

RELIGION

CLERGY CORNER

Mindful eating habits bind us to all creation

Growing up, my mother planted a small vegetable garden in our backyard. I enjoyed working alongside her in the dirt. I watched with fascination as the plants grew. Even more, I loved picking fresh produce and carrying it indoors in a basket for my family to eat.



THE REV. AMY BOWDEN FREEDMAN

One day, my mother sent me to harvest our first carrots. I ran outdoors firmly grasping the green leaves and pulled the vegetable from the earth, only to discover that carrots do not come in bunches! From the packages of carrots in our fridge, somehow I had assumed that under each carrot top was a whole bunch, not just a single orange root.

For most of us, food comes from the supermarket. We have become accustomed to choosing our meals from the shelves of the store, often packaged in a way that has little resemblance to any living thing. With our busy lives, many of us choose frozen dinners and prepared meals over raw ingredients.

Each food item in the United States typically travels 1,500 miles before it reaches our plates. This includes all the produce that we can enjoy year-round and processed foods.

Many of us treat food like fuel, eating to fill up our tanks in order to keep active. A whole industry of fast food has built

up around our desire for convenience, allowing us to eat on the run. Many Americans eat in the car en route to another destination.

Eating becomes a religious experience when we are mindful of the source of our food and our interdependence with other living beings. Truly it is a miracle that seed, soil, sun and water contribute to what becomes food. The food that we eat is essential to our lives nourishing and sustaining us.

This fall, we held a Harvest Dinner during which church members were invited to bring dishes made of local ingredients. If we were unable to find a local product, the challenge was to at least to identify the source. This was an eye-opening exercise! The local farmers market provided many locally grown-and-raised staples. In cooking, we had to consider where in the world our spices came from.

This lesson about eating locally — or at least being mindful about the source of food — has stuck with me. Choosing natural ingredients over processed ones are healthy choices, both for me and our world. Despite the temptation of junk food, real food is more deeply satisfying.

My family has decided to plant a small vegetable garden this summer. Our yard is small, but there is a patch out back where the sun shines brightly for at least six hours a day. I am looking forward to working the soil and planting.

I have also decided to subscribe to Community Supported Agriculture. Simmons Farm in Middletown helps build a direct relationship between

people, food and the farm. Through a subscription, we will receive a share of certified organic vegetables every week during the months of June through October. This will give us the opportunity to experience the workings of a farm more closely and to eat in rhythm with the season. If you are interested in learning more about Simmons Farm, drop by 1942 West Main Road or call 848-9910.

Of course, not everyone has the resources to plant a garden or to choose organic foods. Many children around the world and close to home will go to bed hungry tonight. The annual Aquidneck Island CROP WALK Against Hunger will be Saturday morning, April 26. This is an opportunity to join an interfaith movement in our community by walking three or 10 miles. The funds raised will go to hunger relief, globally and locally. For more information, check out www.cropwalk.org.

The word "religion" comes from the Latin root "religare," meaning "to bind back." Mindful eating is religious because it binds us back to our wholeness with all of creation. Instead of simply refueling, let us make healthier choices that awaken our sense of reverence and gratitude for living. This type of nourishment will feed our sense of joy and generosity!

The Rev. Amy Bowden Freedman is the minister of Channing Memorial Church, Unitarian Universalist, in Newport. The Clergy Corner, written by various clergy in Newport County, appears each week in The Daily News.

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