

FEAD Yourself a Different Way

By Mary Ann Wallace, M.D.

WHEN TEACHING MINDFUL EATING CLASSES, I always pose the question: “Why do you eat?” The reasons class participants give 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 involve sensations that mimic hunger. Furthermore, as sensations go, these all rank as uncomfortable. Smothering them with food has become the coping method of choice for many.

Often, class participants discover hidden reservoirs of pain and suffering, many of which have their origins early in life. As we delve ever deeper into the roots of our maladaptive behavior associated with eating, we find ourselves wrestling with the demons of the past that continue to haunt the psyche with their messages of inadequacy, failure and so on. I have found that by facing, embracing, allowing space and invoking divine grace (FEAD), participants begin to find a different way to deal with the empty spaces left in the wake of attacks from these difficult voices inside. In other words, they learn to FEAD themselves 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, fuller sense of this place in you. Relax all around it and let it be. Face it squarely, giving it 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 focus on knowing at a deeper level what that is.

Amazingly, as we do this, safety grows around parts of us that have historically felt rejected, shut off and abandoned. Simply because we approach these areas of ourselves and our 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

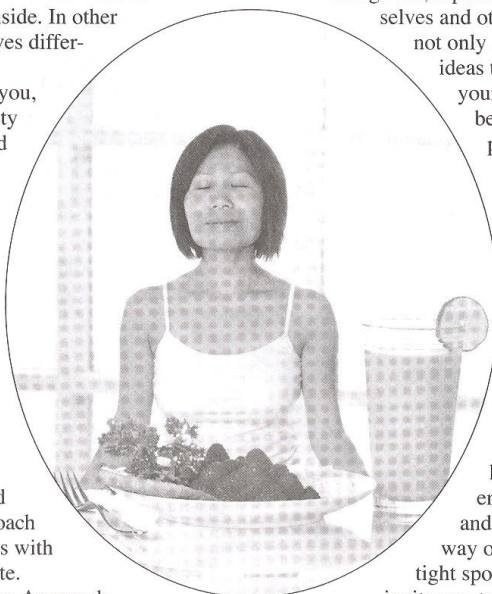
is uniquely healing and nurturing.

3. Allow space for it: As you breathe 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 that is suffering, but a warm, fully loving and safe space. Compassionate space. Develop the capacity to love each part of yourself.

This means dropping the self-criticisms and judgments that 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. Explore 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 into the picture an awareness that surpasses what you have known to be possible up to this point. We want to change old, repeating patterns that have caused ourselves 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.

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 it from our lives. Eating, for many, provides temporary anesthesia from feeling what hurts. By FEADing yourself differently, you provide safety, nurturance and room to evolve into a whole new way of being. The next time you’re in a tight spot, feeling the constriction inside, I invite you to explore this approach. Δ



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