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## FEAD Yourself a Different Way

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### Abstract

When I rolled out my first series of Mindful Eating classes in 2006, I had no idea how deeply the class participants would be getting into the roots of their maladaptive eating patterns. We were soon opening up hidden reservoirs of pain and suffering - many of which had their origins in the antiquity of their lives – sometimes even for generations. I realized that the acronym from my book, *The Heart of Healing*, “FEAD” worked well as an appropriate underpinning for this class, too. By Facing, Embracing, Allowing Space and invoking Divine Grace, class participants begin to find a different way to deal with the empty spaces left in the wake of attacks from these difficult voices inside. The continual stream of emails from former class participants expressing gratitude is an ongoing testimonial for the effectiveness of this new “non-diet” approach.

**Key Words:** Mindful Eating, Mindful, Healing, Embrace, Space, Divine Grace, Maladaptive eating, Eating, Eating Patterns

“Stapling the stomach just can’t be the only alternative to diets and medication!” I exclaimed. Obesity had just surpassed smoking as the number one reason for preventable illness (Strum, 2002). I was on a committee to look at alternatives to the problem, and felt strongly that finding alternatives to drastic measures was important. We already knew that most diets fail long-term, mostly because it is too hard to stick to them (Shai, 2008; University of Iowa, 1998). I knew there had to be a better way.

When I rolled out my first series of Mindful Eating classes in 2006, I had no idea how deeply the class participants would be getting into the roots of their maladaptive eating patterns. In the beginning of each class series, I pose the question; “Why do you eat?” The reasons are myriad – and seldom is it true hunger that stimulates the eating response. Emotional eating stands out as one of the major reasons for reaching for food. Anxiety, stress, worry, fear, anger – all can have sensations that mimic hunger. Furthermore, as sensations go, they all rank as uncomfortable. Smothering them with food has become the coping method of choice for many.

We were soon opening up hidden reservoirs of pain and suffering - many of which had their origins in the antiquity of their lives – sometimes even for generations. As we delved ever deeper into the roots of maladaptive behavior associated with eating, we found ourselves wrestling with the demons of the past that continue to haunt the psyche with their messages of inadequacy, failure, and so on. I realized that the acronym from my book, *The Heart of Healing*, “FEAD” worked well as an appropriate

underpinning for this class, too. By Facing, Embracing, Allowing Space and invoking Divine Grace, class participants began to find a different way to deal with the empty spaces left in the wake of attacks from these difficult voices inside.

Class participants learned to FEAD themselves differently. Here's what I mean:

1. Face it:

Whatever is troubling you; wherever you feel the tension, anxiety or pain inside – pause right there and see if you can get a deeper, fuller sense of this place in you. Relax all around it and let it be. Face it squarely, with full permission to be there just as it is. Approach this place of discomfort with a sincere curiosity. There is something awry here, in this which is you, and you want to know at a deeper level what that is.

Amazingly, as we do this, safety grows around parts of us that have historically felt rejected, shut off and abandoned. Simply because we approach this area of ourselves and lives with interest, the pain often begins to abate.

2. Embrace it:

Go one step further. Approach this place of pain and offer it loving acceptance. Let it be there with the full understanding that pain requires kindness, not rejection. Treat it as if it were a hurting child. In many ways, it is.

The healing begins here. As that which has been rejected feels itself being pulled back into the fold of the living with your warm embrace, it instantly begins to relax in a way that is uniquely healing and nurturing.

3. Allow Space for it:

As you continue to breath deeply, embracing that which is hurting, begin to loosen your grip somewhat. Give it permission to be there and simply allow space for it. Not the space of abandonment in which you turn your back on this part of you which is suffering – but a warm fully loving and safe space. Compassionate space. Within you, develop the capacity to love each part so much that there is room to breathe, be and evolve.

This means dropping the self-criticisms and judgments that have been aggravating the problem all this time. It means allowing room for change where in the past you may have begun a cycle of self-punishment. Explore this: just focus all your attention on breathing into a compassionate space around the area of pain. And watch with gentle curiosity.

4. Invoke Divine Grace:

A last important step in this process is to invite an awareness that surpasses what you have known to be possible to this point into the picture. We want to change old repeating patterns that have caused you and others harm. Sometimes this means not only allowing space, but inviting new ideas to enter into that space. Whatever your belief system, invoke that which is beyond what you currently know to be possible. This expands the space into dimensions of possibility that your conscious mind has not yet realized, and is the basis for deep and lasting change of what has heretofore been a stuck place in your life.

## Participants' reports

*I participated in both sessions of Dr Mary Ann Wallace's Mindful Eating class. The first session was a large group with Dr Wallace presenting the concepts and leading us in guided meditation.*

*The second session was a much smaller group with intensive guided meditation followed by journaling, discussion and one on one coaching. Both sessions resonated with me as I have used food to sooth and numb myself for nearly 50 years. Despite knowing that I was using food for emotional reasons, this is the first class that gave practical, non-diet guidance and insight to help me face my demons; love and embrace myself for who I am; use meditation and journaling to allow the space for understanding and acceptance; and allow my spiritual self to guide me through this life process. Losing weight is the byproduct, not the focus. Dr Wallace is teaching life skills not diet skills.*

- Cyndie Shaner

*The flyer advertising the Mindful Eating class caught my attention. Could it be possible to change my relationship with food and make healthier choices – while considering what this sensation of “hunger” was attempting to feed? I registered for Dr. Mary Ann Wallace’s class and joined a kindred circle of experienced dieters. Early on, we shared our struggles with healthy weight management, despite our knowledge of the basic food groups, nutrition, portion control, and a multitude of different strategies.*

*Through guided meditation followed by journaling we were encouraged to observe and listen to our own stories and messages about how we had learned to nurture ourselves. Dr. Wallace created a safe place to simply consider ways other than food that might feed the sensation we called “hunger.” The momentum of familiar eating habits and patterns hardly allowed for a pause between “hungry” and an open refrigerator. It was in this small space that awareness - mindfulness - was encouraged.*

*Since participating in the Mindful Eating class series, I have remembered to recognize the “hunger” sensations as they arrive – and sometimes pause to greet them and even ask them to stay for awhile. From class exercises, I have a list of familiar eating triggers as well as a list of “things to do besides eat.” There are many ways to nurture with kindness. Years of learned behaviors don’t magically undo unhealthy eating habits, but moments connect with other moments and open possibilities for healthier choices. With patience and daily awareness, I am learning to change my relationship with food.*

- Class Participant

*Dr. Wallace consistently brought our attention back to the idea of being kind, gentle and understanding with ourselves because part of the eating addiction results in self-hatred, self-criticism, and a feeling of failure. Her gentle yet direct, firm approach provided us with a role model as to how to relate to ourselves. When the inner critic was silenced, it was much easier to deal with the facts, feelings and emotions. She impressed upon us the importance and need to be self-supporting, self-nurturing and our own best friend and ally. Dr. Wallace taught us to focus on and decipher the difference between fatigue, a need for love or attention, repressed anger or any other emotion we were feeling as opposed to actual, true physical hunger.*

*She encouraged us to meditate and taught relaxation exercises. Also, when an individual in class had a problem or issue, she stopped and focused on that person, helping them to get relaxed and quiet, to go inside, to get to the core of the issue and find a different approach to solve the problem or address the issue. This was helpful to all of us because basically we all had the same underlying problems and concerns about our weight.*

*These were wonderfully helpful, supportive classes and I surely will be attending more in the future. Dr. Wallace has so much to offer and has a teaching style that provides safety, instruction, education, support and lots of laughter and fun in the process. I also read her most recent book entitled, “Mindful Eating” which was also extremely helpful to me.*

- Joy Hanna

## **In Summary**

Often, the last thing in the world we want when we are in pain is to feel more of the pain! We do everything in our power to escape, cover it up, or otherwise remove this nasty element from our lives. Eating, for many, provides temporary anesthesia from feeling what hurts. How do we remember all that we've learned about equanimity when we are in the midst of tension, fear or anger? All that stuff about "letting go", "surrendering," and releasing? What I'm offering you is an entirely different way to go about resolving these longstanding patterns of inner discomfort. By FEADing it differently, you provide 1) safety, 2) nurturance, 3) room to evolve into 4) a whole new way of being. The continual stream of emails from former class participants expressing gratitude is an ongoing testimonial for the effectiveness of this new "non-diet" approach.

The next time you're in a tight spot – feeling the constriction inside – I invite you to explore this approach. Face. Embrace. Allow Space. Accept Divine Grace. FEAD it differently.

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**Mary Ann Wallace, M.D.** is a physician whose primary focus is mind-body and spiritual healing. For 9 years, Dr. Wallace served as the Medical Director for the integrative medicine program she developed within a large regional hospital system. A pioneer in the field of mind-body medicine, she has extensive training and experience with a variety of holistic healing modalities. Dr. Wallace takes a spiritual approach to classic challenges such as conflict resolution and relationship development.

Dr. Wallace is author of *Mindful Eating: Mindful Life*, available at any bookstore by request, Amazon.com, or [www.maryannwallace.com](http://www.maryannwallace.com).

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