**What Are You Bringing to the Table?**

***By Andrea Lieberstein***

Do you often sit down to the table, enjoy a delicious meal, eat enough to feel comfortably satisfied and have a mind present and quiet of judgments? Perhaps not enough!  Many times, we may bring much more than physical hunger to a meal with a mind full of stories that distracts our ability to fully enjoy or a heart and body experiencing challenging emotions. A foundation of the mindfulness and mindful eating work that I teach helps you develop a kind, non-judging and discerning awareness of ‘what we are bringing to the table’ and make beneficial choices according to what we truly need with a plethora of skills and tools. This proverbial table extends to the many moments of our lives where we are often faced with a litany of food choices and an accompanying inner dialogue, even anguish – about whether to eat or not to eat; how much to eat; what to eat; shouldn’t have that; and so forth. A common ‘go to’ in our culture is to evaluate our choices against the latest diet fad without listening to what we truly want or need or conversely to eat something mindlessly just because it’s there.

These tendencies that are born of habit, cultural forces, consumerism and internalized messages complicate our relationship to food. On top of that, many of us have learned to reach for food to soothe, when the going gets tough, from the first whisper of challenging emotions such as boredom, frustration or anger, to stress or procrastination. Anyone who has done this knows that the comfort or pleasure from food lasts a very short amount of time before the guilt or judgment sets in. Discomfort may also arise from eating too much or indigestion from our food choices.

**Mindful awareness allows us to see what we’re bringing to the table and tune into what we truly need and want. We practice awareness of physical hunger, fullness, and the pleasure of the taste of the food, to eat in a way that honors and respects our bodies. We can use nutritional knowledge and inner wisdom to guide our choices as it makes sense for our own bodies in that moment. We can let go of and/or challenge thoughts and beliefs that don’t serve us and choose the ones that do. We tune into the experience of eating with all our senses so that it can really nourish us. Specific training, mindful eating practices, support and guidance offers the precision and tools to develop this practice and cultivate a new way of being for a lifetime.**

Practicing a mindful check-in before eating helps begin this process.

***Your Mindful Check In*** may include:

* Take a few deep relaxing breaths. Ask yourself:
* Am I physically hungry?
* Do I have emotions present such as boredom, frustration, anger, sadness?
* What thoughts and beliefs are present?
* How do I feel in my body? I am relaxed, tense, stressed?
* How might what I am aware impact my eating choices? Am I truly hungry? Would I eat out of emotions or stress? Am I both hungry and stressed?! Can I meet my emotions or craving with kindness and compassion?
* Notice how the greater awareness can bring more calmness and perspective, and the space to make a truly nourishing choice.

Many people say I know what “I should do, but I don’t”. I always ask my clients to remember their intention for doing this type of work. Developing a clear intention connected to your intrinsic values, what is really important to you, not someone else’s “should”, can be a clear motivator and touchstone to come back to, to make choices that align with your highest caring intention for yourself and that honor your individual preferences, health needs, genetics, joys and pleasure.

In my book ‘Well Nourished’, you learn skills to eat and live mindfully, nourish from the inside out, free up the energy of struggle wrapped up in food and tune into what you truly need beyond food. You can fill your bowl up with what is really nourishing to you in all realms to lead your fulfilling, purposeful and well nourished life!

Our Mindful Eating (MB-EAT) Professional Training and Well Nourished Coaching programs along with our pre-recorded programs and customized individual coaching programs offer a plethora of support and resources to take the next steps in your life personally and professionally.

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