



Week Four

You better cut the pizza in four pieces because
I'm not hungry enough to eat six.

—YOGI BERRA

Life is better than death, I believe, if only because it
is less boring, and because it has fresh peaches in it.

—ALICE WALKER

We receive a box of produce each week from a local farmer. It's always a surprise to find what's inside. Sometimes the veggies are completely unknown to me. Until a few years ago, I had no idea what fennel, turnips, rhubarb, kale, or Swiss chard looked like. Now I actually know how to cook a few of them, to the complete surprise of my family. Cooking isn't one of my strong suits, to say the least!

Lately, the very best items in the boxes have been peaches—the kind that are so juicy that you are sure you've never tasted anything this perfect in your life. When I eat one of these miracles of nature I have to stop everything I'm doing and relish each and every bite, as the juice runs down my chin. A taste like this is so overwhelming, so sweet, so heavenly, that there is no room in my awareness for any other sensation. I am completely present in the act of eating the peach.

Our sense of taste, and other senses as well, can be gateways into the practice of being aware of the gift of life. As Thich

Nhat Hanh explains, eating is “a chance to return to the present moment and stop the rushing and the planning.” Eating these local peaches can’t help but bring me into awareness by their incredible burst of flavor. They remind me to savor life, to savor the long summer days, and to savor simple pleasures.

One of the reasons we are drawn to travel to new places is that we try new foods and see new sights. We are able to experience these new events more fully because we are more present to them. Our everyday stresses and concerns are back at home, and we often live more in the moment when we are on vacation. No wonder we enjoy ourselves so much when we go away! But it’s possible to bring that state of mind home with us, starting with our next meal.

Putting the Wisdom into Practice

These warmer months in the northern hemisphere offer us innumerable opportunities to practice savoring local produce, colorful flowers, singing birds, walks in nature. This week, practice savoring your food. Perhaps head to a local farm or farmers’ market and pick out some produce you’ve never tried. For the next seven days, try not to eat while doing another activity like walking, driving, or talking. Actually take the time to sit while you eat this week.

At every meal, practice tasting and relishing the different flavors on your plate. Notice the colors, textures, smells, and shapes of your food. Slow down and *experience* each bite, as though it were the first time you ever tasted that particular cuisine. Linger over your meals, taking a few extra moments to

be aware of the subtle flavorings. Take a few deep breaths after every few bites. If you’re sharing a meal, ask the other person what he or she tastes, what flavors appeal most. After a week of practice, you may find that mealtimes have become oases of calm and stillness, little mini-retreats in your busy days.

