

## Food for Thought

In 1943 at the height of World War 2, and its severe food rationing in Britain, an American psychologist named Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) devised and published his Hierarchy of Needs, a theory of psychological health, determined on satisfying human needs in order of priority. At the pinnacle of the five-stage pyramid, is self-actualisation, or fulfilment of one's potential. At its broad base, are the physiological needs like water, food, warmth and shelter, which have to be satisfied before the next level can be achieved. (Insert Maslow's Pyramid) We usually talk about food and water, but water is more important than food. We can live for about three *weeks* without food, but only *three* days without water.

Not surprisingly, the Bible is full of references, to seed-time and harvest, bread and wine, food and drink, clothing and shelter ... *So* necessarily important are these to life, that it almost opens with such references; 'The Lord God made trees, pleasing to the eye and *good for food.*' (Gen 2:9) One might toy with the current strap-line of the Co-op! 'The woman, Eve, looked at the tree of Knowledge of good and evil. It was pleasing to the eye, so she took some fruit and ate it, and gave some to her husband, Adam, and he ate it.' (Gen 3:6) And we all know what happened after that, deciding that naturism was no longer their preferred state. When Noah was planning his boat trip, he was told to '...take and store by you, every kind of food that can be eaten.' (Gen 6:21) and Pharaoh was told to take 20% of Egypt's produce, and store it against future famine. (Gen 41:35) The book of Leviticus is full 'dos and don'ts concerning offerings and sacrifices, mostly to do with unleavened bread, (Lev 1 onwards) and lists of creatures which are unclean and therefore not to be eaten. (eg Lev 11 onwards) Deuteronomy likewise (eg Deut 14:19) Manna fed the million or so Israelites for forty years as they travelled across the deserts of Arabia. It was a round white seed which appeared each morning when the dew evaporated in the heat of the sun. (Ex 16:14 onwards) Fancy eating the same thing at every meal for most of your life. 'If only we had meat!' (Num 11:4)

The first miracle Jesus performed was the changing of water into wine at the wedding in Cana. (John 2:1-11) He asked the Samaritan woman at the well, 'Give me a drink.' (John 4:7) Another famous miracle was the feeding of the five thousand (Matt 14:16-21) When the prodigal son returned, the first thing his father did was kill the fatted calf (Luke 15:27) Remember the banquet prepared by the king for his son's wedding, but no-one came? (Matt 22:1-10) Martha and Mary gave a supper in Jesus' honour. (John 12:2) Jesus celebrated the Feast of the Passover with his disciples in the upper room – their Last Supper (Matt 26:26-29) After his resurrection, He travelled the road to Damascus with

two friends who only recognised him when he broke the bread and gave it to them. (Luke 24:30) When his disciples had been fishing, but had initially caught nothing, Jesus prepared breakfast for them on the beach by the Sea of Tiberias. (John 21:4-12) He said, “When I was hungry, you gave me food; when thirsty, you gave me drink; when I was a stranger, you took me into your home, when naked, you clothed me.” (Matt 25:35,36) and “Whoever has two shirts, must share them with anyone who has none; and whoever has food, must do likewise.” (Luke 3:11)

But what is today’s problem? And how great is it? Well ponder the following facts for a moment; there *is* enough food in the world to feed everyone, the problem is how to get it from where it is *produced*, to where it is *needed*. Approximately 795 million people in the world are chronically malnourished, that’s one in nine of the entire population, and 21,000 people die every day from hunger and related causes, half of them children under five. The problems are clearly severest in sub-Saharan and developing countries. ([www.stophungernow.org](http://www.stophungernow.org))

But what of our own Country? According to a group of doctors and academics writing in The British Medical Journal in December 2013, hunger in the UK has reached the level of a ‘public health emergency.’ According to The Independent newspaper, hospital admissions for malnutrition have doubled since the global financial crisis of 2008, and the Government’s austerity initiatives. The Trussel Trust which started the first food bank in a garage and garden shed in Salisbury in 1997, reports that over a million people are asking for three day supplies of food. There are now in excess of 425 food banks including schools, churches and businesses, supported by 80 frontline professionals and 40,000 volunteers. During the summer holidays last year, an estimated 1.5 million parents went without a meal to feed their children and an extra 5000 emergency food supplies were provided. In our home town of Witney, our food bank, is in constant demand, and in need of our regular donations.

Contrast these findings with those of Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall’s ‘War on Waste’ television campaign in 2015; one third of the food we produce never gets eaten, but goes into recycling or waste. The average household bins a staggering £700 a year on food thrown away, most of it quite edible. Supermarkets have been forced to face up to the fact that misshapen vegetables are equally nutritious, *will* sell, and should not be ploughed back into the ground. ‘Sell-by’ dates are another obscene waste. People often think that that means an ‘eat-by’ date, and throw away perfectly edible food.

So at this time of harvest thanksgiving, let us all resolve to change our attitudes and habits: Google, read and inform ourselves about the problems, ignore

sell-by dates, buy ‘wonky’ fruit and veg, forage the hedges and ditches for ‘fruit in due season’, support national and international charities more generously, join campaigns and boycotts, volunteer our time and talents, clear out our cupboards and give to our local food bank, visit their site, [oxfordshirewestfoodbank.co.uk](http://oxfordshirewestfoodbank.co.uk) and accept their challenge! Don’t just sit there, do something.

*‘The needy will not be forgotten, nor the poor left destitute’* (Psalm 9:8)

Howard Brayton