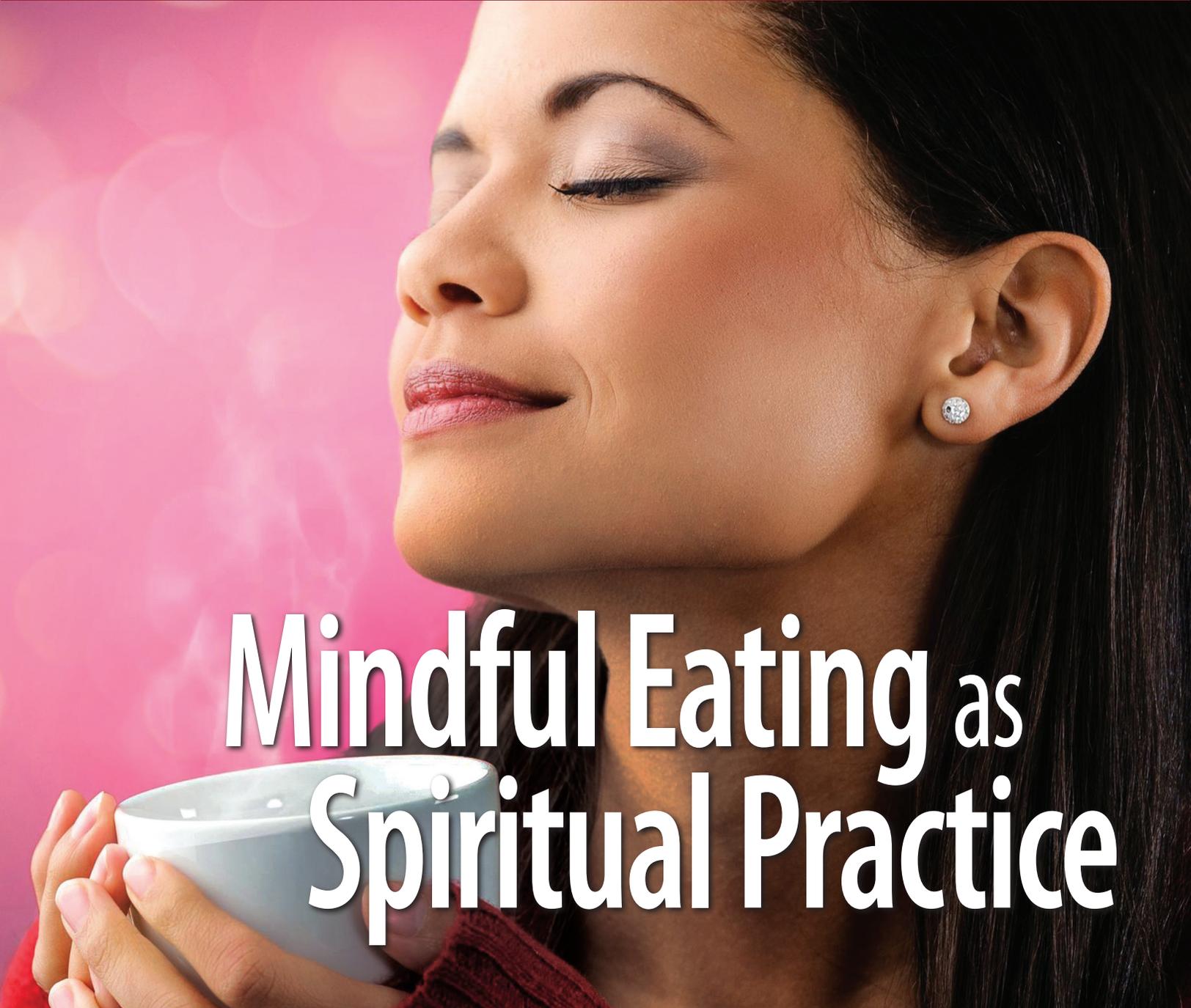


FOOD *for* THOUGHT

WINTER 2018



Mindful Eating as Spiritual Practice

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About The Center for Mindful Eating:

Our Mission:

The mission of The Center for Mindful Eating, also known as TCME, is to help people achieve a balanced, respectful, healthy, and joyful relationship with food and eating. By providing an easily accessible source of information and opportunities to interact – via the web and in other ways – we seek to train and encourage professionals, who can then foster this capacity in others.

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About this issue:

This edition of Food for Thought will help you make your way into the New Year with new eyes, an open heart, and an exploration of the deeper aspects of mindful eating.

The lead article, “Understanding Mindful Eating as a Spiritual Practice” is by Lynn Rossy, Ph.D., Vice President of The Center for Mindful Eating (TCME), and author of *The Mindfulness-Based Eating Solution*. Intended for professionals, this article will help you explore with your clients the broader implications of every bite of food we take. She explains the need to be aware of our intentions in practicing mindful eating, what we are attending to during eating, and the attitude that we bring to the table every time we eat.

The educational handout, “Creating a Sacred Space for Food, Mind, and Body,” is by Caroline Baerten, a mindfulness-based nutritionist/RD and certified

Mindful Eating, Conscious Living teacher (ME-CL). This educational handout offers your clients many suggestions for cultivating reverence in their relationship with food that can insert the sacred into the process of mindful eating.

Jan Chozen-Bays, MD, author of *Mindful Eating: A Guide to Rediscovering a Joyful and Healthy Relationship with Food*, offers the practice article, “Introducing the Spiritual Aspects of Mindful Eating to Others.” Her exercise provides a powerful way to understand the interconnected nature of all life through the simple act of eating a raisin.

The final offering, “Saying “Thank You” As a Guide to Opening Your Heart” is a beautiful practice written and recorded by Lynn Rossy, Ph.D. Use it on a regular basis to remind your heart and mind of the many blessings that surround and nurture us.



Understanding Mindful Eating as a Spiritual Practice



Lynn Rossy

Ph.D.

Before people enter the path of mindful eating, they are generally unconscious of how their food tastes. In fact, people often discover during the first week of practicing mindful eating that they don't like a lot of the food they eat every day, but they just hadn't noticed before. While this seems fantastical, it demonstrates our degree of disconnectedness from ourselves and our experiences in life, including eating.

Leonardo da Vinci described it perfectly when he wrote, "an average human looks without seeing, listens without hearing, touches without feeling, eats without tasting, moves without physical awareness, inhales without awareness of odor or fragrance, and talks without thinking (Gelb, 2010)." This is how we live, and the consequences are enormous.

As an antidote, mindfulness practice is available to us. It lies at the foundation

of mindful eating, supporting our efforts to see clearly, act responsibly, and come home to a deeper understanding of ourselves in relationship to the world. Mindfulness is defined as being present in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally. It can be understood through three mechanisms—intention, attention, and attitude (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Shapiro, et al., 2006). These descriptors of mindfulness give us a road map for translating mindful eating into a spiritual practice.

Our Intentions

If you start by asking the question, "what is my intention for practicing mindful eating?" you might get a variety of answers. Typically, people start with the intention of self-regulation. "I want to eat less and lose weight." "I want to stop bingeing before I go to bed at night." "I want to quit eating so many sweets." However, the role of intention in mindfulness meditation practice has been shown to shift over time along a

continuum from self-regulation, to self-exploration, and finally to self-liberation (Shapiro, 1992).

Therefore, if you can look beyond mindful eating as simple self-regulation, you are apt to find that there is much more you can achieve through the practice. Through deepening your mindfulness practice, your intentions may evolve to include a deeper sense of well-being and a more dynamic relationship to what you value and what gives you meaning in life.

A way of attending

Mindful eating, therefore, is a path of waking up to our senses—taste, smell, touch, sight, and sound—and waking up to our connectedness to the world outside of ourselves. Once we awaken to our individual senses, we become aware of how the food we eat influences us and, eventually, to how the food we buy is connected to people around the world and

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understanding

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the environment in which we live.

This deeper attention helps us begin to comprehend that when we eat, we are engaging in an act that has much significance. Wendell Berry, an American novelist, poet, environmental activist, cultural critic, and farmer, said “eaters must understand that eating takes place inescapably in the world, that it is inescapably an agricultural act, and how we eat determines, to a considerable extent, how the world is used. This is a simple way of describing a relationship that is inexpressibly complex” (Berry, 1990). To eat mindfully is to be awake to this beautiful and complex relationship and our interconnectedness to our food, our farmers, our soil, our environment, and beyond.

After we have understood how to use mindfulness and mindful eating to heal our own bodies and minds, it occurs to us that we are not alone. The food we eat doesn't just come from the grocery store (or as one young child told me, “the refrigerator”), it is produced by the forces of nature and the human beings that tilled the soil, planted and harvested the crops, drove the trucks, packaged the products, and so on.

In practical terms, we give our undivided attention—the second mechanism of mindfulness—to eating. What is this food I am about to eat? What does it look like? How does it smell? What color is it? Is it appealing? How fresh is it? How processed is it? How many chemicals and preservatives are in it? What will it feel like in my body? How far did it travel to get to me? What was the cost of the transportation? What is the wage that people receive for growing this food? As we eat, our attention goes to the taste and the pleasure we derive from food, as well as the amount of food our body requires.

Reflecting on these thoughts and experiences, we begin to realize that eating is not simply a way to relieve our hunger or calm our emotions. What and how we



“Mindful eating as a spiritual practice refers to our ability to be awake and connected to our deeply held values and to a purpose beyond our self-interest.”

choose to eat connects us to a greater whole. Every bite of food that we put into our bodies is not only making a personal statement about how we feel about ourselves, it is making a political, social, environmental, and spiritual statement. Mindful eating as a spiritual practice refers to our ability to be awake and connected to our deeply held values and to a purpose beyond our self-interest.

Attitude

It can be humbling to realize that the food that we take for granted or that we may have obsessed about so much is a precious gift. Comprehending and being grateful for the gift of our food brings in the heart qualities of mindfulness—the “attitude” that we bring to the present moment and to our act of eating.

Gratitude for our food is part of the spiritual path of mindful eating. It's not just an emotion, but it's a value that we can embrace each time that we eat. Gratitude requires our intention to be fully awake. It is a function of attention, and it is the attitude that we bring to

this sacred act of living. Eating with full presence, we are touching the sacred every time we eat. “Perhaps ‘spiritual’ means simply experiencing wholeness and interconnectedness directly,” as “everything is spiritual in the deepest sense, as long as we are there for it” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

Lynn Rossy, Ph.D. is a Health Psychologist, Executive Director of Tasting Mindfulness, LLC and Author of The Mindfulness-Based Eating Solution. Lynn can be reached at MindfulRossy@gmail.com.

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Introducing the Spiritual Aspects of Mindful Eating to Others



Jan Chozen Bays

Roshi, MD

Here is a simple exercise to help introduce an awareness of the spiritual aspects of eating—the interconnected nature of all life. Of course, you will need to do this exercise yourself a number of times before asking anyone else to try it. It is your interest, curiosity, and even enthusiasm for trying something new that will “flavor” a client’s venture into new territory.

To guide yourself and your client in this exercise, all you need are two raisins. Give one to your client and place the other in your palm.

The exercise: “Hold the raisin in your palm. Explore it with your eyes, like a piece of art, attentive to the colors, shapes, and surface textures. What do you see?”

Bring it to your nose. What do you smell?

“Now we are going to use the power of our imagination. Imagine that you can see *into* this raisin and see its history. It is like seeing videotape running backward in time, keeping track of all the people who helped to bring this raisin to you.

“For example, one person placed this raisin in your hand. You see where it came from before that, perhaps a bowl, and before that, a box. Going back further, you imagine the person who bought the raisins and the checkout clerk who sold them. That’s three people so far. Who came before that? Perhaps a clerk who unloaded the big cartons from a



“It is your interest, curiosity, and even enthusiasm for trying something new that will ‘flavor’ a client’s venture into new territory.”

delivery truck, opened them, priced the smaller boxes of raisins, and put them on the shelf in the grocery store. That’s four people.

“Keep going backward, imagining all the people who brought this raisin to you. (Pause as you do this yourself.)

Ask yourself or your client: “*How many people did you count?*” (Important: All answers are correct).

Ask: “*What if you added in the bees, earthworms, and other living beings who helped grow this raisin. How many would that be?*”

“Now imagine that you gather around you all those people—of many

ages, sizes, and colors—and all the other beings whose life energy flowed into this one raisin and brought it to your hand. You silently thank them. Then, keeping your eyes closed, show them your appreciation by slowly eating and enjoying this one raisin.” (Pause as you do this yourself.)

Ask: “*What did you notice?*” (Remember: all answers are correct.)

Jan Chozen Bays is a pediatrician, Zen teacher, and author of Mindful Eating: A Guide to Rediscovering a Joyful and Healthy Relationship with Food, published in 2009 by Shambhala. A new, revised edition will be released this November.



Mindful Eating Day

January 25, 2018

Mindful Eating is:

- An opportunity to connect with present moment awareness -- pause, check-in, notice, evaluate, rate
- Autonomy for any food, regardless of what type of food that is.
- Choice and flexibility -- before, during and after a food choice is made.
- Promoting and acknowledging that all eating experiences are unique to the individual, situation, moment.
- Self-care.
- Self-kindness.
- Non-judgment surrounding food and eating choices.

As we bring the qualities of mindfulness, such as compassion and kindness, into Mindful Eating, we do NOT pathologize, stigmatize, or shame individuals in larger bodies, nor do we pathologize, idealize, shame, or compare individuals in smaller bodies. Mindful Eating promotes size acceptance.

With Mindful Eating, we have an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the natural diversity of bodies and the conviction that they are all worthy of compassionate self-care.

**Join us in the celebration of mindful eating
- online, everywhere, January 25, 2018**

Creating a Sacred Space for Food, Mind, and Body



Caroline Baerten

MA, RD

Throughout human history, food has been perceived as sacred. The word sacred, used within the context of mindful eating, is not a religious term. Instead it refers to our spiritual connection with life and earth.

When food and eating are seen as something sacred, it is a way to express our respect and gratitude for what has been offered. All food is sacred in the sense that the life of a plant or animal has been sacrificed to feed another living being. Farmers have spent many hours of hard labor on their fields. The chef or the parent in the kitchen has made all this effort to nourish body, mind, and heart with balanced foods and the joy of eating.

If what has been given to us is no longer taken for granted, then eating becomes a spiritual practice. When we fully wake up with undivided attention, we clearly see that everything in our universe is part of this unseen and interconnected web. When we perceive the suffering that is caused by our unwholesome eating habits, then compassion naturally arises. “The wonderful thing about food is you get three votes a day,” says Michael Pollan. “And every one of them has the potential to change the world.”

Here are some suggestions to incorporate into your mindful eating practice that cultivate reverence in your relationship with food:

- Reconnect with silence, inside and outside of us. In this deep stillness, there is space and a lightness of being.



It is only when we pause mindfully that new and more wholesome ways of relating to food and ourselves become possible.

- Know the history of the ingredients on your plate by tracing them back to their origins (for example, meet and talk with farmers, winemakers, or cheese producers).
- Look into the future and see clearly how this food will be soon part of your body’s cells or other living beings, such as birds, worms, and other microorganisms.
- Be aware of the joy of giving and receiving. Feel deep appreciation for all the efforts people and all living organisms have made in order to nourish us.
- Wake up with all your senses to the natural elements, such as water, soil, sunshine, and fresh air, that are omnipresent in food, our bodies, and the environment. Take a moment of contemplation and ponder the

mystery of growth and life.

- Set a wholesome intention before eating, when compassion, joy, wisdom, trust, and mindful awareness are kindly invited.
- Consciously honor the sacrament of eating together by giving thanks for the delight of food and the presence of others.
- Practice detachment and equanimity by letting go of the “shoulds’ and “shouldn’ts.”

Isn’t it the orientation of our heart—not how much or even what we eat—that most matters?

Caroline Baerten (Belgium) is a mindfulness-based nutritionist/RD, qualified sommelière, and integrative psychotherapist. She specializes in work with disturbed eating behavior and nutrition ecology. Since 2016, she has been a certified Mindful Eating, Conscious Living teacher (ME-CL) www.menu.org.

