



## One Small Change

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**M**y client Leyla was stuck in a relationship that wasn't going anywhere. Things were great the first year but their relationship had been on the rocks for the last two. Leyla was terrified of breaking up with her boyfriend because she was convinced

she'd never meet anyone else, so she clung to him for dear life.

As we worked together, we peeled back the layers to discover how she was, or wasn't, nourishing herself. What someone is eating and drinking is usually a good barometer of how

they're taking care of themselves in all other respects. At the time, Leyla was living mostly on cola, fast food, alcohol, cigarettes, and late-night parties. She was feeding herself quick pick-me-ups to mask how tired and unhappy she really was.

Then one day, I could sense Leyla was getting fed up with her own destructive behavior. She was angry with herself and everyone else in the world, and the flood of tears finally fell. Through the tears she realized how afraid she'd been and paralyzed to change her life for fear she would make the wrong choices.

"Sometimes all it takes is one small change," I told her during our session. Leyla looked at me with a mixture of doubt and hope. "Because change is so hard for us," I continued, "we have to be loving and gentle with ourselves." And then I asked her to give herself permission for one change that would help strengthen her. Leyla thought a moment. "Maybe I could try to stop drinking cola," she said. This might seem like a small change, but for Leyla it was the catalyst that would help her let go of a lifestyle that had long ceased to support her.

As her nutritionist, I could have told her any number of things about how bad cola is for her, from the caffeine to the high acidity and chemical sweeteners used in diet colas. In the United States, cola has even been referred to as "liquid candy" because a 600 mL bottle contains as much as 85 mL of sugar. There's always a new study reporting the health hazards of drinking too much cola or smoking cigarettes or eating too many fried foods. But these news stories are never enough to change people's behavior. In my 30 years' experience as a nourishment consultant, I know people can't be told to change: They have to deeply want to change.

The next time I saw Leyla, she was beaming. She had drank only two colas in seven days. By the second week she had also cut down on smoking and drinking alcohol, which she and her boyfriend did a lot together. As her confidence in herself grew, she made more positive changes. Three weeks later, she went on a vacation by herself for the first time in years, visiting an old childhood

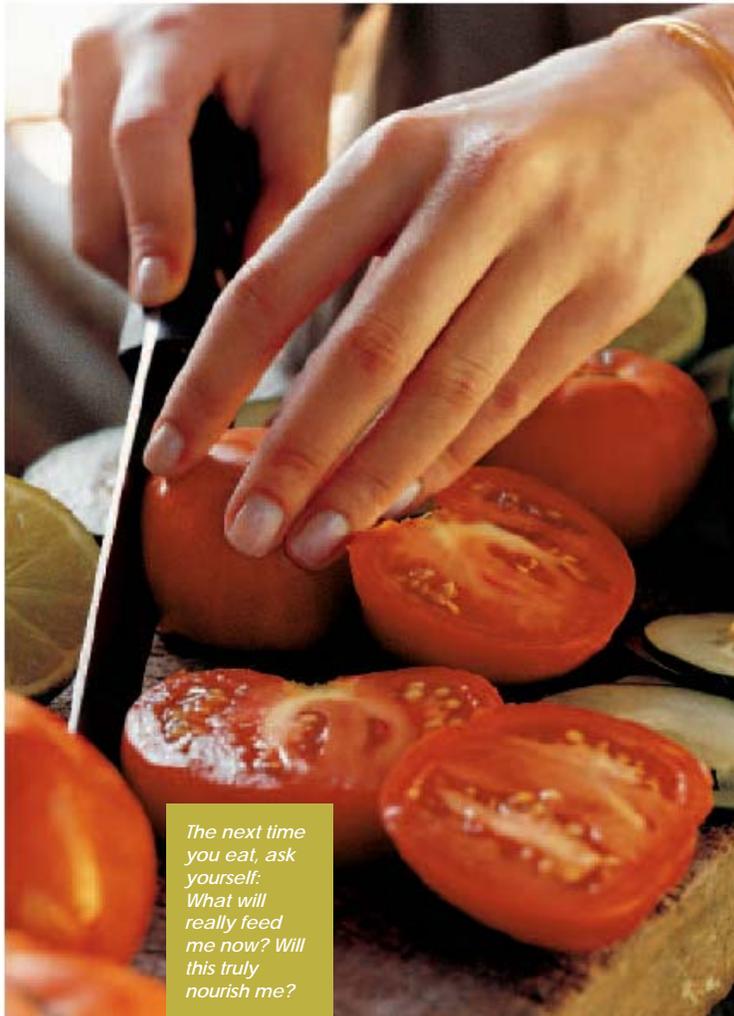
friend? That has a happy ending too. They fell in love and got married, and this winter welcomed their first baby.

When we desperately try to maintain the status quo because that's how it's always been, or how it should be, or what others think it should be, then we know it's time to make a change. Ironically, we spend so much time and energy resisting change while change is a fact of life. Really, it's that simple. All living organisms, from people to the trees and animals, are perpetually in flux. This is what it means to be *alive*—we change and we grow. But the human mind gets so powerfully attached to the notion that life should stay the same, or match our ideas, that we fight change every step of the way.

The most difficult changes seem to require us to let go of something or, like Leyla, someone. Change invites us to embrace the unknown. Even though she deeply yearned to be happily married, Leyla was afraid to end her relationship because she had no way of knowing what would happen once she did. What if she never met another man who liked her? But life doesn't give any of us guarantees. I think we have something even better, and that's possibility. You take a step. You experiment. You follow your heart and risk

letting go of what's comfortable, which often times is the exact source of your suffering, so that you can surprise yourself by truly being happy.

The more we resist our personal growth and live in fear of the unknown, the more life feels like a struggle. We go through the daily motions but in fact we're sleepwalking through our lives, caught between how things used to be and the projections or fear of how they might be. In other words, we swing from the



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friend with whom she had lost touch. She surprised herself and had a better weekend with this man than she had expected.

When Leyla came home, she finally had the courage to end the relationship. Once she stopped resisting the need to make changes, her life no longer felt so hard. In fact, she blossomed. She continued to reduce the fast food and cola, lost her extra weight, had more energy, and was happier than ever with herself and her new freedom. And her long-lost

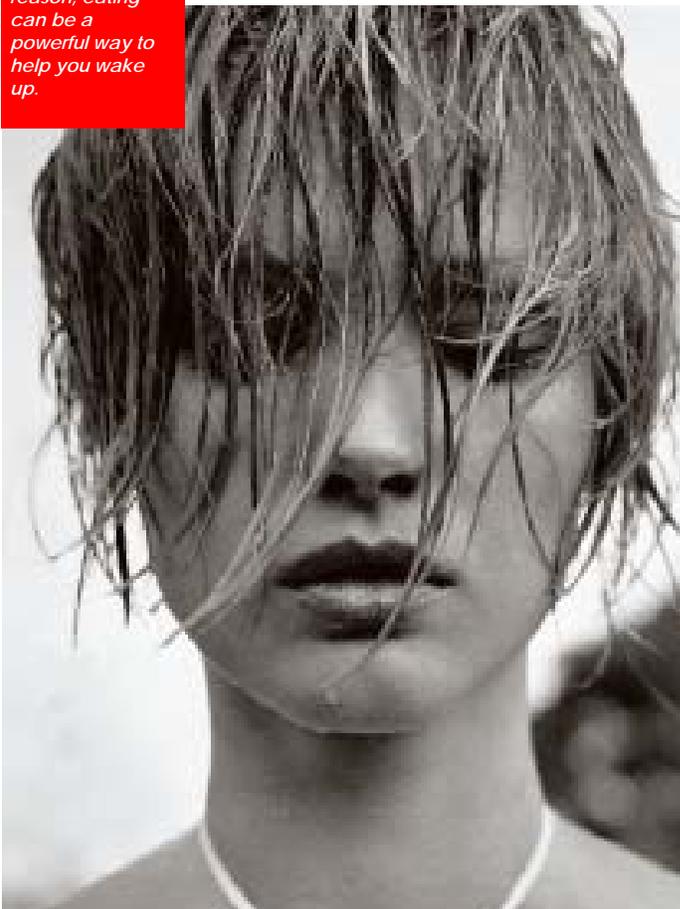
past to the future experience the present moment—which is where life actually occurs.

I once worked with a man who in his late 30s was still eating all the hamburgers, French fries, desserts, and beer that he ate as an 18-year-old. As a teenager he could eat anything he wanted, but as an older man these same foods made him gain weight and gave him indigestion. He laughed at himself when he realized that even though he had grown up, he still thought of himself as youthful as an 18-year-old and so fed himself that way. The point is his body had matured, but his self-concept hadn't. His mind had to catch up with the reality that he was now in an older body that needed to be treated differently.

Many of my clients experience profound awakenings when they're in the midst of a life transition, like switching jobs or careers, moving, getting diagnosed with a serious illness, ending or beginning a relationship, or experiencing the death of a loved one. These transitions are important for us to pay attention to. They provide enough of a gap in our identity—we're in the process of changing from who we were to who we're becoming—to get us to pay attention to our inner life. These major life transitions demand that we reconsider our priorities and integrate our lives to include our bodies, hearts, and spirits for the next stage of our life's journey.

In describing the practice of walking meditation, the Buddhist meditation teacher Thich Nhat Hanh writes: "The miracle is just to walk on earth. You breathe in. You become aware of the fact that you are alive. The greatest of all miracles is to be

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and rarely alive. We have to awaken ourselves to the truth that we are here, alive. We are here making steps on this beautiful planet. This is already

performing a miracle. But we have to be here in order for the miracle to be possible. We have to bring ourselves back to the here and the now. Therefore each step we take becomes a miracle. If you are able to walk like that, each step will be very nourishing and healing."

How do we wake up to the truth that we are alive? The key is being present, with all of our senses wide open and receptive. If we aren't present in the here and now, we risk missing out on so much of life.

At any given moment, you have the opportunity to connect to present time—through your breath, the beating of your heart, the feel of your foot touching the earth. The body always lives in the present. For this reason, eating can be a powerful way to help you wake up to your most vibrant and alive self. Every time you eat you have the opportunity to

reconnect to the truth of who you are now, and to feed yourself in a way that loves and honors the miracle of you.

The next time you eat, ask yourself: What will really feed me *now*? Will this truly nourish me? And then wait a moment for the answer to bubble up from your deepest inner self. This doesn't just work for food. You can ask yourself this question for just about anything—a job, a relationship, an evening out. Keep in mind that whichever part of yourself you choose to feed is that which will grow, for better or worse.

We are living in a time of great personal, cultural, environmental, and global change, which affects each of us in our daily lives. I find this a very exciting and hopeful time to be alive. It is now time to become whole. No matter how hurt you may have been as a young child, it is time to forgive and move into healing and change. No matter how many times you have not listened to your deepest needs for independence or inventiveness, it is time to act on what you know to be true in your heart and to take the first baby step. No matter how

many times your mother or grandmother kept telling you to eat more as a child, it is time for you to say to yourself, "Enough, I know how much I need."

Sometimes, all you need is one small step towards nourishing yourself each day—whether it's giving up cola, eating more vital foods, or making the commitment to have quiet time alone. What is important is to be consistent with your effort. It's okay if you take two steps forward and one back. What really matters is that you keep walking.

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The Turkish version of her book, *BUDA Size Yemege Gelse*, is available in all bookstores.