



Article by Mary Ann Iyer, MD, MA

FEAD Yourself a Different Way

www.maryanniyer.com

“Stapling the stomach just can’t be the only alternative to diets and medication!” I exclaimed. Obesity had just surpassed smoking as the number one reason for preventable illness. I was on a committee to look at alternatives to the problem, and felt strongly that finding alternatives to drastic measures was important. We already knew that most diets fail long-term, mostly because it is too hard to stick to them. I knew there had to be a better way.

When I rolled out my first series of Mindful Eating classes in 2006, I had no idea how deeply the class participants would be getting into the roots of their maladaptive eating patterns. We were soon opening up hidden reservoirs of pain and suffering - many of which had their origins in the antiquity of their lives – sometimes even for generations. In the beginning of each class series, I pose the question; “Why do you eat?” The reasons are myriad – and seldom is it true hunger that stimulates the eating response. Emotional eating stands out as one of the major reasons for reaching for food. Anxiety, stress, worry, fear, anger – all can have sensations that mimic hunger. Furthermore, as sensations go, they all rank as uncomfortable and smothering them with food has become the coping method of choice for many.

What I discovered is the acronym from my book, *The Heart of Healing*, “FEAD” suddenly came into focus as an appropriate underpinning for this class, too. As we delved ever deeper into the roots of maladaptive behavior associated with eating, we found ourselves wrestling with the demons of the past that continued to haunt the psyche with their messages of inadequacy, failure, and so on.

How do we remember, when in the midst of tension, fear or anger, all that we’ve learned about equanimity? All that stuff about “letting go”, “surrendering”, releasing?

By: 1) Facing, 2) Embracing, 3) Allowing Space and 4) invoking Divine Grace, class participants have found a different way to deal with the empty spaces left in the wake of attacks by these difficult voices inside.

FEAD yourself differently. Here’s what I mean:

1) Face it:

Whatever is troubling you; wherever you feel the tension, anxiety or pain inside – pause right there and see if you can get a deeper, more full sense of this place in you. Relax all around it and let it be. Face it squarely, with full permission to be there just as it is. Approach this place of discomfort with a sincere curiosity. There is something awry here, in this which is you, and you want to know at a deeper level what that is.

Amazingly, as we do this, there is safety around a part of us which has historically felt rejected, shut off and abandoned. Simply because we approach this area of ourselves and lives with interest, the pain often begins to abate.

2) Embrace it:

Go one step further. Approach this place of pain and offer it loving acceptance. Let it be there with the full understanding that pain requires kindness, not rejection. Treat it as if it were a hurting child. In many ways, it is.

The healing begins here. As that which has been rejected feels itself being pulled back into the fold of the living with your warm embrace, it instantly begins to relax in a way that is uniquely healing and nurturing.

3) Allow Space for it:

As you continue to breath deeply, embracing that which is hurting, begin to loosen your grip somewhat. Give it permission to be there and simply allow space for it. Not the space of abandonment in which you turn your back on this part of you which is suffering – but a warm fully loving and safe space. Compassionate space. Within you, develop the capacity to love each part so much that there is room to breathe, be and evolve.

This means dropping the self-criticisms and judgments which have been aggravating the problem all this time. It means allowing room for change where in the past you may have begun a cycle of self-punishment. Try this: just focus all your attention on breathing into a compassionate space around the area of pain. And watch with gentle curiosity.

4) invoke Divine Grace:

A last important step in this process is to invite an awareness that surpasses what you have known to be possible to this point into the picture. We want to change old repeating patterns that have caused you and others harm. Sometimes this means not only allowing space, but inviting new ideas to enter into that space. Whatever your belief system, invoke that which is beyond what you currently know to be possible. This expands the space into dimensions of possibility that your conscious mind has not yet realized, and is the basis for deep and lasting change of what has heretofore been a stuck place in your life.

Often, the last thing in the world we want when we are in pain is to feel more of the pain! We do everything in our power to escape, cover it up, or otherwise remove this nasty element from our lives. Eating, for many, provides temporary anesthesia from feeling what hurts. What I'm offering you is an entirely different way to go about resolving these longstanding patterns of inner discomfort. By FEADing it differently, you provide 1) safety, 2) nurturance, 3) room to evolve into 4) a whole new way of being. The continual stream of emails from former class participants expressing gratitude is an ongoing testimonial for the effectiveness of this new "non-diet" approach.

The next time you're in a tight spot – feeling the constriction inside – try this. Face. Embrace. Allow Space. Accept Divine Grace. FEAD it differently.

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MARY ANN IYER, M.D., is a physician whose primary focus is mind-body and spiritual healing. She is a pioneer in the field of mind-body medicine, and is the author of *The Heart of Healing* and *Mindful Eating: Mindful Life*, as well as numerous guided meditation CDs, available at any bookstore, Amazon or www.maryanniyer.com.