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Book Review: The Gift of Our Compulsions

For years a client has been telling me about a book that helped with her food problems and anxiety and I finally bought a copy for myself. *The Gift of Our Compulsions: A Revolutionary Approach to Self-Acceptance and Healing* by Mary O'Malley is as helpful as my client says it is and I encourage you all to read it, whatever kind of food or weight compulsion has been plaguing you.

O'Malley's premise is simple: Your compulsion is not the enemy, but the entrance to healing old wounds and bettering your life. Most of us treat food compulsions as ingrates whom we can't wait to get rid of. We say, "I hate it when I can't stop eating even when I'm full," "I'm disgusted with myself for throwing up after a meal," "I'm sick of obsessing about weight and can't stand how the scale owns me." O'Malley wisely cautions that what we resist persists. Really, has your self-hating attitude actually made unwanted behavior disappear? Doubtful, or you wouldn't be reading this blog.

The true gift of compulsions, asserts O'Malley, is that they came about to protect you from emotional and psychic pain. You became preoccupied with weight because it was better than worrying about your parents squabbling every night, you sat in your room eating cookies in the dark after Mom died because grieving hurt so badly, you purged away your anxiety about starting a new school in a new city every few years because your family moved around alot. Can you see the protective nature of compulsion? It didn't develop to plague you but to tenderly protect you from emotional pain.

The book is replete with exercises to help you understand your food (and other) compulsions and figure out what they've been trying to do for you. It also offers simple breathing and meditative exercises to relax and focus you. O'Malley herself had eating problems and was where some of you are for a good long time—until she started valuing her compulsive actions and let them teach her better ways to take care of herself, including being compassionate and curious about behavior. One of my favorite chapters describes four important questions to ask yourself about your compulsions to fully understand them. General answers and vague suggestions don't really cut it when dealing with behavioral change, so I value O'Malley's practical wisdom and ideas.

Imagine being free of food and weight compulsions. Better yet, imagine learning about yourself and how to create your best life through what O'Malley calls "meeting" rather than battling compulsions. Give this enlightening book a thorough read.

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