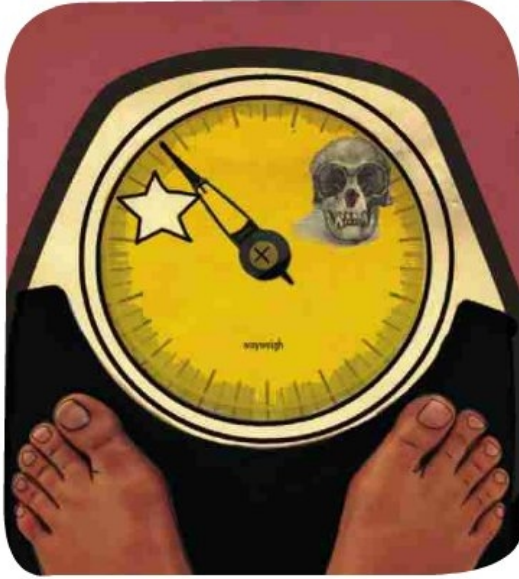




PERSONAL HISTORIES

A Series On True Experiences



SOCIETY & LIFE | ESTYLE

WEIGHT LOSS

ZOOM

'I felt that I had been carrying a 30-kg rucksack all my life'

IT'S 1996. A 30-year-old managing director (MD) of a software company is looking at the weighing scale with horror and disbelief. A 100 kg! How could this be? All that jogging, the dieting, but now, something had to be done. Fast! A wedding was coming up, his own! And then that MD, ie me, had a stroke of luck! I was gifted *Fit for Life* by Harvey and Marilyn Diamond — a book that made sense and seemed practical too. A vegetarian diet, I already was one. Lots of fruits (which I loved) and salads (well, something new there), no restrictions on portions (whew! I have a hearty appetite). The only challenge was to minimise processed/refined food and dairy products because apparently they do not suit many people. "What the hell, let me try it," I said.

"I'm going on a diet." Family rolls its eyes. Oh no, not again. But I was determined. And boy did I get results! The extra kilos melted away at a kg per week, and in nine

months, I was born again. I felt that I had been carrying a 30-kg rucksack all my life, and now suddenly, I had gotten rid of it.

Ah, the unbearable lightness of being! Life became interesting. A friend, who had not met me for a while, re-introduced himself to me at a party. Another was insistent that a magazine had printed my interview but with someone else's photo ("Come on, Peter. That's not you," he said). Ordering food got me more than a sideward glance. Pizza without cheese, vegetable sandwich without bread or butter? And bhelpuri without sev or puri or spicy chutney. ("What do I put in it, then?")

Then I began to dig deeper. I found out more about the system I was following. I was amazed to learn that the weight loss that changed my life was just a side benefit — the real payoff was to be healthy and disease-free lifelong.

I had to relearn how to live by nature's rules, listen to my body to give it precisely what it needed and nothing else. My meals consisted of a simple plant-based diet with a focus on whole foods, eaten raw to the extent possible, adequate exercise and, most importantly, rest and sleep. An hour more in bed — ah, that part was music to my ears.

Over 15 years, I have learnt that nature, though a hard taskmaster, was not an unreasonable one. If anything, she is tolerant and rewards those who care to follow her rules.

✦ My whole life has changed. I stopped falling ill so I threw my medicine chest out. I was full of energy and looked 10 years younger. To use a cliché, I was adding life to my years and not just years to my life.

Everyone around me was intrigued about what I did and how. And it did not take much persuading to get me talking about it. Stopping me from talking, however, was the problem. After all, I had found the elixir of life, I wanted to change the world; to share with others the secret that had changed my life. Over-enthusiastic, bordering on the fanatic, I put many people off until I realised what I was doing.

Now I understand that moderation is the key and my role is to give people the information about the healthier options available. To tell them what I did and how it helped me, and offer to support them should they want to make a change onto the road to better health. In the end, they can still have their chocolate cake with vanilla ice cream, but at least it will be an informed choice.

PS: I met the bhelpuri vendor after a couple of years. "Peterbhai, just to figure out how you were eating what you were ordering, I made it for myself to taste... and, you know, it's actually quite good."

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