

New hope for those struggling with weight loss:
Understanding the socio-psychological roots of obesity

By Claudia Bernhardt Pacheco

The epidemic of obesity in the United States, where more than 50 million people are well above their normal weight, is quickly spreading to those countries that adopt the same type of consumer society, socio-economic model and philosophy of life.

Even in Brazil where there are still malnourished children and people starving to death, there are more and more overweight people and the Spas, exercise classes and endocrinologist's offices are becoming overcrowded.

The problem has even begun to worry the Europeans who always have considered esthetics and elegance to be essential. 50% of European men are overweight and 13% are obese; 35% of European women weigh more than their ideal weight and 19% are obese.

Italians are concerned about an increase in potentially dangerous weight loss surgery. In addition to liposuction, Italians seek out other forms of medical intervention to win the battle of the bulge.

Among these, is surgery to reduce the capacity of the stomach. In one operation, the upper part of the stomach is "strangled" by a ring that reduces the capacity of the stomach from 3 liters to 20 milliliters. In another operation, a piece of the stomach is surgically removed. The purpose of either operation is to create an immediate sensation of fullness.

The most popular surgery recommended for the voracious is to re-route the digestive system in various places to prevent the absorption of food. Or, small balloons are placed in the stomach for 6-12 months making it difficult for the patient to overeat. Obviously doctors do not mention the terrible side effects of these "miraculous" techniques, nor do they mention how inefficient they are in the long run. It is much simpler to resort to the technique of making oneself vomit after eating (bulimia) or just stop eating altogether (anorexia) – both diseases with potentially fatal consequences. In fact, more and more narcissistic young people are suffering from eating disorders as their parents despair, unable to find a cure.

For most of these people, surgery will not resolve the problem. Often, the negative consequences of these operations are worse than the obesity itself. And in most cases, patients regain the weight they lost.

The cause of obesity is, directly or indirectly, psycho-social, which makes it inefficient to treat the problem medically. Why are the citizens of capitalist countries becoming more and more obese? Clearly, there must be a link between obesity and the philosophy

of life, values, habits, psycho-energetic environment and attitudes of these individuals and their growing anxiety which they try to placate with food, among other things.

Anyone who is excessively overweight or excessively underweight is very neurotic. And there is no other way to treat the problem without seeing the true cause of the person's dissatisfaction, which obviously is not related to what he eats. To the contrary, the more a person tries to placate his anxiety with food, the more anxious he will become. First, because he has an oral fixation and is using food as a drug to hide the cause of his problems from himself, a behavior that is itself anxiety provoking. And second, as he gains weight he becomes more and more deformed, which generates problems of low self esteem, depression and feelings of inadequacy with resultant isolation, sexual and relationship problems, work-related problems etc.

The obese person suffers from an inversion of values and believes that the pleasures of the senses are the principle source of happiness. His psychological life is smothered, atrophied -- and his being suffers from the repression he makes against his psychological, affective, esthetic, intuitive and intellectual life. The hunger he feels is not for food, but for sustenance of a psychological, affective, cultural and spiritual nature. Voracity is directly related to the problem of envy. The less a person is aware of his envy, the more dissatisfied, voracious and unbalanced he will be.

Our society is crazy and cruel. Crazy because it constantly incites the over-consumption of food through massive advertising campaigns and then, after it has made people addicted to food and obese, the same society criticizes and condemns the appearance of these people, excluding them from the concept of "normality" and beauty. And, all the while, the food industry profits from the pathology and weakness of the human being, abusing his inversion.