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AT THE DINNER TABLE WITH ...?

Translation by Donatella Randazzo

In the last article we talked about eating habits, and the difficulties encountered in changing them long term. To investigate a little bit on the causes of such persistence, I suggested the use of the technique of the observer, knowing that for many of us, including seasoned psychosynthesists, food is a sort of Free Zone, a special time and place, devoid of any in-depth awareness. One of the reasons why this happens is due to the fact that for many of us, food can quickly satisfy the need for comfort which, even for a short time, can let us handle the pain or hardship at difficult times. Why renounce it? For this reason, self-observation while eating is an act of courage. It means entering an area whose effects are well known, not so the true causes which have given rise to our habits, i.e. the automatisms which make us choose the food we eat and behave at the table in ways of which we are not aware. Eating is such a central issue in our existence, arisen from the mix of different instincts, emotions, sentiments, family memories, figures of speech, traditions, beliefs, images, constraints, in very personal proportions: besides assuring the nutrients essential for living, eating is a dimension where a great deal more is involved.

For some, food is a sphere tightly connected to sensuality, eros and pleasure; for others it is just a means for survival – some aseptic eating for living – or even a tiresome, obligatory inconvenience; or, it can be the main purpose of their day, or an occasion to show that they can stay on top of what’s current. And what about the conditioning created by media means? Who was unable to sit at the dining table in the absence of a TV set, today is in good company with others who cannot even chew their food without checking the e-mail on the smartphone or letting friends on the social networks know, in real time, where, with whom and what they are eating. Some eat only biofood, acritically, or fruits and vegetable

farm to table (but the other way round) only because they contain miraculous micronutrients, whereas others trust only the products out of their back garden: the list is endless.

However, when these habits and behaviour do not derive from a sacrosanct right to eat quality food, be it local or exotic, but are dictated by needs arising from the emotional level, which thus transcend the physical composition of food, making changes is a much more demanding task. We are prisoners in a cage of automatisms, thus we must look for and find the key to break free.

Many people believe that, as they do not suffer from any of the well known dietary disorders such as bulimia, anorexia, binge-eating etc, everything is in order. Even though they feel some uncontrollable urge for food which is apparently harmless, or they have a hate/love relationship with food –not a true conflict, but a matter of incomprehension. These people, in particular, I have invited to have lunch with the observer to find out what really happens at the dinner table, hoping that the disclosure of new scenarios in the process of self-comprehension can induce them to make significant changes.

Has your observer managed to focus on the various characters in which you identify when you sit at the table? Whom have you recognized? I can propose a few “classical” ones: the **Dustbin** who cleans out any table, the chronically Miseryguts who does not like any dish, the **3-star Critic** who judges food either tasteless or too salty, the **Wimp** who knocks over glasses and bottles as in a bowling alley, **Snacky** who makes eight snacks a day, the **Runner** who sits down on the edge of his chair, ready to run off, the Slug who needs to have his plate and tablecloth removed, in order to stop chewing ... or who else?

Can you link these dinner companions to an I-child who used to act the same way, and trace it back to the sources of such behaviour?

I can give you a few suggestions: the Dustbin could have been fed by a mother who did not take into account his physiological needs, when he was not hungry; for

Wimp, the dining table could have been his only chance to avoid having to be “perfect” all the time; for the Dustbin, perhaps eating everything on the plate was a means to making his mother happy and thus being her wonderful child; the slow speed of the Slug could be his “power” to make the rest of the family wait for him to finish.

The unconscious reasons beyond these and other behaviours and habits related to the food sphere, often make us eat or starve only to satisfy the emotional level, but as a result we become less and less able to understand the physiological needs of our body, its hunger and satiety signs, thus giving rise to a painful gap between our two levels.

In this case, it is necessary that we do something. After the initial phase of learning, carried out by the observer, we must *lovingly* accept every content revealed; then act not by relying on harsh will, which can suddenly give in or make some of our parts turn against us (how can we blame them?), but by making a wise use of the will: a proactive attitude aimed at conquering new territories of the psyche, rather than at fighting the old habits.

Why not create a new subpersonality able to take care of our meals, re-establish contacts with our body, taking into account its true needs, learning again to discern between hunger due to a need for food and emotional hunger? And in the same way, at mealtimes, able to feel when it’s time to stop eating?

To conclude, I wish to give you another reason for starting this awakening work, by reminding you of the title of this column: *Food between Earth and Heaven*. If we nail our dining table to the earth, locating it in the lower part of our egg diagram, from that level it’s unlikely that higher qualities will be associated to our meal: thoughts and emotions will follow at the same level, and we will have missed the opportunity to eat from our special table “with a view”, placed on the terraces of our higher unconscious!