

the Search for True Nourishment

Awareness also asks that, if you use food to knock out the pain, you notice whether or not it is effective; that you notice if and for how long the pain disappears. Without making yourself feel wrong for doing it, try to decide whether the food fills the ache, whether it does what you want it to do. If you learn that the food is not relieving your suffering—if it is, in fact creating more of it—you can choose a more satisfying anodyne. Not that anything will actually dissolve despair; sometimes your options are reduced to ways you can nurture yourself while the sadness has a chance to wash its way through you. Some ways of killing pain are more satisfying than others. And by remaining sensitive to the effectiveness of the methods on which you rely, you are in a position to choose the ones that work. Eventually, certain behavior patterns will fall away, like leaves from a tree—naturally, gracefully—not because you are attacking them but because you have no use for them anymore.

Breaking free is not a war, not even a fight. You don't divide yourself into "good" parts and "bad" parts; the very attention that this division gives to self-defeating behaviors often activates the patterns it is attempting to destroy. There is no need to struggle, only to remain sensitive to the motivation behind your actions and then to the actual effectiveness of those actions. Breaking free is about trusting and strengthening your ability to choose health over illness, growth over stasis. Given the opportunity, you really can—and will—distinguish between what you intuitively feel is wholesome and what is not.

The essence of breaking free is the kindness with which you treat yourself. Your intention, when you began eating, was certainly not to make yourself miserable. You ate to protect and take care of yourself. When you become conscious of that intention, you can begin to trust your natu-

ral instincts, your intuitive wisdom. You can begin to give credence to those parts of you that, like a tropism, turn toward the light and the warmth that infuse you with positive energy.

You live the way you eat. Your belief in yourself and your ability to make decisions that will enhance your well-being extend to every level of your life. If you deprive yourself of food, you probably deprive yourself of other things, too. If you feel that you cannot be trusted with food, you probably mistrust your judgments, opinions and feelings. In exploring your relationship to food and hunger, you are tapping the foundation on which your self-esteem is built; the benefits of the time you spend in such exploration will, like the hub of a wheel, radiate to each spoke of your life.

When you begin experiencing the joy of providing nourishment for yourself on a physical level, the confidence in your ability to make other satisfying choices will grow. That confidence will, in turn, affect your friendships, your home life, your time alone. No longer will thoughts of food—what you just ate, shouldn't have eaten, are going to eat—occupy so many hours of the day, form the center around which your other activities revolve.

Be honest with yourself. Unless you are absolutely willing to face the truth about food and you (this means becoming aware of how much you lie, sneak and cheat around it), you can't move. It is like looking at a road map: unless you know exactly where you are starting from, you can't find the way to your destination.

You break free with kindness, awareness, and love. You break free from the myths you have created about yourself: that you are basically untrustworthy and out of control; that you must change in order to be loved; that you must treat yourself with harshness and force in order to reach a goal.

Just as a balloon lies crumpled and

flat until your breath fills it out, so your ability to be trusted and nurturing lies folded and unheeded in a corner of you. By focusing your attention on your worthiness, you breathe life into it—you give it space to move, to talk, to shimmer.

Breaking free is not especially about being a certain size or feeling like a "normal" person around food, although these results are concomitant with the process. When you start eating out of physical hunger and stop eating when you're satisfied, you lose weight. Being thin is not a blessing God gave to some people and withheld from others. Being thin is not magic.

In the end, you break free from the illusion that your hunger has to do with food and that the answer to it is being thin. You begin answering the call of a hunger that has never before been satisfied. You begin realizing your potential as the irreplaceable human being that you are, instead of using food to postpone that recognition.

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