

**Glenn Livingston, Ph.D.
And Howard Jacobson, Ph.D.
Beyond the Pleasure Principle in
Habitual Overeating**

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Dr. Glenn: Hey, it's the very good Dr. Glenn Livingston with Never Binge again and I'm here with --

Howie: The worthy Howard Jacobson of WellStart Health and Plant Yourself.

Dr. Glenn: Absolutely worthy. I want to talk about something I consider to be paradigm shifting today. It might be a short call, but I encourage people to listen carefully because this can make all the difference. First of all, here's something from Jack Trimpey which really encapsulates how the pig, our lizard brain, our reptilian brain operates. It will get away with whatever it can get away with and, which Jack Trimpey said, was that addiction expands to the tolerance that surrounds it. Addiction expands to the tolerance that surrounds it. For

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GLENN LIVINGSTON Ph.D.



the longest time, I thought that that meant that I had to set things up so that the pig couldn't get away with things it didn't want. If you look at the typical person that gets really motivated and stays motivated, there's something that's staring them down, like diabetes or cancer, knee pain or arthritis or something like that where they really feel like they can't get away with anymore and they let their pig eat as much as the pig could until it couldn't be done anymore.

And so I thought that the most important way to overcome the pig was to convince myself that I couldn't get away with it. So for example, when I struggled with giving up salt, I did a lot of research to figure out what damage salt does even if you don't have high blood pressure because the typical person believes that the only bad thing about salt is the high blood pressure that it can create. And I found out that you can actually have a hemorrhagic stroke. Your odds are elevated in the absence of high blood pressure. And so I kind of put my pig more in the corner like it couldn't get away with it anymore.

And the same thing with rice and beans -- there's nothing wrong with rice and beans for the vast majority of people, but for me I was really overdoing it and had to figure out that there was a chemical that's created when you cook starch, when you cook meat also. It's called heterocyclic amine and there's a particular one called harmine, which aggravates a condition I have called a benign tremor and therefore I could not get away with having rice and beans. And sometimes the pig would say, well, you could get away with it one more time and it will go away in a couple of days. Then I remembered that a lot of psychology is based upon moving beyond the pleasure principle.

There's an article that Freud wrote, an essay that Freud wrote way back when. I'm not a big giant hairy fan of Freud. I think that he had



something to say, some things were useful, some things were not, some things were very context-sensitive in the Victorian times in which he was working so they'd be anachronistic now. But this is one of those things that I thought was pervasive and stood the test of time, which was that maturity meant moving beyond the pleasure principle. You can choose your behaviors not necessarily based upon how much pleasure or pain they produce, which would say that we're not really much better than rats or even amoeba if you're looking at it like that, but you can make traces based upon your intellectual evaluation of what they're going to do in your life, what kind of person you want to be.

And so once I remembered that, I said, well, it doesn't matter if I could get away with it. It doesn't matter if the pig can get away with it. I don't want to get away with it. I want all these other things in my life that I know, not having salt or not having rice and beans is going to produce for me. So it doesn't matter how pleasurable it is. It doesn't matter whether it's painful enough. I don't live based upon pleasure and pain. I'm going to consider it but it's not my primary consideration. My primary consideration is my intellectual evaluation of what's good for me and what direction I want to go in.

I guess what I'm saying is I believe that a great deal of what I produce in Never Binge Again is designed to move us beyond the pleasure principle. So when your pig says you can get away with it, it says, yeah, but who cares? I don't live like that. I make my choices not based on pleasure and pain but it want to accomplish in the world. Anyway, that's the short insight that I have but I think it's paradigm shifting. The corollary to that is that people tend to fall in love with their feelings. They're going to feel so sad if they don't eat this pig slop. They're going to be too anxious. They're going to feel too guilty if they



don't eat it. Their mom baked it for them or their cousin did it a work function or whatever and they're going to feel too guilty. And I'll intervene by saying, well, why do you have to be in love with those feelings? Why can't you feel guilty and not have it anyway? Why can't you feel sad and eat healthy anyway? That's another way of saying, let's move out of the pleasure principle and into a more mature way of being. So what do you think?

Howie: I think that's really interesting to not feel like you have to be at the brink of the cliff because I start working with people, that's often where they're coming from as they're binging. They're telling me this is why I have to it, because I have kidney disease and I don't have any luxury because my doctor told me. And so they're trying to use that to keep themselves in line, like they're trying to rent a drill sergeant. The more they're doing that, the more they're failing.

Dr. Glenn: Yeah. It's like the concept of hitting bottom, like you have to hit bottom before you're willing to give it up.

Howie: Yeah.

Dr. Glenn: But why do have to lose everything before you're willing to change? Or can you say I'm a human being and I can make better decisions than that? And if you think about it, bottom seeking is actually a pig behavior. It says let's keep going until we do hit bottom. Yipee, let's keep doing it.

Howie: Yeah. You know where I started doing that? Where we met in the internet marketing world. All the good stories were people hitting bottom and it was like, oh boy, I can't wait until I hit bottom so I can start a million dollar a month internet business.



Dr. Glenn: Right. Right, right, right.

Howie: Right, like the pictures of them living on Ritz Crackers and peanut butter, off-brand peanut butter, in their sister-in-law's basement.

Dr. Glenn: There's some fantasy that things are going to be magically different and you hear that in the 12-step programs also, all these stories of people who hit bottom and then turn things around. What you don't see is all the people who hit bottom and kept going, right?

Howie: Right, or all the people who woke up one day and said, yeah, enough of this, like I'm fine, I'm functioning well, there's nothing on fire and I want to live better.

Dr. Glenn: Yeah, and let me see what's possible to accomplish with the balance of my life.

Howie: Yeah. I did a Facebook Live today. When I started teaching at the college level, a mentor of mine said, "You know, your students can either get A's or they can learn the stuff but the two don't necessarily correlate or overlap."

Dr. Glenn: What do you mean? How is that related?

Howie: Well, so I was thinking about this thought experiment that's supposed -- like old Glenn, who -- you're like 60 or 80 pounds overweight and totally binging on food. If I have that old Glenn a choice and I said you can either be exactly the same person you are with the same habits, the same weaknesses, the same mindsets, the same strengths, the same outlook on life, and magically you can get to your ideal weight and stay



there; or you can change, you can become the kind of person you want to be with control over yourself, with self-esteem, and you don't lose the weight, which would you choose?

Dr. Glenn: That time, I probably would have wanted to be my ideal weight.

Howie: Yeah. I think all of us at that point choose the first one. Those of us who succeed at some point shift to the second one.

Dr. Glenn: Yeah. I see what you're saying now.

Howie: It's not about the results that we want. It's the lower blood pressure or painting ourselves into the corner. The problem with that is the better you do, the farther you are from the corner.

Dr. Glenn: Right.

Howie: Are you familiar with the work of Robert Fritz? He wrote a book called The Path of Least Resistance.

Dr. Glenn: Oh god, a long time ago, right?

Howie: Yeah. Live your life like an artist. Like artists, when they're almost done with the painting, they don't lose focus. They gain more focus. They are more motivated. They have more momentum. Whereas most of us, if we're trying to lose weight or change a habit, the closer we are to our goal, the more leeway we give ourselves to slip up.

Dr. Glenn: That's interesting.



Howie: Yeah. It's because we have this oscillating mindset of -- because what we really want to do is avoid the bad thing. And so the farther we get from the bad thing, the less hard we have to work to avoid it.

Dr. Glenn: That makes sense. That's really interesting. Cool. You always have an interesting perspective when I talk about these things. You have an interesting perspective even I don't talk about these things.

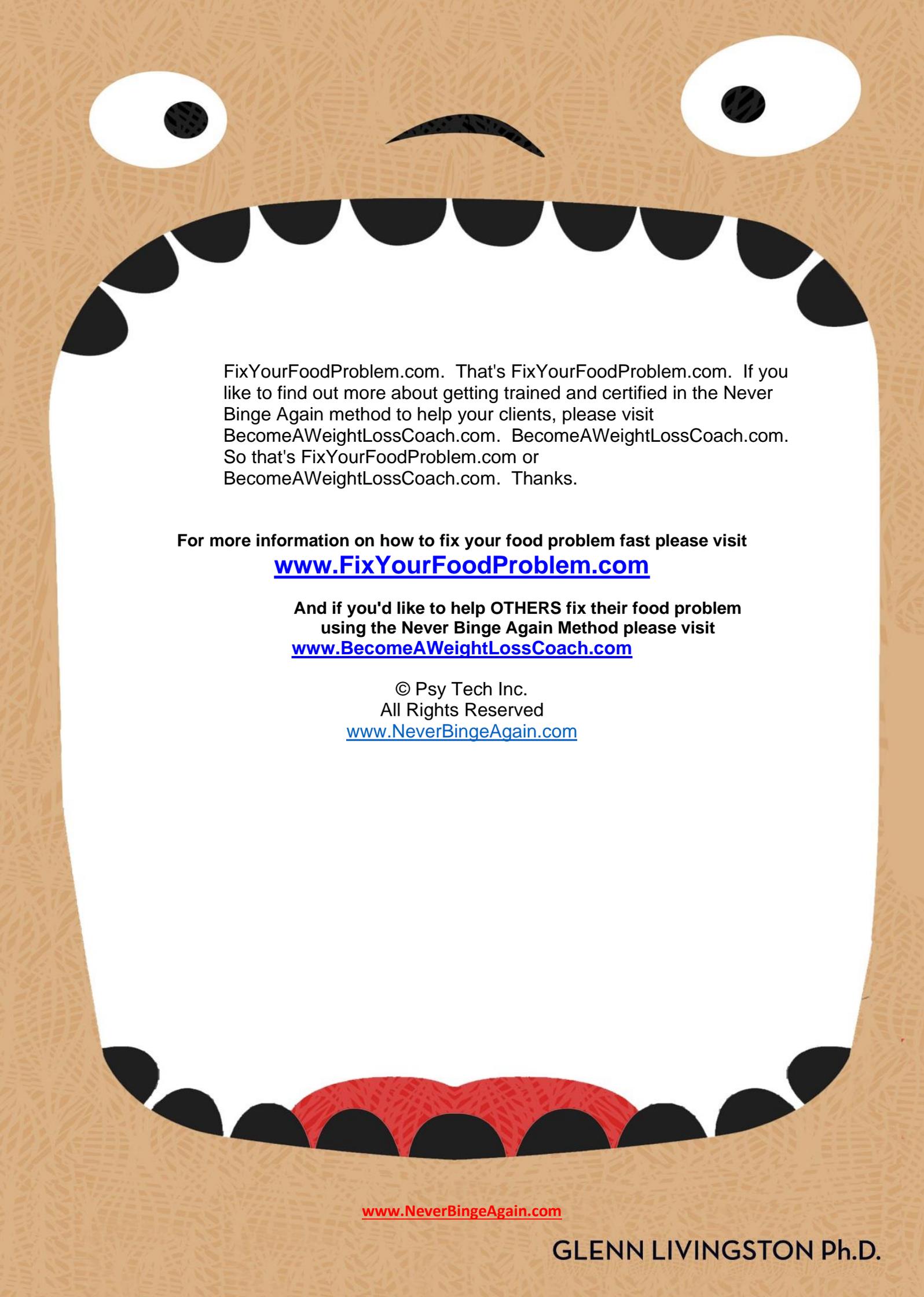
Howie: Yeah.

Dr. Glenn: Anything else you want to say about it?

Howie: I don't think so. I like your framing because that's really helpful with this idea that it makes sense to raise the stakes, and I think at the beginning that's probably an appropriate thing to do. We do all sorts of things just to get moving that we don't do and we're already moving. It's almost like when I have to start my lawnmower, I have to pull the cord to get it going but I don't have to keep pulling the cord once it's going.

Dr. Glenn: Or all the effort that it takes to get a plane into the air into cruising altitude and then how much less fuel it takes to get it to its destination after that. So I guess the takeaway is who cares if you can get away with it, you don't want to get away with it. And don't fall in love with your feelings. Your feelings are not facts and make decisions with your head. That's the idea. I wrote a book a long time ago called Eat with Your Head but the content was not that good. But I think I still like the phrase.

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