

## Eating yourself whole

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So called eating disorders are rife in modern society. The incidence of obesity, in adults and children, is high and rising in many societies. Anorexia nervosa and bulimia are well known in most high schools and orthorexia, the excessive following of health food diets, has recently been named. In this article I would like to present a few of my observations revealed through Psychophonetics exploration and process inherent in the eating habits of clients.

There is no shortage of nutritional advice in the popular media. Conventional wisdom, backed by scientific thinking, confirms the importance of healthy eating. Most people have some idea of what constitutes a healthy diet, but paradoxically, many who struggle with issues around eating know which foods would best serve their physical needs but feel powerless to exercise their choices. Something else takes over. In the words of a client struggling with obesity, *"I binge on sugar because it numbs the incredible rage inside"*. She was aware of the impact that her food choices were making on her weight but, when in the grip of a rage attack, was powerless to resist.

Another client, also struggling with excess weight found herself bingeing on salty, fatty, carbohydrate foods, specifically chips. When catching the moment that she reached for the chips and entering it consciously, she discovered it was when she was experiencing discontent and churning inside. These feelings were usually related to frustration about her limited career options and these foods helped to numb the raging emotions. Another ate compulsively to *"fill the incredible void and emptiness inside"*.

A twenty year old woman's parents and friends were concerned about her losing weight and picking at food. She was diagnosed with anorexia

nervosa. In conversation we discovered that she has bursts of extreme anger with panic attacks. It feels as though *"everyone is always in her face"*. She finds that she *"protects herself with her body language"*. Upon further exploration we name that she feels so much pressure inside that any pressure from the outside aggravates this inner pressure and she bursts in a fit of rage or panic. Food added to the feeling of fullness and pressure inside, hence the picking at food.

Using Psychophonetics non-verbal tools of sensing and gesturing we found a perpetual knot in her stomach and tight back and shoulder muscles as a guard to surround and protect her vulnerable sense of self. She had done this from early childhood as a protection from a picky, smothering and critical parent. This holding pattern became perpetual and internalized. She discovered that she had taken on an internal critic. An inner pressure is created by this holding and perpetuated by her self-criticism. The young child who took on this pattern did so as a defence mechanism. What she really needed at the time was protection and unconditional love.

As an adult, she was able to become aware of the inner dynamic, acknowledge the critic, make a choice to find compassion and unconditional love for her own vulnerability, gradually letting go of the muscular tension.

Another young woman with Bulimia experiences *"pressure from food inside, her clothes from outside, with her own nagging voice in between"*. In gesture she also finds that she has created a shell of protection, to protect her heart from her boyfriend who doesn't really see her for who she is. She realizes that she needs to speak up for herself and who she really is, rather than molding herself to others in order to be liked.

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In Psychophonetics we name this protection an 'inverted guardian'. It may be experienced as a shell, a wall, a cage or any other restrictive device that we may have erected around ourselves to hold out an offending attack from another person and is usually originally placed in childhood. It is constructed psychically but converts into muscle tension. At the time of exploration, you find that the original offender is long gone but the protection has become habitual and is often not conscious. It becomes restrictive as we want to express ourselves but find that there is an invisible barrier that stops us. When brought to awareness, the choice maker in us can usually find the motivation to release the restrictive patterns and to invoke new patterns and habits.

A woman, who felt that she was making excessive use of detoxification diets and processes, came to the realization that she constantly felt dirty as a result of abuse in childhood. She was striving to clean herself physically in an attempt to rid herself of the dirty feeling when in fact it required a working through of the feelings of dirtiness taken on as a result of the abuse.

In the Chinese healing tradition foods are known to feed the body as well as the soul. According to Paul Pitchford (2002:310) in 'Healing with Whole Foods':

*The sweet flavour, especially when found in warming food, helps energy expand upward and outward in the body. It is a harmonizing flavour with a slowing, relaxing effect. The sour flavour causes contraction and has a gathering, absorbent, astringent effect, to prevent or reverse abnormal leakage of fluids and energy, and the bitter taste causes contraction and encourages the energy of the body to descend. It reduces the excessive person. Salty has "centring" earthy qualities.*

Science confirms that carbohydrates which are primarily sweet increase the absorption of tryptophan and tyrosine into the brain. One of the pathways of conversion of these amino acids is

into neurotransmitters, tryptophan into serotonin and tyrosine into dopamine and noradrenaline. Serotonin is thought to play a part in sleep, inhibition of pain and the control of mood. Noradrenaline controls the overall activity and mood of the mind and has a role to play in wakefulness and motivation.

Food and eating choices are often used in a way to alleviate or self medicate for uncomfortable soul experiences. Sweet foods may be used to numb or to expand a contracted state. Salty foods may be used to ground a feeling of flightiness. Unfortunately when these choices become extreme they may not be in the best interests of the body. When they compromise the whole, it may be useful to find what is going on inside and to find ways to harmonise the soul experiences with soul exercises. Impulses can be extremely powerful and often at odds with the choice-maker. Bringing them to awareness and assessing their origins and motivations aids the strengthening of the choice-maker and puts it into perspective alongside the impulses.

### Reference

Pitchford, P. (2002). *Healing with whole foods: Asian Traditions and Modern Nutrition* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). CA: North Atlantic Books (pp310–316)

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