

Ellen Livingston - Feeding the Hunger Within - Exploring Emotional Eating

Today, we're going to explore one of the aspects of the raw food diet, or ANY diet for that matter, that frequently derails people in their quest for health and happiness. Emotional eating was certainly a big hurdle that I, and many of my friends, had to get over before we could start to experience our bliss.

My next guest expert, Ellen Livingston, is known and loved the world over for her compassionate approach to healing on all sorts of levels. A registered yoga teacher and life coach, author and inspirational speaker, Ellen transitioned to an all raw diet in 2002, to heal from a number of serious health issues.

I met Ellen at the Woodstock Fruit Festival this year when I went to 3 separate lectures of hers and in every single one she had me weeping tears of identification and realization.

Some people in life are gifted with the ability to touch people, and I feel honoured to have Ellen as my guest today to talk about this driving need many of us have to eat over our feelings.

Hello Ellen!

Ellen:

Hello Anthea:

Anthea:

Ellen, for people who don't know you, could you describe why and how you came to this lifestyle?

Ellen:

Thanks for having me here, it's really my pleasure. This emotional eating topic is something I'm passionate about. I love to share my thoughts about it and explore such a rich and interesting area.

I really think much about health. I was a healthy athletic kid. It wasn't something that I thought about much until I was 18 yrs, and had a bad skiing accident. Came down the mountain on a stretcher and came home on a first class seat in the airplane because my whole knee was torn apart. I didn't realise how serious it was until about 2 yrs physical therapy, knee reconstruction, and a lot of months on crutches.

I healed as well as I could. But I began to have a domino effect of other health problems after that and I'll never know if they were related to that accident – likely there was some connection - I had back issues, tmj, migraines, insomnia and

depression, intestinal problems, IBS, GERD (reflux), barrettes esophagus was also a possible issue. The doctors wanted to do more testing and I didn't like the invasiveness of the testing nor did I like the protocol of pretty heavy duty drugs that they wanted to put me on.

That's when I really began to question. The doctors told me that it had nothing to do with the food that I was eating. That blew my mind that my intestinal tract could have all these problems and it could have nothing to do with food so I started doing my own research. I took 20 years of research and finally a Chiropractor gave me "*Fit For Life*", which introduced natural hygiene, and the concept of eating a mostly raw food diet. I was really taken with that and it wasn't long before eating a big salad and in the community I was living in, someone gave me a copy of David Wolfe's book *The Sunfood Diet*. I read it over night and made a phone call the next morning to hire a coach. Once I read that book, it was an overnight process for me and I didn't turn back because I started getting some pretty impressive results within 24 hours in the digestive tract.

It was about a year and a half after that before I met the Grahams. That was a serendipitous meeting as well because I was doing raw in a not very successful way. It was helping me and I was getting better but I was becoming emaciated, I didn't know how to eat fruit - most of us don't start out that way unless we are lucky enough to begin on that path. I was living on vegetables. My digestive tract couldn't handle fats and it was a blessing in disguise perhaps because I wasn't going the raw gourmet path but I wasn't getting the calories that I needed.

Rozi sent me straight right away with how to eat enough fruit and my weight came back and I was able to strength train and everything started to come into place at that point. Now it's a little over 12 years and I have no reason to veer off this path now.

Anthea:

I can relate to your story, apart from your accident. That was my story with the reflux disease and IBS.

Ellen:

After the accident, I was leaving home to go to college, so it was a very emotional time and I turned to yoga because I had always been a spiritual seeker but grew up in a family where there was no guidance around that and so I was on my own. When I discovered yoga at around 19, that changed me majorly, impacted my search for health on all levels and gave me a solid grounded place while everything else was being questioned.

Anthea:

I think that people think that if they fix the food part, that that will answer all of their problems but it's just a small part of the picture.

Eating disorders are on the rise. It seems like every woman out there, and many men, suffer from some kind of emotional eating behaviour. Do you think it's the food we're eating, or is there more to it than that?

Ellen:

Both. Our whole way of living is causing us to stray further from what some primal self in us knows is natural. We're experiencing all kinds of stressors from this grade of separation on a physical level, emotional, mental and spiritual level. I think it becomes tempting and easy to numb with cooked/processed food to deal with the separation from what is more natural and right for us but it can be done somewhat on a raw diet by eating overeating or eating too much of the gourmet or fatty or spicy foods.

It doesn't work as well with the cooked foods because the raw foods, even the gourmet don't have quite the addictive or low level nutrient factors that the cooked food has. If we tend to be an emotional eater or an over eater or a number of emotions eater, we may well carry that into our raw path so we are still going to have to look at it.

We've stopped using food for fuel and nutrition but we forget that when we get into that speeded up autopilot lifestyle. We eat out of habit rather than having food in its proper place as fuel and nutrition. There are a lot of causes of overeating which is one kind of eating disorder. Our body does have a biological mechanism or system for balancing the calories we consume - the energy that we take in with the energy expenditure.

In the natural world, this would allow us to maintain a relatively stable natural weight because we would eat when we were hungry, we would only have our natural foods available and we would eat until we were full and we wouldn't wait to eat until we were hungry again.

We have a natural reward system in our body that would encourage us to seek out things that are pleasurable. We have that dopamine response that we get, that motivates us in our natural environment which leads us to healthy food choices and the reward of that yummy delicious mango would provide our motivation to go and get it. But becomes whacked out with unnatural foods, and when we aren't listening to our hunger signals or the food we have doesn't have sufficient nutrition value and so we don't actually feel satiated so we eat more than we need in terms of calories.

That in and of itself is one of the reasons for overeating. We also make poor choices when we're experiencing toxic hunger where we think it's hunger but really we are

just having symptoms which are part of the body's mobilisation of waste products or the natural cleansing that happens when digestion is mostly finished.

We might get a headache or fatigue, or light headedness. We might start getting crabby or the brain gets foggy or we get the shakes or feel sadness or boredom or stomach rumbling - all the things that we often attribute as 'I must need food' and then when we eat food, sometimes these uncomfortable symptoms get better and gives us the misguided information that maybe we needed food but really all we've done is probably stopped the cleansing activity that was happening and so we're back to a state that feels familiar and grounded to us but in fact it's not really a positive place to be.

We overeat for that reason - eating based on symptoms that are uncomfortable to us that tell us that we might need food from experience because that has worked in in the past but it's not really true physiological hunger. We overeat because of food addictions - there are things in some of the processed foods that cause us to overeat. It's maybe chemicals or hyper-palatable food - ramped up pleasure factor that activates that pleasure centre and makes us want more - a super normal stimuli and we seem to have a built in preference for features that are larger than what we would find naturally. May be that's a natural survival mechanism system that would be fine in our natural environment but goes a little haywire in today's society with all these ramped up foods. It literally alters the landscape of our brain so the appetat doesn't tone down as it would naturally and our desire for that substance remains unnaturally high and so we overeat.

Variety and availability is another reason we overeat. When I give this talk at the Woodstock Fruit Festival, I asked the audience to start shouting out all the reasons that we eat besides hunger and we probably went on for five minutes coming up with all the reasons that have nothing to do with physiological hunger - connect/disconnect with people, to feel happy, to dull down angry feelings or to fill up from bored fillings, to fit in, to please other people, the clock says it's time, social patterns, overwhelmed, tired. We become attached to and comforted by experiencing negative emotions. It helps us to fit in, so much in society is operating in a negative vibration. It brings us attention - feeling sorry for us, etc. It allows us to take the easy road to continue living small, to not step up and really acquire the skills and self discipline to go after what we really want because we don't feel good enough to do that so that gives us a good excuse. By choosing negative health foods helps us keep that negative vibration place which is our familiar comfort zone, though its not comfortable...more comfortable than the unknown.

When you ask is it the food or is there more to it than that, hopefully I've given a picture of my experience of that. Yes, it's about the foods, it's very much about the foods because if we didn't have the kinds of foods that we have access to today, I don't think we would experience this any where near the level of emotional disordered eating that we see nowadays. On the other hand if we didn't have some of

the other emotional factors of society, and the the pressures on us, we also might not experience such a need to disconnect and numb out.

I think in most of our society now, there is very little emphasis on spiritual development for children and people growing up. Often the adults that are guiding us do not feel spiritually connected themselves and so we don't get that kind of mentoring. There's a yearning that we don't understand and don't know how to fulfil and we turn to food because we learn early on that it works to help us avoid that extremely uncomfortable feeling underneath it all that we don't know what to do with.

It works in a sense that it covers it up but it doesn't really make us happy though so it's obviously not a great long-term solution.

Anthea:

There are so many reasons why we eat. As you say, it does seem to have so much to do with the actual food that we are eating and the excito-toxic nature of a lot of the foods that we are eating - the variety - that's actually a really big one isn't it? I know that in my disordered eating past, I had that experience of I'd eat icecream and then I'd want something salty and then what else could I find in the cupboard. Each of those excito-toxic responses trigger another need to try another flavor - so my tastebuds are dancing around but emotionally, I'm all over the shop.

I would eat and I would feel pain because I had digestive discomfort and then I would want to eat more to get rid of the digestive pain which is such a bizarre and very counter-intuitive thing to do which was another kind of reason why I ate.

Did you ever personally struggle with emotional eating? If so, could you share a bit about your own journey?

Ellen:

Yes, most of us do if we are honest. I never had a big problem with this. I didn't have an eating disorder. I've certainly used food to cope with boredom and spiritual hunger. I've been much more aware of this on a raw diet. I think that's because I've become so much more aware of my emotions on this way of eating and how I handle them. That has really fine-tuned my awareness of what I am doing to deal with my emotions. Am I eating food, am I picking up the phone to talk to someone right away because I can't handle connecting with myself and so I start to really watch that. It is a lot harder to do this on a raw diet because of some of the factors that I mentioned before and certainly the fruits - when you have really good high quality fruit and you eat enough of it, it's so satiating on every level - the nutrition, the hydration, the oxygen, the calories, the sugars - we really get satiated quite fully and don't want more. I think it was a blessing that my body had so much difficulty processing fats when I started my raw journey. It was unfortunate because it was a health issue - I

had a lot of problems with my gall bladder so I couldn't handle the typical emotional eating path of high fat gourmet raw foods and those really work better to numb you out.

I was really out there skating on thin ice because I couldn't use those. I would turn to dates or larabars or overeating in general which isn't easy to do on fruit but you could have a fruit meal and then have a pile of dates afterwards and that would constitute overeating because of the variety and the concentration of the dates, Or just constant snacking.

I didn't notice any emotional eating on a cooked food diet, so I'm sure I was but I didn't become aware of this kind of thing until I really heightened my awareness of how I deal with emotions in general. My whole journey on the raw path was about self-mastery, about learning how to really be captain of my ship and how to practice emotional poise and equilibrium and not let my emotions run the show.

When I discovered yoga at 19, I was really seeking spirituality. I had always been really introspective - always searching for answers to the big questions like 'Why am I here?' 'Where did I come from?' 'Where am I going?' 'What's the purpose of this life really?'

I remember questioning so much as an early teenager 12/13 - 'What does it mean to be successful?' My parents were very academic, high achievers and that outward achievement was what I was taught was success and I just wasn't content with that. I'd write in my journals all the time. Searching for answers in books. I felt myself to be different from most people but I couldn't put my finger on it. As a young teenager, Jonathon Livingstone Seagull was a favorite book - I have a very dog-eared, well highlighted copy. I think I really related to Jonathon's solo journey and his quest for more life, more meaning, deeper learning and clearer seeing and I think that early discovery of yoga and some of the books helped me understand and find a container for all these deep yearnings.

I would often go to this place - yoga and meditation - instead of to food when I felt empty and anxious and uneasy - it actually worked better for me because I was so hungry spiritually and yoga helped me there in a way that food didn't.

The other thing I did and still do is to automatically just seek out nature. That is much more soothing nowadays than any kind of overeating because it actually helps me connect with that disconnected place - when I feel disconnected. It's yoga, meditation and nature that really brings me into a better state of being and I think that most people find that the longer you are on a raw path, the more time and experience and support you have to master some of these experiences with the emotions, the less you become attracted to the coping mechanisms like over eating or emotional eating. We're just not attracted to taking ourselves to that negative vibration.

It doesn't feel good, it's not what we want to do and Chris Kendall spoke of this, that's one of the reasons why raw food diet helps us grow spiritually so quickly because our vibration begins to match the food that we are eating. We begin to become more attracted to that higher vibration place and yoga, meditation, nature, heart to heart connections where people match that vibration that the food is helping us to arrive in. Emotional eating just does not have the same draw that it used to.

Anthea:

You were very lucky to have that realisation very early on. That craving that you were having was actually a spiritual hunger rather than a physical hunger. I found out quite late in my journey that was actually the root cause of this whole need to fill it with food. It took me quite a bit longer and even the practice of yoga wasn't quite enough. Maybe because I just tended to use it as a physical practice rather than actually look beyond that initially.

Chris Kendall spoke about the way that when we eat raw that all of a sudden we begin to experience our emotions so much more. Would you agree with this? And like to share your thoughts on how we can learn to stay with those emotions rather than reach for a bag of nuts or cooked food in order to shove those feelings down.

Ellen:

One of the reasons that Yoga helps, just like a raw food diet, there's a cleansing that happens in regular yoga practice that is a process of energy channels in the body becoming more open and everything becoming more fluid; more easily flowing, more communication throughout our being. There is less obstruction and less physical numbing happening in the body regardless of food. We can cause energy blockages in our body no matter what we are eating and the more we eat raw and the more we practice things like yoga that helps us facilitate that fluidity of the communication in the body and the movement of the energy, then through either of these practices, raw food diet and yoga, certainly put the two together - as things open up, there's more sensation and more feeling. We just feel more and I think that it is a good thing but it can be uncomfortable because it's unfamiliar. It can make people feel nervous, anxious, very uncomfortable. It's a time when we really need to have support and my passion is to support people through this process and help people find and learn how to use various tools to help handle this new experience of feeling yourself and feeling your response to life. Waking up to all of that awareness. You asked what else can we do? Awareness is so key.

If we understand what's going on, we can embrace it. If we don't understand or have tools, it's not easy to embrace. It's very common and I think it may be the number one reason why people don't stay on a high or all raw diet, because of that discomfort and how we notice that we begin to experience a different energetic vibration than most other people. We don't fit in the same way we used to. We can witness ourselves rather than engaging every sensation. Observe with wonder and curiosity instead of

anxiety or judgment. We begin to learn to trust the experience when we come at it from this angle and to trust that all is well and what is happening is we are experiencing feeling and if the feeling is negative, we can simply ask 'what is the learning here?' rather than telling a whole big story about all the bad things that are going to happen to us. That's when the feeling gets really entrenched in us. If we can step into this witness seat, then we don't engage with it at that level.

Just as we become less attracted to the negativity of cooked foods, so we begin to become less attracted to the negativity and conflict in general. I began noticing with a sort of profound awareness that just came up out of nowhere, it seemed suddenly but probably happened over time, but I didn't want to watch violent or conflictual or real negative message movies. The kind of drama that I used to be so attracted to became a turnoff. I started to rent from the library, all these inspirational movies about people who had achieved something amazing against the odds and had stepped into their personal power and into a really high positive vibration and I wanted feel good stories and inspiring things. It wasn't a conscious decision.

I was energetically vibrating at a higher, more positive place. I was a magnet for those kinds of experiences that would match my vibration. It's why you meet so many people at the Woodstock Fruit Festival or anywhere where a lot of fruitarians gather, where the energy is high - not in a hyper kind of way, but in a beautifully happy kind of way. It's a positivity that says life is good - doesn't the sun feel good? - let's have some fun.

I was waiting in line for some banana ice cream that was taking a little while and the chefs came out and said 'we apologise, it's going to be a few more minutes' and there was 15 of us standing around waiting for this afternoon snack of banana ice cream and someone started tapping a spoon on a cup and somebody else started tapping a spoon on the table - (Tasha - that was me!) Pretty soon we had about 15 people doing this amazing jam session and it came spontaneously.

It came from a bunch of people who felt good and knew how to connect just for the sake of connecting and having fun and for no other reason. I thought that was a beautiful example of what happens from the food and the learning and the awareness - people begin to live in a more happy vibration. There's no desire to reach for the bag of nuts, there's no need when you are surrounded by other people when you have that collective experience and I think when you don't have that support network and don't have the experience of being with other people who match your raw vibration, that primal instinct gets threatened.

We have a deep primal need to identify with a tribe. We reach for those nuts to bring ourselves down to the level that matches the people that we are with because that is a primal instinct - to be matching the people that we are with and unfortunately the people that we are with are often very unhealthy. That's not helpful in the big picture but it's more comfortable in the moment.

It's important to seek out people - you don't have to lose your friends and family - but seek out new people that understand the path you are on and can match that vibration with you so that you can have a new tribe.

Anthea:

You have just articulated so many different levels of our emotional eating. This deep primal need to identify with a particular tribe - I think that that is probably at the heart of many of our eating issues. I totally agree with you to seek out like minded people or people who you want as your role model. People who are moving in the direction that you want to go. I think that is so important. Many of the people at Woodstock that had gone through huge health struggles to get there. Cancer, bipolar, really hideous things and I guess that's what happens with people who have gone there and have come out the other side. You do have this new lease of life and do want to have this positive experience.

How do we distinguish between true hunger and emotional/spiritual hunger (the kind that leads to "emotional eating")?

Ellen:

This is the awareness I am talking about. How do we pay attention and know what is going on when we think we are ready to eat? One good thing about the raw food diet, is that it gives us the opportunity to really learn to distinguish between the types of hunger. True hunger is felt like a pleasurable wave sensation in the neck and throat area. At first it might be a little more uncomfortable and demanding because of the importance to the body of getting fluids when it seems some. You don't want to put off your thirst. It's okay to put off hunger. Your body has enough fuel and nutrients on board generally to last a little while. We can fast for a little while and be okay so it's not necessarily urgent that you respond to that hunger signal right away. Nature can make it pleasurable and if you ignore it because you are busy and don't eat, then it will come back in 15 or 20 minutes and that is when you will feel it again. If you're not sure if you are feeling a sign of true hunger, then you could try drinking a glass of water, wait a little while, pay attention and notice what happens after that. I mentioned some of the signs that we think are hunger that really are generally some kind of cleansing or detoxification phenomena rather than true hunger.

Hunger is not uncomfortable - you'll notice an emptiness in the stomach. You may just have a general desire for fuel - an intuitive understanding that your body needs fuel and you'll have that sensation in the throat. When you eat only when you're truly hungry, food will be really pleasurable. Pretty much any decent food would be really pleasurable and your digestion will be more efficient and better because your body is really ready. Nature makes all the things that we need to do for health, generally pleasant so that we will want to do them. We born onto this planet millions of years ago with doctors and people telling us what we needed to do to be healthy. We had to just know like the wild animals do.

If it's an emotional/spiritual hunger, that's when we want to eat but we haven't felt the hunger signal. We're grabbing at food, we might have just eaten in fact or if we're hungry for things that are not good for us, that's a sign that it's probably an emotional or spiritual hunger. If we want the chocolate cake or the pizza - it might even be a carbohydrate deficiency that day, which is making us want those heavy dense foods but it may also just be an emotional or spiritual hunger.

Thinking about that, having the awareness of what's in these foods that are causing us to gravitate towards them and having the awareness of the other things that I talked about of what we are trying to numb out and cover up from.

Some things to do if you think you are hungry but you know it's probably not really physiological hunger - you can wait a while, drink a glass of water, take a walk, meditate, listen. Self inquiry - What am I hungry for? Love? Movement? Entertainment? If for food, what kind of food? Listening is very important.

I have a friend who sets his alarm to go off every hour on the hour and pretty much no matter what he is doing, he checks in with himself just to check that autopilot way of dancing through the world that happens when we're not really listening.

Anthea:

I was thinking about the people with anorexia and restrictive disordered eating, what your thoughts are there on how people can overcome the fear of food?

Ellen:

I'm not an expert on these kinds of eating disorders. It's something that I've studied in the sense of having worked with a number of people who have dealt with bulimia more often than anorexia but in a sense it's the same root insufficiency experience where there are feelings of 'not good enough', 'not loved enough', 'not enough' in general that feeling of lack in the self that leads to this skewed relationship with our body and with how we nourish ourselves and how we take care of ourselves. Really we have to go in and work with that person on an emotional and spiritual level to find out what their experience is in that area and it's not just about getting them to eat food because we can force feed somebody but it's not really dealing with the underlying problems.

Really trying to help the person tap into what's going on there - what is their experience? What are they feeling? What are they attributing to food that really isn't about food? We make up all kinds of stories about what food is and then of course, there is all the body image issues that are not helpful in the media that tell us how we are supposed to be and how we need to look and we get a really distorted vision around that. I have people who are underweight, overweight, they don't feel like they are at the right weight - and they come into coaching and we really don't focus on that. We let that be. We acknowledge that they have those feelings, that they have

that self-judgement, that maybe it's a fact that they have more or less weight than is really optimal for their health - we acknowledge that and then we take the focus off of that and put the focus on 'what is your experience?', 'what do you really want?', 'what do you really love?', 'what makes you feel really good?', 'what would you love more of in your life?' and we try to really maximise these experiences of feeling good and allowing ourselves to have experiences and welcoming experiences in our lives that feel good.

There are so many shoulds and pressures and work, work work, and should, should, should and do, do, do and we don't get much time to feel and we don't honor that experience as being as valid and as productive as the experience of doing. Many of our clients rewrite the definition of being productive means or being successful means because it's very interesting when we look at how societal definitions of those words are being projected on to how we think we have to show up and when that is so uncomfortable for some people, I think naturally react to that and it may show up as an eating disorder. It might show up as anorexia - so to take the focus off of that body image and just focus on what is that experience of insufficiency or lack or disconnection.

Anthea:

I know that for so many years, my whole world revolved around what I looked like in the mirror and how I was comparing myself to so many other women, particularly those magazine images and not in my life, and I feel this great gift that that way of thinking has been taken away from me now. It has been taken away and so my focus is very much on what can I contribute here? I looked at those insufficiencies and they often weren't around body weight, they were more about my relationships and when I started to work on those, then the body weight stuff ceased to be an issue.

Ellen:

I read a book that I shared a little bit at the Fruit Festival - it was called 'Be Nobody' by Lama Murt. It is very articulate in that experience of how (quote) "our real specialness lies not in our uniqueness but in what we share with all others. It's who we really are and it's who we really want to be". So what he is saying is that we tend to think in our society that our specialness is our accomplishments, our outer identities, we all have to be somebody out in the world. We have to make choices about what we have to do for our work and how we are going to show up and what we are going to wear and we tend to think of that as our specialness but what he is saying is quite the opposite. He is saying that that is just the fun that we have out in the world, but our real specialness is not that, it's actually in the nobody that we all share. "realising what we are when we're not being ourselves" or that outer identify "experiencing the great relief and the 'itchlessness' of being nobody is thus more a matter of emptying than of filling".

We tend to fill up that stress but it's really emptying out all the identities and all the 'I'm this and I'm that and I'm a mother and I'm a teacher and a well dressed professional. I'm successful and I have money' and, if we can empty all of that out and connect with the nobody, because that's where we connect with everybody else, that's what we have in common, that essential essence or that divinity or the light. When we connect with that, we connect with everybody and then we feel relief because all of our identity is what separates us from each other and we feel alone. But when we tap into that nobody place, then we feel part of the larger whole and we don't have that tension; we are able to relax then into that 'ocean-ness' of connectedness with everybody and I think that's really challenging to do in today's society that's so focused on giving us accolades for all the unique ways that we make ourselves show up differently from everybody else as something special. We forget that our real specialness is how we are alike underneath our identities.

Anthea:

What you are touching on here reminds me a little bit of what Tim Van Orden was going to be speaking about on this speaking about on the summit - compassionate competition - and how we're so geared up to present ourselves as these unique identities in the world and that's how we are going to forge forward by doing these incredible things but in actual fact, since I've shared my weaknesses and my vulnerabilities that I've made so many more connections and it's been a profound turnabout experience.

Ellen:

That's where our healing is - when we tap into that connectedness and relax our incessant drive to be individualised and different. There is nothing wrong with trying some identities and having a blast achieving things, I think that's all wonderful as long as we're not attached to the idea that that is who we are. That's just what we are doing.

Question from Tasha:

I hear some people say that there is no such thing as emotional eating - that if we are feeling emotional, then we need to eat some more fruit and that helps us to balance our emotions and we are not going to feel as crazy and emotional. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Ellen:

We know that the two of the most intensive uses in the body of our daily nerve energy that gets restored when we sleep and we wake up with only so much to spend for the day and digestion and the conduction of emotions are two of the most intensive uses of that limited supply before we start our battery. If we are feeling emotional, you will see that people will generally have one of two responses - they'll either eat to

cope with it, because it's a way of hopefully not having to feel so much intensity or they will not eat which is actually a wiser choice by the body to not eat because the body knows that it can't deal with the digestion - even of fruit and the emotion really all at once. So it's going to have to deal with the digestion of food because our basic health and survival depends on the food getting digested and not just sitting in our stomach. So it will have to take it's attention to the digestion, thereby not focusing on the emotion so we might get the result if we eat when we feel the emotions of not feeling emotions so it might feel like we've handled the emotion but it's like stopping the cleansing process, we've stopped the emotional learning process and it will just come up again to be dealt with later when we can handle it.

I would say that in a general sense that your comment is referring to the fact that if general we are not eating enough fruit, that can definitely lead to some what might look like emotional eating, in other words we're not fueled well, we're not sugared well and we're running a deficit in simple carbohydrates as the day goes on and so we get to the end of the day and we haven't had enough fruit all day then that's the most typical time to see people do what looks like emotional eating, where they're going for the cooked carbs and other things and so if they had eaten a much more appropriate amount of fruit during the day, they could avoid that problem.

The same way if we haven't slept enough, these problems can come up so that whole wheel of health and looking at all the basic things that we need to keep up with, eating our fruit, getting our movement, getting our fresh air, our sunshine, our rest, our loving relationships, meaningful work, spiritual connection - all of those important spokes - if any one of those is not on a regular basis, being dealt with well, then it can lead to that kind of problem. But if I'm feeling emotional, my healthy response is going to be to wait to eat, even fruit, until I've calmed down the emotional nerve energy that's running through me because I'm not going to be able to digest very well if I try to eat.

I like to be calm and non-emotional when I decide to eat, even if it's fruit.

Question from Jonas:

Have you got familiar with the 15 formations of general semantics?

Ellen:

No, I'm not familiar with that.

Anthea:

What if people want to go raw and they're struggling to stay the path? What's your recommendation?

Ellen:

That is commonly what happens - people struggle to stay on the path. We don't hear of many people who just ace it right away. Support - big time. That was my knowing of what I needed when I started over 12 years ago and there wasn't as much available support as there is now. That was my inclination - that's maybe just the way I am when I try to make big changes in my life. I seek out mentors and I look for the people that have what I want and I hang out with them. I can absorb it by osmosis and I'm always hungry to learn and so I will put myself in environments where there are people learning and teaching what it is that I want to know. So support and immerse yourself - I call it immersion therapy - by that I mean immerse yourself in the support via workshops, potluck, chat groups on the internet, videos, audios, books - everything that helps feed you with the messages.

Because what you focus on expands. Pay attention to what you are paying attention to and pay attention to what it is that you want to succeed at but immersion therapy is put quotes up around your house - do what it takes to keep your focus there so that you are getting these messages over and over again - before you go to work, when you come back, it's feeding your sense of feeling like you're on this path and you know what to do and there's support out there.

I also have my clients spend a lot of quiet time alone with the simple question 'what do I really want?'. 'What really matters the most to me?', 'How do I really want my life to feel?', 'Who care what other people think? What do I want my life to feel?', 'This is my life, how do I want to live it?', 'If I could do it any way I wanted to and it didn't matter about money or whatever people think or whether I would fail, what would I do? What would I love and what am I willing to trade for this?' because ultimately succeeding on a raw path or any new path is about commitment. Once you decide to be committed to what you really want, to be committed to the level of health that you really want that requires a raw diet, once you commit to what really feels true for you, then you've created an effective container within which you can work out the details - like learning what to eat and when it's ripe and what supplements you might need or how to exercise appropriately or how to deal with social and emotional challenges in restaurants and friends houses and all those details.

Those are just the details - you can learn those quickly once you are coming from a centered place of personal commitment. Willpower is just about pushing through. I don't know anybody who has made it for any long extended period of time on a raw diet through willpower alone. It's the true inner commitment that we need because that's what leads to the necessary self-discipline that we're going to have to build.

It needs to come from a strong internal motivational force. Doing this because this is what you really want. Maybe it's not the raw diet that you really want but it's the results that you are going to get from the raw diet that is what you really want. The health and vibrance and energy and vitality to go after your dreams and so you really have to sit still and get really, very honest with yourself. What are you willing to trade for that? What is it that you really want? Because if you don't know, if you're just trying to get on a raw diet because you know that's the healthy thing to do but

you're not really coming from that deeply internally motivated commitment, and you know you're not committed, if you keep floundering on the path.

It's hard to admit it, but I actually get my clients to be brutally honest and with a little tough love to show them that they say they're committed but they're not really. Because when you're not really committed, there's hesitancy, a chance to draw back every time somebody says something or questions your path - if you're not committed, that could pull you right off and it's always ineffective. It's not going to work until you've wrestled with that commitment question and what is it that you really want so that you can develop the discipline that you really need.

I don't pretend to anybody that this is an easy task today. Immersion - build your knowledge - immerse yourself in the positive messages - the knowledge - so that you know that you're confident that you have the knowledge to do this and then sit with that question - what do I really want? what am I willing to trade? how am I going to really develop my level of personal commitment?

No coach, nobody can do this for you. Ultimately you have to be committed in yourself. That's all it takes. Once you're committed - it's really a refreshing place to be because you just keep coming back to that commitment. I have my clients write purpose statements - 'who I am is someone who...' and we start to talk about our compass setting and our commitment to what it is that we really want and what is in our way and what are we going to do about it? Who do we need to be to pull this off? it's an active, co-creative journey.

Question from Monique:

I began to transition to a raw, low-fat vegan lifestyle approximately one year ago, starting with smoothies and then more and more whole fruit - persisted through the discomfort. Today I'm 98% raw but the discomfort just doesn't let up. By the end of the day, I'm famished. Would fasting speed up this fasting process? The discomfort is light headedness, shakes, deep hunger, foggy brain etc.

Ellen:

I would have you fill out a health questionnaire and have you get a lot of factors because while I do believe it's a universal appropriate diet, every body is on their own journey as to how they're going to move towards that place and so there's a lot that we need to look at that makes the path work out differently to different people. I would ask you to calculate with me how many calories that you were actually taking in from the fruits so that we would know whether you were really up to where you needed to be when you hit that evening hour and you still felt really ravenously hungry. Fasting is something I've done - it's a really good practice. I don't generally recommend this for my clients except on the basis of if your appetite goes away. That's a great way to not eat - that's your body's way of saying I need to do some

cleansing and I can't really afford to use extra energy to digest right now. I just need a break from the food so that I can just cleanse.

Doing mono-meals is sometimes a good way because you have a better sense of whether you are truly satiated after a meal. You don't have that variety issue so you can just eat one type of food at a time for a meal and pick some of the higher calorie fruits - oranges, bananas and grapes and make sure that you're taking in enough calories. If you're having all those symptoms, you may be misinterpreting them for hunger so that ravenous, hunger feeling you have, if you're also feeling light headed and foggy brained, may really be a cleansing response and sometimes you have to drink water and grin and bear it - put on some nice music, light some candles, meditate, go for a walk - do other activities - make sure you're getting enough calories for your basic activities but you just have to get through it and it usually doesn't take very long for those basic symptoms - a few days in general - for those symptoms to start clearing up. It doesn't sound like you're experiencing anything truly scary or deeply uncomfortable. Just a vague discomfort - you may just have to ride it out, knowing that it is going to get better on the other side. Your sugar regulatory systems and all those other things that are off are going to get a chance to correct themselves and start operating a little more optimally so that the sugar gets out of your bloodstream and goes to the cells where they should go and doesn't give you the fuzzy, shakey feeling and stuff like that.

Anthea:

You've always been a truth seeker, Ellen, and have lived your life in unconventional ways, including homeschooling your children. Could you share a bit about how you've been able to choose the roads less trodden often, and perhaps share some of those stories with us, so that we can feel empowered and inspired to listen to our hearts as well.

Ellen:

You're tapping into my deepest excitement and passion here and why I help people with the raw food diet because it's really not about the food, it's feeling good enough to do what we really love to do and build in the confidence to step out and listen to our hearts and honor where they want to take us.

It was my intuition, my heart messages that led me to first attachment style parenting, that really big changes in my life started to snowball and come into outward manifestation when I had my first child. She's 21 now and I wasn't on a raw diet at the time, it was like a primal response to parent her in what is now called attachment style parenting. In other words, breast feed and feed on demand whenever she wanted during the night, whenever, to carry her around against my body in a sling or some sort of container that would keep her on my body. I left my job. I had planned to go back just 6 hours per week - just 2 x 3 hours stints per week and when I tried to do that when she was a few months old, she resisted so violently

that, after two weeks of attempting that, one day I came home and her father had been just at his wits end trying to handle this screaming baby who just wanted the connection with her mother.

He had finally put her down in this little crib that we never used at night but it was set up in this play room and I came home and this little tiny baby wide eyed, sucking her thumb, super duper mechanically really fast and staring at the wall and didn't respond when I walked into the room until I picked her up and soothed her and that was too much for me. This is when I said, 'this is not natural separating from my child like this - she's showing me what it is that I need to do'. So just listening, letting the wisdom of the child show me how to be a mother and the same feeling and guidance from my child led me to home schooling. I really didn't know anything about homeschooling - it was something that happened because when I thought about putting her in a school, and what that meant, it just didn't feel normal. It just didn't feel right somehow. It wasn't going to work for her and the blessing was that my first child had the kind of personality that just wasn't going to fit in to that kind of environment so I started homeschooling her.

it was disappointing that all of our little playgroup went to school so we had to find other people but eventually we did and then this kind of intuition and instinct led us to join up with an intentional co-housing community - which was really a blast with the kids - it felt very natural. We all helped each other and got to see each other and go to run around barefoot. The kids got to run into each other's houses and just very communal kind of living that felt very tribal and normal and this led me naturally to raw foods that weren't such a stretch after that. I was getting used to living differently.

Somewhere along that way, I literally stopped caring about what other people thought about my choices and I think that becoming a mother just really deeply helped me learn to trust myself more. My child's well-being and precious true nature was on the line. Even if maybe I was willing to risk my own, I wasn't willing to risk my child so this intuition led me to not only homeschooling but to unschooling where we just threw out the curriculum, really began to deeply question what was true and what really mattered. The same kind of questions I ask my coaching clients. What's true for you? What really matters to you?

Learning how to think for yourself and to question those so called societal norms - are they really normal? They're certainly not natural. I remember a funny conversation with my kids around the kitchen table once where they asked 'who decided what an education is?' They were imagining - was it a bunch of people who sat around a table one day and decided that these the things that kids need to learn and this is the order they need to learn them in and this is how they are going to learn these things and this is what they don't need to learn and who decided that? It was a very profound question and we spent a lot of time with that.

Unschooling is really child led learning - my philosophy was that I was just the facilitator; the child owns their life and their education. I'm a guide, I'm a mentor sometimes, it's my job to pay close attention to my children, keep them safe, help them to be healthy and then notice what they are noticing and facilitate their learning in that area. I was following their lead it was a really delightful experience because there was no fight in it. I wasn't trying to force some kind of learning on them so they were happy. They were getting to do what they wanted to do and they have all grown up to be very centered individuals because they trust that their ideas are valid and that what they care about is a good thing to care about because nobody told them that it wasn't what they should be learning and so that was what really mattered to me - my children feel a sense of self. That they feel a sense of trusting their own messages.

When I got a divorce, when my youngest was four and a half, and I was told that I had to go to work full time and put all the kids in school, that that was the only way, and I felt pretty depressed for a little bit, thinking about that but it wasn't long before I tapped into that inner strength and said 'wait a minute, this is what matters most, that I protect these children's right to learn what they want, how they want and in their own way'. So I found a way, we developed together with my kids something we called the SunnySide Learning Center and people had said to me 'you guys seem you like you have so much fun and do so many cool things - can we just pal around with you sometimes and do what you're doing?' So I developed a business idea out of that and I had a little home school learning center where children were dropped off and we didn't do any curriculum, it was a child run place. Our only rule was respect. Respect of each other, respect of the materials, the place and we had a little morning meeting each day where everybody would talk about what it was that they were inspired to do that day, I would have ideas up my sleeve but I was always ready to throw them out if the kids had a better idea or that wasn't really where their energy was. They had a workshop out in the garage, they had music and games in the living room, the dining room was a huge arts and crafts center and they pretty much got to do what they wanted.

To the outside observer, it might have looked a little chaotic, there was a lot of set up and clean up that we had to do, but it was a very bustling happy place, full of engaged happy people who were doing exactly what they felt like doing. Sometimes we were operating together, other times, there were really tiny groups or individuals in areas doing their own thing. I brought in a bunch of interesting people from the community to offer things to the kids like shelter building or we had a guy who drew reptiles for guidebooks and he brought about 100 reptiles over one day for the kids to hold and touch and showed them his drawings and that was inspiring and we just had a lot of fun.

I did that for a few years until the kids were older and we all outgrew it. Today, what I'm inspired to do is not so much with my children because they are onto their own things now. They're 15, 18 and 21 and I have got myself five acres of land just outside of Michigan and I've turned the house into a communal living space so I have a little

apartment and there are several other adults living in different rooms and apartments here and we garden together and have events in the yurt and it's just the way I like to live. I've had to skirt a few regulations subtly to do what I do but always living within the spirit of the law and creating a quieter kind of community living than I used to do when the kids were young. A very co-creative lifestyle with multiple income streams and so the potential future here really excites the visionary in me and I like to live in an inspired kind of way - doing what's fun, what brings people together, what ignites our creative energies and I don't like a lot of rules. I find away around them.

Anthea:

I loved what you said about living within the spirit of the law. My husband would really like that.

Ellen:

Sometimes the laws or these regulations are created for interesting reasons and we don't all need to be punished for that. I think that do no harm is the main thing and take care of the planet and take care of each other and there is really is a lot more creative ways to live and to make money and to help each other out and have fun doing it.

Question from Rachael:

Do you have any resources that you would recommend for starting a daily yoga habit at home?

Ellen:

You can go to my website - ellenlivingston.com and there's a tab up at the top that is called 'yoga' and you can click on that and on the right hand side there is a free download of basic top tips for starting a home yoga practice so hopefully that will help you.

Anthea:

Ellen, tell us how you generally work with people? I know you do individual consulting, but you also run retreats, right?

Ellen:

That's been my really exciting project. I started out doing some retreats in Michigan where I live up North where it is beautiful and even on my own property and I have a vision, probably starting next summer and fall of being able to have small retreats here using my 30 foot yurt on the five acres that we have here. They always include

yoga and coaching and raw food diet and exercise and nature and interesting deep discussion about life and what is important and all of that. This will be my fourth winter of taking retreats to Costa Rica starting with Florida to get out of Michigan in the winter time and then I found a connection with Jodie and Brian Kalvi who have the Farm of Life Retreat Center in Costa Rica - a very beautiful place with very wonderful people who run the retreat center and there has just been such a good connection with them and it's worked so well that I will continue offering annual winter retreats in Costa Rica for as long as it continues to work so beautifully.

In the past, I've had 14-18 people on each retreat - it looks like it will be about that this year too - I only have a few spots left at this point and airfares are only going to go up so if you're interested, what's special about these particular retreats is the sense of community that we develop in a small group like that and I facilitate that right from the get go. We have an opening player's circle where we share our own experiences and our health quest and our journey and we share openly from each other and just right from the get go we start to feel that sense of approachability with each other and this is such an important support group for you to have on this kind of journey.

I make sure that happens on the retreat and it's followed during the week by 3 different group life coaching sessions where we open up into the questions about what is it that you really want. We use art therapy - that's my previous training. We bring that into the sessions just to give us another language. It's fun and cracks the ice and opens us up into deeper awarenesses where we get stuck in our familiar verbal language. The artwork helps, it's fun and it connects us with each other and people notice things and open you up and then we divide into small groups and we deal with the question - what's in your way? What's holding you back? Let's just face it - let's get it on the table. Let's help each other with it. Let's transform it. Let's look at it at a different way. Let's find a new perspective. Let's just radically bust through these obstacles because they don't need to be obstacles - they can be opportunities for beautiful growth and transformation so then at the end of the week, we are moving into so I get this now. Who do I need to be? What do I need to step into. By the closing circle, people are offering a declaration of what they are intending to step into as they graduate from the retreat and go back home and I do stay in touch with people afterwards to help them on that journey.

We also have a lot of fun at the retreat. We have yoga every morning, we have an all raw low fat vegan diet - beautifully prepared and presented for you and then we have blissful experiences at the most pristine and gorgeous waterfalls you can imagine with swimming holes and natural beaches. We move our bodies quite a lot - we're out in the fresh air and sunshine. I'm excited to see the brand new chemical free swimming pool and lap pool that is being built there right now and will be ready for my group when we get there this winter.

This year's retreat is taking place - January 30th to February 7th. More information is on my website on the retreats page. I'm also excited about expanding my 12 month

coaching program. Really looking for clients who are ready to dive in a little bit deeper, at a more committed level because the level of shift and personal transformation that we are talking about is deep and takes time. We need to give it time and work on that over that period of time with the kind of guidance and support that will facilitate us staying with it and really making the changes that we know that we really want to make.

Anthea:

You have a gift for people on the call today. Would you like to share what it is? And how they can receive their free gift?

Ellen:

For the first 5 people that respond to me by email, I will offer you a 25% discount on that 12 month coaching program if it's a good fit for both of us and we will determine that from a conversation on the phone where I can tell you a little bit more detail about how the program works and what your commitment is and what my commitment is, what we're actually doing together and we can find out whether it is a good fit for both of us. I take it really seriously, because we are going to spend a year together fairly intimately.

That's one of my gifts - it also includes a \$100 discount if you are part of that coaching program on the Costa Rica retreat. The other gift is simply my e-Book, The Ultimate Raw Food Diet Detox and Wellness Program. You can receive that for free just by being on this call and using the links that Anthea will send you.

Anthea:

You have just given yourself so generously today in this call and two very generous gifts there. Your retreat just sounds so amazing. If I hadn't just taken my whole family to the States for the Woodstock Fruit Festival, I would definitely be doing your retreat in January. They just sound like really highly transformative experiences. I hope one day I can do it.

It's been so wonderful talking with you today. You're such a treasure in my life. I feel really blessed to have met you and really honored to have you on the summit so we can give the gift of you to so many more people. Thank you from all of us.

Ellen:

Thank you Anthea and Tasha. I think that having summits like this - I'm just so grateful for you making this happen for inviting me to share. I love to share and I loved meeting you at the festival and I love that our connection is continuing and am just so grateful for the work that you are doing.

Anthea:

Thank you so much everyone for being on the call.