, want to be at a low point like this—at a low point like I was with my cake in the kitty litter, at a low point like Miranda was with her cake in the garbage—and still view yourself with self-regard? Clients ask me, "Why would I like who I am if I'm doing something I wanna stop?"

Here's why: You need self-regard, especially when it seems impossible. Because self-regard will bring you peace—exactly what you need when you're feeling desperate—because it shifts you away from being a harsh judge and into being a neutral, compassionate witness.

Self-regard will help you avoid so much of the pain that you create for yourself and will help you step out of spinning in whatever your struggle happens to be. When you're not dizzy from all the spinning, you can focus on resolving the issue in your life.

Why should you treat yourself with self-regard, despite the bingeing? Because your bingeing is here. Because it's happening. Because it's the reality of your life right now. Because hating the binge hasn't helped you stop. Because, weird as it sounds, your bingeing may have helped you. Looking back, you may

see that bingeing helped you to cope, to avoid despair, to keep going. Hating the binge may help you in the short term, but it'll hurt you in the long run.

Bingeing is a habit that was wired into your brain with practice. You experienced an urge to binge and you reacted to it by bingeing. The emotional distress caused by the hatred cemented this connection.

Letting go of the hatred allows you to begin to let go of the bingeing. Letting go of the shame allows you to see that there's nothing wrong with you. You have work to do, but there's nothing wrong with you. You will work on wiring a new neural connection away from the bingeing. But for right now, you're bingeing. That's what's happening right now. That's what *is*.

Byron Katie teaches about the tremendous healing power of loving what is as a springboard for transformation. She writes, "I am a lover of what is, not because I'm a spiritual person, but because it hurts when I argue with reality. . . . When we stop opposing reality, action becomes simple, fluid, kind, and fearless."

What would you do if you were fearless? And how would you get there? How do you get from self-loathing to self-regard?

You start by lighting up the shame. Shame researcher Brené Brown defines shame as "the intensely painful feeling that we are unworthy of love and belonging."

Shame loves isolation and darkness. Shame leaves us hiding beneath it, defeated.

So get up. Turn on the lights. And let's talk about the shame of binge eating together.

For a binge eater, shame is a before-during-and-after kind of pain. Shame triggers a binge. We binge in secret. We feel shame that we binged. Wash, rinse, repeat.

So . . . how to stop the cycle? Consider that you are profoundly worthy of love and belonging. (Because you are.) Consider that your bingeing has absolutely nothing to do with your competence or moral fiber. (Because it doesn't.)

You're not broken or flawed or inept. This isn't about how good you are or how weak you've been. Binge eating isn't a moral issue. It's a wiring issue. There's no place for shame.

Did you know that when you react to an urge by bingeing, your brain is working exactly as it was designed to work? Your brain has learned to efficiently automate a process that happened again and again: Up came the urge, down went the binge. Your brain is trying to help you.

And if your binges were preceded by restrictive diets, your brain is trying to save you. It signals you with urges to binge as a way to prevent you from starving. It wants you to live.

When you understand this, you can stop blaming—and shaming—yourself. You can ease the emotional distress that has helped to strengthen an old neural connection. And can you give yourself the space to wire a new connection.

We're going to take a deeper dive into the wiring and how to rewire your brain in future podcast episodes. For now, I want to take a closer look at where shame will take you and where self-regard will take you.

What do you think you're likely to do if you're feeling shame? If you're like most binge eaters, you hide, you stay quiet, you ruminate, and . . . you eat and quite probably binge.

When you do these things, you continue to reinforce the pattern of binge eating and deepen the neural groove in your brain that anchors it. And you increase the chances that you'll gain weight or prevent yourself from losing weight.

On the other hand, how do you think you'll be likely to show up if you're feeling self-regard, or compassion toward yourself? My experience, and the experience of my clients, is that the actions taken out of self-regard are quite different.

Chances are you'll be more likely to stay connected with people in your life. Chances are you'll be more likely to reach out to a loved one if you could use support. Chances are you won't be as frantic to binge, and that even if you do end up bingeing, you'll have some space available to carefully consider what you'd really like to binge on and then take the time to at least enjoy the binge while it's happening.

All of these actions taken when feeling self-regard would be next to impossible to take if you were feeling shame. And yet these are actions that will help you weaken your pattern of bingeing.

So . . . I want to reiterate why self-regard is such a gold mine. Self-regard offers the possibility of being neutral and curious about your bingeing, rather than harsh and judgmental. The closer you are to neutral, the better you'll be able to increase your consciousness of what's happening before, during, and after a binge.

So much of bingeing goes on unconsciously. Sometimes we'll find ourselves at the checkout with a box of ice cream and can't recall how we got there. Sometimes we'll find a chicken carcass on our plate and can't believe we ate almost all of it.

The work of rewiring a new neural connection begins with becoming more aware of what's happening for us leading up to a binge, while we binge, and after we binge. To be aware, we need to have the courage to stay present and watch it all with a gentle, neutral, curiosity.

In the next episodes, we're going to break this down and look at how this would actually work in key areas of binge eating: weight shame, food restriction, urges to binge, the binges themselves, the aftermath of binges, and weight loss after bingeing.

Stay tuned.

A little fearlessness will go a long way.

That's it for Episode 3. Thank you for listening.

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Thanks for listening to this episode of The Done Bingeing Podcast. Remember, although life coaching can complement therapy, it's not a substitute for therapy if that's what you require. Make sure you get the support you need. And let Martha know if she can help you along the way. Come back next week for more on saying goodbye to the binge.