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GETTING OUT OF DIET-CULTURE MENTALITY

Free Yourself from Diet Culture Manipulation.
Gain Control Over Your Relationship with Food.

Cultural Trance. When it comes to food and body image, countless people are lost in a trance. The way any of us thinks about food, dieting, exercising, and our body shape is culturally ubiquitous, media-driven, and insidiously embedded in our consumer mentality.

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Reinforcing Fear Whether it's dieting or body image (or myriad other places to focus our anxiety, such as money, beauty, having enough [this or that], accomplishment, or even approval from others), notions of gain, loss, reward, deprivation, accumulation, and fear are constantly reinforced. We don't need to have a clinically diagnosable issue with food or body image to suffer from the kind of thinking this milieu creates. Many of us are profoundly preoccupied with food, body image, weight, calorie counting, exercise, food as reward, exercise as redemption, restriction of food as progress or as "good" behavior, and overindulgence in food as "bad" behavior.

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We can fear what will happen if we:

- Eat [this] or [that].
- Don't eat [this] or [that].
- Don't go on the next diet.
- Stop weighing ourselves on the scale (since it seems to determine our worth).
- Don't get to complete our entire exercise plan (or regime).
- Discover that our jeans don't fit like they should.

The Thoughts Have a Purpose Whether we experience this in mild or severe ways, the thoughts themselves serve a purpose. Understanding this purpose is key to helping us shift from this fixated thinking to the fresh thinking of recovery, from living in diet-mentality and into the journey of our 360-degree, full spectrum, full health life.

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What purpose could our culturally conditioned thinking milieu serve?

It keeps us in a trance of mind that offers us:

1. a *distraction* from other thoughts or life issues;
2. a sense of belonging to a cultural conversation;
3. an opportunity to get control over something in this otherwise uncontrollable, tender human life;
4. the illusion of keeping ourselves under control, and;
5. a sense of *familiarity* wherein, like the veritable mouse, even though we are often confounded, the walls of the maze are familiar. Some of us are hopeful for a way out of the maze even while we hit our noses up against the walls of the maze's making.



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Distraction & Diet Culture Mentality

tells you what to think about food, calories, nutrition, appetites, portions, when to eat, when not to eat, what to eat, what not to eat, how to eat, how not to eat. It can be crazy-making because there is ALWAYS a new diet coming around.



Yet the underlying message is the same:

You are not okay as you are and WE, the magic diet-creating system, can save you. We've got this all figured out for you. And, truly, we are only here to help you with the goals you also have for yourself, namely, fitting into [your jeans, your bathing suit, the life you're seeing advertised by us right now].

Have you considered what this says about your ability to think for yourself?

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Belonging & Diet Culture Mentality tells you that once you do get to that magical number on the scale, or into those jeans or that [holiday dress, bride's maid's dress, bathing suit], or finally have control over your appetites and cravings, you will BELONG!! You will have made it to the ever-lasting land of acceptance, approval and belonging. You'll be IN with the other successful people. You won't feel like an outsider wondering how other people "stay thin" while eating [this or that] or "control their portions" at food-centered events.

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Diet Culture Mentality gives you another way to BELONG:



You are immersed in the conversation about all the diets and food. Which diet you're on. Which foods you are eating. What you are not eating. What others are eating or not eating.

You can research diets and sign up for programs that countless others participate in, such as Weight Watchers or other "lifestyle" diets.

While some of us don't explicitly talk about which diet we may be doing, consider another way that these conversations do sneak in (in phone calls with a friend or family member, at social gatherings, for example).

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Overheard at baby showers, luncheons, or book clubs:

- “I wish I could stay thin like you!”
- “Oh, this food is so delicious. I wish I could eat more!”
- “I’d love to have more, but I am watching what I eat.”

“I’m being good
today.”

(And, therefore,
not eating cake.)



- “No, thanks. I am going to a wedding and I want to fit into my special dress.”
- “No thank you, I want to keep fitting into my [tennis outfit].”

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Have you considered what this says about how women are told we can create connections or how we get to belong?

Control & Diet Culture Mentality tells you HOW you can FINALLY get control over your appetite, cravings, body-composition, in short, YOUR LIFE. Diet Culture also tells you that once you have this control, your life will be magically changed, forever. You are going to be able to End the Struggles, Win the Battle, Overcome, Prevail, Show Food Who's the Boss.

Have you considered what this says about women's appetites?

Familiarity & Diet Culture Mentality is another key consideration. How familiar something is to us depends on how deeply it becomes a part of us. How does something become a part of us? By the role modeling and conversations around us. By repetition (each time we repeat a pattern - or a thought - it becomes more familiar AND more likely to BE our pattern).

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There is another side to this consideration: we also want to feel “familiar” to other people. In other words, we don’t want them to experience us as too strange, too divergent, too different, or too unfamiliar (to themselves). If other people were to find us a bit too strange or different or unfamiliar it may risk our sense of belonging.

So there are ways in which we participate in certain conversations or modes of being or lifestyle choices based on underlying (and sometimes unacknowledged) needs for belonging and familiarity.

Consider this: When “everyone else” at the party is talking about how fattening [this or that food] is, what might happen if you were to express a thought that counters this diet-culture conversation? It’s a bit like talking politics... it can divide people.



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Countless women with whom I have had the honor of working in Hunger, Hope & Healing have come upon a developmental stage in their recovery where they can no longer participate in those kinds of conversations in ways that they once did.

They no longer live through the lens of diet-culture mentality. Nor do they live with body (or appetite) control mentality.

Nor with shame and self-loathing.

When they find themselves in settings where such conversations may happen, they have choices about how to respond (both verbal and non-verbal).

These women experience themselves as grounded, empowered, and free. Their moods, relationships, and vitality are under their “control”, they “belong” to themselves.

Have you considered what that might feel like in your own life?

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Living an Awakened and Vital life

A 360-degree life, requires the precious and challenging process of extricating ourselves from the diet-culture trance, from the maze itself, to lift ourselves into the wider horizons of well-being, freedom, clear thinking, and greater connection to our intuition and deep knowing.

To lift ourselves out of this trance requires us to acknowledge the “benefits “ that trance-like thinking has offered us. Part of our human nature longs for distraction, belonging, control, and familiarity, the rewards of the cultural trance.

Since there are genuine needs being met by the trance, acknowledging this is fundamental to how we address these needs. The practice of Getting in the GAP offers relief.



GETTING OUT OF DIET CULTURE MENTALITY

Get In Your GAP Is a practice based on yoga's tools for focusing the senses (pratyahara), developing mental concentration (dharana), and practicing meditative awareness (dhyana).

Grounding:

using our senses to get grounded in the present moment

Attention:

wielding attention to cultivate concentration

Presence:

becoming present through mindful awareness

Getting in the GAP lifts us out of the maze of ruminative or compulsive thinking, distraction, daydreaming, and dullness. Grounding, attention, and presence lift us into the space that exists between and beyond thoughts.



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Distraction

Getting in the GAP brings us to the present moment where we can experience relief from our brain trance. We are able to redirect our mind from its usual compulsive habits. Most of us are caught in the multitudes of distractions that pull on us constantly. We are not being in the present moment. We are dashing about doing the myriad things, whether mental or physical or both.

Diet-mentality, diet-thinking, and diet-culture can have an appeal to the part of us that wants out of the constant swirl of mental noise - because it appears to tell us what to think, what to feel, and what to do about it.

However, what if getting into the present moment distracted us away from that insane swirl - AND - we didn't need to be lured into diet-thinking to do it?



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Belonging

In *Getting in the GAP*, we return to our deepest presence, where we experience a felt sense of belonging. The present moment will always reveal to us that we are already here; that we already belong; that life is already breathing us.

Since we do deeply crave a sense of fundamental belonging, and since it is a kind of elusive and conditional thing in diet and body image culture, if we shift our focus, using *Getting in the GAP*, and we discover that we already belong, we can end the frenzy of trying to belong.

Then, we can act with wisdom in relationship to our body, appetite, movement, rest, and nutrition too.



Control

In *Getting in the GAP*, we experience refuge from cyclical, disordered thinking, and a greater sense of control over where we put our attention. In diet-culture, we're told how to think.

(Please note: we might not realize this if it's been deeply conditioned into us "forever". It will appear to be completely normal thinking. However, if we ask ourselves, "*Does the scale really determine the worth of human beings everywhere?*" We might find ourselves pulling away from the shore of diet-culture and body-negativity into a different kind of inquiry.)

Getting in the GAP helps us to have some mental leadership over where we put our attention, in how we see ourselves and others, and in what we come to understand from our inner wisdom - not from outer conditioning.

We call this leadership - because we also come to realize that having control over our minds and bodies is impossible. But, having some wise leadership IS possible.

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Familiarity

In *Getting in the GAP*, we cultivate a sense of familiarity with our natural presence, our native openness, where we experience clarity, freshness, love, and freedom.

Mindfulness is such a household word these days and we know people from all walks of life are benefiting from how it slows down their minds, increases self-esteem, and elicits states of relaxation that are more than cognitive. It's neurological, biochemical, visceral, emotional, physical, and yes, even spiritual.



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Get In Your GAP:

Get Grounded, Pay Attention, Become Present

Get Grounded:

Choose an object on which to rest (and re-direct) your mind. Get grounded on an actual experience in the present moment (not the narrative you are telling yourself about the present moment, nor the story you have running in your head about yourself as a person or a yoga teacher). This might be the feeling of your feet on the ground, or the sensations of your hand holding your phone as you read this blog, or the temperature of the air coming and going through your nostrils as your body breathes you. Choosing is the first step to getting grounded in the here and now.

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Pay Attention:

Dharana is the sixth limb of yoga and refers to the art of developing and sustaining concentration. If your mind is like the average wandering mind of modern (and ancient) people, you'll need to wield your attention. You'll need to intermittently, yet kindly and consistently bring your attention back to the object you chose in step 1. This is a

Become Present:

By repeating steps 1 and 2, you will cultivate mindful presence. Your brain will actually undergo both neurological and biochemical shifts toward your Inner Presence, also called your ventral vagal parasympathetic nervous system "hum". Practicing this on a daily basis, many times a day, will provide you with relief, open you to your inner wisdom, and deepen your relationship to your body's appetites and needs for movement, rest, play and nurturance.

If you would like an audio mindfulness recording, please let us know: Sarahjoy@hungerhopeandhealing.com

HUNGER, HOPE & HEALING FOUNDER & DIRECTOR



Sarahjoy Marsh

Transformation Catalyst

Sarahjoy Marsh, MA, E-RYT-500 yoga teacher, therapist and author, is a vibrant, compassionate catalyst for transformation to those that suffer from addictions – in particular disordered eating patterns/emotional eating.

The combination of her knowledge of powerful yoga and mindfulness tools, her ability to identify when a conditioned mind crowds out clear thinking and to inspire the courage to bring insight into action, her perspective on the terrain of the stages of recovery and the tools to use along the way to recovery make her methodology (outlined in her book *Hunger, Hope & Healing*) a comprehensive and effective healing modality

Her 28 + year training and facilitation background includes transpersonal counseling, art therapy, and community mental health, the psychology of yoga, Ayurveda, and rehabilitative yoga