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FOOD *for* THOUGHT

WINTER 2020

Food Justice

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The Center for MINDFUL EATING

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 easily accessible, research-based information and opportunities to interact in community, we seek to train and encourage professionals and to educate the public about the practice of mindful eating.

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About this issue:

This issue of *Food for Thought* examines the intersection of food justice and mindful eating. Limited access to adequate food, power dynamics within food production and distribution systems, and food industry practices that harm workers and the environment all impact a mindful eating practice. Bringing mindfulness to these inequitable and damaging systems is the first step in rectifying them.

In "Mindful Eating for the Beloved Community," Alex Askew discusses the causes and health impacts of food insecurity for people of color. He describes and offers Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's vision of the Beloved Community as a healing remedy.

"Integrating Food Justice into Your Mindful Eating Practice," by Caroline Baerten extends the practice of mindful eating to embrace compassionate awareness of the origins of our food, including equity and environmental issues in its production, distribution, and relative access.

In the Educational Handout, "Self-Reflections on Food Security," Linn Thorstensson advises mindful eating clinicians to consider how their clients' experiences with food insecurity impacts their relationship with food and eating. Linn also encourages clinicians to consider their own experiences of food insecurity and how they influence their work with clients.

Caroline Baerten offers five contemplations from Thich Nhat Hanh in this issue's Dharma teaching, "Contemplations for Food Justice." These contemplations deepen our awareness of the interconnection of food systems and the environment and strengthen our compassion for all the human and nonhuman beings within them.

Food justice is an urgent, complex, and multifaceted issue. These nine pages can only begin the long conversation necessary to heal our planet and all of its inhabitants. We conclude this issue of Food for Thought with a bibliography of resources and an intention to continue our own learning. Questions and comments about this issue can be sent to info@tcme.org

TCME welcomes Jennifer Oetting, Program Director!

I am proud to join TCME as Program Director and look forward to being part of the future of the organization. I come to the position with a wide variety of experience having held leadership positions at the University of Missouri including Cardiovascular Medicine Division Administrator and Wellness Program Coordinator. I developed an interest in population health while working in healthcare but fell in love with seeing the deep and meaningful impact on individuals while working in the wellness program. I went on to run my own baking business where I focused on creative flavor profiles and working with local ingredients. I count myself fortunate to be passionate about my work whether it's in the kitchen or helping others.

I hold a Bachelor of Science in Business & Human Resources from William Woods University and am a long-time resident of Columbia, Missouri in the USA. Columbia is home and where I have raised my son who has achieved his dream of proudly serving as a United States Marine. I now enjoy spending time with my loved ones, friends, and fur children. You'll find me savoring beautiful farm-to-table meals at local restaurants or experiencing live music in the local area and beyond.

Mindful Eating for the Beloved Community

Chef Alex Askew
TCME Board Member

Health starts in our homes, schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, and communities. We know that eating well, staying active, not smoking, getting the recommended immunizations, screening tests, and seeing a doctor when we are sick are all factors that can influence our health. But our health is also determined in part by our access to social and economic opportunities: the resources and support available in our homes, neighborhoods, and communities, the quality of our education, the safety of our workplaces, the cleanliness of our water, food, and air, and the nature of our social interactions and relationships. The conditions in which we live explain in part why some Americans are healthier than others, and why Americans are not generally as healthy as they could be. By working to establish policies that positively influence social and economic conditions, we can improve the health of large numbers of people in ways that can be sustained over time. Improving the conditions in which we live, learn, work, and play will create a healthier population, society, and workforce.

Food Insecurity is a key issue in the Economic Stability domain

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) divides food insecurity into two categories:

1. **Low food security** - Reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet.
2. **Very low food security** - Reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.

Food insecurity is defined as the disruption of food intake or eating patterns because of a lack of money or other resources. In 2014, 17.4 million U.S. households experienced food insecurity at some time during the year. Food insecurity does not necessarily cause hunger, but hunger is a possible outcome. Food insecurity may be long term or temporary, and it may be influenced by a number of factors including income, employment, race, and disability. Poverty is a primary risk factor for food insecurity: in 2016, 31.6% of low-income households were food insecure, compared to the national rate of 12.3%. That same year, Black, non-Hispanic households were nearly two (2) times more likely to be food insecure than the national average

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Beloved Community

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(22.5% versus 12.3%, respectively). Among Hispanic households, the prevalence of food insecurity was 18.5%. Disabled adults are at a higher risk for food insecurity due to limited employment opportunities and increased rates of poverty, as well as a lack of transportation access to purchase affordable, healthy foods.

Residents are at risk for food insecurity in neighborhoods where transportation options are limited as the travel distance to stores is greater and there are generally fewer supermarkets. Lack of access to either public transportation or a personal vehicle further limits access to food. Groups who may lack transportation to healthy food sources include those with chronic diseases or disabilities, residents of rural areas, and some minority groups. A study in Detroit found that people living in low-income, predominantly Black neighborhoods travel an average of 1.1 miles farther to the closest supermarket than people living in low-income, predominantly White neighborhoods.

Adults who are food insecure may be at an increased risk for a variety of negative health outcomes and health disparities. For example, one study shows evidence of higher rates of chronic disease in low-income, food-insecure adults between the ages of 18 and 65. Food-insecure children may also be at an increased risk for a variety of negative health outcomes, including a higher risk of developmental problems compared with food- secure children. In addition, reduced frequency, quality, variety, and quantity of consumed foods may have a negative effect on children's mental health.

The Beloved Community: Prescription for a Healthy Society

"The Beloved Community" is a term that was first coined in the early days of the 20th Century by the philosopher-theologian Josiah Royce, founder of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., also a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, went on to popularize the term and his vision for a just and equitable world has captured the imagination of people around the world for decades.

Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. - The King Center

As described by Jeff Ritterman, MD, "Fundamental to the concept of the Beloved Community is inclusiveness, both economic and social. A world where everyone can share in the earth's bounty describes a society in which resources and assets are shared far more justly than in today's world.Economic and social justices are the twin pillars supporting the Beloved Community. These twin pillars are also necessary for a healthy society. What would be the health impacts of living in such a society?

Economic and social justices are the twin pillars supporting the Beloved Community. These twin pillars are also necessary for a healthy society. What would be the health impacts of living in such a society?

In highly unequal countries, like the United States, health outcomes and social well-being suffer among the general population. We don't live as long as our peers in more equal countries, nor do our infants or children.

We incarcerate more of our citizens, our children score worse on math and science tests, we trust one another less, and we kill one another more often. Greater inequality of income leads to a generalized societal dysfunction."

Alex Askew is a professional chef and co-founder of BCAGlobal. In 2014, Alex was selected as a 2014 National Kellogg Fellow in Leadership in the Racial, Equity and Healing (REH) cohort. He has served on the TCME board since 2019. Alex can be found on www.bcaglobal.org

Integrating Food Justice and Mindful Eating

Caroline Baerten
MS, RDN, CDN

What does Food Justice mean to health professionals and mindful eating teachers?

A just food system is one in which the production, distribution, and consumption of food is unaffected by systemic inequalities based on race, class, ability, or gender. Through the lens of mindfulness and compassion, we are able to see clearly the injustice taking place on the level of agricultural pollution and harmful food production methods. When we look even deeper, we also become aware of the structural causes for food injustice.

For health professionals and mindful eating teachers, it is critical to recognize that food injustice affects those at the bottom of the "power pyramid" the most. For centuries, the Western world has been dominated by White men who prioritized themselves above all else. Women, children, and people of color (Black and NBPOC), in both Europe and the US, have had the least privilege and the least access to a rich variety and supply of food. Reasons could range from limitations on property ownership, where they might have cultivated their own produce, to socially-engineered financial dependence on a male relative.

In his "Food for Thought" article, Chef Alex Askew draws attention to the conditions in which groups of people used to live, and are living now, which may explain in part why certain individuals in our society are less physically and mentally healthy than others. The nature of our relationships at home or in the community can be either supportive or trauma-invoking, and all of these relationships shape our daily food choices, overall health, and psychological well-being.

Food justice is social justice, as food is our most intimate connection with ourselves, our communities, and the food traditions that have been passed down through the generations. Unfortunately, many of the bonding and nurturing qualities related to cooking and eating were disrupted over the centuries. In many ways, the (cooking) fire was extinguished and replaced by a troubled relationship with foods, while the rich diversity of female bodies became ruled solely by measures of thinness and fatness.

Mindful eating helps us look deeply into the belly of the food system and explore how it creates a world where human beings, and especially women, feel disconnected from their food and alienated from the needs of their bodies. The most feared word today is "obesity," and to be fat is considered a morally repugnant failure. Unfortunately, in a perverse interference with appetite, restraint is offered as the only righteous path to redemption, by both the food and diet industry as well as subsidized health professionals.

Eating awareness starts by questioning the origins of food:

Where is this food coming from and was it produced in a sustainable way? Most kinds of foods, depending on one's individual body and blueprint, are absolutely fine if they are made with nutritious ingredients (real butter, cream, or cheese, whole-grain flour, free-range meat), instead of foods chemically-modified for a long shelf-life.

Did the people working in the field, the food production plants, and distribution companies receive equal living wages compared with their male

and/or White colleagues higher up the ladder? Food justice addresses racial and socio-economic issues because there cannot be equal access to healthy food without equal access to jobs, income, and transportation.

What kind of foods and recipes are rooted in your own cultural tradition? Unlike the one-size-fits-all dietary rules certain nutritionists and health professionals are telling us, our behaviors around food and eating not merely individual choices, but expressions of a particular social and economic context. Sharing meals and eating heartwarming comfort foods (often those high in calories!) have been part of our food history for centuries. These recipes and moments of social gathering around the table are especially important for families who migrated, as food is often the only remaining bond they have to their home country.

Food justice is woven into the fabric of mindful eating. The spiritual practice of mindfulness meditation creates the link between eco-friendly, sustainable food choices and individual wellbeing. It is not just about changing the way we eat, it is about changing the way we live and how we treat each other.

Caroline Baerten (Belgium) is a mindfulness-based nutritionist/RD, psycho-traumatherapist and qualified chef. She has served on the TCME Board since 2013 and can be reached at info@me-nu.org or www.me-nu.org

Cultivate Seeds of Self-Compassion

Start the new year with a month of mindful eating reflections and exercises

The 2020 World Mindful Eating Month theme is "Planting the Seeds of Self-compassion." World Mindful Eating Month is a free online International Event which runs January 1-31. Throughout January you will find daily reflections, suggestions, memes and ideas to help you create a mindful eating practice.

There are many ways to participate:

- **For daily updates and discussion, Join the Facebook group World Mindful Eating Month 2020 (coming soon!)**
- **Follow TCME on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram throughout the month of January.**
- **Follow #MindfulEatingMonth, #TCME, and #MindfulEating throughout the month of January.**

Become a Sponsor for TCME's Mindful Eating Resources

The Center for Mindful Eating is looking to build individual and corporate support from those interested in helping us provide high quality, researched-backed Mindful Eating resources for professional, public, and Spanish-speaking populations. Please see https://www.thecenterformindfuleating.org/Sponsorship/ for more information, or contact Ana at info@tcme.org.

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Self-Reflections on Food Security

Linn Thorstensson

NT mNTOI

In the previous articles we explored food injustice and food insecurity plays in health and wellbeing, as well as how we as Mindful Eating professionals need to have an awareness around how these food inequities may affect our clients' relationships with food and eating. We know from research such as the Minnesota Starvation Study that food restrictions have an implication on not just physical health, but mental health as well, leading to everything from a preoccupation with food to Binge Eating Disorder and everything in between.

For us as nutrition professionals, it's important to explore our client's history with food insecurity and the impact it's had on their current relationship with food and eating. I believe it is of equal importance to educate ourselves around the individual limitations on accessibility, affordability, and skills that our clients have when it comes to nourishing themselves with food. Public health promotions in which food are centred as the solution to health need to account for how social injustices affect food and nutrition and we need to advocate for systemic change in accessibility, rather than what usually seems to be the message: placing the responsibility for health solely in the hands of the individual. Not that anyone owes anyone their health in the first place.

The following questions build on the explorative questions that Caroline mentions in her article.

Five ways to explore if past or present food insecurity is playing into your own relationship with food and eating;

"As nutrition professionals, it's important to explore our client's history with food insecurity and the impact it's had on their current relationship with food and eating."

Ask yourself:

- If you have ever experienced hunger due to lack of financial means and/or access to buy food?
- What impact you think this experience had on how your present relationship with food? Some examples may be eating beyond the point of uncomfortable fullness because of fear of not getting enough, hoarding food, or eating in secret?
- Do you have access to a wide variety of foods to nourish your body? If yes, how can you best use this opportunity? If no, what are the barriers you face and are there any which could be overcome, with support if necessary?
- Do you have the adequate skills and time to cook meals at home for yourself and your family? If no, what kind of support or systems change is necessary for this to become a possibility?
- If you are not currently experiencing food insecurity yet still experience symptoms like restriction or bingeing, who can you with professional support as necessary create an environment that lessens your feelings of scarcity?

Journal on these questions, have conversations around them with people where it's safe to do so in short get curious about the role food insecurity may play in your relationship with food and eating.

Linn Thorstensson NT mNTOI, Registered Nutritional Therapist & TCME Board Member, Private Clinic in Cork, Ireland. Linn can be reached at linn@straightforwardnutrition.com

Contemplations for Food Justice

Caroline Baerten
MS, RDN, CDN

In ancient cultures and for thousands of years, indigenous people have had a traditional relationship with local foods that includes a connection to the territory, a feeling of being responsible for the ecosystems and a spiritual kinship.

For farmers, this relationship to food is even more essential when we look at the fight for land rights, self-determination and climate justice.

Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh invites us to contemplate where the food comes from and to feel gratitude for Earth's gifts.

Thich Nhat Hanh's 5 contemplations before eating:

1. May we recognize this food is a gift of the earth, the sky, numerous living beings, and much hard and loving work.

2. May we eat with mindfulness and gratitude so as to be worthy to receive this food.

3. May we recognize and transform unwholesome mental formations, especially our greed and learn to eat with moderation.

4. May we keep our compassion alive by eating in such a way that reduces the suffering of living beings, stops contributing to climate change, and heals and preserves our precious planet.

5. May we accept this food so that we may nurture our brotherhood and sisterhood, build our Sangha, and nourish our ideal of serving all living beings.

Caroline Baerten (Belgium) is a mindfulness-based nutritionist/RD, psycho-trauma therapist and qualified chef who specializes in work with disturbed eating behavior and nutrition ecology.

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