



Article by Mary Ann Iyer, MD, MA

Breaking the Patterns that Hold Us

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When I went through a painful divorce in the 1980's, I—to my horror—began to rapidly gain weight for the first time in my life. I went from size 4 to size 14 in a matter of months. I was completely out of control. It took me a while to uncover why I couldn't get on top of my own behavior. It was not until I began to explore the depth of loneliness and sadness I was experiencing that my weight turned around. And this happened AFTER I dropped all attempts at dieting.

I believe much of the obesity epidemic has its roots in the pain that we experience by believing false messages about ourselves. When we were younger, we often didn't have the space we needed to understand clearly what was told to us, because we were dependent on other people or situations for survival. The view of the world we developed way back then gets tapped into when we're dealing with people in our lives in the here and now on whom we think our life depends. These vulnerable places inside of us are easily stimulated by situations that feel unsafe or leave us depleted, and are tapped by advertisements for unhealthy food.

Those who take my Mindful Eating class know that I insist that we not talk about weight loss. We focus, instead, on the roots of what we're carrying around—whether it's weight or something else—that is not something that we want. The first—and sometimes difficult—part of that is to love ourselves as we are. When we really get a good handle on that, when we can look at ourselves and where we've been and see it with great compassion, we are on our way home. “I know how I got here; I see what my experience has been—”. Not just as a neutral statement, but with heart bursting with compassion. As if we could see that earlier self, right now, enduring, doing all (s)he can just to survive. We aren't focusing on “fixing” our weight, but rather on letting that scared, hurt part of us experience safety and what it feels like to be cared about.

There is a difference between objective physical reality - which may be a certain weight— and all the extra subjective judgments we wrap around that simple fact. The simple, factual statement can be helpful to listen to. We know that extra weight increases the likelihood for certain musculoskeletal and other organic problems, so having a simple, pure desire to come back to a healthy weight is a good thing.

But, meanwhile, the whole river of judgment that went into the weight gain is running like acid in our minds. So, whatever shame we feel isn't just about hearing someone mention our weight in the here and now. The shame is often part of how the weight got there in the first place. Or perhaps we gained weight

out of a need for protection. It is by going back to that river of acid and being with ourselves there – where the shame was spawned - that gives us the key for the freedom we long for.

When we feel dependent upon another person, it creates a certain Godness around that human being, which leaves no room to recognize the reality of where (s)he is coming from. When you feel yourself reacting to what someone is saying to you, focus on first seeing what is true objectively. Then, notice what the subjective – the inner currents of accusation - are. The voices/beliefs that cut you apart. Again and again, beneath any emotion that we're having, that's what needs attention. We begin to break down the inner tensions by looking at them – and articulating the details. Separate out what is objective: “OK, I weigh ‘X’”, and then every other single part of the conversation, which are the messages given about that “X” that cause the whole being to cringe.

Every person who speaks in an unkind way to another person has some history to what comes out of their mouth. The reason it is so hard to see this is that we bring history to the table as well. If we can remember that, we open the potential for real change. Allow some breathing space and see that there is background to every interaction. Realize that the tone of voice that comes out of another body isn't about you.

The second we can really see that this person is also obviously hurting, it allows room for them to be as they are. Then we realize that what they say has very little to do with us, beyond the objective data insofar as that may serve us. Even if there is a true statement being spoken, the tone, the feeling is not about us. And if we feel an unkind undercurrent, then we turn right around and take care of ourselves with compassion. “Sweetheart, that character really zinged you, and I'm here to tell you I love you. We're going to take ourselves off this wheel.”

It may help to remember that we, too, have sometimes said things that we later regretted because our behavior came from simply being beyond our coping skills at that time. When we go back to the root of our shame to nurture that place in us that feels “not OK”, it becomes possible to come to today's encounter with enough inner spaciousness that we can see another person more clearly.

We also need to give ourselves permission to not be the ongoing recipient of someone's ire. If a person clearly has an ongoing habit that we find painful, then we need to cut our losses. That also is part of taking care of ourselves. When we feel our life to be dependent on someone for survival, our fear of loss or punishment may prevent us from taking the necessary kind action for ourselves.

We need to be extraordinarily gentle with ourselves when we feel afraid. And not have an expectation of self that is not realistic as well. Sometimes we can't come back to inner balance until we get out into the car, or get home, or sit with our diary, or go for a long walk, or overeat - or whatever we need to do to get to a place where we can sit down with ourselves and say, “OK, let me get down to the root here and what do I need to do for me? What am I going to do to take care of me?” And – not selling ourselves out as fodder to buy permission to exist.

I have sometimes found it helpful to think about someone in our lives whom we love who shares the same issues. When we can look at this person, and see how deeply we love her/him, and how our heart longs to

break through the garbage that's cluttered around her heart, we've already realized another perspective on the issue. We can see the possibility of a different story line that surrounds the weight (or issue) that is kinder and closer to the truth. To allow our soul and mind to embody that deeper knowing that we're able to apply to this other person is a beginning. If it's true for her/him; we can make some cracks in the armor of what we hold to be true for ourselves. We realize the old view is not inviolable.

If you have someone in your life that you love deeply with a similar issue to yours, you can see how you do that naturally. Your heart is flooded with compassion. So you can begin to apply this same thing to yourself. You see how you protected yourself the best way you could. Let your heart swell in caring for that precious child who did what (s)he could. Just hang out there until that child knows that there is an environment in which (s)he is safe. And that environment is the safety of your heart. The whole past, present, future experience melds together, here. We live in all those time frames at the same time and we carry them with us. So – it's a very real thing to do this.

We're in a different space and age than we were when we imbibed the views that cause us to suffer. Sometimes when we're in a long-lasting painful situation, we start to feel like it's going to go on forever. But, as soon as we wake up to the pattern, itself, it starts to shift. We need to allow for the possibility that it can be different – especially if we've had a long-term condition. This can be one of the biggest challenges for us in making the necessary changes to authentically get out of the mire. To allow room for whatever it is – overweight, a chronic ailment, an ailing relationship - to be different. Whatever it is where we feel like “that's the story of my life.”

I offer this *meditation* as an integration.

[Consider recording this to listen to; or you can click on <http://www.maryanniyer.com/meditations.html> to hear the audio, recorded live in a workshop by Dr. Iyer.]

Finding your innocence

Close your eyes and go back inside.

Find that place in you that feels vulnerable. That wonder's if you're OK. That isn't quite sure.

And from the center of your heart, turn to that place inside of you. Greet that place as a child.

You know the life path that you went through as a young person on this planet. You know. You have enough distance that you've been able to see it from a different perspective.

Now go back. Greet that place in you that suffered. That was overwhelmed. Greet that place in you that didn't know that you were not at fault.

See the innocence of that child who endured and made do and found coping mechanisms that worked at the time.

See the innocence and how hard that was. Not as part of the story but to go right in and allow that girl (boy) to feel what it's like to feel safe.

Open your heart. Open your heart.

You might take her (him) in your arms. You might just sit with her (him) with a full-on eye to eye contact with full respect. Something she (he) didn't get.

And then imagine being that little girl (boy) again and looking into the eyes that see you with respect. Look into eyes that see you with respect.

Feel what that feels like in your body. To know that someone sees you.

It is never too late to feel that in every cell of your body. It is never too late.

And thank that adult who loves you, who sees you, who knows your heart because more than anything of course that's what you're longing for.

Breathe deeply all the way down to the bottoms of your feet. And anchor that.

And know that that is the truth. Everything else is someone playing out their suffering and feeding you a lie.

The truth is that you are loved.

You. Are. Loved.

I am so glad that you are here.

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