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**What is Real Hunger?**

**By Caryl Ehrlich**

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In order to identify hunger, you must first understand what it is. This is not as easy as it seems. Many of you may never have let yourself experience true hunger, only a feeling of discomfort. Not knowing exactly what it was, you may have been eating past hunger for such a long time you can no longer differentiate between hunger and the feeling of anxiety, stress, boredom, or any number of other emotional or circumstantial stimuli. You haven't allowed yourself to go without eating for a long enough period of time to have felt true hunger; you may not have experienced it since childhood.

Each of us is born with an innate sense of hunger. When you were a baby and felt this sensation, you cried. Your mother or caregiver pacified you with a bottle or breast, and when you were no longer hungry, you pushed the food away. Before you could speak, you made yourself understood.

As a toddler beginning to eat baby food, you were still in control of your food consumption. Your mother might have thought you had to finish everything she served, but you had other ideas. You might have clenched your little baby teeth and not permitted one extra spoonful of anything to enter your mouth. She might have pushed your chubby little cheeks together trying to force you to open your mouth, but you would not. If she did manage to insert some food, you spit it out, sometimes on your bib, sometimes on mom. The message was clear. "No more food, Mommy."

As she persevered, you finally learned to please your mother by finishing everything on your plate. You may have been told that if you ate your vegetables, your reward would be dessert. You were bribed with a lollipop if you'd stop crying. You learned to eat all your food because it gave pleasure to others. It didn't seem to matter anymore whether you were hungry or not. You were taught to ignore your feelings of hunger and satiation just to please someone else. And you learned well.

Years later, you're still keeping a friend company by sharing a meal when you're not hungry, or accepting an alcoholic beverage just to be part of the crowd, or to please a hostess.

## What is Real Hunger?

The dictionary describes hunger as "the painful sensation or state of weakness caused by need of food." Some people become irritable, shaky, or disoriented if they are not fed at their usual mealtime. Others experience hunger as feeling lightheaded, empty, low, headachy, or hollow. At times a growling stomach prompts an eating episode. Some eat when they get depressed. Others lose their appetite when they get depressed. External stimuli are abundant, as are emotional and physical ones, yet few of these are hunger, just some other strain on your nervous system.

Human beings have a built-in fight or flight mechanism that helps them to survive. When your ancestors roamed the earth and encountered a tiger who had leaped out of the bushes, they would mobilize themselves to either fight the tiger or flee from it. Years later, you still face the tigers. A death in the family, loss of a job, or an illness may certainly have the bite of a tiger. Your pulse quickens, your mouth feels dry, your palms sweat and you revert to old behavior and try to quell the anxiety by putting something into your mouth. You also may be reacting to the fluctuations of daily life - a waiter being inept, traffic inching along, a line at the bank - that cause you to eat a box of cookies or ask for a

second helping of food. You might be misidentifying a minor travail as a tiger when it is only a baby cub.

Have you had the experience of thinking you were hungry at noontime only to become absorbed in a project or in a book, and have several hours pass before you think about food again? True hunger cannot wait a few hours. It demands to be fed. You were not hungry at noon but were responding to a time of day stimulus, another reason you've given yourself to eat. If you distract yourself with some other activity, the urge usually passes within a few minutes. Try to differentiate between your hungers and your urges.

Food need not fill you up in order for you to feel satisfied. A few bites of foods you don't usually eat can be very satisfying while baskets of bread, mugs of coffee, or liter bottles of diet soda might leave you feeling hungry and unsatisfied.

It is not okay to eat when you are physically or emotionally uncomfortable. Eat when you're hungry. Stop eating when you are no longer hungry, not when you are full or there is nothing remaining on your plate. As your clothes get looser, you'll start to enjoy leaving food on your plate. It is a process that takes time to achieve. Remember:

- Volume of non-nutritious food merely stuffs and bloats but does not satisfy real hunger.
- Variety and texture along with nutrition satiates hunger.

This article is an excerpt from the book *Conquer Your Food Addiction* published by Simon and Schuster. Caryl Ehrlich, the author, also teaches The Caryl Ehrlich Program, a one-on-one behavioral approach to weight loss in New York City. Visit her at

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## **Spiritual Hunger**

**By Valerie Garner**

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#### **SPIRITUAL HUNGER**

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The definition of this common word, (Hunger) "The state of discomfort or weakness caused by lack of food, a desire or need for food, ANY strong desire or craving." The parallel between the natural and the spiritual, truly is at times uncanny to say the least. We all know what natural hunger feels like. What about spiritual hunger? It can feel different to different people but common feelings are: a deep sense of emptiness; feeling like there's no meaning or significance to life; feeling lost; feeling like something is missing but not being able to identify even what is missing; it can be an edgy, gnawing feeling of unknown origin; it can feel like deep sobbing from the very center of our soul. These are only a few examples of what spiritual hunger can feel like.

Many, if not most times, when we feel this spiritual hunger we are unaware of what it really is. It does bring discomfort and pain, so we look to soothe that pain. We may fill that with anything...drugs, alcohol, any form of destructive habits, obsessive compulsions, eating disorders, sex, pornography, TV watching, the list is extensive. Many times we can also fill that same spiritual hunger with things that look more positive; like filling every second of our lives with busyness, people, family, kids, spouse, sports, entertainment of any kind, shopping, reading, work, the list is endless. Not that these things are bad, in and of themselves, but could we be using these things to fill spiritual hunger? I'd encourage you to think about what you tend to turn to when you sense those feelings of spiritual hunger. What are those areas of escape in our lives? There are also some who have been so wounded beyond belief that they simply have lost the ability to feel at all, thus masking spiritual hunger with numbness and denial.

We often view that discomfort or pain as an enemy to be quelled, after all, nobody in their right mind likes to hurt. Let's explore that a little further. Look back again at natural hunger (food). If we go too long without food, our tummies hurt, we start getting weak, maybe get a headache and if we go too long we can even start to lose our desire for food. If we keep going like this we will eventually die. Some can go longer than others without food, but the end result will always be death. Thus, hunger is actually a very good thing, it signals that we have a very real need for nourishment. This is EXACTLY the same thing spiritually. The bible says in Luke 6:21 "Blessed are you that hunger

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now, for you shall be filled."

Hunger a blessing? YES! For the hunger will cause us to turn to nourishment that is needed, in order to bring life. God our Creator, made every person with a need within our souls that ONLY HE can fill. His purpose is to bring life and bless us. When we try to fill that void with other things, it only leads to more hunger. It may bring temporary relief, like eating a bit of junk food that doesn't satisfy. Yet, our need is REAL food, food that nourishes and sustains us, gives us strength and life.

If you are feeling stirred in your heart now, if you're feeling spiritually hungry, there's good news. John 6:35 says "And Jesus said unto them, I am the BREAD OF LIFE, he that comes to me shall never hunger, and he that believes on me shall never thirst." Psalm 107:9 says, "For he satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness." Psalm 34:8 says, "O taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the man that trusts in Him."

It is easy to get spiritually filled. Simply ask with an honest heart something like "Jesus, I'm hungry, please come fill me, I need You" or whatever is on your heart. Have a heart to heart talk with Jesus who WANTS to bless you and fill you. One thing important to notice...we eat food in the natural everyday, our need for food spiritually is daily too, simply come to Jesus and you'll be amazed!

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