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## *The Root of Hunger*

I believe the root of hunger begins when you are born. You enter this world alone, probably cold, scared, confused, naked and crying. You are crying for food, for love, for warmth and safety. Your mother cradles you up in her soft arms and putting you to her breast, you are given all those things in one sweeping motion. And what is at the center of this experience? Food. Picture this in your mind; your mothers arms encircled around your tiny baby body to create a sanctuary of safety and protection. She is cuddling you, cooing at you, and gently holding you close. You are brought to the warm, soft skin of her breast and as you latch on to her nipple warm sweet milk comes flowing into your mouth, over your tongue and down your throat where it flows into your tummy creating a warm sensation at the core of your body. Your whole body feels warm, full and safe, while the milk is providing energy and vital nutrients to your whole physical self. Now, ask yourself, how connected is food with life? Yes! That's right! Very connected!

When babies are fed by their mothers or anyone else, it sends a clear message of safety and love. It is directly connected with nurturing. When someone gives a baby food the message is "I care for you, your well being is important to me, I love you". There is a great amount of bonding that occurs around feeding a hungry baby. The baby is often held close, talked to, with soothing words in soft voices. The baby's hair is stroked back from its face; the cheeks and skin are gently touched as a deeply felt, loving gesture. Even as the baby grows, food is naturally associated with care; a lolly pop at the doctor, chicken soup when your sick. Receiving food during these hard times says "I will help you when you are scared or sick, I am there for you, you are safe and are going to get through this." These are very powerful messages, very healing and comforting and completely necessary for a child to grow into an emotionally balanced adult.

As the child grows, he/she learns to provide for themselves. They can do more things by themselves as young children and even more into their preteen years. Many lessons on loving, self care, and even stress management techniques are passed down during this time and are now ready to be tried out on their own. Most skills do not include food but they hold

the same exact messages that are essential to building foundational living skills. The same messages that started with food will now lay the bricks for how the child will emotionally take care of themselves later. It sets the stage for the child to develop into secure, grounded adults. Little by little the average child begins to incorporate these skills into their self-care practices. When the young adult leaves home they will take with them these tools from their parents, and put them into action in order to maintain a healthy emotional condition.

Sometimes these tools were not properly transferred from the adults to the child.

These skills are something children can learn, by example but it requires that the parents who raised them have a good understanding themselves of these elements. It also requires that the lines of communication between parent and child are smooth and open so that these lessons can be properly transferred.

In some cases parents were not, themselves adept in these life skills and thereby, could not transfer them to the child sufficiently. This left the child lacking tools that are foundational and essential for caring for themselves as adults. Some examples of this in the parents are; alcoholism, drug addiction depression and other mood disorders. Excessive anger or physical abuse, verbal abuse such as excessive criticism of the child or co-dependant relationships. Often time's even eating disorders of their own made them unable to help the child acquire the necessary self-care techniques.

This created an environment that worked against the child from many angles. Not only did this deprive the child of elemental skills for living but it also created situations that left a child in fearful or unsafe conditions. When a child is in fear for their own or someone else's safety, usually an adult is there to comfort the child and restore the child's confidence that he/she is safe from harm. But when this is missing for what ever reason, the child's worst fears come to life and that child literally becomes responsible for there own well being before they are emotionally ready. This sends the message that *"A situation can go from bad to worse and you should prepare your self for extreme measures of self preservation."* It could be one incident and it could be a thousand. The message is the same, *"Fear or stress is to be taken seriously and you should be ready to protect your self or escape."*

Sometimes our parent had the tools, but there was some kind of a communication gap between parent and child that was not noticed or addressed in early childhood. Some examples of these conditions in children that would cause these gaps are; depression, low social skills, including extreme shyness, resistance to religious beliefs of family, general feelings of inadequacy, and sometimes just an underline feeling that our parents didn't "understand" us. They did not see that the child was struggling on a deeper level, and needed more support and guidance than they recognized at the time.

These circumstances often created a milder yet, similar kind of emotional response as I mentioned before. When parents unknowingly let their child get overly stressed or fearful and were unable to be there to comfort them, the child grows up with a sense of *"the world is not safe and I must do everything within my power to protect myself from any harm"*

Adults who grew up in these conditions are forced, by instinct of self preservation, to go to great lengths to avoid fear and stress. These emotions were at one time, very real warning signs of dangerous situations and were used to protect them and keep them safe. Later, when this does not serve the adult anymore, the situations change but the feelings still remain. These emotions are heavier and carry more impact than average emotions and dealing with them is difficult. In order to cope, escape routes were chosen, often in the form of an addiction; to alcohol, relationships, drugs, money, or... you guessed it, food. Usually this works, although not completely, and not for long, not to mention the side effects of addiction are destructive and will eventually harm you in some way.

Here is where I tell you why I think food is the most destructive of all these coping mechanisms. First of all it begins so early in life. We begin eating as babies! By

the time we are adults, we have been in the throws of addiction for 20, 30, or 40 years! So it goes on longer than other addictions that start in the teen years or later. Secondly, food is acceptable. It is in every home in every family, everyone needs it and it is socially accepted. It's everywhere, all the time. Getting it is easy and there are no legal ramifications for having it. It's the perfect drug. And third, food addiction isolates like no other addiction, and I think this is key; it shows up on our bodies sometimes very early in life and quickly begins warping our social lives. If you are over weight, you are pushed to the very edges of society pretty quickly. We are often ridiculed and made fun of. Shamed into moderate to complete isolation. Even alcoholics and drug addicts "hang out" together in bars, in groups, and in gangs. They create a family outside the family for themselves. A safe place to be supported. The compulsive eater doesn't "hang out" with a group of other compulsive eaters. We are alone. We are meant to "tribe" up in groups as human beings. When we are pushed out like that, It goes against everything we need as people, we do the opposite of thrive, we spiral downward and the emotional issues we already had compile.

For compulsive eaters, hunger "triggers" the emptiness feelings and even fear or panic! Fear of hunger is a common thread in eating disorders. This makes a lot of sense. If fullness represents love and wellbeing, then hunger, its opposite, represents loneliness and fear. Now think back to what I was saying about fear and what it taught the child described above. I said that at any time *"a situation can go from bad to worse and you should prepare your self for extreme measures of self preservation."* and *"fear or stress is to be taken seriously and you should be ready to protect your self or escape"*. These are pretty strong messages and if you ask anyone to sit with them for long, with out taking action, you are clearly making an unreasonable request. You are literarily asking them to *not* save their life!

These feelings are at our core and if you have never dealt with them directly, (and especially how they are connected with food) with a therapist, a healing professional, spiritual counselor or a coach, you may very well be unable to break the addiction to food on your own. A "diet" will not work for you for any lasting period of time. You will fall pray to these self preservation techniques (overeating) that are so deeply ingrained in you time and time again. You, and others that watch you, might label it with words like "will power" or "self- control" but the truth is you are up against something much bigger than the "leaves "of a tree ...you have got to deal with the "roots!" This is why I say things like *"it's not about the food"* and *"the only way out is through"*

The food addiction doesn't have to be an object of contempt. In fact, it is solely responsible for getting you through the tough times in your life until now. It is, simply put, your life, preserving and protecting itself. You are providing yourself essential self care through food. If we look deeply we can see where it has been helpful. You can even say "Thank you" to it. But after that, it's got to go. It is not a sufficient source of love and care and has probably long ago stopped working for you.

Here we are today. We are able to learn new things, pick up new skills and see the ones we need to let go of. We have use of reason. Does this mean that by understanding all of this, we can just let go of the excess food? No. It will take practice practice practice. A little everyday. But I can teach you the essentials for creating a path out of this way of living.

If I could just hand you a diet and say "Here...eat this" and you could, we might

find it easier. But then you would never find out what you're really hungry for anyway. You are really hungry for life. I mean life as in sense of purpose. You are really in search of yourself, a person who is alive and fulfilled. A person with heart and courage. A unique person who has an unlimited amount of gifts to offer this planet. A person who can handle their own emotions without running for cover. A person who can create situations

for them selves that are safe, well balanced, beautiful and creative. The person you were meant to be....

Is this person gone? Do you have to build them from scratch? No. You will not really be building anything but skills. (Most of the skills will be de-construction actually) The building was already complete the minute you were conceived. You were complete then, and you are whole now. The person I am referring to has always been here waiting to come out, it is the person under the food.

The path I am taking you down is not some physiological theory I learned in college. This is my experience. I have walked this myself and gotten to where I am; comfortable on my path with out the food. When I got to this point and thought I was done, something told me I was just beginning, that I was now to go back and get you! I feel very called to do this work. I will walk this with you, explaining as we go and coming from a place of deep understanding.

My aim is to gently, carefully peel back your fingers from the food and ask you to, little by little step out into unsafe places with out your crutch to see that you *can* do it. You will come running back to me half laughing half crying because you did it and, because it was scary! Each time I will send you a little further out, each time without the food. Soon you will look back and see that you are out in totally new territory! You are well on your way down your own path and you have completely left the food behind!

You don't need it! It has been loading you down literally with extra weight. You will move much faster much more efficiently with out it but you will need to trust me and actually let go of it when I say. I will ask you to "walk through" the feelings you are afraid of, but I will give it to you in reasonable baby steps so you are not overwhelmed.

A diet is easier, but it will only give you the body and only temporarily. I am offering you your life back! Now get ready to go on an adventure, you're not far now, as you have already taken the first big steps, you have admitted you want something more!

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