

What Are You Hungry For? Hint: It's Not Food

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A provocative new book reveals the self-defeating truth about dieting, while lighting the path to a full and healthy life. Says Oprah, "This book is an opportunity to finally end the war with weight and unlock the door to freedom."

When I first read Geneen Roth's *Women, Food and God* — in one big gulp — I knew I'd found something profound. I don't like the term *food addict*, but I realize I've been one, and it has taken me years to learn (and relearn) that the choices we make about what we put in our mouths are only stand-ins for the beliefs we carry in our minds and our hearts. So as I read Geneen's book, I recognized such a basic truth — and one that I seem to need to be reminded about time and time again: A lot of us use food as a drug — to hide from our feelings, to anesthetize ourselves, to escape. And I really wanted to talk to Geneen about this, because she seems to understand better than anybody else how we torture ourselves over a number on a scale or a size on a dress when we'd be better off putting our energy into loving and understanding our real selves. Here's a piece of our conversation:

Oprah: I think this book could have been called "Women, Shopping and God", or "Women, Meth and God", or "Women, Gambling and God", since food is just one of the things we use to deny our own worthiness — for love, for godliness, for peace. So why is understanding our obsession with weight the key to finally losing it?

Geneen Roth: A lot of people come to me and say they just want to lose the weight. And they want to get it over with, and they want the problem to go away, and they want to wake up thin tomorrow. But they don't really want to look at the beliefs that are fueling the whole obsession or, really, their relationships to themselves, to their families, to their lives. They don't really want to look.

What happens is that people end up losing weight ten, 20, 30, 50 times in their lives. They just endlessly do it, because they think endless dieting is a way to get a handle on their problem. But even if they get a handle on their dieting, just losing weight is not the point. Unless you really see what your core beliefs are, what's making you overeat — beliefs like "I'm damaged; I don't deserve this; love is not for me; this will never work out; God is a ruse; goodness is not for me; I'll always be separated from what I love" — and until you name those beliefs, they will shape your life willy-nilly. You'll just keep on acting them out by punishing yourself with food. But if you can finally get to understanding the beliefs underneath, you can learn how to live.

Oprah: You wrote *Women, Food and God* because you wanted women to—

Geneen Roth: I wanted women to, first of all, stop thinking about their "problems with food" as the biggest curse in their lives. It's the issues underneath the "problems with food" that need to be dealt with. I also wrote it because I wanted to share the knowledge that using food as the doorway to understanding yourself can lead to unimaginable beauty and openness and a kind of awakening. Most people don't know that. I think we all have a hunger that's hard to name. A lot of people who come to my retreats have never named it before, or else they've named it in church, but they can't actually see the connection between what they're doing with food and this yearning. I call it "the flame" that they have: They yearn for big answers to live a big life. But they have to start with the most basic fears.

Oprah: And this book is the place to start. It's an opportunity, a chance for all of us who have carried the curse of weight, the burden of weight, the struggle of weight to realize that understanding the roots of that struggle can lead to something richer, deeper, and more profound. I'm telling everyone to read it now!