

OLIVIA WOLLINGER

FAREWELL TO BINGE EATING



AN AUTOBIOGRAPHIC
COMPANION FOR THE
JOURNEY FROM
FOOD ADDICTION
TO JOYFUL EATING
WITHOUT GUILT OR SHAME

A warm welcome ♡!

About this book:

“Is it possible to overcome eating binges?” – “Yes, it is, and I’ve experienced it myself.”

In her autobiographic account, Olivia Wollinger describes the steps she took in order to achieve addiction-free eating behaviors. She generously grants the reader insights into her wealth of experience, sharing successes and failures alike. With great sensitivity, she offers useful information and practical suggestions in order to help others affected by binge eating addiction to find their own way to their “feel-well” weight.

About the author:

Olivia Wollinger, MA, suffered for many years from binge eating disorder. When she realized what was happening to her, she embarked on a life-changing journey towards self-understanding and healing. In her practice in Vienna, Austria, she supports nowadays others who are in the process of overcoming food addiction. For more information, please visit:

www.farewelltobingeating.com

Olivia Wollinger

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An Autobiographic Companion
for the Journey
from Food Addiction
to Joyful Eating
Without Guilt or Shame

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aivilo – Embracing the Body

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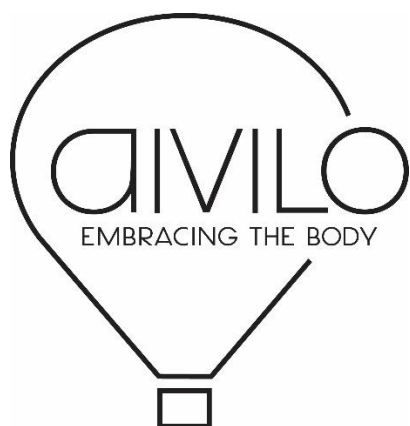
Thank you

“The Soul was weeping bitterly
– it felt so sad.
But, as its voice was small and timid, they didn’t hear it cry.

Then said the Body:
Wait, I shall help you.
Let me create a symptom
that’ll make our Human stop and settle down.

Maybe, your voice and needs
will then be listened to.”

(Unknown origin)



Your life's journey of discovery

Diary Entry Tuesday, July 4, 1995

"I'm still having this eating problem. At the moment I'm stuffing myself with a peanut butter sandwich, although I'm not really hungry at all. If I exercise daily for two weeks and eat only a little, I'll get to where I want to be (weight-wise), but I don't have any willpower whatsoever. I'm fed up. Every day I say "tomorrow" while I'm stuffing my face.

But, – I'm going to try again; tomorrow.

My plan: Four kiwis for breakfast, two bananas plus an apple for lunch, fitness center, half a package of baby carrots, three fourths of a cucumber, half of my stash of tomatoes. Thursday: Three fruits in the morning, three fruits for lunch, fitness center (except when I go to the city), remaining baby carrots, remaining tomatoes. Friday: Three fruits in the morning, three fruits for lunch, fitness center, red beet. Saturday: Visit H. (on bike), one fruit before leaving. H. certainly will have a lot of cookies again. If I survive that, I'm great. No cookies, but as many fruits as I want. No Diet Cola, no coffee – I've had too much of both lately, and my stomach is already rebelling.

If I get through these four days (I just wolfed down a piece of chocolate without enjoying it) I'll feel great. But, I'm afraid I don't have enough strength. If I don't make it, it'll be my own fault and I'm not allowed to complain. No sympathy. What good does chocolate do if I don't enjoy it but rather just wolf it down? Quitting coffee and cola will be hard. But, damn it – it must be possible to do it for four days? Then I'll at least be rid of my ugly double chin. Get a grip on yourself. How will I ever be successful if I don't have any self-control and am unable to muster any self-discipline?"

Diary Entry July 16, 1995

"It was not possible to last these four days. I just managed two of them. Every Monday I think the same thing: "A new week, a

new chance”, and at the end of the week I watch myself again indulging in cookies, peanut butter sandwiches or similar stuff.

I have no willpower. Before indulging in a veritable “calorie bomb” or having second or third helpings, I fight my super-ego for maximally half a second before caving in. I’m not even thinking any longer, I just eat and eat until I’m stuffed and can eat no more – and that takes a lot and a lot of food.

If I carry on like this, I’ll never reach my ideal feel-well weight. I never feel well. If I’m unable to control myself, there can be neither sympathy nor compassion. I’m getting outright mad. It simply must be possible! Just a tiny little bit of self-discipline. I’m going to try one more time. Once more, tomorrow, Monday.”

This is the perpetual vicious cycle of Bing Eating: We don’t feel well, so we decide to lose weight; we manage for a couple of days and feel terrific. Then, suddenly we succumb to an episode of food cravings, and we feel like losers, we curse ourselves and are desperate. We finally get a grip on ourselves, swear that we’ll muster more discipline this time around and embark on the next diet plan that is again doomed to fail, and so on and so forth.

Does this vicious cycle seem familiar to you? Are you currently going through something similar? If yes, I can just imagine what is happening to you, because I’ve experienced and suffered through all of this myself. Even though you may feel – as I did then – that you’re the only person on earth thinking and acting in a similarly strange way: You’re not alone! I can understand you and I’m here for you now.

I would like to give you hope. Yes, it is possible to overcome eating disorder. I know this from my own experience and from the experiences of many affected persons I was privileged to care for in my practice and during the workshops I conduct.

But let me be frank: Unfortunately, it is not possible to leave binge eating habits behind quickly and easily. Rather, it is a long

and arduous trek full of difficulties that also has its beautiful moments. The path is not straightforward and takes a different course for everybody.

This means that I unfortunately will not be able to present you with a ten-step program in this book, guaranteeing that you will reach your goal within a certain number of weeks. This would be a highly dubious claim in light of the serious nature of eating disorder. What I can do, however, is to describe to you the path that did work for me. It is up to you whether you will let yourself be inspired by my experience.

For our journey together, I'd like to suggest that you take on the role of an explorer. Imagine you're participating in an exciting expedition in order to discover a land thus far undiscovered. While the general direction is clear, the journey's details are still unknown. You do have a vision of the final destination, but in reality you have no idea what it will actually be like when you get there. Together, let's explore the path and the goal. Explorers are naturally curious people and interested in observing whatever they find on their path. They take notes and are perpetual learners. Explorers take things step by step.

They draw lessons from their setbacks for the rest of the journey. Sometimes, it may rain or storm, the path may turn muddy, and they're afraid that they will never reach their destination. Still, they continue their journey. They just keep going. Each new discovery rekindles their enthusiasm and energy. Explorers grow through their experiences and gain strength, making it easier and easier, step by step, to progress on their path.

A few words about this book

The path I would like to explore together with you is the path to your innermost self. I'm *not* going to impose new behavioral rules upon you, and I will *not* tell you what to do. You're an adult and responsible for your own life. Please consider everything I will present to you on the following pages as non-committal offerings. I simply invite you to explore whether my suggestions

are suitable for you at this point in time or not. All of us are different, and it is up to you to find out what may be helpful to *you*.

Why did I write this book? When I was suffering from binge eating disorder, I was devouring books by people who also had been affected. There I found accounts of binge eating and how much better life was without it. But how did all these people manage to get from Point A to Point B?! Which specific steps did they take? How did they cope with the inevitable setbacks? These were some of the questions that remained unanswered, at least in the books I read, which left me with a sense of disappointment. I also read a large number of books by different experts where I found helpful hints. Still, I was yearning to be understood by someone who had gone through the same things as I did, and who felt the way I did. And I promised myself that I would write such a book if I ever managed to find my way out of my binge eating habit.

Here I am, ready to make good on my promise. On the following pages you will find out a few things about me and my innermost self. I shall open myself up to you and share my high and low points with you. Let there be no doubt – doing this renders one vulnerable – but I shall gladly run this risk so that you may feel that you're not alone.

Would you like to join me on this journey of discovery? If so, let's don our khaki explorer's outfits, put on our helmets, turn on the headlamps and take the first steps.

Maybe you already tackled a large portion of the path and thus are an experienced explorer? Even better! Explorers love learning from each other. Maybe you, too, will come across some insights that you may find useful for your own expedition.

♥ **Expedition Diary:** I recommend that you keep a diary of the trip because explorers record their observations and results in order to put them in order, so they may better recall them. You may choose a particularly attractive diary, one you really like and enjoy, because it'll be with you for some time.

Alright, my fellow explorers! Let us set out together on our journey, eagerly anticipating what we will find along the way.



Before we begin, I should mention, for the sake of full disclosure, that this is a self-help book that in no way aims to replace either psychotherapy or medical consultations.

Chapter 1:

Understanding Eating Disorder

Entry in my diary, February 20, 1996:

"I am sitting here – my mind is exhausted from eating too much – I am staring ahead of me – What is normal? Finished. I don't want it any more. When am I going to wake up from this blasted lethargy? Who will wake me up? Why can't I get myself out of this fix? Destiny / pre-ordained fate / God – have I lost my faith? I am alive – I am healthy –I feel love in my heart – Why am I not happy with these gifts? Strength / Faith / Hope: Where? I need all my strength in order not to fall into a hole. Tears. Sadness. 11/15/93: the first dietary entry – craziness – I have been driving myself insane for the past two and a half years, and have not been able to carry on longer than one or two weeks without having a bingeing episode.

I feel meaningless. For the past week, nobody has asked me to do anything with them. Obviously, I could call somebody. But why? I could not care less about people. Nothing matters at all. I don't matter to anyone. Why should I bother to get a grip on me? I haven't gone out for exactly one week, except for the fitness center and the University. I am at the end of my rope. I feel sluggish / tired / sad / meaningless. I have no goals (except for University). I actually wanted to relax this weekend, but I discovered that there is nothing I would enjoy doing, except for studying.

This afternoon, stuffing myself did the trick: I was able to sleep for about three hours. Then I watched a couple of good shows on TV. Now they're over. Should I eat again? I'm already feeling sick to my stomach. Should I go to the fitness center? My stomach feels too full. I can't go on writing forever. What shall I do now? Sleep again? Study? Eat again? Or take a shower, after all?

If I were in love again, everything would be better. Final solution: Get out of the house! Don't sit in your room. This way you'll never meet the person you need. But that takes a lot of strength, which I don't have. I am tired. What good are the coolest events, if I feel too tired to go there? It's a vicious cycle.

I'm alone, completely alone. Even though I could be surrounded by dozens of people if that's what I wanted. I hate everything – but, no – I don't hate everything, that is not true. I'm unable to enjoy anything. I care about nothing. I care about nothing.

I feel empty. Life is passing me by. To me, the meaning of life is to be happy. Is my life therefore meaningless?! The thought that I might not be able to overcome this on my own, drives me mad. I'm wasting God's gift. I understand it all, but am unable to change anything.“

This diary entry marked the low point of my life at the time when my existence was dominated by bingeing episodes. When I read these lines today, I am deeply moved by the sense of meaninglessness I felt at the time and the deep sadness I expressed.

Hello Eating Disorder, I sense you

In my case, it all began in 1993 when I was 21 years old. My then boyfriend first cheated on me and then left me. I went on vacation to Greece with my girlfriends and tried to squelch my pains. I consumed uninhibited amounts of alcohol and sweet desserts with the result that I had a lot of trouble buttoning up my jeans after the holidays. What a shock! Only the year before, I'd shed several pounds by sticking to a strict diet. I absolutely wanted to get back to that weight!

That's how the vicious cycle began for me. Lovesickness was the trigger, but not the underlying cause. The tendency to eat uncontrollably had lain dormant in me much longer. Issues related to eating and body weight had assumed greater and greater importance in my life until I ended up reacting with regular episodes of binge eating in 1993.

A couple of years later, in 1996, I attended a seminar at the University. I found myself sitting opposite a woman, about my age, who I thought was attractive. Normally I would immediately feel intimidated and inferior to women whom I considered beautiful. In the case of E., however, I had a sense of deeply felt commonality: During the seminar she nibbled on a piece of zwieback and justified her behavior by explaining that she was suffering from an upset stomach.

Somehow, her behavior, the manner in which she ate the zwieback and made excuses for doing so, seemed familiar. And, quite apart from that, do “normal” people with an upset stomach eat anything? I got the sense that I found myself opposite a woman with eating habits as weird as my own.

At that time, it had already begun to dawn on me that something was wrong with my eating behavior. However, the notion that I might be suffering from eating disorder did not occur to me since I did not vomit and was not anorexic. Since I could not imagine that anybody would be able to understand my eating habits, I kept them a secret. I was ashamed. Back in 1996, there was no such thing as internet forums and the related possibility of anonymous information exchange.

Little by little I established contact with E. and learned that she often would eat an entire jar of honey in one sitting! Wow! That meant that I was not the only person on earth with weird eating habits! What a relief! This opening up of a trusted person was my first step out of the trap of binge eating. E. did not think me a monster although I told her about my eating habits. This gave me the strength to take the next step: Understanding my eating disorder. E. lent me a book on bulimia. I still remember how I recognized myself in the book and how relieved I felt. My suffering had a name: Eating Disorder! I stopped denying it and got to know it step by step. This was the beginning of my path out of eating disorder.

When does it become Eating Disorder?

Let's have a look at how you can recognize if you are “merely paying attention to your diet” or whether there is already an underlying addiction. Unfortunately, however, it is not possible to draw a straight line. Your alarm bells should go off, however, as soon as you have the feeling that something is not right with your eating habits.

Thoughts driven by food, figure and weight

If your thoughts are almost constantly focused on the topics of food, figure and body weight, the first signs of addiction are apparent. It is even possible for these thoughts to occur in parallel to other activities, a little bit like the soft background music that is playing in supermarkets.

My eating habits, my life, my feelings and my thoughts were dominated by food. It started in the morning when I opened my eyes: What did I eat yesterday? How much breakfast am I allowed today, or should I not eat anything at all? I constantly counted the calories I was allowed to have. Thoughts of food and eating practically never left me, no matter where I found myself – at work, at University, at the movies or with friends. Even the last thoughts of the day focused on food: before going to sleep I would go through the calories I had consumed and tried to figure out my diet plan for the next day. Sometimes I imagined that chocolate balls were rolling out of a cornucopia, filling my mouth. At least the thoughts would not make me fat, or so I hoped.

Such persistently recurring thoughts are often stuck in the future or in the past. In extreme cases, this can lead to a situation where we no longer perceive the here and now:

I recall going on a motorcycle trip with a good friend on an exquisitely beautiful day in spring. The sun was shining, the birds were twittering, and the first buds had already made their appearance. At least, that's what I imagine that it was like. I can't tell exactly because my thoughts were focused on food, meaning that all my other senses had been shut down. I felt as though I was deaf or perhaps in a fog and hardly noticed my surroundings. As we got started, my thoughts were focused on my breakfast: Would it not have been better just to eat an apple? When we reached our destination I was busy suppressing my appetite, envying a slender friend who had joined the trip and was eating her French fries with great gusto. On the way back I obsessed about what I would be allowed to eat that evening and fought my urge to have another bingeing episode. To make mat-

ters worse, I hated myself for not having been able to enjoy the excursion fully.

Sometimes the obsessive thinking around food / figure / body weight are replaced by other thoughts.

When I had fallen newly in love I thought less about food. Instead, I pondered how I possibly could please my new boyfriend, when would he call me again, whether he really cared for me. As soon as the relationship became a little more routine, my usual obsessive thinking about food would catch up to me.

Constant obsessive circles of thought around food, figure and body weight are burdensome. Often, high activity levels serve as antidote: Working hard, always keeping busy and writing to-do lists, for example.

Whenever I threw myself fully into work, I was able to suppress my obsessive thought circles. But as soon as I had less to do or some spare time on my hands, they would reliably catch up to me. It was almost as though my thoughts had been waiting behind a door in order to ambush me as soon as I came home in the evening. Having too much spare time which had not been planned for, therefore, almost felt like agony to me.

♥ Would you like to explore your own circles of thought?

How many times a day do you think that you are too fat? How often do you check your figure in the mirror or in shop windows? How often do you change in the morning because you think that the clothes you picked out make you look too heavy? How often do you pull down your shirt or sweater to make absolutely sure that your derriere is fully covered? How many times a day do you worry about what you have already eaten and what you still are allowed to have? How present are your thoughts, on an everyday level, in the things you are doing at the moment?

At war with our own bodies

A typical aspect of eating disorder is the fact that one's own body becomes the object of harsh self-critique. The body is perceived

as too fat, as boundless, as potato-sack-like and puffy, – regardless of the actual body weight. Moreover, many other areas are criticized: For the most part, these concern the upper thighs, derriere and tummy, and sometimes also breasts, knees and upper arms. Other details such as face, hair, fingers or toes seldom fare much better.

This overly critical perception can become burdensome in everyday life. Often it is played out in the morning in front of the clothes closet because nothing seems to fit, and the outfit must be changed several times.

In my case, it felt particularly bad to wear bathing outfits. One day my girlfriends invited me to join them at a spa. I remember suffering for days in advance, every fiber in me resisted the thought of going. Soon everybody would see my impossibly heavy behind, and I was mortified. Since, however, the embarrassment of cancelling was even greater, I finally decided to join my friends. When I climbed out of the pool I was extremely concerned that nobody should walk behind me. If given half a chance, I would have preferred to swim in my bathrobe.

Controlling, planning, calculating, weighing

Individuals suffering from eating disorder try to regulate their body weight by strictly controlling their food intake. Typically, foodstuffs are divided into “permitted, healthy” foods and “forbidden, unhealthy” foods. The aim is to strive to exclusively eat foods that belong to the first category.

While I struggled mightily against myself, I never achieved this goal consistently. Naturally, I reproached myself. After all, I knew exactly what I had to do! Why wasn't I able to reach my ideal weight? It had to be possible to control my cravings and only to eat “healthy” things. I felt totally undisciplined.

I was planning at least one week in advance what I was going to eat. If I had “sinned” once again, I calculated how much extra time I had to spend on the treadmill in order to get rid of the excess calories. I hated it when parties or family celebrations disrupted my diet plans.

I would have preferred not to go, but did not dare to cancel. Sometimes, I would build in a “prophylactic” unit of exercise in order to be able to eat more when attending an event.

Additionally, the process of weighing plays a very important role. For one thing, the scale often determines how much may be eaten, and when. And then there is the kitchen scale:

I would weigh all my foods in order to calculate their exact caloric value. To the extent possible, I would try to avoid places where this was not possible, such as restaurants. I would feel almost tormented by not being able to control the calories I was ingesting.

It was often not the body that decided how much food to put on the plate, but rather the complicated meal plans and calorie counts.

I was convinced that I should not trust my own hunger. Instead, I calculated how many calories I would be able to save by delaying meals. In order to do so, beverages like Diet Cola, coffee and tea, and sugarless chewing gum were my helpmates. I felt proud when my stomach was growling audibly because it meant that it was empty.

This scheme, however, seldom works out because the powerful exercise of self-control often leads to an equally potent loss of control. Many sophisticated plans are thus undone by repeated episodes of binge eating.

The mood changes with the weight

Stepping on the scale in the morning often causes a great deal of discomfort. If one suffers from eating disorder, the mood turns dark when the scale does not show the desired weight. One's daily condition depends on whether it will be a “good” or a “bad” diet day. “Good” days give rise to the hope of finally having achieved “it”. “Bad” days bring on the fear of gaining weight.

When the scale showed the desired result, and I was having a “good” food day, my world was okay. Food days were “good” when I was sticking exactly to my diet plans or, ideally, was eating even less than my allotment. Whenever I managed to do that, my sense of self-

worth increased. Life was beautiful, and I felt strong and radiant. However, one little extra bite or an extra ounce on the scale could change this. From one moment to the next, I considered myself the biggest loser in the world. I was often wavering between rejoicing to high heaven and plunging to the depths of despair – which was emotionally exhausting.

Stressful food relationships

At times I was even unable to keep staples such as oatmeal, rice or noodles in the house without feeling the constant urge to polish them off. It was almost impossible for me to take food anywhere. I remember a hike with friends where my thoughts constantly focused on the provender I had brought in my rucksack: “You must not eat it all up. What are the others going to think? Get a grip on yourself.” My usual precise planning had been foiled since I didn’t know when the group was going to stop for a meal. I would never have dared ask the question. The topic food was taboo for me. Under no circumstances did I want to give rise to the slightest suspicion that something was wrong with my eating habits. Finally, I could not stand it any longer. While climbing uphill I shoved one piece of chocolate after another into my mouth, gasping for air. As you can imagine, this was not particularly enjoyable, although I even had decided to allow myself a “forbidden” treat on that particular day since I figured I would burn up lots of calories during the hike.

Thoughts of food and eating may almost become scary.

I would only allow myself very specific portion sizes. Whenever the plate was empty, that was it. This thought made the approaching end of the meal almost intolerable. The emptier the plate would get, the more my appetite and my cravings seemed to grow. I felt far from satisfied. Often, I would have preferred not to start eating at all, because I was afraid of being unable to stop. I wavered between binge eating and fasting, with disastrous consequences for my weight.

Secrecy and double life

Handling a binge episode while alone is relatively simple. But what to do when cravings overcome us when we are not alone?

Then we may resort to a thousand different subterfuges and secretive behaviors:

“I just forgot something; I’ll join you in a minute” or “Why don’t you go ahead without me; I need to make a phone call” or “I’ll just take a brief walk to get some fresh air”. In reality I used the time to stuff myself with food. I recall using a friend’s bathroom break to rush up to the buffet in order to grab a few tartlets which I devoured furtively before he returned.

We’re ashamed of our eating habits and try to hide them as best we can. And we’re equally ashamed of the lies we use to hide them.

I thought everybody would be watching my every bite, wondering quietly why I was so ravenous. Sometimes I felt that people I met in the street were actually able to discern how much food I had eaten. When I ate a sweet, I was convinced that everybody knew that I had cheated on my diet plan.

While “healthy foods” are eaten in front of others, “unhealthy” ones are often consumed in solitude. Step by little step, this habit leads to a double life.

I was comparing the amounts of my food with those of other people and desperately tried to adjust. Under no circumstances did I want my gluttony to be discovered. I talked to no one about it since I was absolutely certain that I was the only person with such abnormal cravings. I paid a steep price for this dual existence by feeling lonely and misunderstood.

Recurring binge eating episodes

One of the clearest indications of eating disorder is the presence of regularly recurring, uncontrollable bingeing episodes. One may try to withstand them for as long as possible, and then, particularly in the evenings, resistance becomes difficult if not impossible.

Whenever such an episode was approaching, my feelings were like “I want it so badly, I’m going to knock over everything in my path” or

"If I can't have food right this minute, I'm going to snap" I was utterly unable to muster the willpower to withstand this obsessive need for food. There was something much bigger and stronger than I, at whose mercy I found myself, helplessly.

Sometimes it was only one little bite too many, and I was smack in the middle of a binge episode. Especially when I was eating something from the long list of "forbidden" foods, I was thinking "It doesn't matter now anyway" and I would keep on eating until I became physically ill and was forced to stop. I wanted to gorge myself with as much as possible of the "forbidden fruit" knowing that I would have to go back to my diet the next day.

During such binge episodes, I would completely lose control of myself, – it was as though I was in a trance. I no longer could perceive myself, as if I had ceased to exist. I only consisted of gorging and swallowing. Proper table manners went out the window. Had anybody ever witnessed one of my binge episodes, I would have died of shame.

While I was stuffing myself I was already thinking about the diet I was going to start the next day, how many calories I had to cut and how many extra exercise units I had to plan on. What an utterly bizarre and frustrating situation! While I was eating the foods I constantly craved, I was unable to enjoy them. I was plagued by my bad conscience, knowing that I had failed and "sinned" yet again. I could not understand myself. Why was I so utterly lacking in discipline?

After going through a binge episode, I hated myself even more than before. I was actually convinced that I could watch my double chin and my upper thighs grow. My tummy was aching, I felt beat, and I only wanted to sleep. The next morning, I woke with a horrible taste in my mouth, feeling hung over and sore.

Each time, I promised myself never again to eat "forbidden" foods. I resolved to become even tougher on myself. At the same time, I dreaded the next relapse. I simply could not understand why I kept having these binge episodes. Every time I could feel another one coming on, I was surprised and incredibly disappointed in myself. It was enough to despair.

Many people who are affected by eating disorders vomit after they overeat. This type of eating disorder is called bulimia. If no vomiting occurs, however, the disorder is called binge eating. Therefore, vomiting is not a necessary criterion for the presence of eating disorder.

Let me mention that vomiting carries major health risks. Try to search the internet under “bulimia and teeth” or “bulimia and esophagus”, and you’ll find several pictures on the topic. While they are hard to look at, they do depict reality.

A person’s figure is not a reliable criterion of an eating disorder. Body weight depends on three different factors: the type and amount of food consumed and the intensity of weight-regulating measures (vomiting, exercise, fasting, laxatives, appetite suppressants), in addition to genetic predisposition.

Finally, I should mention that “grazing” takes the place of binge episodes for quite a few people that are affected. This is the urge to constantly eat something, a cookie here, a few nuts there, a slice of sausage here and a piece of cheese there, and so on. While this type of behavior does not qualify as binge eating, I would also consider it an indicator of an eating disorder if experienced as troublesome by those so affected.

Honesty with oneself

It is difficult to admit to oneself “Yes, I have an addictive eating disorder”. I know that from own experience. Who wants to admit being an addict? Maybe the word “addiction” evokes in you – like in me – the image of someone whose life has been irretrievably messed up, a lost soul leaning against the wall of a house, waiting for the next “fix”.

It was not quite as bad for me. On the contrary: I tried to perform my various roles perfectly in order to maintain the external impression that I was doing well. That can be pretty exhausting. But there were times when I actually did feel like a junkie, like when I would dress again in the evening in order to walk, zombie-like, to the near-est gas station where I could buy my “drugs” – sweets. My urge to do

this was so strong that it actually put me into some kind of trance. "I need sweets, now, right away!" Nothing else mattered.

Although we never can get out of our own skin, it is amazingly possible to deceive oneself.

For years on end I avoided facing the truth. I minimized my addiction by calling it "my little eating problem" Each downfall was followed by a high, and I forgot completely what had happened before. I had convinced myself that I would tackle my problem with a new diet. Guaranteed!

There is a game children play – maybe you know it, too: If I hold my hands up in front of my eyes and don't see anything, nobody will find me. If I don't "see" my food addiction, does that mean it does not exist?

I was living by myself at the time and could stock my fridge exclusively with "permitted" foods, such as cottage cheese, carrots, at least five different fat free yoghurts and Diet Cola. One of my girlfriends made the following comment: "If you only eat this stuff, you should be as thin as a rail". For a moment, her remark brought me back to reality. I was deeply ashamed and quickly tried to change the subject.

If I was eating "forbidden" things, I would do it quickly, and often while I was doing something else. Eating – me? Never! During my bingeing episodes, the trancelike condition I found myself in helped me to repress things. Only after the episode had passed would I become painfully aware of my predicament. Still, I would begin another diet the following morning, being firmly convinced that I was going to follow a healthy one from now on. Surely, I of all people did not have a problem with food!

The term "eating disorder" doesn't sound much better than "compulsive eating". After all, who wants to have a "disorder"? Ultimately, it doesn't matter what you call your behavior. What's much more important is to determine whether your eating behavior and the thoughts that go along with it, are burdensome to you.

I was able to start my path of recovering from eating addiction by being honest with myself and admitting the following:

- * *Yes, I do have a problem, and it is enormous.*
- * *I eat more than is good for me.*
- * *I experience regular bingeing episodes.*
- * *I am unable to stick to my diet plans.*
- * *I lead a double life: I count every single calorie, eat healthily AND gorge myself with masses of sugary and fatty stuff during my binge eating episodes.*
- * *The stricter the self-imposed discipline, the more severe the bingeing episodes.*
- * *I am unable to reach my ideal weight.*
- * *If I occasionally do reach my target weight by trying extremely hard, I am unable to maintain it over the long run and I keep putting on weight again.*
- * *I'm feeling miserable, no matter how often I pretend to be happy.*
- * *New Year's resolutions, like "I'm going to change this once and for all at 00:00:01 h on January 1st, are meaningless.*
- * *It doesn't make any sense whatsoever to wait for the big key event that finally will throw a switch in my brain. I must start working on myself and do it now.*

Sometime later I recognized:

- * *I need help, because I won't be able to do this on my own.*

A first look behind the symptoms

I was convinced that the root of all evil was the dissatisfaction with my weight. I was dreaming of my ideal weight because it would guarantee the end of my bingeing episodes. Thus, I kept pledging time and time again that I was going to apply even stricter discipline when implementing my diet schemes. It simply had to be possible to get a permanent grip on myself.

On one occasion, the passionately desired goal finally seemed to have been reached: I had achieved my ideal weight. I was expecting some kind of ecstasy, because I had been dreaming of this moment for a long time. I thought I would be able to live happily ever after, parading around in my mini skirt, winning everybody's admiration with my fabulous looks.

None of this happened, however. I was more dissatisfied than ever, but did not know why. Because I was so desperate, I had several bingeing episodes and quickly regained my old weight, meaning my old problems had not gone away. Looking back, I understand what happened: Although I had been yearning for it, reaching my ideal weight actually was shocking to me. For years I had held my weight responsible for all the negative aspects of my life: For the fact that I didn't feel comfortable in my own skin, that I was dissatisfied with my life, that I was ridden by complexes, that I didn't like myself and that I had no charm and was unable to find the mate of my dreams.

What happened when I did lose weight? I still did not feel well in my own skin. I still was dissatisfied. I still suffered from self-doubts. I still hated myself. I still found that I had no charisma, and Prince Charming still had not rung my doorbell.

All of a sudden, I had lost my familiar scapegoat, but the negative aspects of my life continued to plague me. I never thought about the true causes of my problems because I held my weight and my bingeing episodes responsible for everything. Figuring out a new diet regime was much easier than trying to work on my damaged self-confidence.

The insight that life does not always take the desired course and that, in reality, we never are as happy as we pretend to be, is painful and sometimes scary. By constantly focusing on our figure, our weight and the calories we consume, we manage very nicely to repress all these things. Thus, our food addiction assumes an important function. In her book "Eating in the Light of the Moon" (starting on page 19), Anita Johnston compares it to a plank:

„Imagine yourself standing in the rain on the bank of a raging river. Suddenly, the water-swollen bank gives away. You

fall in and find yourself being tossed around in the rapids. Your efforts to keep afloat are futile and you are drowning. By chance, along comes a huge log and you grab it and hold on tight. The log keeps your head above water and saves your life. Clinging to the log you are swept downstream and eventually come to a place where the water is calm. There, in the distance, you see the riverbank and attempt to swim to shore. You are unable to do so, however, because you are still clinging to the huge log with one arm as you stroke with the other. How ironic. The very thing that saved your life is now getting in the way of your getting where you want to go. There are people on the shore who see you struggle and yell, 'Let go of the log!' But you are unable to do so because you have no confidence in your ability to make it to the shore. [...]

To recover from disordered eating requires the development of whatever skills are necessary to replace the function of the log. [...] And so, very slowly and carefully, you let go of the log and practice floating. When you start to sink, you grab back on. Then you let go of the log and practice treading water, and when you get tired, hold on once again. After a while, you practice swimming around the log once, twice, ten times, twenty times, a hundred times, until you gain the strength and confidence you need to swim to shore. Only then do you completely let go of the log.“

Slowly I began to realize that I had tried to put the cart before the horse with my years of dieting: My weight problem and the bingeing episodes were the symptom, and not the problem!

With that insight, a myriad of questions arose: Why did I have that boundless craving? Why these bingeing episodes? What was the message they were trying to give me? What was wrong with my life? What did I have to change? What was the function of my obsessive food craving? What did my “plank” signify?

Surely, I was looking for the love of my life. But how was I supposed to find it. I did not particularly enjoy my course of studies, but should

I abandon it all shortly before the year was over? That would really be extremely insensible! My parents had divorced early on, but I was sure that this had never been a problem for me. Could it be that I was wrong? I had been warned that sweets would make me fat. But that could not be the reason for my insatiable cravings? Or could it?

So many questions and so many possible answers. By taking a really close look at your everyday life, you may find some clues as to the causes for your food addiction:

♥ **I feel the urge to overeat whenever ...:** Let me invite you to pick up your diary of discovery and to enter the following sentence: “I feel the urge to overeat whenever ...” You may prefer to use “stuff myself” rather than “overeat” if it feels more appropriate in your case. Now let your words flow until they stop by themselves. Then put the diary in your handbag and take it out whenever you again feel the urge to overeat in order to add more information.

“My urge to stuff myself is there: whenever I have to study, but find it really hard to concentrate ... whenever I don’t know what to do with myself on the weekend ... whenever I have managed to live on just fruit for three days in a row ... whenever I am with my family ... whenever there is an all-you-can-eat buffet ... whenever I should clean the house ... whenever I open a pack of wafer biscuits ... whenever I attend one of Professor L.’s lectures at university ... whenever I’m bored with my work ... whenever I don’t feel like working but have to ... whenever I feel lonesome ... often after meeting D. ... whenever G. says something stupid to me ... whenever I drink too much alcohol ... when I watch television before I go to my unicycle class ... whenever I feel bloated ... when nobody called me the entire day ... when I finally want to eat stuff that’s on my “forbidden” list ... today, when I was mad at myself because of my incompetence ... when I’m tired, but there’s no time for sleep ... when I feel this immense inner tension ... just before I start menstruating ... today, after I’ve been shopping all day ... when I feel ill at ease.”

It is critically important to understand that your compulsive food cravings currently fulfill a lot of different functions. Therefore, you simply won't be able to just kick them out.

Contributing factors to binge eating behavior

In my experience it is not necessary that you immediately understand the entire background and all the underlying reasons in order to take several steps on your path to recovering from binge eating addiction. You will gradually come to understand which functions your addiction has in your life. Don't start to look for the causes right now; this will only get in your way. On Facebook I found an apt quotation by the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855):

„It is only possible to understand life by looking back, but we must live it by looking forward.”

The process may be similar to working your way through a textbook: Knowledge grows steadily, page by page, and the connections become increasingly clearer. People are different, and the respective backgrounds and causes, in addition to the functions the eating disorder has assumed will vary greatly. In my experience, however, I have found that there are a few factors that seem to contribute to binge eating behavior.

One of these factors that was a constant companion on my own path to recovery was my lack of self-love and the resulting lack of self-confidence. I had heard several times before that self-love was an important factor in recovering from eating disorder. Therefore, I tried mightily to love myself. Since I was convinced of my many shortcomings as regards my looks and my character, however, this striving was often undermined. How could I possibly love someone like that?!

I asked myself often why I was having such trouble – REAL trouble – loving myself. Why did I have to go through all kinds of exercises and try so hard to find a more loving access to myself?

In my work with women struggling with binge eating addiction, I noticed that the issue of “self-love” and “self-confidence” was a red thread that was woven into all their stories. In addition, there were other shared aspects: thought circles, perfectionism, mood swings and difficulty perceiving and expressing feelings and needs. All of this I was thoroughly familiar with.

Why was there such a level of conformity of themes in the area of binge eating addiction? Could it be that there was a greater overarching connection? When searching for answers I came across the concept of “toxic shame”.

Toxic shame

“Healthy” shame is something you surely have experienced. It is primarily felt when something unpleasant happens to us, like inadvertently sending a somewhat delicate email or text to the wrong person. Or, maybe forgetting an important appointment or saying something that was definitely not meant for the ears of your conversation partner. Or when we manage to spill red wine on our host’s beautiful white carpet. How embarrassing! We’re ashamed and would love to crawl into a mouse hole.

This healthy type of shame shows us clearly whether our behaviors are up to our own or others’ expectations, norms and boundaries. Therefore, shame is an important feeling for our social interactions and our development as social beings.

Shame only becomes harmful or toxic, when we are not only ashamed because of *individual* behaviors but on account of our *entire* being. Brené Brown uses the terms shame (= toxic shame) and guilt in the following context:

„Guilt = I did something bad. Shame = I am bad. Shame is about who we are, and guilt is about our behaviors. (...) Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging. (...) Shame is basically the fear of being unlovable – it’s the total opposite of owning our story and

feeling worthy. [...] Shame keeps worthiness away by convincing us that owning our stories will lead to people thinking less of us. Shame is all about fear. We're afraid that people won't like us if they know the truth about who we are, where we come from, what we believe, how much we're struggling, or, believe it or not, how wonderful we are when soaring (sometimes it's just as hard to own our strengths as our struggles).“

(“The Gifts of Imperfection”, Brené Brown; page 39 and 41)

Toxic shame does not come and go; it is more like a chronic condition. Just like the core of one's being or a personality style, it becomes identity and accompanies all thoughts, feelings and actions. In his book “Healing the Shame That Binds You” John Bradshaw talks on page 34 of the “internalization of shame”.

Toxic shame produces humiliating voices in our head. These shaming voices want to convince us of our worthlessness and try to persuade us that nobody will like us the way we really are. Therefore, we try our best to put on an act or to adjust.

I was often experiencing this ill-defined, uncomfortable feeling which I thought was owed to my lack of eating discipline. Therefore, I was dreaming of my ideal weight, desperately trying to reach it. I was absolutely certain that this would be the ultimate key to my well-being. Today, the concept of toxic shame helps me understand why my plan ultimately would not work even though the scale might show the right weight: Since I felt that I and my entire being were unacceptable, my weight would not change that. I often felt that I was not good enough or that I was a burden. I felt inferior and in the wrong place. There was a toxic shame voice in my head, telling me clearly “You are a burden”, or “You are nobody”, or “Whatever you do is stupid nonsense”. I had the constant urge to justify myself for what I did, thought, felt and was.

Toxic shame may arise when somebody close to us or an attachment figure, constantly gives us the feeling – either directly or indirectly – that we're worthless the way we are. Often this pattern is first created during childhood years:

- * The child is only loved if it meets the demands, dreams, wishes and idealized images of such attachment figures. As soon as the child goes its own way, conflict arises.
- * The child's achievements and/or good looks are frequently made the center of attention, rather than his or her individuality
- * So-called narcissistic expansion takes place: This phenomenon arises when an attachment figure uses the child's positive characteristics or achievements in order to compensate for their own feelings of inferiority (for instance: "My child always has top grades in school") Additionally, there is the notion that the sole reason for the child's existence is to give meaning to the attachment figure's life, and he or she is not loved for their own sake.
- * Some of the child's feelings or characteristics are regularly negated (For instance: "Don't make such a fuss", or "Don't be so touchy", or "You are always imagining things")
- * The child is often confronted with devaluing statements, such as "Who do you think you are?"
- * When mistakes are made, the attachment figure's comment is often "You are a loser", instead of offering assistance in order to help draw useful lessons for the future.
- * Attachment figures treat the child with emotional coldness, virtually freezing all attempts for the child's true nature to surface.
- * Attachment figures create either directly or indirectly the sense in the child that many things have become impossible to do after he or she was born. The child believes it is a burden.
- * Double-bind communication takes place: The child is told one thing, but senses another, and therefore becomes unsure as to what is true. Therefore, s/he will doubt himself / herself. Example: A close attachment person says "I'm doing well", but the child senses that this is not so. The child poses the question and gets the answer "You're just imagining things".

- * Some of the child's needs such as hunger or being full, are not recognized or respected. The child becomes convinced that his or her own wishes and inclinations are either unimportant or wrong.
- * Regular boundary violations such as a disregard for the child's privacy occur.
- * Basic trust is lacking in the child, meaning that it has not experienced being fully able to trust its environment.
- * Abuse of any kind, both at a physical and emotional level, takes place.

Many children learn that they only will be loved if they act in contradiction to their real nature.

“Since the child depends on the attachment persons' devotion and care, and his / her survival depends on them, s/he will do everything to please them. S/he will construct an exterior self that does not correspond to his / her true nature. You may call it false self, mask or façade. Thus, the false self becomes a mechanism ensuring the child's survival. If a child starts putting on that mask early, s/he will find it increasingly difficult to recognize and feel his / her true self in later life. Many adults are thus incapable of expressing how they actually feel, for one thing because they do not perceive it, and for another because they don't dare to say it”.

(“Weiblicher Narzissmus”, Bärbel Wardetzki; page 41) Translator's note: We decided to provide the original German titles of referenced works which have not been translated into English.

What does toxic shame have to do with eating disorder? I mentioned earlier that I discovered similar behavior patterns in myself and others afflicted by binge eating addiction.

These may be linked to toxic shame as follows:

Addictive behaviors

Toxic shame is uncomfortable and hard to bear. Pills and other drugs, however, will not help alleviate the pains of the soul.

Therefore, our subconscious develops other coping mechanisms: Addictive behaviors produce at least temporary relief and thus assume an important function in the lives of affected people.

Eating addiction, however, is self-destructive. Maybe this is owed to the fact that our toxic shame convinces us that we're never good enough and that "bad" girls or boys must be punished. It is only the "good" girls or boys that are showered with gifts of gold.

While on the topic of addiction, let me also mention alcohol and the internet (especially the smartphone), in addition to binge eating. Many individuals afflicted by eating disorder, including myself during that time of my life, feel attracted to both:

The first internet chat rooms appeared in 1994. At that time, they were exclusively available at my university. Food was not allowed in the PC room. Hours of chatting put me into a state of intoxication. If smartphones had been invented by then, I would probably have been glued to mine all the time. I welcomed anything that would keep me from eating! Of course, I immediately wallowed in self-recriminations for wasting my time needlessly. When I went out in the evening, I often drank too much alcohol. When I was intoxicated, I finally felt happy, strong and carefree.

„Addiction can be described as chronically and compulsively numbing and taking the edge off of feelings.“

(„The Gifts of Imperfection“, Brené Brown; page 70)

Obsessive thought circles

Another method of avoiding the feeling of toxic shame are thought circles. They not only have us dwell on topics like figure, weight and food, but may be swirling ceaselessly and obsessively around other things. Here are a few examples:

- * Playing mind games and indulging in hypotheticals (“If he does not call me today, I will not call him either. If he does call, however, I will ...”)
- * Pondering at length relatively unimportant decisions “Should I buy the green shirt or the blue one?”)

- * Anticipating the worst case scenario (“Why does the boss want to talk to me?” What did I do wrong? What if I get fired? What if ...”)
- * Trying to plan the future right down to the last little detail.
- * Pondering at length what others may think of us.
- * Comparing ourselves to others – wondering whether they may be slimmer, more intelligent, and the like.

Recently, I found the following posting on Facebook: “I cannot sleep because I don’t know if dragons feel sad because they’re unable to blow out candles.” This fits my mindset to perfection: I was worried about anything and everything.

end of reading sample / Chapter 1

**This book is available for purchase via the
website of Amazon.**

Chapter 2:

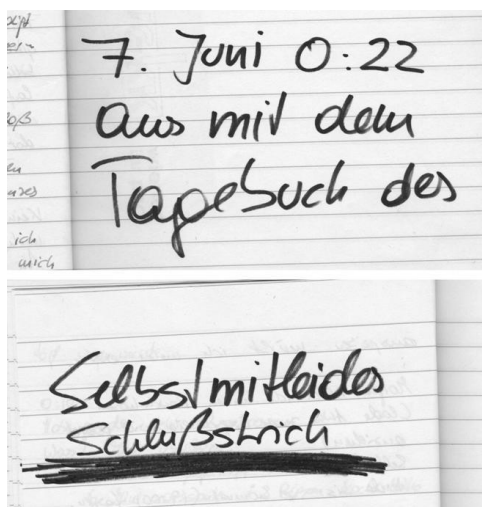
Opening up the tunnel vision

Entry from my diary June 7, 1996, 0:10 h

“Just finished stuffing myself again. Somehow, the whole thing no longer was fun and didn’t satisfy me. I wolfed down the first two cheese croissants while typing on the computer – without even noticing. Somehow, they were gone all of a sudden, and I did not even taste them (...) I didn’t want to have a bulging tummy tomorrow because I wanted to invite W. to dinner and wear my new dress. It’s my own fault. I’ll fast until he comes, possibly only fruit juices”.

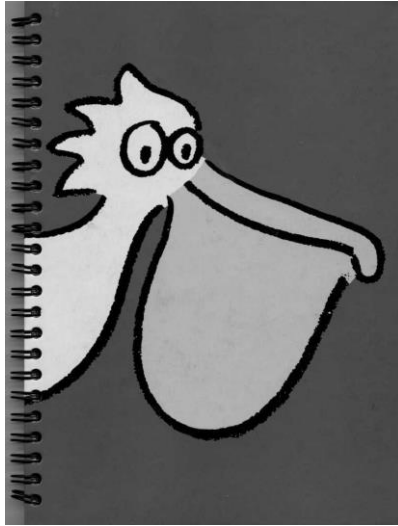
This was the last page of a diary filled with diets I was unable to stick to in the long run, with detailed calculations of my target weights, with exhortations to hold out, and with self-recriminations. The interesting thing was, I that night for the first time realized my binge eating episodes no longer brought me any relief. By dealing with the background of my eating disorder, I slowly developed a deeper understanding of my behavior. I began to understand that I would have to re-orient my thinking instead of continuously going around and around in the same destructive thought patterns.

At 0:22 h I wrote: “I am finally drawing the line under my Diary of Self-Pity.”



A few days later, I started a new diary. I chose one in my favorite

color, purple, and a design that actually seemed to smile at me:

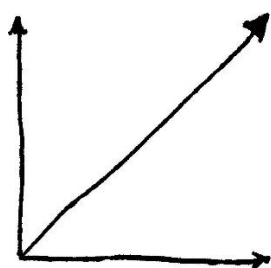


“This will be a ‘fair weather’ diary, a diary of positive thoughts and interesting experiences. In my old diary, I recorded plenty of negative thoughts. If you are longing for negative thoughts, just pick it up and wallow in self-pity. You will find plenty of it here in all its different facets. But not here! That does not mean that I am not going to solve problems. I shall, and how! My new diary is a step in this direction. I no longer want to write down what I should be doing, like in the old diary, but rather what I have done!”

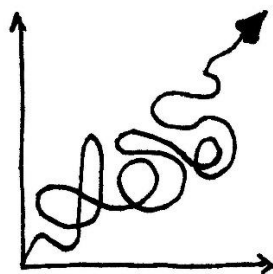
I took responsibility for myself, instead of waiting for a miracle that never would arrive. Slowly, I began moving forward instead of going around in circles.

When we suffer from eating disorder, we tend to compare ourselves to others and to experience ourselves as inferior, which is one of the manifestations of toxic shame.

Therefore, I would like to emphasize that my journey in no way was as structured as you might think. Rather, it was more like a zigzag line.



Wishful path



Realistic path

I tried all kinds of approaches, sometimes consistently, and at other times, and much too often, less consistently. Rarely was I sure whether my attempts actually would bear fruit. It was a path of “trial and error” with many different loops, multiple binge eating episodes, a lot of despair, but also with many wonderful experiences.

What I will share in this book is the essence of my years of experience. These are the things that in retrospective were most helpful to me. They are meant as suggestions for you. You will have to find your own path, which you will follow at your own pace.

Inviting constructive thoughts

When we are in the throes of eating addiction, our thoughts constantly circle around food, figure and weight. Every day, they focus on our failings, supposed flaws and defects. We can't stand ourselves – something we confirm to ourselves countless times each day. The voice of toxic shame wreaks havoc by whispering that we are neither beautiful nor good enough. In the context of eating disorder, this causes a vicious cycle to start: The worse we feel, the more we chastise ourselves, which makes us feel even worse, and we finally need to overeat in order to numb these feelings, ...

If I were to tell you that you are worthwhile just the way you are, you would probably not believe me, right? Therefore, I'm not even going to try to convince either you or your inner voice.

Instead, I would like to offer you alternative thought models in order to slow down the vicious cycle of destructive thoughts. Let us use the image of beam scales: One of the scale-pans holds the usual destructive thoughts, while constructive thoughts are placed in the other as counter-weight. Thereby, we are able to create a balance, preventing destructive thoughts from becoming disproportionately important by constantly occupying our entire thinking.

I'm not going to persuade you to see everything through rose-colored glasses from now on. This might only become another mask. Life, as we know, consists of both good and bad, of positive and negative things. It consists of light and darkness, laughter and tears, – and of many shades in between.

I simply would like to suggest a shift of focus. If you, like I, are a fan of the Harry Potter books, you may be familiar with an Albus Dumbledore quote:

“Happiness can be found, even in the darkest of times, when one only remembers to turn on the light.”

(From Joanne Rowling's book “Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Askaban”)

Let's take a simple example: When we walk through the city on an overcast day, we may choose to complain of the greyness that surrounds us. Alternatively, we may choose to focus on discovering colorful things, such as a flower here or a lovely house there. Both may exist side by side, but it is up to us where we would like to direct our focus. Paying attention is a little bit like spreading fertilizer: If we concentrate on unpleasant things, they will multiply through our attention. The same is true in the reverse order for pleasant and positive things.

Another example from the realm of eating disorder: You may choose to observe your figure in every shop window you pass, commenting negatively on it, or you may elect to notice the cute puppy on the opposite side of the street. The choice is yours.

Shifting focus, meaning consciously directing your attention, requires making decisions repeatedly. It would be unrealistic to expect being able to rid ourselves from one day to the next of our familiar thought circles. Doing so requires constant training, just like building up muscles.

Let me therefore introduce a couple of exercises that you may be able to integrate into your daily routine without having to free up a lot of extra time – for example, on the way to work, waiting at the check-out line in the supermarket, riding the elevator, while on the playground, or during boring meetings.

Still, it can be challenging to think of exercise. That's completely normal! For one thing, this happens because our thinking, which is marked by toxic shame, keeps us from doing something for ourselves. Secondly, it's challenging simply because we are creatures of habit. It takes perseverance and regular exercise to integrate new things.

Please don't be upset if you sometimes forget to remember the exercises. If you like them, simply start doing them at the next given opportunity. You may also want to use simple little "crutches" such as a reminder on your mobile phone or a sticky note on your PC. It also may be meaningful to link the exercises to repeated daily routines, such as brushing your teeth, taking a shower, riding the elevator or daily travel by train or by car.

end of reading sample / Chapter 2

**This book is available for purchase via the
website of Amazon.**

Chapter 3:

Satisfying our physical hunger

Eating disorder confronts us with three questions to which we desperately seek answers:

When should I eat?

How much should I eat?

What should I eat?

In order to find the right answers to these questions, I had established a few rules. I was absolutely sure: If I were to follow them strictly, I would be able to lose weight. However, the wished-for, permanent weight loss never materialized. I blamed my lack of discipline for this failure. If only I would try harder, if only I would adhere strictly to my rules, then ... However, the “then” never came, because my plans were repeatedly foiled by episodes of binge eating.

I experienced my body as an excessive monster that devoured food. For years, I was convinced that I had to control my excessiveness if I wanted to have a slim body. As I began to focus a bit more closely on eating disorder, new thoughts began to mature in my mind: Could it be that my cravings were excessive precisely on account of the strict control? Maybe my “monster body” was even able to give me sound advice if only I dared to listen?

Although I was about to enter uncharted territory, I wanted to learn giving my body what it needed. After many years of eating disorder, however, I was no longer able to understand its language. It felt like two strangers trying to approach one another. In trying to get to know each other, my body and I had to start from scratch.

Eating disorder’s control mechanisms

In order to pave the way towards being able to feel my body, I had to let go of years of control mechanisms, such as various diets, counting calories and the scale.

Diets

The plethora of different diets that have sprung up is rather interesting. Most of them promise ultimate success in losing weight and attaining good health. But – which one is truly ultimate of all the ultimate diets?

In 1992, the year before the onset of my binge eating episodes, I would eat only fruit before noon and otherwise adhere strictly to the so-called Food Combining diet. While I did lose weight, I never felt sufficiently slim. Moreover, I often felt ice-cold and suffered from bloating and abdominal cramps. In 1993, I re-gained every single pound I had lost. Although I repeatedly tried to revert to my “success diet”, I did not achieve the desired weight loss, because more and more often, binge eating episodes would cross my plans. Nevertheless, I stuck firmly to my diet regimen, although I often would have fancied other foods. By way of example, the bread I painfully denied myself at breakfast, I ended up wolfing down in the evenings during my binging.

Diets create excessive eating. The more we must forego something, the more we crave it. Such is human nature. Imagine me placing a beautifully wrapped present on a golden pedestal in the middle of your living room and putting a label on it: “DON’T LOOK!” What will happen next is fairly obvious: We circle the package like hungry lions, anxious to see what’s inside. A similar thing happens with forbidden foods: They seem so incredibly delicious precisely because we can’t have them.

In 1994, I tried a special juice diet, comprised of fruit and vegetable juices, in addition to a few foul-tasting supplements that were supposed to make up for nutritional deficiencies. While it was difficult to forego solid foods for an entire week, I did manage and lost weight nicely. To be honest, however, I did not feel particularly well. Moreover, I could not live on juices only for the rest of my life and had to become adjusted to eating solids again.

I had trouble managing my everyday eating and quickly re-gained the pounds I had dropped. Subsequently, I started having “fruit only days” time and time again – the more often, the better. I hoped to be able to “detoxify” by doing so. Ultimately, however, I made up for each and every one of my “fruit only days” through my binge eating episodes.

In 1995, I tried the “paleo diet.” Its inventor opined that we, on account of our slowly working evolution, are only able to tolerate the

foodstuffs and preparation methods of our Stone Age ancestors. That seemed sensible to me. Thus, I started exclusively eating boiled red meat and raw vegetables. I did so, although I did not like red meat, particularly when it had been boiled in water without seasonings, as was recommended in the relevant diet book. During the first week, the diet worked beautifully. The rules were simple and easily understandable, and I knew what I had to do. I dropped a few pounds and was ecstatic. But then I attended a seminar at my University. During our lunch break, all my colleagues went to a restaurant. Since I did not want to be an outsider, I joined them. At the restaurant, I was unable to stick to my strict diet plan. Although I chose the menu with the fewest calories, I was racked by my guilty conscience. Due to the unplanned situation, I had the feeling that I no longer was controlling my weight loss and thus had failed. In the evening I reacted with a bingeing episode. This was the end of my “paleo diet”.

Diets are heedless of our needs and predilections, and, in particular, of our everyday lives. They evidently assume that we feel the same every day and are able to make do with exactly the prescribed amount of food. Diets do not permit individual latitude. They do not help us recognize the needs of our bodies.

Diets place the idea of foregoing and doing without front and center. Isn't it peculiar that they often make us forego exactly the things we love the most? It is difficult to do so throughout life, and especially in times of inner crises. These are exactly the moments when there just isn't enough room for one more loss, and diets fall by the wayside. Thereby, the gates have been thrown wide open for the notorious yo-yo effect.

Did you ever notice that most women's magazines publish the best cookie recipes in the weeks leading up to Christmas and the best diet strategies right after New Year's? Immediately following Easter, at the latest, they come up with the best tips for the perfect bikini figure. Only this morning I heard the following commercial on a local radio station: “Lose five pounds in seven days with this new miracle diet.”

I used to buy lots of magazines that would promise similar things. Every time I spotted another “miracle diet”, I felt again completely overwhelmed. The articles featured photos of beautifully prepared meals. Everything would have been so easy with a personal chef preparing and serving these delicacies. But me – cooking thrice a day – and only for myself?! Phew! Moreover, I was used to completely different foods. It would have meant having to change my eating habits within these seven days and learning to cook. Therefore, I never even started these diets and tried fasting in order to achieve quick results.

In 1996, I resolved deliberately to quit trying yet another “miracle diet”. I no longer wanted to chase after short-term successes, because I was fed up with the perpetual ups and downs of my weight. Instead, I needed a nutrition plan that could work for me in the long run and which I could adhere to without overexerting myself. I needed a form of nutrition that did not make me feel that I had to forego the things I liked eating for the rest of my life. In other words: I was yearning for stability in my eating habits.

Calorie tables

I resembled a walking calorie table. All the numbers were in my head, and I calculated them automatically when I ate. At home, I would weigh my food because I had to be sure how much I was eating. When preparing a salad, I would count individual drops of oil. Not one too many! Under no circumstances was I to exceed a specific number of calories per day!

I preferred foods with lots of mass and few calories, like water melons. Sometime I ate so many of them that I had a bloated tummy and felt unwell. Yet, my head was satisfied because the caloric balance was correct.

Eating at restaurants was difficult, because there I could not know exactly what kind of ingredients, and thus calories, were hidden in the meals. Moreover, I was unable to weigh the food. Not having any control over the calories I ingested felt extremely uncomfortable to me. Thus, I mostly chose the “safest” option, the one with the fewest calories – salad.

I had salad while others were eating the things I was forbidden to touch: Pizza, pasta, and cakes. During the meals it was hard to reign in my appetite because of all the temptations directly in front of me. Consequently, I judged myself harshly for being excessive and voracious.

No matter how disciplined I was, in the end my calculus never worked out. The more calories I saved and the more I gave up, the worse my next binge eating episode would be. No calories were counted during binge eating. I stuffed myself with everything that was forbidden: Fat, refined flour, carbohydrates and, above all, sugar.

This was my rationale: I had to give up as many calories as possible in order to make up for my binge eating episodes. Could it be the case that the exact opposite was true, - meaning that my binge eating episodes were the result of forcing myself to forego so much?

Did you ever consider how caloric values are determined? In order to do so, a so-called bomb calorimeter is used, in which the foodstuff in question is burned under oxygen excess pressure. The combustion chamber is surrounded by a steel shell, which, in turn, is completely surrounded by water. The energy created by the combustion process serves to warm the water, enabling the calculation of the amount of energy developed – for instance the number of calories.

The question as to how much meaningful information calories actually provide about the nutritional value of food remains controversial. It would be possible, for the sake of argument, to burn a piece of wood in the bomb calorimeter in order to determine its caloric value. Wood, however, does not nourish us. Moreover, no combustion takes place inside our bodies, as we do not carry ovens, but rather digestive systems.

The following comparison strikes me as meaningful: Evaluating food on the basis of calories is as meaningless as buying a clothes closet on the basis of its caloric value. We judge the closet based on its appearance, how it will fit into our space, and how many clothes it will hold. We would not dream of burning it before deciding on our purchase.

To what extent does the caloric value of a particular food tell us whether it will make us pleasantly full and satisfied? There are many other factors at play, such as quality, method of preparation, freshness, additives, vitamin content, amount of protein, carbohydrates and fats, whether the food is hot or cold, the role of our digestive system, our individual predilections, our olfactory sense, our frame of mind, the love with which a dish was prepared and so much more.

In 1996, I resolved to stop counting calories. Initially, it was hard getting the numbers out of my head. Whenever a number would pop up and/or I would start calculating, I decided to stop that thought. Nowadays, I no longer remember calorie counts by heart. Earlier on, I would not have thought it possible to forget, but it actually can happen. Just like with my French vocabulary, - as soon as I stopped practicing, it drifted into oblivion.

The scale

While there is nothing wrong with the scale per se, I would suggest that you re-consider its use, if weighing yourself is a decisive factor of your life. The following examples may help you recognize whether this is the case for you:

- * You feel extremely ill at ease if you, for whatever reason, are unable to weigh yourself.
- * You step on the scale several times each day.
- * You weigh yourself again after a bowel movement, since you hope that you may have lost a few ounces.
- * You experience a sense of anxiety before stepping on the scale.
- * Your mood depends on what the scale tells you. Within a split second, the weight your scale shows causes you to feel either euphoric or frustrated.
- * Whenever your scale shows more weight than expected, you immediately think that your day is a lost cause. You instantly feel heavier, even though you may have felt physically quite well shortly before.

- * You no longer understand the world if the scale does not show a weight loss, although you ate “right” the day before.
- * You are overjoyed because you lost some weight after having come down with the flu and are terribly disappointed to find you have re-gained it within a couple of days.
- * You are afraid that a “foreign” scale may show more weight than your own and thus relativize your weight loss successes.
- * You take the scale with you on vacation.
- * The scale decides whether you may eat pizza or cake on the weekend.
- * Even a pound more unsettles you extremely.

I remember one particular occurrence: One day, my scale showed that I had lost about two pounds. I was over the moon! My clothes were fitting just right, and I felt terrific. It was a beautiful day, and I walked through the city, feeling wonderful, perhaps even a little flirtatious. No wonder, – I thought I was looking great!

Later that day I visited a friend and stepped one more time on her scale. Over four pounds more than at home! That couldn't be! Quickly, I took off my clothes and calculated how much I had been eating and drinking. To no avail: according to my friend's scale, I had not lost any weight. Suddenly, my clothes seemed too tight, and I felt awful.

Isn't it remarkable what effect the scale can have on us?

Since I was unable to cope with the full extent of losing control, I weaned myself gradually: I resolved that I would not weigh myself prior to the onset of my monthly period. Due to water retention, I tended to weigh more during that time. Additionally, I stopped weighing myself after going through one of my binge eating episodes. I did not want to torture myself even more. Finally, I put my scale in the farthest corner of my apartment, so that it no longer was within easy reach. I had to take the conscious decision every time not to get the scale out of its little nook. Another wholesome move was not to aim for a precise target weight and to ignore the scale's decimal points.

We are humans and not machines, and even with regular eating behavior it is normal that our weight fluctuates.

I still remember how, during my time of binge eating, an additional 300 grams would drive me to despair. “300 grams more than yesterday? What if I gain another 300 grams by tomorrow? And the day after?! None of my clothes are going to fit me at the end of the month! Panic!” I was astonished to find that I, in reality, was unable to feel whether I weighed 300 grams more or less. By not getting on the scale every day, I was able to spare myself assorted mood swings.

Eating without control mechanisms?

If we are *not* on a diet, and do *not* count calories and are *not* controlled by our scale, is the path out of eating disorder tantamount to uncontrolled feasting, with the inevitable consequence that we will be bursting at the seams?

Definitely not! Even when not in the throes of eating disorder, a certain form of control is necessary when it comes to food and eating. Many of us live in societies with excess resources. Food is in abundant supply, readily available, and for most of us, affordable. If we are to feel well within our own bodies, we should definitely not eat everything that’s available! We need to decide what we would like to consume and what not.

How we arrive at this decision, is of utmost importance. When we suffer from eating disorder, the head decides what the body needs. The body itself, on the other hand, has very little to say; it is largely ignored and/or dominated. I don’t think that this is the way to create physical wellbeing. Thus, finding the path to recovery from eating disorder means listening to the body’s needs. The body itself is allowed to decide what it needs.

As long as we are still unused to listening to our body’s voice, it is a little bit like the humming of a bee in the middle of a busy highway’s din: It is easy not to hear it, or ignore it. Therefore, our body needs extra support in order to prevail with its needs, despite the challenges of everyday life, time constraints and other obstacles. Here, the head has an extremely important role to

play. It finds the way to implement the “Yes” or “No” messages of the body. But, unlike in the case of eating disorder, the head plays a supportive role, rather than a domineering one. Living in harmony with one’s own needs means that body and head must act together.

How does our body know when to eat what, and how much? Body-oriented measurement units will help us make these decisions. I shall introduce them to you on the following pages:

Hunger and Satiety

Hummers and Beckoners

I used to think that living without eating disorder would mean not having to think a lot about eating and food. This, however, does not correspond to my situation today: I eat every day, and therefore I have to choose every day from the large supply of available foods. This means that I have to consider – or, perhaps even better, perceive, what will do me good and how much I need each day. What did change, however, is the fact that thinking about food has become so much more enjoyable, and no longer is a burden. Moreover, I no longer have the sense of a terrible loss if I tell myself “no” one day, knowing that there definitely will be a “yes” some other time. I am confident that I am allowed to eat with gusto and pleasure every day.

Yet, let me not deceive you: The mere fact that the measuring units are body-oriented does not at all mean that our inner voices don’t rebel at times. Food is seductive: It looks appealing, smells delicious, loves us, is there for us, gives us pleasure, comforts us, drives away fatigue or boredom, and thus fills many voids. Saying “no” can be a challenge, even though body and head are working together. But if “no” originates in the body, it has been my experience that long-term implementation becomes easier. The emphasis is on “long-term”, because it takes practice to introduce new behavior patterns.

On my path of recovery from eating disorder, I used to hate words like “long-term”, “having patience”, or “taking time”. My problems were nettlesome, and therefore I yearned for “miracle diets”, quick fixes, and successes which would be immediately apparent.

The following insight was essential: Finding the path out of eating disorder meant changing my life, something which could not be done “quickly”. My healing only began when I no longer shied away from taking the long road.

Living in accordance with the needs of our bodies, means being able to read their language. To me, this is comparable to reading written text. Remember how we struggled as children, trying to read our first words? And today we read entire books without a trace of difficulty. Learning to read the language of our body is similar: It takes practice and resolve. Therefore, let me ask you to be particularly kind and gentle to yourself as you undertake this endeavor, just like you would deal with a child trying to learn how to read. The things that may seem difficult today will become routine with practice.

Body measurement unit “hunger”

Our hunger responds to the question “When should I eat?” The answer is: “Whenever your body is hungry.”

Physical hunger ≠ emotional hunger

In the sentence “Whenever your body is hungry”, the emphasis is on the word body. We may eat whenever we sense physical / bodily hunger, as opposed to psychological / emotional hunger.

Physical hunger is the hunger of the body, indicating a bodily need. In order to meet our body’s need, we must have a sufficient amount of nutritious food, “nutritious” meaning that our body not only feels full but also satisfied.

Emotional hunger, on the other hand, is the hunger of the soul, indicating an inner need. In order for the soul to feel sated, it also needs nourishment. Chocolate pudding or chips only fulfill this role to a limited degree. What is needed is self-care through nurturing thoughts and actions.

As long as we have not yet learned to distinguish between physical and emotional hunger, we perceive both as one thing only, namely bodily hunger, which we try to still by eating. Therefore,

we need to learn which hunger we are dealing with in order to react appropriately.

My hunger seemed to know no bounds. No matter how large the unit or the amount – one piece, one slice, one portion, one plateful or one package – it was never enough. Basically, I was able to eat all the time. Sometimes, I was “grazing” the entire day.

I was convinced that I could not trust my boundless hunger. If I were to heed it, I would devour twice, three, or four times as much food (or even more), and inevitably grow fat. Therefore, I tried to do my best to suppress my hunger. My important “eureka” moment came when I understood that it was my emotional hunger which knew no bounds, and not my physical hunger! Finally, I understood why I was unable to actually taste or enjoy chocolate during my bingeing episodes. My emotional hunger simply needed something else! Therefore, I had to figure out two things on my path to recovery: Which nourishment (in the sense of food) did my body need? And which nourishment (in the sense of caring support) did my soul need?

Perceiving physical hunger

Just like any other feeling, physical hunger is highly subjective. Therefore, you will have to figure out your own personal hunger indicators. Psychology tends to use scalar systems in order to find out how strongly a client experiences a certain feeling. Equally, we may use a scale in order to define our hunger: “Hunger 1” means a little hungry, while “Hunger 10” means extremely hungry.

Many people tend to think that being hungry and a growling stomach are one and the same. There are, however, many more signs, both physical and emotional, that let us know that we are hungry.

end of reading sample / Chapter 3

Chapter 4:

Satisfying our emotional hunger

My biggest challenge was not to eat when I was physically full. Often I read the following advice in various magazines: "Instead of eating sweets, try taking a nice hot bath. It will relax you, and your urge to eat will subside." This type of advice used to infuriate me because it never worked for me. If I felt the urge to eat, no bubble bath, no cup of tea or telephone chat with a friend, or any other kind of diversionary tactic would help. The only thing that would help was eating.

It took quite some time before I realized that this in no way was a reflection of my own ineptitude, as I used to think. The fact was that my emotional hunger was too great to be satisfied through simple means, like, for instance, taking a bubble bath.

My emotional hunger manifested itself in physical sensations which were close to unbearable: Permanent tenseness and tightness in the throat, pressure and anxiety sensations in the chest, and the feeling of being surrounded by cotton wool. I sensed an enormous inner void which felt like a huge hole inside of me. I was constantly racked by feelings of self-doubt and a lack of self-assurance. In terms of the physical hunger scale from 1 to 10, I would peg the emotional hunger I felt at the time at signal level Red, meaning between 7 and 10.

During the day, I was usually able to ignore or suppress my emotional hunger by constantly keeping busy and engaging in endlessly circling thought patterns. After all, I had to be in top form at all times. However, when things calmed down in the evening, the burdensome feelings inside of me became unbearable. My emotional pain demanded the attention I otherwise denied it. It felt like a bunch of sensations which were all knotted up, like a rock weighing a ton, like "I can't stand it! Take it away from me, right now!" I needed a high dose of an antidote which would immediately relieve me of my suffering: I had to eat.

Binge eating episodes are high-dosage antidotes used in order to immediately bring our inner situation from "completely unbearable" to a level that is tolerable. Gentler methods, like bubble baths, only start working after a certain amount of time. If, however, the inner pressure is enormous and we are hardly able to stand it, we resort unconsciously to the high-dosage quick fix of

overeating, which is usually followed by a guilty conscience. While it is not pleasant, it feels familiar, and is thus easier to bear than the sensations usually associated with emotional hunger.

My emotional hunger was enormous because I was not doing well in those days. Although I tried to present a radiant and cheerful image to the outside world, I was deeply insecure and sad. It was difficult for me to embrace my needs. In most instances, I didn't even recognize them. I often felt that I was a burden and in the wrong place. I used to vacillate between rejoicing to high heaven and plunging to the depths of despair. Since I had no inner stability, I looked for it on the outside. I had forgotten to enjoy life on account of my perpetual, perfectly maintained to-do lists and planning exercises. In the back of my head, I was constantly pre-occupied with all the things I still had to do. I spurred myself to constant high-level performance and hardly allowed myself any leisure time.

I tried to please others in order to get the approval I so desperately craved. Yet, it was never enough. Praise, recognition and manifestations of love felt like a drop in the ocean. I constantly critiqued myself and hated my shortcomings.

In order to get away from binge eating and overeating, our emotional hunger needs to be stilled first. On the path of recovery, it is important to gradually lessen the permanent inner pressure and tension, so we can become increasingly more tranquil. Only then will we be able to develop coping strategies to help us during emotionally stressful times, which inevitably occur in every life, by applying gentler methods than binge eating. Bubble baths, a nice cup of tea or a telephone chat with a friend may then become appropriate.

Stilling our emotional hunger requires taking appropriate steps and measures on a regular basis. If we have neglected ourselves emotionally for many years and lived in contradiction to our innermost core, meaning that we literally have “shriveled up”, the notion that a bubble bath will take care of things simply does not work. Nor is it enough to afford ourselves an occasional weekend get-away at a spa or similar place every six months or so, while

neglecting ourselves completely in between. Our emotional hunger needs regular supplies of “soul food” just like our body needs to be fed regularly in order to be satisfied.

Let me make my point more clearly by drawing a comparison between emotional hunger, emotional pain and back pain. When we suffer from acute back pain, we may have to resort to a strong and effective painkiller in order to be able to function in the short term in our daily lives. However, in order to reduce the pain and thereby the use of painkillers in the long run, we need to take care of our back health. Some important steps include learning to assume a correct posture, by strengthening our back muscles and occasionally having a specialist help us address blockages in the spinal column. The healthier our back becomes, the less frequent the acute pain attacks will become.

Occasional recurrences of back pain will ideally be less painful, and we may be able to address them through less extreme methods, such as some gentle back exercises. We need to pay attention to our back in order to improve its condition, and do so on a regular basis and not only when the pain flares up. The long-term healing success depends on the degree of the pain’s chronic and entrenched nature.

You may like to imagine emotional hunger as a large vessel we carry inside us. When we find ourselves at level 10 of the hunger scale, the vessel is empty and bottomless, meaning that everything poured into it will immediately be drained. Hence the feeling “everything is always too little.”

First and foremost, the vessel needs to be given a solid bottom. This is the most important and often the most protracted part of the healing process. In most cases, professional support in the form of psychotherapy is needed.

Only after such a solid bottom has been created are we able to fill the vessel with nourishment for our soul. Step by step, the vessel will begin to fill up, while at the same time our emotional hunger begins to diminish.

The vessel’s basic substance will determine how long it takes to solidify its bottom and fill it up. Ideally, our inner vessels will eventually be filled to the brim and run over. Then, we’ll have enough energy to share with others, without overly straining our own resources.

There are two dimensions in dealing with emotional hunger. First, we need to replenish our inner vessel regularly in order to still our emotional hunger gradually, and lessen the pressure. Secondly, we need to develop strategies other than overeating to cope with the emotionally stressful and taxing times that are a normal part of life.

Perceiving our emotional hunger

On the path of recovery from eating addiction, it is essential to distinguish between physical and emotional hunger. Different measures must be taken in order for both to be satisfied.

Physical hunger	Emotional hunger
Synonym: Bodily hunger	Synonyms: Hunger of the soul, emotional pain, inner lacking, enormous void, inner pressure, inner tension, accumulated oppressive feelings, living against our innermost core. ...
Becomes acutely manifest whenever our body needs food.	Becomes acutely manifest when our soul needs tender loving care.
The hunger of the body.	The hunger of the soul.
Arises when we fail to give our body over a relatively short time period or just a few hours no or too little food.	Arises when we give our soul no or too little loving care over an extended period of time, often many years.

Physical hunger	Emotional hunger
Should be satisfied, at the latest, at level 5-6 on the hunger scale in order not to turn into ravenous craving.	Should be satisfied regularly in order to prevent emotional pressure from building up.
Increases when we are living in contradiction to our physical needs.	Increases when we are living in contradiction to our inner needs and essential core, and when we hide behind masks. Closely related to toxic shame.
Can only be fully addressed with the help of food.	May be suppressed in the short term with food, but will not be eliminated thereby.
It needs food in order to be stilled.	It needs inputs other than food in order to be satisfied, for instance love and self-care.
Felt at both the physical and emotional levels.	Primarily felt at the level of the soul.
Shows up independent of the availability of food.	Shows up especially when food is beckoning.
Shows up whenever we're physically hungry.	Shows up independent of physical hunger, especially when we're physically full, but still want to continue eating.
Shows up before the onset of a meal.	Often prefers to show up towards the end of a meal.
Satisfied through eating within a very short period of time.	Often impossible to satisfy it short-term.
When we are physically hungry, we are best able to perceive the taste of food.	When we are physically full, but continue to eat because of our emotional hunger, we are less able to perceive taste.

Physical hunger	Emotional hunger
Is the feeling: “If I eat enough I’ll be able to become physically full.”	Is the feeling: “It is never enough, no matter how much I eat.”
It should not be endured, as this will lead to ravenous cravings.	It needs to be endured sometimes, as it takes time to still great emotional hunger.
The question is: “What would you like to eat in order to feel satisfied?”	The question is: “What do you truly need right now, other than food, in order to feel better?”

If we haven’t given ourselves permission to eat when we are physically hungry, the signals of physical and emotional hunger will become mixed up. Why does this happen?

For one thing, we tend to hold back on eating for as long as possible in order to lose weight when we’re struggling with eating disorder. This causes our physical hunger to turn into ravenous craving, approaching level 10 on the hunger scale. At this point, our body sends out the signal: “Food! Right now! A lot!”, since it desperately needs nourishment. Similarly, emotional hunger in people with eating disorder demands attention. The better we learn to satisfy our physical hunger, the more clearly we will be able to distinguish it from emotional hunger. When we feel physically full, but something in us still calls for “Food! Right now! A lot”, we know that it’s our emotional hunger which wants to be heard.

Moreover, when we are afflicted by eating disorder, everything having to do with food and eating is considered “bad” and saddled with feelings of guilt. At the same time, feeling guilty when eating is a clear indication of emotional hunger, since we feel deep down that in reality we need something other than food.

If we gradually learn that it's completely alright to eat whenever we're physically hungry, and are thereby able to reduce the feelings of guilt, we identify the voices of emotional hunger more clearly. It is important to learn the language of our emotional hunger in order to respond to it adequately, meaning with something other than food.

I found out that my emotional hunger speaks to me in a language that is different from the one my physical hunger tends to use. To me, these voices are the clearest sign of emotional hunger. They primarily show up when I am physically full, but "still need a little something else."

My inner voices assume three different guises. Most often, they sound like a little child hitting the floor theatrically in the supermarket, screaming: "I need some sugar, right now!!" Alternatively, my inner child will seem withdrawn and hurt, and show through its body language that it feels neglected. "You are so mean and won't even let me have this." Finally, there may be a sugar-sweet, tempting siren voice, whispering to me: "You've already had to compromise so much. At least, here and now, all your wishes may be fulfilled. Come on! Eat it, eat it, – and just eat it."

I have learned to distinguish whether the signal "Food! Right now! A lot!" comes from my physical or my emotional hunger. If it is my physical hunger, it means "Please, eat something. Listen to your body now!" If it is my emotional hunger, it means "You are physically full. You know that it will neither taste good nor will it do you any good if you continue eating now. Is it actually food you need? What do you really need?" In moments like these, I most often need some rest, loving attention or affirmation and, in the long run, less work and more time and space for leisure and fun.

The big question is: How can we still our emotional hunger? In other words: What do I need in order to feel comfortable and happy in my life? How I would love to give you a simple answer! But there is none. This is the big challenge when we suffer from eating disorder. We need to find out, step by step, what we need in order to still our emotional hunger and to nourish our soul.

This takes a journey of inner development and, naturally, time.

Taking care of our self-relationship

When trying to still our emotional hunger, the issue of self-relationship is critically important. It is usually when we're mired deeply in a relationship crisis that we also struggle with binge eating addiction. Maybe you'll think it strange that I am talking about a relationship crisis in this particular context. I do think, however, that the relationship we have with our own selves absolutely is comparable to the relationship between partners. The fact that we cannot get out of our own skin does not mean that the relationship we have with our own self automatically functions well. Here, too, relationship care is needed, just as it is in partnerships and friendships.

Such relationship care doesn't begin only during times of crisis. Quite the opposite is true. In order to achieve a closeness, we constantly have to strive to do things for one another, to be attentive and to perform the occasional piece of "relationship work". The same goes for the relationship we maintain with our own self. It's been my experience that it is a mistake to think we don't need to do anything nice for ourselves when we are doing well! If we want to overcome our eating disorder for good, it is important to especially use the times of strength to replenish our empty tanks and inner voids. When we are relatively relaxed, it is easier to find and try out emotional tools for our wellbeing, compared to times when we are yet again feeling down in the dumps. We thereby create important resources for the times when life in general and our self-relationship are not on a smooth path.

As is the case with any other type of relationship, it is completely normal that our relationships with ourselves, too, are not equally close every day.

This was a significant insight for me! I used to think that "normal" people always feel equally well and beautiful. During the course of many honest conversations I found out that this is not the case.

Sometimes we get on our own nerves, and sometimes we enjoy spending time with ourselves. Sometimes we think we're great, and at other times less so. That's absolutely fine! Therefore, we need to learn to live with ourselves in an appreciative relationship, on both good and bad days.

What about self-love?

The more we love ourselves, the more prepared we are to do nurturing things for ourselves and to embrace our needs. The more often we do this, the smaller our emotional hunger will become over time. While this may sound easy, it is far from so when we are in the throes of eating addiction. If you've read the chapter on toxic shame, you will understand why we find it so unbelievably difficult to like, let alone love, ourselves.

In the past, I would have reacted to the topic of "self-love" with a little tired smile: "That's all very well and good, and may work for others, but definitely not for me." In many respects, I yearned to be someone different. I felt it impossible to ever be able to love someone like myself.

end of reading sample / Chapter 4

**This book is available for purchase via the
website of Amazon.**

Chapter 5:

Sensing and enduring our feelings

I remember eating slices of crisp bread, one after another, shortly before my driving test back in 1994. One of my fellow students expressed his surprise: “I wouldn’t be able to eat a thing right now!” Today, I realize that I was trying to swallow my nervousness by eating.

However, nervousness was not the only thing giving me a reason to eat: I ate when I didn’t know what to do with my time, I ate when I was really busy, I ate when my job provided too little of a challenge, I ate when I was overtaxed on the job, I ate when I was unable to concentrate, I ate when I wasn’t doing well, I ate when I was doing well – out of fear that my happiness would not last, and I ate when I sensed a feeling within myself which I could neither define nor endure.

Accordingly, I didn’t just overeat during my bingeing episodes. In my daily life, I also ate much too often without my body asking for it. I used food to regulate my emotions. Consequently, I often felt stuffed, even when I wasn’t bingeing. I used to think I could solve the problem through occasional fasting.

Only later on, did I recognize that, in reality, the solution to my problems was somewhere else: I had to learn how to deal with my feelings instead of swallowing or repressing them. Moreover, I needed to learn to face my feelings in real time, in order to prevent them from growing into an unbearable, tightly knotted, enormous ball, which would only be untangled with the help of bingeing episodes.

The body as the theater of feelings

The word “feelings” encompasses the term “to feel”. This helps us understand the way in which we perceive feelings: We feel them with the help of our body. Our head, meaning our thoughts, helps us to interpret what we feel and to translate our feelings into needs.

“The body is the stage upon which our lives are played out”

(Weiss / Harrer / Dietz: Das Achtsamkeits-Übungsbuch: Mehr Lebensqualität durch Entschleunigung.) Translator’s note: We decided to provide the original

German titles of referenced works which have not been translated into English.

Languages offer various terms for naming what goes on inside us. In order to enable us to concentrate on the essentials in this chapter, I've deliberately chosen not to deal with the exact differentiation between the concepts of "feelings", "emotions", "moods", "sensing" and "to feel".

In the past, the head was my principal decision maker. It determined how I should feel, whom I should like, who I was to be, and what my daily life should be like. Almost everything was fully thought through and planned. To the extent I was even aware of them, I left little room for my true feelings. The things my head figured out, however, were oftentimes not in harmony with my feelings and my essential being. "You feel tired? That's impossible, – you haven't achieved much of anything today! Get a grip, – there's still a lot to be done!" In those days, eating was the only way of allowing myself to do what I actually was yearning for deep down: To break down the barriers of control, to not have to function, to not always have to know "the right way", and to be able to forget everything during the sleep which usually followed my binging episodes. In order to free my subconscious from the need to rebel, the time had come to listen to my feelings instead of suppressing them by eating.

In order to perceive our feelings, it is necessary to feel our way deeply into our body. If we, however, live in separation from our body or even hate it, it will take time and practice in order to get in touch with it again.

In the past, sensing what was inside me, was alien to me. The fact that I often felt as though in a daze, made matters even worse. Therefore, I perceived my feelings most acutely when experiencing steep heights and profound depths. I found it very difficult to distinguish the nuances of the feelings in between.

The trauma therapist Peter A. Levine puts it as follows:

"Learning to understand the language of the body is remarkably similar to acquiring a foreign language. It has its own grammar, syntax and idioms. All of that cannot be

learned in one day.”

Therefore, please be patient with yourself as you learn to sense. There may be important reasons in your life why you only feel little or nothing at all. They may have served as effective protection mechanisms against psychological or physical injury. You are allowed to admit your feelings gradually and in small doses. This may allow you to determine whether the act of feeling is safe for you at a given moment, and let you gain the courage to increase your familiarity with your innermost being. Please do not force yourself. When confronted with anxiety-provoking or threatening feelings, enlist the help of an expert. If you experience major resistance against being able to sense your inner world, it is also advisable to consult a therapist.

Warm-up exercises for sensing

Our sensing ability functions optimally when we're not trying to force it. It's a bit like looking for a lost item. Most often, we manage to find it after we've given up rummaging feverishly through all drawers and have “let go”. When trying to sense, our inner attitude should be somewhat similar: we're not looking for anything specific, but rather open up to what's already there. We observe. When it comes to sensing, there's no “right” or “wrong”.

There is only your highly personal sensing which is always right, just the way it is, at any given moment; if you're initially unable to perceive anything, – that's also fine. You will then be able to explore how exactly this “nothing” in your body feels.

In order to sense, you will need to observe the perceptions in your body, meaning focusing your attention deliberately on that particular place. Unfortunately, there's no academic subject for “naming feelings”. Therefore, we sometimes don't have words to describe what is happening inside us. Thus, it becomes necessary to develop a vocabulary for our inner sensations.

When we are learning (or re-learning) to sense, we may start with simple physical sensing exercises in order to warm up, in a man-

ner of speaking. There's no need to immediately tackle understanding our most difficult emotions! It's a bit like learning math. We started out by learning addition before daring to approach multiplication. Today, we're equally comfortable with both! Learning to sense works in similar ways:

Practice makes perfect! For most of the exercises, it's not even necessary to make room for any additional time, since they can easily fit into our daily routines:

end of reading sample / Chapter 5

**This book is available for purchase via the
website of Amazon.**

Chapter 6:

Coping with binging episodes

Diary entry, May 6, 1998:

"10:15 p.m. I hate myself. I hate my job. I hate the part I believe to be missing. I hate my body. I hate my thoughts, which are too much.

I bawl almost daily.

I love my friends, I love the sun and spring. I love the scent of lilacs. I love skating.

I laugh every day.

I'm going crazy. Sometimes, I really think I'm going crazy. I constantly feel I'm pissing away my life. I'm incapable of enjoying things. The days are passing too quickly. Whoever taught me to think so much? How I hate it.

I just want to be satisfied. I'm never satisfied. At least, I want to be satisfied more often than dissatisfied. I've got the feeling I'm going downhill; I'm turning into a monster. I want to shut down these thoughts. I just want to take in everything the way it is. Shit.

I feel an inner void. I'm afraid it's been here for many years. Only, I suppressed it by overeating. I don't know how to fill this void (surely not by eating). I don't know what I'm looking for. I'm finished. I don't want to go on. I don't feel like trying anymore to see everything in a positive light. I just want to cry and feel sad. Mourn. For me and my life. No prospects. No boyfriend. No job which fulfills me. I'm sitting here. Tired, sore throat, too fat, without any inner radiance, pimply."

Diary entry, June 14, 1998:

"The time has come to take responsibility for my life, for who I am, what I do and what I have achieved. It is time to get to know myself and what makes me happy, gives me enjoyment; my goals and my beliefs. It is time to experience the here and now and not always to dwell on the future or the past. It is time no longer to shift the blame onto boyfriend / job / family / upbringing. It is time to follow my own path. But only step by step,

taking one step after another.”

When we are in the process of freeing ourselves from eating addiction, there are times when we see more light, and other phases when we only notice the shadows. Throughout, however, it is important that we support ourselves with the utmost loving care, especially during the dark times.

Guided by a caring attitude, we can learn to say: There are no relapses, only recurring or new behavior patterns. Even after having worked intensively on our development, we still fall back on old-established patterns, especially in times of major challenges – or when we feel weakened. In such situations, we simply don’t have enough strength to focus on new and unusual behaviors. Please don’t accuse yourself of failing! We’re only humans and not machines.

Setting realistic goals

On my path of recovery from eating addiction, behavior patterns marked by shame, especially my perfectionism and black/white thinking, were the stumbling blocks. I demanded a great deal of myself. Failure was not part of the plan. I wanted to carry out all exercises perfectly, full of enthusiasm, and “from now on, forever”. Each binge episode was a bitter setback and immediately made me doubt myself and the direction of my path.

At some point, I understood:

- * If I replace my perfect eating plans with perfect healing plans, I will fail perfectly.*
- * I need small, specific goals which I’m actually able to implement. Goals that are too lofty frustrate me.*
- * The binge episodes will continue to be with me for a while, no matter how hard I work on myself.*
- * Given that I neglected my body and my needs for years, changes can’t happen overnight.*
- * Leaving binge eating behind requires constant effort and consistent behaviors. I have to prepare myself for a long distance*

run, and not a short dash. Therefore, it's better to distribute my energies evenly.

- * Working on myself functions best when I'm in reasonably good shape. If I'm in the middle of a binge episode, I can't expect a lot of constructive behavior from myself.*
- * Whenever I perform one of the exercises, I deserve praise, no matter how well I do it. While on this path, I need all the support I can give myself.*
- * I will progress much better with caring self-motivation, and not by standing aside, cane in hand.*
- * Working on myself all the time, incessantly, doesn't work. Too much of a good thing can be too much. I can't always be constructive. Sometimes, I need a time out.*
- * As soon as I've got the feeling I'm going round in circles, I need the help of therapy.*

Anticipating binge episodes

Whenever I was able to go through an entire week without a single binge episode, I felt like the queen of the world! I was sure that I'd finally found the right knack. From then on, I would never have another binge episode! I was completely convinced that I would manage completely "without", definitely, until, ten days later at the most, I would be disabused of that notion. By setting my expectations extremely high, I created a number of unnecessary frustrating experiences.

Binge episodes will continue to be with you until you've found a different way of coping with life's challenges. Therefore, it can be expected that the binge behavior will stay with you for some time. This scares most people. "Does that mean that I'll have continue enduring binge episodes?" Let me reassure you: while they will go on for some time, the intensity will decrease gradually. The overwhelming vehemence will be diminished, and they will no longer be quite as repulsive. This will make them easier to endure.

When anticipating another binge episode, it no longer will catch you off your guard. I know: this self-honesty hurts. It won't help setting yourself the lofty goal of "From now on, I'll manage" only to feel like the worst loser whenever the next binge episode strikes. Binge episodes should not hang over your head like a sword of Damocles. Instead, I'd like to encourage you to take a realistic look at your situation: How many binge episodes did you have last month? On that basis, you can guess the number for the following month. Toxic shame thrives in dark corners. It's time to shed light on our binge habit, to own up to it and to assume responsibility.

What counts on the path of recovery from eating addiction is not how long you're going to manage "without relapsing". At issue is finding a way of mastering your life. For the time being, binge episodes are still an important tool in your search.

Understanding binge episodes as alarm signals

Even though we may be several years into our healing process, we will still go through ups and downs. That's part of life and completely normal. Especially during "low times", we tend to resort to usual patterns, including binge eating. If we're not doing well, these are the easiest ways to cope, and are thus completely legitimate.

On May 31, 2001, I wrote in my diary:

"Food and eating are again pre-occupying me. I feel fat, and have started looking at slim girls again. Beginning to hate myself again. Hmmm. This scares me."

During such phases, it is important to understand that our addictive thoughts and actions function like alarm bells: They want to draw our attention to something important.

During that time, I no longer experienced binge episodes. Still, I was occasionally overcome by my food-addicted thoughts and often ate more than was good for me. I understood that this actually was

a useful alarm system. It told me: "Somewhere, you're ignoring your needs. Walk more slowly. Treat yourself more lovingly. Take care of yourself." As soon as I did that, my symptoms disappeared. Over time, I learned how to listen to and appreciate this alarm system.

Diary entry June 4, 2001:

"Everything will be fine. No matter how it turns out, it will be alright. It's interesting to see, how pre-occupied I still am with food and how little I can do against it. Beconers / hummers are of little use right now, only patience and waiting will help. You've spent many hours of your life hating and rejecting yourself. It's time we made peace."

Appreciating small advances

In my practice, I often care for clients who report with a sense of desperation: "I've been working on myself for such a long time, but there's zero progress. I still have those bingeing attacks." In most cases, my answer will be: "Is there really no progress? Try having a closer look!"

Each and every bingeing episode is considered a bitter setback, since it often is viewed as an indicator of failure. However, we ignore the fact that the episodes will stay with us as long as we need them, no matter how hard we work on ourselves. Therefore, I recommend that my clients first and foremost look for other indicators of success, such as the quality of the attacks and changes in their daily lives.

end of reading sample / Chapter 6

**This book is available for purchase via the
website of Amazon.**

Chapter 7:

Life after Eating Disorder

Building a safe house to protect you

I think the path of recovery from eating disorder is somewhat like building a solid house. Imagine the following situation: You're standing by yourself on a mountaintop. All of a sudden, a heavy rainstorm bears down (= signifying that life's challenges are pummeling you, and you're desperate and lonesome and don't have a way out). You're cold and yearn for a place where you can take refuge. You're in need of a safe house (= self-confidence and self-love, which will enable you to face all kinds of situations without resorting to food addiction as your crutch).

However, a stable house cannot be erected overnight. First, the basement needs to be dug out, in order to give it a solid foundation (= comprehending eating disorder and understanding that, for the time being, it has an important function). Also, it's impossible to build a house all on our own. We need the help of specialists (= psychotherapy and/or body-oriented methods, workshops, books ...). Collaboratively, one brick at a time is put in place (= it is only possible to walk the path step by step).

At some point, the first room is finished. You enter it proudly and feel pleased (= appreciate small successes) and you feel protected there (= in many situations, you're already reacting appropriately without resorting to bingeing episodes).

During the process of building your house, you acquire a number of new skills, like being able to adjust the hinge of a door (= you learn, for example, to say "no" more often). In the beginning, your toolkit was a complete mystery, but now you have several valuable tools in it and know how to put them to good use (= you know, for example, which words to use when someone oversteps your boundaries).

If you run out of ideas, you may leaf through a magazine like "House Beautiful" (= whenever you feel you are going round in circles, get help again). Gradually, you start to sense what your personal "home" will look like (= step by step, you get to know yourself better and understand what it is you need).

At some point, your personal protective “house” has been completed. There will always be rain and wind because we cannot change the weather (= life will always throw us challenges), but now you will be protected (= you’ve learned to take care of yourself and react appropriately to such challenges without resorting to bingeing episodes).

In order for your house to stay comfortable and give you sufficient protection, it needs to be maintained and cared for regularly (= living is learning, because one is constantly confronted with new situations and problems). You may be able to handle some of the maintenance yourself, and for other issues you will need to consult specialists (= even after overcoming eating disorder, we are not entirely free of problems and are allowed to afford ourselves the support of a therapist from time to time).

It may not be perfect, but it is your house where you feel at home (= you accept yourself the way you are and no longer strive for perfection).

Life without eating disorder

I used to have a certain notion as to how I would feel once I finally had managed to live without eating disorder. During one of the exercises whose purpose it was to re-program my subconscious, I visualized the following situation: Striding across Vienna’s St. Stephen’s Square, I would be happy and radiant, full of energy and, above all, slim. People would be admiring and smiling at me.

Years later, I actually did cross St. Stephen’s Square. In the meantime, I had made peace with my figure and had left my bingeing episodes behind. I remembered the earlier visualization exercise and found that my actual feelings differed significantly from the ‘that’s-how-it-will-be’ vision:

There was no “YEAH!!! Look at me! Admire me! I, yes – I – did it! All the burden is gone, and I am FREE, FREE, FREE!”

I simply went across the square on that day – that was all. My thoughts were dwelling on a different topic, or, maybe, I was just

admiring the beauty of St. Stephen's cathedral.

Life without eating disorder does not feel like an explosion of happiness after winning the lottery. It feels just like an ordinary existence, having both joyful and sad moments, fun and frustration, beautiful and not-so-beautiful days, and, sometimes, even devastating misfortunes. Here's the difference from living with eating disorder: Feelings are no longer "swallowed" by overeating or repressed through other extreme behaviors like shopping addiction, athletic fanaticism, being constantly glued to our smartphones, or excessive self-control.

Our energy has stopped feeding our self-destruction, meaning that we no longer use it *against* ourselves, but *for* ourselves. Life overall becomes easier and more joyful. Mood swings are less pronounced, and we no longer vacillate rapidly between highs and lows. The sharp curve of our moods and emotions becomes more like a gentle wave, and our feelings are much easier to endure.

When I suffered from eating disorder I often asked myself what use there was in loving myself. Today I know: because I genuinely like and appreciate "me", I no longer inflict avoidable pain on myself. This insight has impacted many areas of my life. I only welcome people into my heart who understand and accept me the way I am, and I deliberately decide with whom I'd like to spend my spare time. I've learned to give myself exactly the kind of care I so sorely missed in the past. This has helped to lessen my neediness, something that has also had a positive impact on my relationships. My eating habits changed because I no longer wanted to impose stomach aches and other ills on myself. As a result, I've become healthier and more efficient, because I care for myself, and make sure to keep an appropriate balance between work and leisure. I've stopped defining my self-worth by the length of my to-do list. Only after cleaning it out, could I set clear priorities. Instead of chasing my life, I actually live it. I've stopped putting myself down countless times every day, and thereby stopped blocking myself with self-hatred. Precious energy has been released, which I can now put to good use, not only for myself, but also for those I care about. Since my thoughts no longer are

constantly focused on myself, I'm better able to perceive the here and now, and I've also become more open.

Life without eating disorder doesn't happen overnight. We don't wake up one morning with a totally new attitude. Rather, it comes slowly and gently. Gradually, we grow into our new life. Only by looking back will we be able to recognize: Wow, what a change! Any plans and schemes starting with "when my eating disorder is gone, then..." have little meaning because we cannot know what we will be like then.

When in the throes of eating disorder, we often ask ourselves: Is this ever going to end? Let me share with you a quote from the book "Breaking Free from Emotional Eating" by Geneen Roth, pages 207 and 208:

"There is an end to the self-flagellation, the punishment, the doubt, and the anguish of emotional eating. There is an end to the torturous way you interpret what you do with food, an end to using your eating against yourself. There is an end to classifying actions as good or bad or right or wrong and to classifying food as 'permissible' and 'not permissible'. There is an end to defining overeating as failure. There is an end to the half-crazed feeling of never-ending hunger. There is an end to wanting it to end.

There isn't an end to eating every day or to making mistakes. There isn't an end to fluctuations in weight. There isn't an end to change. There is no such thing as arriving and never having to work with yourself again. There isn't an end to feeling increasingly connected to and compassionate with yourself and those around you. There isn't an end to the joy of forever growing."

I used to think: "When my eating disorder is over, I'll finally be the person I've always wanted to be!" Meanwhile, I've come to understand that I will probably continue to change and develop for the rest of my life. This prospect no longer frightens me, because I've found a certain stability within myself. Moreover, I no longer feel the pressure to act because I don't worry about bingeing attacks breathing

down my neck. I'm no longer in a hurry.

"I now see that cultivating a Wholehearted life is not like trying to reach a destination. It's like walking toward a star in the sky. We never really arrive, but we certainly know that we're heading in the right direction."

(Brené Brown, "The Gifts of Imperfection"; preface, page XIV)

Both during and after eating disorder, I took the task of working with myself very seriously. There was always something to be changed or questioned, to be analyzed or processed, to be improved or to be made more harmonious. At some point, however, it dawned on me that joy, laughter and spontaneity were being shortchanged. The time for more play and fun in my life had come. Thus, my personal wish for the coming years is to make room for even more lightheartedness in how I deal with myself, simply allowing myself to be what I am. To trust that I will notice in time when another change needs to be made. To admit to myself: I am allowed to flourish!

Naturally, life without eating disorder, too, has its challenges. Just because we've put eating disorder behind us, doesn't mean that we are immune from major life events, such as separations, miscarriages, deaths, relationship crises or even banal, frustrating, everyday life situations. Moreover, I've meanwhile concluded that it's not possible to free ourselves completely from the voices of toxic shame. While they're not permanently with us once we've overcome eating disorder, they will continue to pay us the occasional visit, even afterwards.

But, maybe that's precisely life's meaning? Learning how to best cope with all the challenges instead of fighting them? Floating gently with the stream of life, instead of trying to swim upstream? Allowing ourselves enjoyment, even during moments of darkness?

I want to stand up even more courageously for what I am and what I need, instead of twisting myself around so "everyone" likes me or I make a good impression on "others". This is an area where I still have room to grow and to learn. Today, my goal is authenticity, rather than a "perfect" life.

“When acceptance and approval becomes my goal, and it doesn’t work out, that can trigger shame for me: ‘I’m not good enough.’ If the goal is authenticity, and they don’t like me, I’m okay. If the goal is being liked and they don’t like me, I’m in trouble. I get going by making authenticity the priority.”

(“The Gifts of Imperfection”, Brené Brown; page 54)

I know the feeling of waking up in the morning, thinking: “I really would prefer to sleep forever.” I believe that it ultimately was important for me to clearly say “yes” to life, rather than destroying myself gradually.

Everything told, I lead a satisfied life today, and have found my place. Without eating disorder, I would not have had the pressure to act. Without eating disorder, I would not have been forced to embark on a journey of self-discovery, to look for and to find what suits me and enables me to lead a harmonious life.

“The opposite of ‘never enough’ isn’t abundance or ‘more than you could ever imagine.’ The opposite of scarcity is enough, or what I call Wholeheartedness.”

(“Daring Greatly”, Brené Brown; page 29)

This may be the right moment to say to my eating disorder: “I want to thank you for having been part of my life. Thank you for opening my eyes and thank you for reminding me of the things that are truly important in my life. Without you, I’d never have become the person I am today.”

Nowadays, one of my professional priorities is to care for people afflicted by eating disorder. Time and time again, I find myself listening to the same burning question:

“Is it possible to overcome binge eating episodes?”

My deeply felt answer is:

Yes, it is, and I've experienced it myself!

This means that you, too, can do it!

With this in mind, let me wish you
the very best for your personal path!

Warmly ♥

Olivia Wollinger



This book may grow further!

Writing a book means spending endless lonesome hours in front of the computer, mulling over many thoughts. Therefore, I'd love to read how you, the readers, feel about my book. Please feel free to post your review on either my website or that of Amazon.

If you have questions about this book, please feel free to post them at www.farewelltobingeating.com – needless to say that you may do so anonymously. I promise to collect all questions and to answer them as best I can.

Tips for books, CDs and links

Books and CDs quoted in this book

Bradshaw, John: *Healing the Shame that Binds You*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc. 2005. – A “dense” book; it took me several months to read it. Bradshaw provides a comprehensive description of shame. This book gave me a few “aha” experiences and helped me greatly to understand myself and my addiction.

Brown, Brené: *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are*. Hazelden: Minnesota 2010.

Brown, Brené: *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*. New York: Gotham Books 2012. – To me, the books by Brené Brown feel like warm chocolate pudding for the soul, because she writes openly about her own mishaps. While examining the topic of shame from a scientific viewpoint, the author has a lively writing style, in addition to providing numerous vivid examples.

Johnston, Anita: *Eating in the Light of the Moon*: How women can let go of compulsive eating through metaphor and storytelling. Secaucus, N.J.: Birch Lane Press 1996

Luebcke, Susanna / Soeller, Anne: *Emotional Body Healing: Touches Your Heart, Changes Your Life*, Xlibris Corporation, 2010. – For everyone wanting to learn more about EBH.

Luebcke, Susanna: *Emotional Body Healing Meditation for the Heart* – CD with piano accompaniment, available via www.emotionalbodyhealing.com

Parlow, Georg: *Zart besaitet: Selbstverständnis, Selbstachtung und Selbsthilfe für hochempfindliche Menschen*. Wien: Festland Verlag 2003. – Numerous books on the topic of high sensitivity are commercially available.

Pearson, L. & L.: *The Psychologist's Eat Anything Diet*. The Gestalt Journal Press, Inc. 1973. – Here, to my knowledge, the concepts of hummers and beckoners, to which both Geneen Roth and I later on referred, were discussed for the first time. The book also deals with the issues “overweight” and “eating with children”.

Roth, Geneen: *Breaking Free from Emotional Eating*. New York: Penguin Group 2005. – This book explains eating when hungry, in addition to hummers and beckoners.

Rowling, Joanne K.: *Harry Potter*: New York: Scholastic Inc. 1999. – I love the Harry Potter novels!

Schmidt, Amy: Dipa Ma: *The Life and Legacy of a Buddhist Master*. Cambridge: Windhorse Publications 2005.

Wardetzki, Bärbel: *Weiblicher Narzissmus: Der Hunger nach Anerkennung*. München: Kösel Verlag 2010. – Unfortunately, the work on “Female Narcissism: The hunger for approval” has yet to be translated into English.

Weiss Halko / Harrer Michael / Dietz Thomas: *Das Achtsamkeits-Übungsbuch: Mehr Lebensqualität durch Entschleunigung*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta Verlag 2012. – You will find that there are many English-language books on mindfulness commercially available, including the work on mindful eating by Susan Albers.

Additional recommendations

Chapman, Gary: *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts*. Chicago: Northfield Publishing 2011. – Different people show their love in different ways. I found this insight useful as it helped me recognize that I received more love in my life than I was aware of.

Inside out: Animated Disney Pixar movie about inner voices, (awarded an Oscar in 2016). I find that this loving and detailed account kindles our curiosity to get in touch with our own inner voices, in order to, perhaps, at some point maintain a friendly relationship with them.

Marshall B. Rosenberg: *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*. Encinitas, CA: Puddle Dancer Press 2015. – This book may help to learn formulating our own needs.

Rosen, Marion: *Rosen Method Bodywork: Accessing the Unconscious through Touch*. Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books 2003. – For everyone wanting to learn more about the Rosen Method.

Just for fun

Whenever we work intently on our self-development, it sometimes becomes necessary to stop and relax. In such moments, we're allowed to enjoy things that do not further our development and do not teach us anything, but simply are good for the soul. Here are four of my favorites:

Basford, Johanna: *Secret Garden: An Inky Treasure Hunt and Coloring Book*. London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd. 2013. – A coloring book for grownups.

Canfield Jack: *Chicken Soup for (the Cat Lover's) Soul: Stories of Feline Affection, Mystery and Charm*. Soul Publishing LLC 2012. – Pleasant stories, but if you're not a cat lover, there are many other nice books in this series.

Marbaix, Jane: *Zentangle for Kids: The Fun and Easy Way to Create Magical Patterns*. London: Sterling Publishing 2015. – Coloring pictures with small patterns, beautiful and simply explained.

Paddington, the 2014 movie, based on the book by Michael Bond. You will find the trailer on YouTube.

Websites

www.farewelltobingeating.com: The English-language website companion to the book. Here you will find details on the author and questions about the book from its readers.

www.aivilo.at: This is Olivia Wollinger's German-language website. She practices in Vienna, Austria, where she specializes in caring for people who want to learn how to sense their feelings again, in addition to focusing on food addiction and the desire to have children. By the way, "aivilo" is "Olivia" spelled backwards.

www.emotionalbodyhealing.com: This is Dr. Susanna Luebcke's website. She now lives with her husband in the Pacific North West. You may make arrangements for private sessions (live, Skype or phone) and seminars.

www.roseninstitute.net: Here you will find information on the Rosen Method and a list of Rosen professionals who meanwhile can be found on many continents.

www.ted.com: Inspirational talks of maximally 20 minutes' length, for example by Brené Brown.