

Zaharina Savova

LOOK AT

the empty plate



Psychology of Eating



Get the moment.

Honour every moment of life.

*Because the highest and most glorious achievement
of a man is the ability to live.*

Prof. Tsekomir Vodenicharov, DMSc

Look forward for the english edition soon.

Foreword

The food we cannot do without. Inevitably present in our lives – visible and invisible. Often loved, sometimes hated.

This book goes beyond talking about proper or wrong, useful or harmful eating and it does not offer diets.

Look at the empty plate...

Why is it empty? Is it because we are afraid to fill it up, or is it because all in it has been absorbed to the very last crumb, in order not to remind of itself ... or of something else?

Food as a mirror of our lives...

What do we allow ourselves, and what we don't? What do we want, and what do we take instead?

Is it about the empty plate or about the emptiness inside us, because whatever is put into the plate does not bring pleasure, but we attempt to warm our souls in vain?

Who and how does he or she fill up our plate?

There is a lot of symbolism in food and eating. Food is not only vitally necessary, it is also a relation to oneself, to the other, to the world. In the book we talk about our first contacts with food that leave deep traces – how important are the first memories and what their influence is later in our lives, how do they form our attitudes and culture of eating.

Our way of eating, our attitude to food, and the choices we make show how we feel, what's happening to us right now, what we want, what we miss. If we succeed to look at the empty plate, we can understand a lot. This book prompts

us to think about how we take care of ourselves, how well we know ourselves, what we want from life, do we suppress something, how we communicate with ourselves and with our loved ones. It will lead us to many other simple but important revelations.

I decided to talk about eating disorders in a comprehensible way – what causes them, what are their manifestations, what are their consequences. I consciously avoid scientific language and academic stylistics. And I consciously do not say certain things, I do not go into details to avoid misunderstanding.

Look at the Empty Plate reveals a lot about the symbolism of food and paves the way for an understanding of the psychology of eating. A new perusal, a new awareness of our relationship with food will help us to give more space in our lives for love, happiness and satisfaction.

Why “Psychology of Eating?”

Food gives us life and energy. We cannot without it as we cannot without air, without water, without sleep, and probably without love... And it's something so normal and natural! But not for all. What happens that food which brings so many emotions and is a topic of countless conversations, instead of giving energy for life, becomes a source of serious problems and leads to disturbed health for some people?

In fact, there have always been eating disorders, but in recent decades they have become an epidemic, even one might say – one of the signs of modernity. More and more children and adolescents are overweight and at the other pole are the strictly healthy eaters.

About food and eating is written, commented, and argued more than ever. Today we are talking about the fact that it is increasingly replacing some important relationships in the lives of many people. Unconsciously it becomes a difficult relationship, replacing the emotional needs of many.

This book aims to make you think about your relationship with food and how your inner self feels. How does eating from something vital and so natural become a problem, a disease? How does food begin to perform other functions in our lives and becomes a ground for love and hatred, an emotional vent, a means of manipulation, self-proclamation, and whatever else? How have we lost our relationship with ourselves and our ability to understand what our body, our soul, our hearts want?

In the book you will find many practices, exercises,

experiments, techniques – small steps towards change, and they will provoke hidden answers and wishes in us. These exercises and techniques can improve our quality of life, our self-esteem; they can make us more energetic and healthy.

You will find true and shattering confessions of people who have gone through the difficult and long way of treating various eating disorders that will make us contemplate and, why not, become more aware of some choices and behaviours.

Every day a lot of people wage their tough and long-running war on food, and this is so because food has gradually turned into an enemy, hated and loved at the same time. The vast majority of them are women. From the morning, with the first thought, they begin their series of battles – and it goes like that day after day. When angry, they say “I’m fat! I am terrible! I am ugly!” When they want to punish themselves for some failure, they resort to food. Sometimes they try to silence their grief with chocolate. One piece of chocolate becomes a whole bar, and sometimes even two. The grief does not disappear, but the shame appears because they have gone too far with the chocolate. And this goes on over and over again. They repeat “I am repulsive!” so many times that their self-esteem deteriorates. Stepping on the weighing machine, these women do not see figures but a verdict. A verdict of whether they are beautiful or, worse, worth as people. This is cruel! It is cruel a person to punish oneself like that every day. It is cruel a person to insult oneself in such a manner. It is cruel to live in this hell.

Food accompanies us from birth to our last days. Eating is not like breathing – we know that if it stops, one does not last for more than a few minutes. Eating, on the other hand, is a relation that goes through our lives and which depends entirely on us. Food, to a great extent, shows in a metaphorical way our relations with life. We can understand a lot about people from the way they eat. Often a certain life situation provokes a change in eating behaviour. It is not a prerequisite

for someone to be with an eating disorder in order to use food as an unconscious way of expressing worries and fears. Everyone at some point may have disturbed, unbalanced eating. But it is short-term, episodic and does not make him or her dependent on food and therefore it does not cause serious health problems.

Everything changes in life. We change ourselves; our tastes and attitudes change; the way we perceive ourselves also changes. People go through different periods – when they are loved or upset, successful or depressed – and these emotional states often affect how they eat.

Over the decades, many social and economic changes have taken place. Our way of life is now different. The roles of the man and the woman have changed. Moral values and aesthetic criteria for beauty have changed also. All of this has led to endless challenges. There are contradictory demands that present themselves in front of the modern woman and they cause not only tension and stress. In order to be successful in modern society, a woman has to comply with a lot of conditions and to meet the “requirements” that are expected from her, albeit unwritten ones. One of them concerns her appearance.

Nowadays, unfortunately, the all-around standard for a beautiful body means a weak body. How to look good, i.e. weak, and to eat at the same time, without this becoming a problem and everyday stress? This issue is a serious challenge because not all are born to be as weak as many of the popular figures who we accept as beauty standards. On television, cinema and magazines, we see their beautiful bodies, and the comparison with the mirror image of our own bodies often disappoints. In recent years, there has also been a tendency to introduce models of abundant forms, but where does remain the place for women who are neither weak nor full, but have these eternal “3 kilograms” in excess? For women

who have hips and waistlines? Or for those with a belly that has not been ironed? Or for the others who cannot restrain their favourite food or simply cannot starve...

For sure never before has the woman not been on the line of such contradictory demands that make her more vulnerable in her identity. The cult of aesthetic value has become a definition: “Whoever is beautiful, he is good!” And to be beautiful means also to be weak. Thus, the outer beauty gradually has become tacitly a measure of the spiritual value of the person. The weak body has become a value for success, and the existence of a prejudice to the appearance of people is a factor even when recruiting them. Over time, the body appearance has gained the power to control, to influence choices, preferences, and so on. The imposed idea of appearance as a value system also defines a behaviour in communication and relationships in which the body serves as means and as a weapon. For many people to be weak has become the necessary quality to feel accepted. Girls grow up with this conviction because they see it and hear it everywhere. Having bodies according to the aesthetic canons is a necessity for successful social connections. When, for one reason or another, such a body cannot be reached, many people carry a heavy struggle within themselves. This is often not noticed by the others, but it can be caught in phrases such as “I will die fat and hungry!”, “I am just so!”, “I cannot stand myself sometimes!”

The role of the woman as a mother, wife, and professional has also changed significantly over the last decades. Already every generation is very different from the previous one – we are much more different from our mothers and grandmothers than they were different from theirs. And how much more differently (will) our children live? The change in the relationship, responsibilities, tasks, opportunities and role of the woman in the family is enormous. Nothing is the same – neither the way of bringing up children, nor the parent-child

relationships, including ours with our parents. The changes also affect food in terms of variety, way of preparing, eating places, and so on. In the 1980s and early 1990s there was a lack of rich choice of food, and now the food is diverse and the market offers countless opportunities. But apart from the exotic products that are available everywhere, often we reach for unhealthy food simply because it is very tasty and looks enticing to the eye.

Here's how we can fall into the abyss of unhealthy relationships with food imperceptibly. There is hardly a period in human history when people have not had problems with food. Perhaps except for the short stay of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, where again the food – in the form of the famous apple – sends them to our world. With the onset of new times, however, there is more and more incidence of extremes such as hyperphagia, orthorexia, pregorexia, anorexia and bulimia, and more and more people are “resolving” their emotional problems through food.

There are many theories about the causes of eating disorders in humans. And there are different effective therapeutic methods and good practices, some of which I know, accept and use. In this book I present my experience as a researcher and psychotherapist for the prevention and treatment of eating disorders. The therapeutic method I apply is based on the Neoreichian analytical psychotherapy created by the Swiss psychologist and psychotherapist Prof. Valdo Bernasconi. In short, I can explain the method as treating the soul through the body. In its core is the idea of the unity of soul and body. Modern man does not seem to attach the necessary importance to the relationship and interdependence between emotions, body, psyche, health. We assume that psychic experiences have their own record, their registration at different places in the body and this is manifested with one or another symptoms. In this sense, for us, the body, clear and without censorship, expresses many

of our emotional problems and traumas. By learning to understand the language of the body, we can reach the real causes that provoke the symptom or the disease.

This book is for all who know that sometimes they misuse food, and for those who know they have passed their limits. And it is not just for women but for men as well.

I want to say that food is not an enemy, and I would never advise treating it with devaluation or contempt. Enjoy every bite, cook for the family and for yourself, and love it. A popular phrase states that “we must not live to eat but we have to eat in order to live.” I will not agree with it completely, however, because taking food mechanically, with no pleasure, and just as a number of calories and annoying necessity, is like having sex only for childbirth. Inherent for the human nature is the desire for pleasure, the pursuit of happiness. It is achieved when we have a conscious relationship with ourselves. Life in “I must!” is painful. The fine balance is set in each and every one of us, and that is why understanding the lack of restraint or explaining the excesses are the goals of this book. It is aimed at understanding the personal relationship with food in order each of us to be able to find the most natural eating pattern for him or her.

Content

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Why “Psychology of Eating?”

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- How relatives and the therapist to talk with the patient to motivate him or her?
- Model of eating disorders
- Therapy of eating disorders

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Afterword

Acknowledgments

Bibliography

About the author

About the author

Professor Zaharina Savova, DM, is a lecturer at the Faculty of Public Health at the Medical University – Sofia. For more than 27 years, her research and applied practice has been in the field of public health, social medicine and health management.



She is a leading specialist and researcher in the prevention and treatment of eating disorders. The topic of her doctoral dissertation is Socio-medical Problems and Approaches for the Prevention of Anorexia and Bulimia. He is the author of the monograph Anorexia and Bulimia – Diseases of the Present Day. Prof. Savova develops a model of risk factors for these diseases, a guideline with common rules and criteria for the prevention of eating disorders. She has a number of publications in Bulgarian and international editions, as well as participations in radio and television shows.

Professor Savova is a member of the Council of Medical Science of the Medical University – Sofia. She is an individual member of the European Association for Body Psychotherapy (EABP), and the Bulgarian Association of Psychotherapy (BAP). She is also a teacher and supervisor at the Bulgarian Institute of Neoreichian Analytical Psychotherapy.

More information about the author, the trainings she makes and her publications you can find on her website at:

www.z-savova.com