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AND DR. PHIL'S...

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to win them all

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*Great News for
Your Body!*

THE TOP **10**
HEALTH TIPS
OF THE YEAR

12 Fantastic Ways
to Bring More
Magic into
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A MIRACULOUS
COURSE IN
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LOSS**

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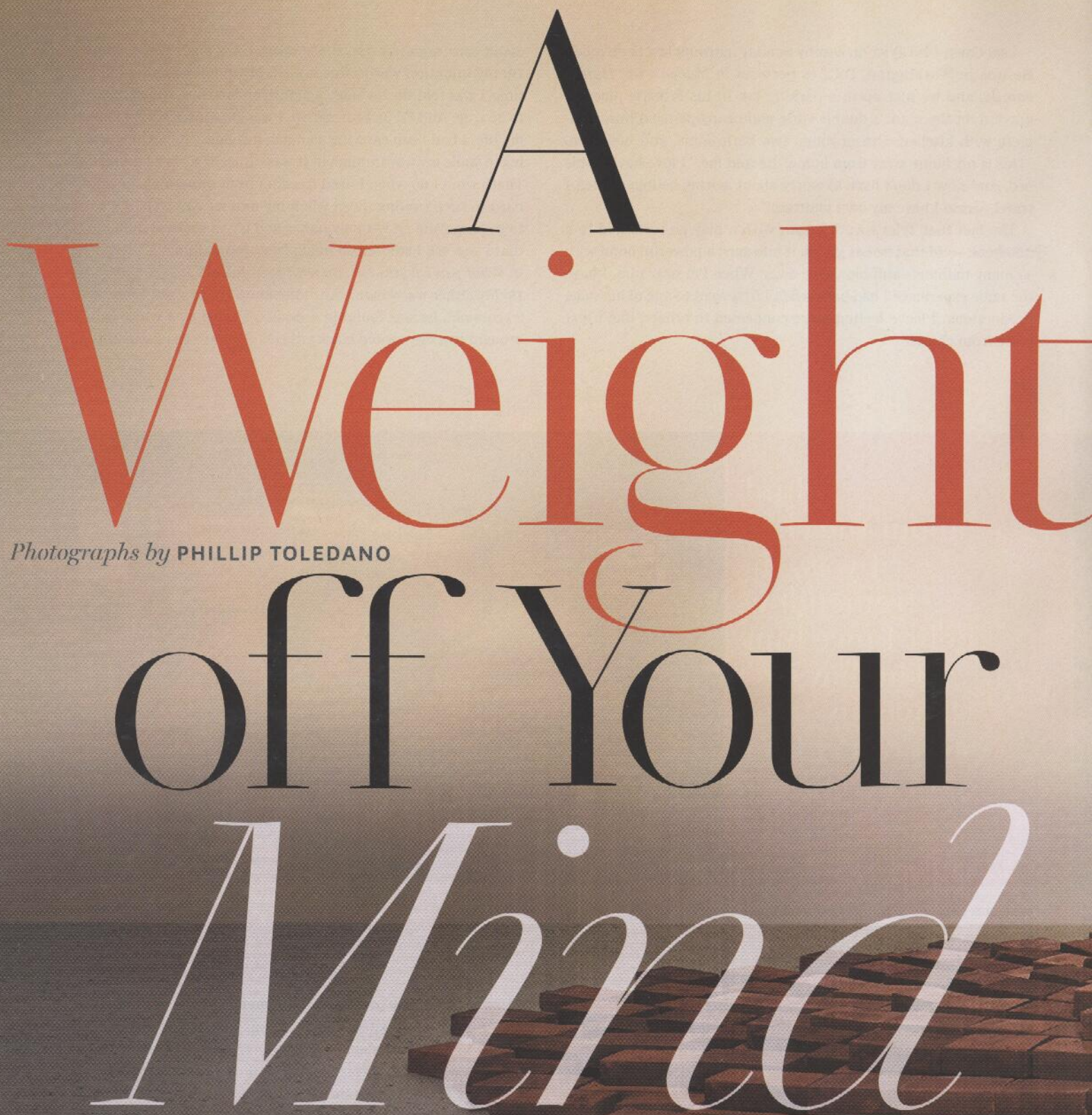
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A Weight off Your Mind

Photographs by PHILLIP TOLEDANO

THOSE EXTRA POUNDS YOU'RE LUGGING AROUND STARTED AS AN EMOTIONAL BURDEN: SADNESS OR SHAME OR ANGER THAT YOU BURIED AND TRIED TO SOOTHE WITH FOOD. BUT AS *Oprah* RECENTLY DISCOVERED, A GROUNDBREAKING NEW BOOK BY *Marianne Williamson* CAN HELP YOU STOP EATING YOUR FEELINGS, CONNECT WITH YOUR THINNER, HAPPIER SELF, AND LIGHTEN YOUR HEAVY HEART.

"IMAGINE YOUR EXCESS
WEIGHT AS A BRICK
WALL BUILT BY YOUR
SUBCONSCIOUS TO SEPARATE
YOU FROM OTHER PEOPLE
AND FROM LIFE ITSELF."
—MARILYN WILLIAMSON



➤ Being overweight is a spiritual issue. And spiritual growth is required to overcome it. This is a truth I have learned through public trial and error.

In 1988 I starved myself to fit into a pair of jeans, then walked onto the set of my show hauling a wagon loaded down with 67 pounds of fat. I wanted to make clear just how much weight I'd lost. As time passed, though, the fat came back, and by 1992 I was in the heart of the struggle to gain control of my body. So when Marianne Williamson appeared on the show that year to talk about her handbook for enlightenment, *A Return to Love*, I asked her the question every outwardly successful person wants the answer to: "Why can I handle every other issue in my life but seem to constantly fail at this one?"

Marianne responded with a letter in which she chided me for playing small in order to compensate for my big life. She ended with these words: "Until you accept the magnitude of your function, your unconscious mind will sabotage any attempt to show your full magnificence. Your self-concept has to match your manifestation or else the manifestation is doomed. In fact, if you diet and lose weight, your mind will either put the weight back on or trip up in some other area. In order to lose weight on a permanent basis, you want a shift in your core belief about who and what you are. This is the miracle you seek."

Sixteen years later, I was still seeking the miracle. And the last person I expected to see early one morning as I turned onto the corridor leading to my office—hair still wet from the shower, not a drop of makeup—was Marianne Williamson. I was tired, hadn't slept well, and really wasn't prepared to engage in conversation. I was trying to ready myself to start a new season, feeling bloated and disappointed that I'd gone the whole summer hiking every day and eating healthy yet managing to lose not a single pound.

I had just the night before been revisiting that note. Over the years, I'd read it countless times, trying to decipher "the magnitude of your function." I remember looking at Marianne and thinking, *This is the strangest thing, running into her right outside my office.* I didn't know why she would literally be put in my path (it turned out she was waiting to see someone else), but since I believe that there are no accidents, that everything happens for a reason, I decided to take advantage of the moment and ask what I'd been too embarrassed to admit I didn't know. "All these years later," I told her, "I'm still trying to figure out what you meant by 'magnitude of your function.'"

Her response was to send me a letter of explanation that night. Then another. And another. Each letter became a lesson. The first one was a revelation; every one, a prayer answered.

And although they were originally intended privately, just for me, it struck me that anyone who's ever started out eating one measly chip, only to look down and find the whole five-ounce bag gone, could benefit from these lessons. This is how Marianne's new book, *A Course in Weight Loss*, came to be.

Making and keeping the connection to fully honor and love yourself is, for everyone, the journey of a lifetime. But if you use food to subjugate your feelings, your missteps are obvious: They're manifested on your thighs.

I'm no longer battling my weight. I had to make peace to move forward and look at the fear that keeps showing up as fat. For compulsive eaters, that's generally how it works: Subconscious urges to eat stem from anxiety—fear—about a multitude of things. And until you deal with that fear, the fat will stay. As Marianne says, your unconscious mind will put the weight back on.

A Course in Weight Loss is about retraining your mind to let the light of a higher consciousness be your guide—to release the burdens and fears your weight represents. It's not a quick fix. The results will come only from your full dedication and commitment to the process.

Geneen Roth's book *Women Food and God* opened the door to understanding why we stuff our feelings with food. *A Course in Weight Loss* is a guide to healing the feelings. It is the miracle we've been waiting for. Read the excerpt that starts on the next page, then read the book, and you'll see what I mean.

Opal



"YOU'VE SUBCONSCIOUSLY TRIED TO GET RID OF DIFFICULT FEELINGS BY EATING THEM." —MARIANNE WILLIAMSON

I'd asked God to enter my life and make all things right. And the wall had disappeared.

The same can happen for you. Imagine your excess weight as a brick wall you are carrying around. This wall has been built by your subconscious; its purpose is to separate you from other people and from life itself. Looking closely, you see that every brick has something written on it: *Shame, Anger, Fear, Judgment, Pressure, Exhaustion, Stress, Heartbreak, Injustice, Protection, Jealousy, Inferiority, Embarrassment, Self-abnegation....*

Now allow yourself to read this list again, very slowly. With every word, ask yourself: Does it represent a thought, an emotional reality, or a character defect that pertains to me? Know that the vast majority of people, were they to be honest with themselves, would say yes.

The weight you are seeking to let go of was added to your consciousness before it was added to your body. Your body is merely a screen onto which your thoughts are projected, including unprocessed feelings, negative ideas, or fear-based attitudes and personality traits.

Everyone has negative emotions. For whatever reasons, yours have become frozen within you and are not being processed properly. Instead of handling sadness by going through it and then letting it pass, your sadness gets stuck in your mind, and then your body. You are failing to assimilate an experience and let it go. But our systems must process waste emotionally and mentally, just as they do physically. Painful experiences are not meant to

linger. They are meant to teach us what they need to teach us, and then dissolve into the realm of soft-focus memory. Even bitterness in our past can transform into peaceful acceptance. With your system of psychological-waste removal on the blink, however, you've subconsciously tried to get rid of difficult feelings by eating them.

In some of us, unprocessed pain expresses itself through taking drugs or drinking; in others, through emotional outbursts; in still others, through promiscuous sex, and so forth. The form of dysfunction is not particularly relevant; what matters is that we address the unprocessed suffering behind it.

In the past, you may simply have ignored or suppressed the thoughts, feelings, and memories that caused you pain. Now you can make another choice: You can look at your pain and then release it.

It is not enough to merely identify your pain; you must surrender it for healing. Saying, for instance, "I am so embarrassed about this or that situation" is not of itself a healing. To say, "Dear God, I am so embarrassed about this situation. I place everything that happened and all my feelings about it in Your (continued on page 277)

➤ I WAS never a food addict, but for years I was a compulsive overeater.

Diets did not work. I would starve myself, then binge, starve myself, then binge, in a constant cycle of self-abnegation and self-indulgence. I hated many things about the situation, but what was worse than anything else was how much I thought about food. I was obsessed with it. I thought about lunch before breakfast, planned whole errands around places to eat. Thoughts of food hardly ever left my mind.

Until they did, in a miraculous way. When I was in my mid-20s, I began studying *A Course in Miracles*—the metaphysical thought system that teaches forgiveness as the road to inner peace and the remembrance of the unconditional love of God. I wasn't consciously thinking of my weight. I was looking for miracles in other areas. But one day I looked down and couldn't believe what I saw, on the scale or on my body. Weight had simply dropped off, and I realized why. The weight had merely been a physical manifestation of my need to keep others at bay. I feared other people and had built a wall to protect myself. Practicing the Course, I'd learned to extend my hand across the wall. I'd learned ways to replace fear with love.

A WEIGHT OFF YOUR MIND

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hands. Please help me see it differently"—that is a healing.

What is placed on the altar is then altered; as you surrender a situation, your thoughts about it are changed. You can think of this as a divine intercession. Your Divine Mind—a counterforce to the temporary insanity that keeps you from loving yourself—will remove the wall that surrounds you. You will look at each brick, own the thoughts and feelings that imbue that brick with such addictive force, and then place it in God's hands. Give to Him what you do not want, and what you do not want will disappear.

Return now to the list of words that represent the bricks in your wall. For each word, write in your journal the thought, situation, or person the word brings up for you. Some examples:

Shame: *I am ashamed of* _____. Perhaps you acted foolishly, and cringe to think that other people still remember.... Do not go unconscious. Write it all out.

Anger: *I am angry at* _____. Perhaps you feel unfairly treated, and have not released all your anger at the meanness

of others. Or perhaps you have not forgiven yourself for self-sabotaging behavior in the past that affects your life now.... Do not go unconscious. Write it all out.

Fear: *I am afraid of* _____. Perhaps you carry a secret fear of loss, of tragedy, and have not yet learned to release it to God.... Do not go unconscious. Write it all out.

When you have fully responded to each word on the list, close your eyes and see yourself standing in a golden light. See all the flesh you think of as excess weight as a brick wall that you hide behind. Look closely at the wall; you'll see that it is made up of your own suffering and pain. Now ask God to walk up to the wall with you. Together the two of you begin to take down each brick, one by one, and ultimately dismantle the wall. Explain to Him what each brick means to you, then watch how whenever He touches a brick, it crumbles.

IN OTHER AREAS OF YOUR LIFE, YOU MIGHT BE competent and happy and successful. But when it comes to eating—a fundamental part of a healthy life—it's as though wires have gotten crossed in your brain. What is

unhealthy can seem good; what is good can seem boring. When the brain identifies as comforting something that is in fact harmful, the confusion of signals is so deep that the rational mind alone cannot fix it.

Here's what is good: learning to love Not-Thin You, for she is nothing other than a product of fear; and fear, being the absence of love, is a call for love.

As counterintuitive as it sounds, it is your learning to love Not-Thin You that will cause this aspect of yourself to disappear. She didn't ask to be here; she isn't comfortable here; she was summoned up, and summoned up by you. As you make her your ally rather than your enemy, she will disappear.

The goal is to heal the relationship between the part of you that eats wisely, and the part of you that eats dysfunctionally. They are not two separate beings, but rather two aspects of one mind.

Thin You and Not-Thin You are energetically as well as physically different. Thin You is beautiful in a 21st-century way. Not-Thin You is beautiful as well, in an ancient way. She is not ugly; she is simply you with a coat on, a coat you would prefer to take off.

To judge an aspect of yourself as ugly is ➤

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A WEIGHT OFF YOUR MIND

(continued from page 277)

to abuse yourself, and when you abuse yourself you might respond to your hurt by, let's say, grabbing something to eat. Obviously, this conflict keeps you in a chronic pattern of self-hate and self-sabotage; your habits may be under control at times, but you are never fully healed.

Part of your conflict is that while your conscious mind feels disdain for Not-Thin You, your subconscious mind feels quite at home with her. Subconsciously, you might feel more comfortable within a larger body.

The experience everyone yearns for is love, and you have come to experience eating as an act of self-love, even when you are eating unwisely. Even when you overeat—an act you know better than to think of as actual self-love, given that it is inherently self-destructive—you experience yourself as emotionally nourished, if only for a moment. A subconscious effort at self-love turns into an act of self-hate. But as you learn to be fed love by love itself, you will stop looking to food for what food cannot feed you. You will learn a new set of habits. When you are about to put something into your mouth that you know is not healthy, either in quantity or quality, you will love yourself too much to continue: You will stop, take a breath, and feel love enter you instead.

Then, and only then, can you enter into a dialogue with Not-Thin You based on honesty and transparency. Your work here is to share your truth...to tell Not-Thin You how you really feel...how you feel she has ruined your happiness...how much you hate her, even, if indeed you do. You are not writing in order to attack Not-Thin You. You are simply surrendering thoughts that are already there but remain toxic if unexplored. You cannot get to love without first acknowledging what stands before it.

Once you have told your truth to Not-Thin You and then allowed her to respond, you will learn a very important truth: She does not stand before you craving food; she stands before you craving love.

Below is a letter expressing how a woman named Beatrice communicated with her not-thin self:

Dear Fat Ass,

I know your lumps and bumps are merely a navigational reminder of where you have been, of the things that were out of your

control and happened early on. When Bad Things Happen to Little Girls. All of that. The Story. The Events. But now, you are the Event. You are here. You can celebrate your fierceness that was born with me, Skinny You, long ago. With push-ups and cute bras, with bike rides and mountain climbing and long swims in the sea. Not with the hourly walk to the fridge to see what might make Fat You feel better in the middle of the night.

Put down the fork and pick up the fight!

Put the cheeseburger down and go for a hike! Walk the streets and listen to your music, let Bob Dylan tell you how it is, listen to Bono and let those hips subside! I'm here! I'm waiting for you! It's getting annoying, Fatty. The tires belong on your car, not your midsection. How can your spirit dwell proudly in an excess of 40 pounds? I'm not mad at you. I'm just impatient. I want you to live your life fully, unapologetically, with your head up and your chin in singular. The warrior you have so long searched for is right there, inside of you. I am her. I am you. Let me take over. I am strong.

Love, always, in largeness or a size 2, but come on already!

Skinny Beatrice Badass

Having completed your letter to Not-Thin You, now allow her to write back. Allow her to tell you what she wants to say.

Dear Skinny,

F#*@ you.

It's not easy, sister. It's a daily siege of sliding 180 pounds into jeans that barely button. I'm having a hard time, okay? I know I'm not really an elephant. Without this unflattering excess million pounds of sadness and fear, all piled unceremoniously on my ass and thighs and belly, I am actually a yogi acrobat. A lotus hovering three feet off the ground and spinning somersaults, while gracefully holding up bills-groceries-car payments-life. It just so happens that at the moment I am a large yogi, stuck on planet Earth, in flats. Cartwheels are a distant dream. But...I hear you.

This cellulite is my force field, my invisible shield, my insurance policy. Fat Ass = No Possibility of Getting Hurt. Not able to get into a beautiful dress and rock the dance floor means no evil jackass will have the opportunity to get up in this beautiful mess and cause another hurricane.

Listen, Skinny Superhero. Give me a

minute. I am getting there. I have found the yoga studio, and there are avocados in the fridge. The sun is shining today, and there is work to be done. I am dreaming of one hundred easy sit-ups and that beautiful sheer tank top with the flowers on it.

I'm in, okay?

Jeez, you are a pain in the gigantic ass.

But I love you for always being with(in) me.

In solidarity of spirit, not thigh circumference,

Your Fat Self

It's okay to laugh. In fact, it's good to be playful in these letters; as you own your feelings you will be able to let go of some of the darkness that has engulfed you. And over time, the lighter your thoughts are, the lighter your appetite will be. As mental and emotional obesity fall by the wayside, then so will their physical counterpart. You will become, throughout all dimensions of your being, your best light-filled self. **Q**

Adapted from *A Course in Weight Loss: 21 Spiritual Lessons for Surrendering Your Weight Forever*, by Marianne Williamson, Hay House, Inc. (November 2010).

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