

What is **eating** her?

Compulsively eating her way to obesity, Liz carves precise slices with a razor on the inside of her forearm to relieve pressure and gain a sense of control. Martin stopped binge drinking over two years ago, but can't bring himself to eat a meal in front of others. And Mary, who is 25kg lighter than last year and counts out the number of almonds she eats each day, tells me that having lost all curves to denote a feminine body, she feels safer and sexless. These stories, and many more shared with me by clients got me thinking about food. More specifically, how we form our thoughts about food and its relationship to nourishing our bodies.

The source of our thinking about food goes back to the early philosophers. Famous philosophers in the Western tradition were definitely talking about food, but the way it was dealt with was to marginalize its importance. Food and matters of the body were considered mundane. Plato complains that neither "truth" nor "thought of any kind ever comes from the body." The body is a distraction, keeping us "busy in a thousand ways" because of its need for food.

In contrast, ancient Asian philosophers attached importance to food and advanced ideas of health based on correct eating. Confucius described food as one the three basic conditions, along with an army and trust, for founding a state. *Huangdi neijing su wen*, the book that lays out the theory of traditional Chinese medicine, established the philosophical belief that medicine and food were identical.

Fast-forward to modern society and food is one of the biggest problems of the current world. Our naïve everyday understanding of food and its relationship to the body must be replaced with a comprehension of its complexity. Food has become so overlaid with meaning, and at the same time, divorced from meaning, that we've lost touch with the

simple act of eating. The body has become an alien entity, a thing to be controlled and maintained. To fix it, there is an endless list of the next best "how-to" books on food, dieting, making love, making friends, finding happiness, and sleeping. We impose rigid practices on ourselves, pounding our flesh into submission under the guise of fit-

Sandra Kimball finds deeper meaning in food

ness or starving the body as a way to feel a sense of control, or at least to be good at something.

Liz, Martin, and Mary were at a point where they could no longer treat their bodies like countries that needed to be subdued. They knew from painful experience, that you can only push against yourself so much and that no matter how strongly you want to master your body, eventually, you come up against your own limitations. It was time for them to let go and begin a peaceful relationship with food.

Sometimes it takes an obsession for us to realize that we've lost our way. In modern society it's hard to know anymore what true satisfaction looks like or what it might feel like. For Liz, Martin, and Mary it became essential to recover the inherent joy in the everyday, not by deprivation but by celebration. They had to learn how to listen to their body's innate and mysterious inner wisdom and begin a process of learning how to feed themselves with no leftovers of guilt or shame.

For them, as for all of us, it is a global necessity that we reestablish an ethical relationship with food and put ourselves back in harmony with the natural landscape, plants and animals. A shift can occur when we realize we are not disembodied minds unfortunately connected to a physical body and we begin to take pleasure in simply being alive and reaching out from that aliveness to encounter the world. It means we care for good taste, not necessarily related to aesthetic pleasure and refinement, but to beautifully presented, healthy foods and the pleasure of sharing it with others. When we think about food in modern

society, we can envision a new philosophical appreciation for the aesthetics of nature, the protection of

natural resources, and a higher quality of life for all people. **KTO**

The people mentioned in this article are fictional. Any apparent similarity to actual people is incidental. For counselling services, contact Sandra Kimball, at 075-762-6322 or www.internationalcounselling.com.

"Never eat anything bigger than you can lift."

– Miss Piggy

LETTERS

I RECENTLY DISCOVERED that my husband, to whom I've been married for 23 years, has been having a long-term affair with another woman. He insisted on introducing me to her and claims that he doesn't love me any less and would like to continue his life with both of us. I don't like this idea, but I don't want to lose him either. What should I do?

– Confused in Kaizuka, by email

When a marriage is confronted with one of the partners having an affair, it's crucial to resolve the burden of unconscious agendas and cultural scripts that stand in the way of you seeing each other as you truly are. It means honoring your differences and respecting that each of you is of equal value and validity. The basis of love lies in one's respect for another. If the affair caused a separation that has cut too deeply between you, it can't be undone and it's time to go your separate ways. Reconciliation is possible if you agree never to go back to what was left behind and start with a new beginning. This takes a lot of work, but can lead to a stronger marriage than you had before.

Recently, I've received a number of invitations to Japanese weddings. Of course, I was interested to go once, but considering that the gift money I'm expected to pay for each one is ¥20,000 or ¥30,000, and I don't even know most of the people very well, I'm a little reticent to accept any more. What do you think would be the best way to refuse gracefully and maintain good relations?

– Out of cash in Osaka, by email

It may be difficult to understand the Japanese concept of *giri* or social obligation. It is a highly valued standard for keeping harmony in human relations and is expressed in the formalized tradition of ceremonial gift-giving. At weddings, people tend to give money as a gift and they consider carefully how much should be given. It should not be too much or too little, and should accurately reflect the interpersonal relationship involved. To "refuse gracefully" is not recommended, but one way suggested to me by a Japanese friend is to combine with someone else who has been invited and have the gift be from both of you. If you give a lesser amount and your relationship with the person is not close, you are not expected to attend the wedding. In this way, you honor the relationship, save face and the demands on your finances are lessened.

Is there something bothering you? Sandra Kimball is here to help. Send your questions or problems to: ktoedit@kto.co.jp