

Changing gluttony to love

by Joanna Rotté

It seems as if in order to effect prosperously whatever I undertake to do, I must undertake the doing of it at least twice. Whether it be to hammer a nail, roll a pie crust, compose a story, digest a philosophy, fall in love (with the same person), or lose weight, there is consistently a rehearsal round before the consummate performance. Perhaps I am a slow learner, a fool for practice, or it may be the ominous Saturn square Neptune in my chart. Whatever, so it went in this most true tale of how I cured gluttony—twice.

Before I began eating macrobiotically, I was, to men of passion, raffig, voluptuous, Rembrandtesque; to women friends, I was well developed, eighteenth-century drawing room, to my family, large-boned; to me, I was fat. Being an actress, I was inauspiciously cast in Earth Mother roles—"Phaedra," "Medea," "Molly Bloom"—women emotionally far more mature than I; and when chosen for a part more suitable to my years, the character was, for example, the sybaritic, dim-witted "Princess Hunca-munca," or a sturdy peasant from Brecht or Chekhov, or the wide-grinning, moon-faced "Cheshire Cat" of *Alice in Wonderland*. It took sides of beef, mounds of cheese, and gallons of sweetly spiked drink to ingest those creatures, while in my young, overworked heart, I longed to play silky swans, svelte birds, tiny waifs, orphans of the storm.

I went on diets—low-carbohydrate grapefruit; high-protein hamburger; liquid salt-free Tab; low-fat cottage cheese; frozen weight-watcher's cardboard; crash-anything—tyrannical regimes to which I assiduously adhered, for a time, until fits of craving leveled all restraint. Then, I could gain in an hour what I had lost in a week. Without a food principle as guide, abetted by the amorphous system of calorie-counting, such dieting, unbeknownst to me, presaged failure. I was ignorant, frustrated, and hungry for something. It, the erratic abstinence ritual, culminated in a year-long submission to Dr. Seilman and his two quarts of tap water a day (in addition to coffee, tea, and diet-sodas), high protein, low-calorie, "Quick Weight-Loss" (drown your insides) Water Diet. Progressively, in those final twelve months of self-laceration, my intestines canceled out, kidneys whimpered to their death, and brains floated in the gummy-with-saccharine, soggy package of farmers' cheese that was once my body.

Propitiously, just short of suffocation by liquid, macrobiotics and the vegetable kingdom were revealed to

me. Here was virgin territory: grains never tasted, plants never known, a principle—balance food by its constituent properties of yin (expansion) relative to yang (contraction)—so simple, so reasonable; and a promise of health, happiness, beauty, and thinness. I was on. I dropped meat and sugar: fear faded from the dark corners between the subway and my home, and swordfish melted. I dropped fish and dairy products: construction-workers sang out, "Have a nice day, honey," instead of lasciviously growling, "Man, would I like a piece of that," and layers were shed. I dropped nuts and fruit: dogs and cats playfully nudged rather than attacked me, and density disappeared. I dropped raw food and wine: elderly ladies beckoned gently, instead of spitefully glaring as if I were guilty for being young, and I deflated. With that, my body changed, shifted, re-formed itself, lifting here, contracting there; in short (and I grew a half-inch taller), I was becoming a wheat stalk, a lily of the field, a flower. This was happiness; could it be ecstasy? I infused herbal teas and grated-dalton drinks, suffered ginger compresses, taro plasters, and high enemas, and paid big dollars to have acupuncture needles stuck in my hands, legs, abdomen, kidneys, and to have one permanently embedded in my ear. Four times a day I minced onto the bathroom scale, and if I had enjoyed a snack, a party, a feast, and gained a pound or two or three, I fasted a day or two or three in atonement. Granted, my eating was still fitful, unregulated, lacking rhythm, but I was balancing yin and yang—or so I thought—and it was working. But could I not mobilize a total cure (of intestines, kidneys, brains)—perhaps learn to fly, walk on water, evaporate altogether? Sustained by a vision of perfection, I fasted—fifteen days on bancha tea—and became a saint. Albeit weak (the sight of the curb rising at the opposite edge of a street corner loomed as if a mountain), I was five foot six-and-three-quarter inches, one hundred pounds, and playing "Laura," all delicacy, in *Glass Menagerie*. To men of refinement, I was liche, feminine, fragile; to women friends, trim, slender; to my parents, skinny; to me, I was incredulous.

Which is precisely the point: It, the body of air, was never quite real to me, never quite grounded, never quite of the earth. The fortuitous results of that practice round in yangization endured, slowly diminishing, for exactly one year from the commencement of the fifteen-day fast. Then, for two months, churning in spiraling waves of expansion, I lost consciousness and went OUT—out of

my clothes, out of my heart, out of my home, and out of my mind. The termination of those sixty days of gluttony and sixty nights of peanut butter, cornbread, and cashews was a crash landing in the woods of New Hampshire, with the horror of it, the disease of it, the weight of it: failure impacted the heavy heart of my swollen body. There was one, only one, saving comfort: a body fat on grains and vegetables is prettier than a body fat on meat and sugar, as the former is strung between the poles of heaven and earth while the latter is stretched between the candy machine and the slaughterhouse.

What had happened? Balance: from extreme yang contraction to extreme yin expansion; from extreme taxation to extreme relaxation; from a willow of intensity to a ball of numbness. It was justice—the severe hand of benign justice.

This is Round Two. I threw out the scale, the herbs, the compresses, the plasters, the needles, the strictness. My focus is out of the kitchen, off of my stomach, into my work. I keep active, moving. If I stumble, I meditate, breathe deeply, chant to shake the trees, saw wood, or scrub floors, whether they are dirty or not. As a result—and this is the crucial point—I am opening to love, the love that is all around, everywhere, in the air, the trees, the soil, the animals, the people, in God and in me. Consequently, I eat when I am hungry, once or twice a day, every day—more often when our sister, the Moon is full, progressively less as she wanes. The key to moderation is love.

To explain: If a being eats, smokes, or drinks to excess, does dope, sugar, or pills, it is because, in the context of total environmental and food intake, something has made her/him too yang—tight, rigid, stuck; therefore, the yin expansion derived from excess—chemicals, smoke, whatever—is an inevitable consequent relief from constriction. Given this body abused by a widely swinging yang-to-yin-and-back-again diet, it necessarily tires and develops blockages in the spiritual channel—the path along the seven chakras conducting electromagnetic energy between heaven (yin) and earth (yang)—therefore inhibiting its ability to sustain an even ki flow. As the ki flow becomes irregular (hypo- in a blocked area, hyper- in the complementary area), a general weakening and loss of power sets in. The organs are debilitated, the circu-

latory and nervous systems mucked up, and subtle sensitivity is buried. Seeing this process in terms of the universe: Rampant fluctuation leads to massive blockage and stifled subtle vibration; to impaired receptivity, to scant feeling of love; to a dismal, entirely out-of-order, hardened being. Once a body has become stuck and insensitive, to try to control attraction to harmful yin is foolish if not impossible. However, by embracing—along with macrobiotic food—activity, Yoga stretching, meditation, breathing, chanting (not as exercises to lose weight, nor as religio-health formulas for eliminating overconsumption, but as means to stimulate vibration), blockages are broken through and dissolved, ki flow is equalized, and sensitivity restored. Therefore, if I, as consumer, can open sufficiently to vibrate with the Order of the Universe, I will inevitably be moderately balanced and without need, rather than teeter-totterly balanced with greed. For the vibration of the Order of the Universe is the vibration of love, originating in perfect balance, in the One, wherein there is all, nothing, and no excess. And, assuredly, it is a historical and Hollywood truth that lovers, who are nourished by the rhythm of love, do not eat much. So, conclusively, to be released from cravings for food, smoke, liquid, drugs; emancipated from aberrant contraction to expansion to contraction to expansion to etc.; briefly, to become free: Firstly, open the spiritual channel, and, concurrently, become sensitive to love—which means become lovable; which means, be a lover.

As for the double ordeal in fashioning a heavenly body on earth, there is both insight and solace derived from being a two-time woman. The insight comes from recognizing that when one focuses on means rather than achievement, the balancing process loses the strain of effort, gains the fluidity of enjoying moment-to-moment change, and results emerge by surprise, as blessings from within one's nature, instead of calculated winnings over one's nature. There is Zen in that. The solace comes from feeling that balance—as love—is more comfortable the second-time around, much more wonderful with both feet on the ground. There is music in that. Such is the lesson and lyric of Round Two in this romantic's bout with gluttony. □