

FIRST HOUSE RULE

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Recently, Wu De painted two house rules on the wall above the kitchen table. The painting reads:

HOUSE RULES (non-negotiable):

1. Hug everyone in this house everyday.
2. Be in Love.

—*Your Heart*

I went to art school, so unusual rules are not new to me... but these are some pretty awesome rules! In this issue, I'm going to talk about the first rule. Next month, I'll try to talk about the second rule...

What I'm about to say may shock some of you, but I'm going to say it anyway: I used to hate hugs. No. Not hate. Loathe. I abhorred hugging. Yes, that's more like it. Abhorred.

With a few rare exceptions, hugging generated in me not so much a discomfort as a deep distress coupled with a feeling of wanting to either run out of the room or crawl out of my own skin. It pressed play on a bizarre mental tape that usually went something like this:

Oh, no. This person wants to hug me. Ugh, ugh, ughhh. Maybe I can get out of it... No! Ack, I can't! They're going in for the kill! What if they just took out the trash and their clothes are all germ-y or they just touched money and their hands are all germ-y and they get germs all over me? What if I bump into their nose or poke their eye with my nose or elbow them somehow? (And, if hugging a male, What if I accidentally bump into their junk and they feel uncomfortable or they think I did it on purpose???) What if the other person doesn't like the way I smell or I breathe on them and my breath is bad? Ugh, now we're hugging and I HAAAATE it! Ick, I can feel their heartbeat! I can feel my heartbeat and it's beating all weird and hard! Eww eww ewwww! Deep breath. NO! WAIT! They'll feel me breathing. Gross. I'll hold my breath until after it's over... starting... now! Are they going to be one of those long huggers? Yestheyarenooooo... Makeitstoppleeeeeease... Umm, umm, panic? Yes, panic! Now I'm in a panic and that makes my nipples hard and of course I'm wearing the bra that makes my nipples look really pointy today and they're going to see my nipples and think I'm aroused from hugging them when, in fact, it's because I am terrified of hugs! I really,

really, really hope this is over soon. No, forget hope. This is a hopeless situation, and I think I'm going blue in the face from not breathing. I'm ending this! Hug officially OVER!

There's no way I can know for sure, but I'm pretty sure that my distaste for hugs was palpable. It certainly showed in my technique, which I'll outline for you in case you aspire to being the world's worst hugger:

1. Try to get out of it by playing dumb/unavailable. "What? It's hug time? Oh, I hadn't noticed that everyone else in the room was hugging! Oh, gee-gosh-darn-it, I have something in my hand/something I need to go do that makes me magically unable to give/receive hugs right now. Maybe next time! Bye!"
2. If you can't get out of it, try to make it as quick as possible.
 - a) Making it extra casual helps get it over with quickly. "Oh, alright, chum! A hug it is. Quick little pat on the back and then I'm gonna run away, cool?"
 - b) Making it extra awkward also compels the other person to end the hug sooner. I found that hugging in a weird position does this well. Aim your face for their armpit or something equally strange. Don't just leave your butt sticking way out—make sure the only points of contact are arms, collar bones and above. For many women, this means leaning in an extremely contorted way. All the better. In most cases, the other hugger will quit long before you do.
3. If they aren't getting the hint that speed is the key, try an awkward, overly jovial laugh followed by a gentle shove off.
4. Above all else, do not look the other hugger in the eye at any point before or after the hug. They will see your panic and that is unacceptable. Take any and all necessary steps to avoid eye contact. Laughing extraneously gives you a good reason to look at the floor/the wall/nowhere in particular/*not at the other hugger.*
5. (Optional) If there are multiple people in the room and you've just gotten through the first hug, back away slowly (or quickly). If necessary, make an excuse about some urgent thing that you 'need' to do right away.



This foolproof method to messing up a hug works on everyone. I mean *everyone*. A while back, I even tried it on Amma (the so-called “Hugging Saint”). Lemme tell you, it worked!

For those of you who have met me recently, this information may (or may not) come as a surprise. I love hugs now. So how does one get from having an ego that reacts so negatively to hug time to being cool with hugs and living in a house where hugging is one of the ONLY two rules in the house? Here’s how I did it:

Tea

Tea is the most beautiful and gentle gateway to presence and acceptance that I have ever felt. When you’re so twisted up inside that you can’t even stand the feel of your own heartbeat (much less someone else’s), trying to do a ten-day meditation course is probably *not* the best medicine for you. You need something to bridge doing and being. Tea was, for me, the remedy. It helped (and helps) me to be comfortable in my own skin and, through that, to be comfortable in other people’s arms.

Furthermore, tea helps me feel comfortable being present with and accepting of other people. You can only sit down in silence and share a deep experience with a small group of people so many times without letting them into your heart. Sharing tea with fellow students and new visitors alike is a deep healing of the heart that opens me (and, likely, you) to sharing genuine bonds that transcend the mundane and the material, bonds that recognize the divinity in each and every person present. From that vantage point, where the holy permeates all of us, hugging is easy. It’s no longer just an ego bristling up against another ego or a body clumsily wrapping itself around another body. It’s godliness connecting to more godliness. And what’s not to love about that?

Meditation

Did that mental tape loop I played for you earlier feel at all familiar? Maybe it isn’t hugs for you, but there’s probably something that does or has pressed play on a similar recording for you. Meditation is incredible medicine for this. Through the simple act of sitting still and focusing on your breath or physical sensations or *anything* other than your mental garbage (or even by

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focusing on your mental garbage *as* mental garbage), you can begin to turn down these recordings or to erase them completely.

Meditation can also help you connect more to your body, learning to recognize where you are holding muscle memories, anxiety, tension and other energies that prevent you from being who you really are underneath all the trash you've been building up for the bulk of your life (or longer).

When you acknowledge these sensations as mere sensations, these energies as mutable and these habits as nothing more than habits, you can initiate a profound transformation. This can mean (amongst many other things) going from a person who goes into a tizzy every time the possibility of hugs arises to someone who loves hugs. I'm not a betting woman, but whatever your equivalent of hugging is, I'd hazard a guess that mediation can fix it, alleviate it or help you transcend it.

Living in an Intentional Community

Living in an intentional community is wonderful. I mean, it's really hard. Which is to say that it's rewarding. By which I really mean difficult, but also incredible. Do you know what I mean? Because I don't know what I'm talking about. Except for this: Living in an intentional community promotes intentional, conscious living, thought and action. It takes whatever issues you might have simmering and cranks up the heat on them until they've boiled away.

In my case, part of this has been getting over my charming little hug problem. It all started with Wu De recognizing that I wasn't comfortable hugging pretty much anyone when I first moved here. (Tea and meditation had been helping prior to me moving here, but I still had a lot of work to do!) So what did he do? He started telling everyone to hug me: Resident students. Visitors. Anyone. "Hey, welcome! This is Joyce, this is Fresco, this is Fiona, this is Lindsey... Hug Lindsey. A lot. Every day." At the time, I was all, "Gee, thanks, Wu De. I really need more panic in my life. Don't we all?" But on some level, I still knew that I DID need the panic until I DIDN'T need the panic. What I mean to say is that you can overcome these mental habits by forcing yourself to face them head on, over and over, until you realize how completely unnecessary they are. For me, hugging lots of people countless times was a training drill. It was practicing the same maneuvers over and over in preparation for an anti-battle/hug-war. And that hug-war arrived around the same time as the rule. It came in the form of Greg Wendt.

The Patented Greg Wendt Hugging Method

I had been warned about Greg's mind-blowing hugs for months before he arrived, so I had plenty of time to prepare. Greg's hugs are the stuff of legend, so when Wu De announced an impending visit from Greg, I knew what was up. I didn't have to wait for Wu De to





say “I’m gonna sic Greg on you” to know that his visit would require me to transcend my hug issue.

Fortunately, we tend to have all the right guests at just the right times to help us learn all the lessons we need to learn just when we need to learn them. So in addition to hugging the usual suspects (Shane, Kaiya, Joyce and Wu De), I also got to practice hugging guests including Skylar (one of my favorite tea sisters), Tien Wu (a true tea goddess) and Merlin (the love of my life) before Greg arrived.

And you know what? Practice does make (room for) perfect(ion). By the time Greg got here, I welcomed his hugs, as well as the hugs of everyone else. I was even lucky enough to receive some hugging instruction from Greg on his patented hugging method, which I’ll do my best to paraphrase here:

1. Hug heart to heart.
2. Hug harder, softly.
3. Hug more yummiily. (Optional: Try to “out-yum” the other person.)

During his visit, Greg even shared some advanced tips with us, like always hugging heart to heart. And if hugging had a ranking system, all our hugs would have jumped like 500 points because of his visit. (Seriously, if you want to become a better hugger, go find this guy in LA and get a hug lesson from him. Amazing!)

Forgiveness

Sometimes, people mess up. That means me. That means you. That means all of us. Sometimes, we get

upset at each other and our egos and bad emotional habits get all activated and the idea of hugging seems terrible all over again. Sometimes, my ego takes over and I don’t hug everyone everyday. It usually uses a postponement (“It’s late in the day and I haven’t hugged anyone yet, so I’ll just skip today and try again tomorrow.”), a projection (“Wu De is busy and probably doesn’t want a hug right now.”), a rejection (“Kaiya is all farty right now. I’ll hug him after this round of gas passes.”) or some other inane excuse (“Oh, that says House *Rules*? I thought it said House *Ruies*! Ah, tomorrow, then!”) to get around rule number one. Sometimes, we all get into a little rut as a group and skip hugs for a couple days, and I start to blame my former hugging problem on some level. But to even begin to try to hug everyone everyday requires a lot of forgiveness of others and maybe even more forgiveness of myself. Was I terrible at hugging for a long time? Absolutely. Does that mean I am now, or that I can’t hug everyone everyday? Nope.

I might never hug everyone every day for a long stretch. But that’s what new days are for. Start again. Let go of yesterday. No problems? Hug everybody! Got a problem with someone? Hug it out! Don’t skip anyone. Don’t wait until tomorrow. Them’s the rules, and they’re non-negotiable!

