# Learning To Become Gentle With Ourselves Transcript

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## Introduction to Beth Claxton

Welcome back to the reverse autoimmune disease series. Again we're in version 5.0 Healing Energy body. And I am very happy to bring to you Doctor Beth Claxton.

First and foremost, she considers herself a human on a journey. Her degree is a medical doctor and board certification as an ObGyn marks her path and her curiosity led her to become a teacher of mindfulness based stress reduction and an aggravated yoga health coach.

Most recently, she became certified in functional medicine, which felt like completing the circle to her undergraduate degree in biochemistry. Welcome to the seminar series, Beth.

Thank you so much, Keisha. I'm really happy to be here. So the title of your talk is Learning to Be Gentle with Ourselves, which is just so necessary in this day and age.

I think. What made you what drew you to this idea of learning how to be gentle with ourselves? I always think our own personal stories bring us to where we are, and I would love to hear yours.

Yeah. I was I was going through life kind of like, the Hulk or I thought I was a tin man, and I was like, I had all this armor on and it didn't matter how hard anything was or what I felt, I had this shell and I could just get through it.

So I was an I went to medical school. I did, of course, the hardest residency that you could do as I understood it, because that would be two arms. Never got to sleep.

They were always running around. They were the hardest working people. And then, then I decided to get married and it wasn't a great fit. And I just thought I'd go do it.

## Personal Journey to Self-Compassion

And then I, I'd have children and, you know, at an advanced maternal age and just get through that, you know, I was doing and and then the clinic I was working, they offered a mindfulness based stress reduction course for the providers.

It was an abbreviated, course. And we went in and just sat. And it was absolutely profound for me. And I started listening to the other providers that were taking that class with me.

And a friend of mine said, you know, my mother in law is in town and she's not annoying me. And so as, as I started, you know, I realized at that moment that I had to teach this, that this was too profound to not it was a basic, vital part of health care that was being.

So I just I decided I was going to train. And that's been a, a long journey and one of the biggest, the most important pieces of guiding those meditations is you set, you follow the breath, watch the thoughts, follow the breath.

Thoughts come. You follow the breath. You let the thoughts go and this is the key part. You're gentle with yourself. You don't give yourself a hard time.

This is what happens. This is how. This is what everybody does. This is what the mind is supposed to do. Take the judgment out. Just be loving and bring yourself back.

So that's that's my journey to being gentle with myself. Self-compassion is, I think, a primary missing ingredient in the autoimmune community where I always say there are four PS to autoimmunity.

One is perfectionism. One is people pleasing. One is the Pedido to know your basic medicine, and one is the poison of past pain that's being held on to.

And in all of those there, all four of those PS come with an automatic grid work of non gentleness. So I really loved that we are going to talk about this because these, these four PS I always think have to be healed before autoimmunity can be reversed.

And you know, appreciation and gratitude, curious compassion and collaboration with all the systems you know of your own body. These are all necessary if autoimmunity is going to be reversed and that self-compassion is such a key ingredient.

So I appreciate this very, very much. Oh, thanks. And I'll say just a little bit about my journey to self-compassion. I was, you know, that was that self-compassion is something I was trying to check off.

Check the box. And I had been studying mindfulness for a while, and one of the prerequisites to being able to teach is to do, that's a handful of five day silent retreats and then ten days silent retreats.

And I went to a ten day silent retreat on self-compassion, and I still hadn't gotten up. And we sat down and they every day, every afternoon we practiced metta, which is self-compassion. And, metaphor ourselves.

And and at first it was like, really? Like, I have to do this so I can go to lunch. It just felt so cheesy. And then like, I might start crying. But by maybe day 4 or 5, six, right?

I realized that was the gateway. And there was like, I, there was something soft and tender in my belly that opened up and then let everything else happen.

I remember on day three of my first ten day silent meditation, the pace and retreat and practicing metta and getting really angry. And going out for a walk between meditation sessions because, you know, you can't talk to anybody.

And I'm talking to a bird that I would in, in this sort of area outside that was kind of set up like a circle where you can go for a walk, and the bird would be perched on the ground.

And every time I loop back around, I would mutter to the bird about all the things I didn't tell you about this retreat that should be known. And it was just so angry.

And then all of a sudden gave gateway. And I just started sobbing, you know, and I there it is. Right? There's the soft belly, there's the vulnerability.

There's. And then from that point forward, it was it was just this beautiful, willingness to engage in self-compassion that had not been there before.

There was all this doing this. And right I if if I get this done, then I can relax, you know, and if I just do this, then I'll feel worthwhile. And there's just so much of that and deeply ingrained into our culture.

Right. And I was actually reminded I had my own bit of defiance with it, too, in that I was reading Krista Ness book, self-compassion, right when it had come out and I, I was not making it through the book at home.

It was just sitting there. So I picked it up and I threw it in my bag, and I went to the silent retreat, and I think I read it on the plane or something.

But when I got to that retreat, I realized, like, I think that that book is important. And even though we weren't supposed to be reading You Rebel, you.

I know I finish your book just so everybody knows you're not supposed to read, journal, do yoga. Look at people in the eye I got nothing. Smile at them.

No no no no. Hand them a Kleenex when they're sobbing behind you. No, no, that's a process. Yeah, yeah, it's it's big work. Yeah.

## Mindfulness in Daily Life

And, you know, I still have to be reminded even when they, you know, when with the pandemic and everything is falling apart, it seems like in the world.

And I was scrolling through the news, like, for an hour a day during lockdown and the election, and I, I only recently realized that's not self-compassion.

You know, that's not good. And it's not good for me. Yeah, I came home from the my first Vipassana retreat. Let's see, my daughter, my youngest child was seven and she's now 25.

So that many years ago, whatever that may and and I, I knew I never turned on the news. And it's so interesting because people go, how do you know what's going on in the world?

And, and I always say, my patients tell me, like, I know, I knew. That's great. I knew when Russia invaded Ukraine because one of my patients told me, I figure I get my news from, you know, from being connected to other people, and I don't have to have it invade my space, you know?

And it really is an act. I got immediately that that was self-compassion for me. And everyone's going to be a little bit different, you know, and, and how they create that boundary for themselves and what compassion means for them. But.

Yeah, exactly. It is individualized. And you it takes definite checking in. Yeah. No, it's right for you. Which is I just show me how to do it. Yeah. And I think, you know, one of the things mind is always considered master in our culture, and mind is the one that gets us in trouble and starts going off.

And so body has a lot of wisdom, heart has a lot of wisdom. And, you know, so for our viewers, my encouragement is to check in with body and heart and ask yes and no questions and see what body and heart have to say instead of like turning it over to mind all the time.

That's that's where I discovered it's like, okay, I need to be checking in with my whole system, not just the mind. Absolutely. And that's that was my journey to I was learning to trust the body of.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, in in your daily life, how do you how do you see mindfulness an important tool. Well, meditation. So, stable, stable part of my morning and there are days that there's a lot of brain activity.

There is nothing but brain activity. And realizing that, like, wow, I am really wound up. And it's been really helpful to take a step back to create that space where something happens, you can stop you.

You notice, you can stop, you can take a breath and you can decide what comes next. And you know, you've had teenagers. I have teenagers, and it's so nice to be able to like, just stop and go.

And they're like, mom, why are you saying anything? There's nothing that needs to be said right now. I'm going to think about that. Yeah, it's. Yeah, I'd say that's that's a big one.

Now just noticing noticing what's happening in my body, noticing what's happening outside. I, I say I, I'm a pretty careful driver or I don't really get an accident or cut my fingers or anything chopping because I know I tell myself I'm chopping something and I have a really sharp knife in my hand, and I'm going to make this an exercise in mindfulness.

And yeah, it gets done. I don't think it's any slower than it needs to be, because I certainly don't have to stop and find a Band-Aid. Right? Yeah. Yeah, those those are the ways, I think some examples, but it's everywhere.

Once, once we learn to slow down and it's everywhere. And it's interesting because as you just noted, it's not really slowing down how fast something gets done.

It's slowing down the crowding of one flat over the top of the next one. Yeah. Exactly that multitasking where we think that we can get more done. And really as I'm learning the laser focus actually expands the concept of time.

So we could potentially get more done. Yeah. So letting go of clinical. To an outcome I think is another place where this plays out for me. Where I'm.

You know if I consciously think if my mind is a fists you know and I can let it go, just really consciously open it up and expand my view. Bring it like this, then there's a lot more peace.

In the the clinging to whatever it is that I think is supposed to be happening right now, where should be happening or my expectations. You know, I always say all and happiness comes from and the expectations.

But every time you're unhappy, you're the one present. So. Right. You know, it's like, what? What is it that I'm clinging to right now that I could let go of in?

And it might be that there's less mobility in a wrist, you know, or pain in a knuckle and and in an idea that that should not be there. Right. And so letting go of that contracted.

Oh, no, that shouldn't be there or that fear around mobility might be deteriorating right now, you know, and and that then brings a whole different biochemistry to the joints.

Right. To relax that. Right. Right, right. Exactly. Yeah. The the neuro inflammatory cascade with cortisol and etc. and the vagus nerve and nuclear factor kappab, which just triggers like this highly inflammatory cascade in the brain and all over the body.

It's if we can self-regulate that. Like, how powerful is that? And then it just blows me away. And the times that I thought you were talking about mobility and I, I was thinking the times that I really like dig in and use the use of mindfulness is when I have to go to the grocery store and it's 430 in the afternoon and it's bumper to bumper traffic.

You know, I get on and it's okay. Take a deep breath and I'm not going to be super mobile. This is going to take a while and I'm just going to breathe and do the best I can.

I'll make it there eventually. Yeah. What's the worst thing that can happen?

## Mindfulness, Functional Medicine, and Ayurveda

I could get wound up and get into an accident, right? Yeah, exactly. Yeah. So how does mindfulness play a part in your functional medicine practice? I, I when I took that class, I just knew that it was a vital part.

And I've, I've offered classes throughout the years where I live. And sometimes they're, they're filled sometimes and they tend to be small. And then just recently, as my functional medicine practice has grown, I've made my membership package include the mindfulness based stress reduction course.

So if if they want to be a member, they're taking that class. It's I just love it. Like there was one woman so powerful. She has a lot of pain. So she she just said it was so profound.

Class member seven and they're eight classes. She said. I just didn't realize there was any other way to look at things. Yeah, yeah. And that's going to affect her physiology extensively.

Yeah. Yeah. So yeah everyone everyone gets to take it. And how how do you see a connection between mindfulness and acrobatic medicine. So mindfulness based seduction.

The mindfulness practice is part of the idea of data. It's slowing down. It's welcoming the day with meditation or just being aware of what's happening.

And that is what I see. I array that has like the daily, the DNA, the daily practices that are slowing down, getting in touch with nature, noticing that we are an animal in nature, noticing how my bowels move today instead of, you know, the next day when you're feeling really bad and you haven't even realized that you didn't have a bowel movement that day, the day before, and I can I can really tell there are times that I get really wound up, and then there are days that I start to slow down and I say, oh, yeah, I can hear the birds today, and I can feel that the rain's coming and I can make wise choices with what I'm eating.

And I can say, I'm getting hungry right now, and I know that if I don't do something about this in the next 30 minutes, I'm going to get hangry and I'm going to like, just see whatever food my teenagers have in the cabinet and, you know, satisfy this. It.

So yeah, it's it's really I think it really helps make the whole process, the practice of your meta possible is that grounded meditation. I, I gave a talk for the National Angry Vedic Medical Association when I was on the board years ago, and I was I was pulling the link between trauma and autoimmunity forward from the Vedic perspective.

And one of the the IRA Vedic perspectives that isn't really embedded in our cultural paradigm is that the body is the canvas of the mind, and whatever it is that we're bringing in, there are these three, you know, energies to it.

Oh, just changes in prana, right. And as the communication between the cells and the just as the metabolism and the energies is that building life force, vitality, and if any of those in an autoimmune disease, Tejas burns up.

Oh just right. This fire is too high. And and then there's miscommunication between the cells of the immune system and the rest of the tissues. And all of that happens.

And because of a lack of mindfulness around whatever your what you're eating, what you're thinking about, how you're replenishing your energy, like coffee or tangerines.

Right. Versus listening to the body and giving it what it really wants. Eating against your genetics, you know, like, just that's a lack of mindfulness.

All of it. Right. And it tends to be in, in our culture that we seafood as, a way of satisfying, you know, we've got our six tastes and we, we do a lot of trying to satisfy emotional dysregulation through food and, you know, with your patients, I, I'm sure you hear it just like I do.

You're taking away intensive quote, right? You're taking away the only thing that brings me joy, right? It's like, well, no, I'm I'm not taking it away.

Actually, I'm inviting you into a space of mindful, compassionate, curious, compassion, communication with yourself. Right. Ask your body what it's asking for, and it's telling you very loudly what what it needs right now.

And so that that idea that I guess we're not responsible, for the circumstances that we're living in, in our body, that somebody on the outside tells us what to do or is taking something away or we're being deprived.

I believe that mindfulness changes that and shifts it in a in a really powerful way. Yeah, I agree, it's it's the way that we see it. It's like stopping taking a breath.

What's another way to look at this. And that was very empowering. Right. I talked with someone just the other day who wasn't getting better because they couldn't follow the diet.

And you know okay. For the pride myself of this and this and this. And I said, well the first step is to change the mindset about that, that you're making a compassionate decision for your body and for your health.

And they said, okay. Yeah. And not even a compassionate decision for but you're you're collaborating with the wisdom of the body that it's telling you.

Right? It's like it's already made its decision. It knows what it needs and it's trying to give you that information. This is just a matter of listening to it.

Right? Right, right. Yeah. And finding that sense of that awareness, that communication, that ability to communicate with the body, like, because it's hard.

It's hard because tasting good is very different than how am I going to feel 15 minutes later? Right. And having that that patience and that wisdom to make the decision for something that's going to make us feel better 15 minutes later.

Yeah, yeah, I was in a grocery store when I was first learning, aggravated probably 20 years ago, and I remember, being in the frozen food section with the berries, the frozen berries, and, and looking in my cart and seeing that I had some frozen berries and I had, some unsalted organic butter to make with.

And I had, you know, I had I had some legumes in there. I had a bunch of different things to make sure, and, and realizing that everything in there actually was hitting the sweet taste, even though we all, like, very healthy.

Yes. And and I thought to myself as so interesting and you know, the six tastes, of course, in their beta sweet and salty and sour and pungent and bitter and astringent and, and I started making those emotional correlative to each of those taste and realizing the.

Yeah. When, when I have like a, an experience that leaves a sour taste in my mouth with another person or I feel bitter about something that happened or I'm feeling kind of angry, like astringent, you know, that or pungent that, I reach for sweet to, to make that feel better, even if it's in, it's in our Veda, you know, like.

Speak. It's it's healthy, but basmati rice is sweet. So and so are split mung beans. And so I thought how this is so fascinating. And, and I looked around at other grocery carts that were around me and I thought, sweet and salty is pretty much the the largest part of what you show up in grocery carts and, and then and then I started thinking about a research, article I had read just recently, prior to that that had said the happiest people on the planet are in Bangladesh and and thinking, what's in Bangladesh that makes people so happy.

You know, these monsoons sweep through there, they get their homes destroyed all the time. And then they thought, oh, that's it. They actually don't count on things being permanent.

They don't have any illusion that whatever they have as expectations are, are going to remain permanently fixed. And they've developed resilience and they can find happiness, you know, and joy and all of the, the changes and the transitions because they're mindful of it.

And, you know, that was a big moment in that freezer section in that grocery store. I know. And, you know, it's like this is bringing mindfulness to to our taste.

So our emotional correlations to how things hit us on our tongue literally, you know, and I don't think we in my Vipassana retreat, the very first one, you know, in the evening they, they give you well, at least mine, an apple and some tea is your dinner.

And I remember being so mindful in my meditation after that, and just that apple going through its entire processing, its digestive process in my body and thinking I've never been so tuned in to the process of digestion ever in my life, you know, and and I think that this is something that, you know, is so, so illuminating for a very rushed, achievement oriented, productivity oriented society.

## Practical Mindful Habits and Food Awareness

Yeah. And you look at, processed food like it is, it's just sweet and salty. And I find myself, like, looking for tubs of approval to bring home to. Yeah, let's get this a little better. Yeah.

I mean, I mean, bitter greens, like they're going out of style now, you know, some some something to oppose the sweet salty and the. Yeah. Yeah that's great.

And have come over the last 20 years to just love bitters. You know because I have it in me and that's the thing that it helps to get it so that it's balanced.

So. That's funny. I'm I have a lot of pitta. And I remember making a smoothie with collard greens, which are like, yeah, you really can't get much better than that.

And I, I threw them in the smoothie and I made it, and I could feel like something behind my eyeballs, like some gland just squeezing and I. But I know this is good for you. Yeah.

I'm definitely. I'm cutting up, you know, the pitta and the cough is so good for us to be eating all those greens, so. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. So this is, it's a really interesting conversation.

And what what are, I mean, along the lines of small things that people can do. Sometimes my patients will burst into tears when I give them a little daily routine things to do and say.

If you only knew how busy I was, you would be asking me to do this, you know? And of course, that's the reason they're sitting in front of me in the first place.

But yeah, it's not even, it's not even that they're busy. And they have to add one more thing. They just have to add awareness and that's that's free.

And it doesn't take any time. The first week of a mindfulness based stress reduction class, everyone chooses an activity to bring mindfulness to in their daily life.

Flossing teeth, brushing teeth, starting with a different side of your mouth, taking out the groceries, doing the dishes and people come back and report like I had so much fun doing the dishes.

I didn't. It's usually just something to get done and move on. Embracing that time. It's like a gift. I get to be here with the water. I get to feel the soap.

It's like a bubble bath for my hands and I. I get to, you know, for we have the luxury of having a dishwasher. We can be grateful for the dishwasher as we put them in and arrange them and know they're going to come out beautiful and clean and yeah, like I just went through that process this morning.

Thank you. Sure. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. And, Yes. Making the bed. Any for me, any choice, any tour as I can turn into. Am I going to have fun with this or am I not?

And it's so much more fun and healthier and more enriching to just enjoy it, to still enjoy it, take it to another one that's kind of fun. And that if you get out of bed and and normally you step your right foot on the ground first, then try doing it with the left.

Or if you reached to open up your car door with your right hand, try it with the left instead so that you're mindfully switching up the way that you would normally do things, and then bring awareness to that.

Like, how does that feel? What comes up, you know, in that process? It's kind of a fun one, right? And one of the other exercises that we do in the classes, it's towards the end of the the eight weeks, we all come in, sit down, and people have a place that they normally sit and we sit down and talk a little bit and then we talk about how we come in and we sit every week and are comfortable in this place and more comfortable in our lives, and we're comfortable with our surroundings and find a place that you don't that you know in the rooms look fine.

Pick out a place that you don't want to be. And like, there might have even been a reason that you didn't want to be there and then go live there and take in the perspective of that.

And people say, oh, this isn't mine. Why did I think this was a bad place to set? Or I actually like this better than where I was. It's it's so good for the brain.

Yes it is. I remember reading some instructions on the centering prayer one time, and she encouraged, if you normally sit in lotus or half lotus, or even cross-legged, not to do it and see what happens, you know, and and notice the attitude that's present when you achieve that sitting posture.

And I thought, oh, that's fascinating. What does it mean to go from being able to floor sit with an erect posture and to move to a chair? Right. And, and, what, what what can you be mindful of in that transition?

And how it looks from the outside in terms of what you think people are thinking, you know, and, I loved that. I thought, yeah. Every single little thing. Right.

Just bringing that mindfulness. Do it. Yeah. Challenge it. Challenge your thoughts. Always. Yeah. And I'm also I'm also doing a big declutter project right now in my closet.

And like every little thing like what's is this, is this a negative energy that I see this every day. And is it draining me. So like my is empty basically.

And I feel happy when I go in there and there's a big pile of stuff I got to figure out what to do with now, but that's I just read that back a third.

I have a third of my closet left and there's a heap. It's so big of, hangers on the floor that I have to figure out what to do. And I took all of those clothes, too, and.

Yeah, to a shelter. So it's, it's amazing to be able to go through all of that and and feel lighter. Just so much lighter. Yeah. I did the same thing with my library.

I have a third of my books remaining. From where? Yeah, I started in March doing this. Yeah. Congratulations. Yeah. It feels so much lighter. Yeah. I have to say, though, I have I was a little aggressive and I have missed a couple where I've gone to look for them.

I'm like, oh. That book has gotten. Yeah yeah yeah I've definitely done that. And some books I've had to buy again. I know that's what I'm finding. I grew up in the military, and so getting rid of stuff is pretty easy for me.

It's it's, it's the repercussions. Can I go or did I go? Well, one thing I sometimes I have my daughters when I'm buying clothes, and I'll try something on and I'll say, oh, what do you think?

And they say, mommy has something just like that already. I don't think, you know, maybe I used to, and I rid of it. Those are two to our patterns. And becoming mindful of those.

Right. Exactly. Yeah, I agree. Well, this is all part of that gentleness. You know, showing gentleness for yourself everyone. And so I is there anything that we haven't mentioned along these lines that you would like to bring forward before we end?

I, the only thing that I'd like to say is just the power of slowing down it with your food, because I know we for me, it's it's very powerful.

## Closing Thoughts and Free Gift

And it it impacts, digestion, inflammation and, so many things just sitting down and even eating very mindfully. I had a, one of those silent retreats.

They asked us to stop when we were three bites from four. And that was and I was like, well, maybe I'm three bites and I'm like, I'm going to keep going and just just to see what we can really tell.

And if we're taking each bite and chewing it 30 times before we swallow that, that's, that's amazing for digestion right there and inflammation and all of that.

And it's it helped. I just remember having an incredibly impactful mindful meal that everything was relaxed in my body afterwards. And I don't know when that's, happened since, I'm just getting over Covid and for the last three days, my daughter had made me some chicken vegetable soup.

My meal of the day has just been one. Is that a bowl of that chicken vegetable soup that I would take, like, three bites of and then set it down and then come back to it four hours later and do that again and set it down, you know, and, it just felt like that's what my body was asking for and that's it, you know, and then hydrating and, I think that listening is so important.

So that's very good wisdom. You know, instead of eating mindlessly while you're on the computer, driving or thinking about other things. Exactly, exactly.

Well, you have a free gift for our audience. Would you like to introduce it to them? I do, one of my hands, I guess it's come out of so many branches of all of this.

Like I, your Veda detoxification, spending time with, things in my kitchen, which I your Veda, they call it kitchen table wisdom is making my own deodorant.

And I have, video where I show people how to make, the, the deodorant that I like. And you can tweak it if you want to. It's just, it's so nice to every day open that up and know that it's completely free of toxins.

I know exactly where everything came from. And I made it. And I can put it on. And it's that's really that's really sweet to me. And then another one is a face mask you can do every single day, even on the busy days, as you're making your lunch for the day.

Beautiful. All right. Thank you so much. I appreciate you taking the time. You're very welcome. My pleasure. All right, everybody, until next time, be well.