

THE SONG OF THE SIREN

HISTORY TEACHES US THAT TEMPTATION HAS BEEN AROUND FOR A VERY LONG TIME, BACK AS FAR AS THE TROJAN WAR. WHEN ULYSSES SAILED HOME VICTORIOUSLY FROM BATTLE TOWARDS GREECE, HIS SHIP WAS BLOWN OFF COURSE AND HE WOUND UP OFF THE COASTLINE OF ITALY NEAR THE ISLAND OF CAPRI. THIS WAS THE REGION OF THE SIRENS, HUGE BIRDS WITH WOMEN'S HEADS, SEA-NYMPHS WHO WOULD SING BEAUTIFUL MELODIES AT PASSING BOATS. BUT THIS WASN'T MERE ENTERTAINMENT. THE SIRENS WERE TRYING TO CRASH THE SHIPS ONTO THE ROCKY SHORELINE AND FORCE THE SEAFARERS TO THROW THEMSELVES INTO THE DEADLY WATERS.

ULYSSES, WE ARE TOLD, WAS WARNED AHEAD OF TIME AND HE MADE CAREFUL PREPARATIONS: FIRST HE PLUGGED UP HIS SAILORS' EARS WITH WAX. THEN HE HAD HIMSELF BOUND TO THE MAST. FINALLY HE TOLD HIS CREW THAT THEY WERE TO IGNORE ALL OF HIS PLEAS TO BE UNTIED UNTIL THEIR SHIP WAS SAFELY FAR AWAY FROM THE DANGEROUS COASTLINE.

IT WORKED. THE SAILORS COULDN'T HEAR ONE NOTE OF THE SIRENS' SONG, AND ULYSSES COULDN'T ESCAPE FROM THE ROPES. THE SHIP SAILED RIGHT PAST THE DREADED NYMPHS, AND ULYSSES EVENTUALLY RETURNED TO GREECE AND HAD A LOT OF STORIES TO TELL HIS FRIENDS.

THOUSANDS OF YEARS LATER AND ABOUT 20 MILES AWAY IN THE TOWN OF AMALFI, I TOO HEARD THE SONG OF THE SIREN. THIS TIME IT DIDN'T COME FROM A SEA-NYMPH. IT CAME FROM A

CREAM PASTRY IN THE WINDOW OF A TINY FAMILY-RUN BAKERY. THE PASTRY BECKONED TO ME: "COME INTO THE STORE AND BUY ME. I WILL MAKE YOU HAPPY. I WILL BE PART OF YOU FOREVER."

BUT, DEAR READER, I HAD ALREADY METAPHORICALLY PLUGGED UP MY EARS WITH WAX AND ANCHORED MYSELF ON THE SIDEWALK. I SAID TO MYSELF: "THAT'S NOT A REAL CREAM PASTRY. IT'S PROBABLY MADE OF PLASTIC. IF I BIT INTO IT I COULD CRACK A TOOTH. LET'S GO FOR A WALK SOMEWHERE ELSE."

YOU CAN PUT ANY LABEL THAT YOU WANT TO ON MY COPING MECHANISM. DELUSIONAL THINKING? RATIONALIZATION? NO MATTER WHAT YOU THINK, I HAD 500 FEWER CALORIES THAT DAY. BUT IF I HAD LISTENED TO THE SAME SONG OF THE SIREN AT THAT STORE EVERY DAY FOR ONE WEEK, I WOULD HAVE GOTTEN ONE POUND FATTER.

NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE OR WHERE YOU LIVE, YOU ARE NOT VERY FAR FROM YOUR LOCAL GATHERING OF EDIBLE SIRENS. WE SEEM TO BE A CIVILIZATION THAT HAS ABANDONED FORMAL FAMILY MEALS AND STRUCTURED ALL EATING AROUND VARIOUS TYPES OF TEMPTATIONS. WE ARE TEMPTED BY CHEMICALLY ENHANCED COLORS...TEMPTED BY OVERSIZED PORTIONS WORTHY OF ACHILLES...TEMPTED BY THE EXPEDIENCY A "POWER" BAR OR THICK SHAKE PROVIDES.

WHEN YOU FINALLY DECIDE THAT YOU WANT TO KEEP WEIGHT OFF PERMANENTLY YOU ARE GOING TO HAVE TO LEARN TO DEAL WITH TEMPTATION. *THE PARK AVENUE PLAN* WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO LOSE QUITE A BIT OF WEIGHT IN SIX WEEKS. YOU ARE

CERTAINLY GOING TO LIKE THE RESULTS AND SO WILL YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY. BUT WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN THE MORNING COFFEE CART WHEELS PAST YOUR DESK AT WORK? THERE'S GOING TO BE A BIG, GOOEY STICKY BUN RIGHT ON TOP OF A PILE OF PASTRIES AND YOU WILL HEAR THE SONG OF THE SIREN, AS DID ULYSSES IN ANCIENT TIMES.

IMAGINE THAT YOU ARE ENJOYING A NIGHT OUT WITH YOUR FRIENDS AT THE MALL. SOMEONE SAYS: "LET'S GO GET A COUPLE OF PIZZAS". WHAT'S YOUR RESPONSE? "SORRY, THAT'S REALLY FATTENING AND UNHEALTHY"? AND WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO AT YOUR COUSIN'S WEDDING? "THAT CAKE HAS ARTIFICIAL FLAVORS AND REFINED FLOUR. I'LL JUST HAVE MINERAL WATER." AND MAYBE YOU TOO WILL SOMEDAY FIND YOURSELF ON THE AMALFI COASTLINE AND EXPERIENCE THE TEMPTATION OF TORTELLINI ALLA NONNA OR 1000 CALORIES-PER-PORTION CASSATA.

ULYSSES WASN'T THE ONLY TRAVELER WHO HAD TO DEAL WITH THE SONG OF THE SIREN. LEGEND ALSO TELLS US THAT JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS HEARD THE CALLS OF THE TREACHEROUS NYMPHS AS THEY SAILED ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA. INSTEAD OF THE MORE DRAMATIC APPROACH THAT ULYSSES USED, THE ARGONAUTS FOUGHT FIRE WITH FIRE: THEY WERE SAVED BY THE BEAUTIFUL MUSIC OF ORPHEUS WHO LITERALLY DROWNED OUT THE SIRENS' SINGING.

WE LEARN FROM THIS MYTHOLOGY THAT THERE ARE BASICALLY TWO WAYS TO DEAL WITH TEMPTATION. ONE IS TO PRETEND TO

WALK AWAY FROM IT BUT GIVE UP QUICKLY AND SUCCUMB (THAT'S PARTIALLY WHY THE FAILURE RATE OF DIETING IS ABOUT 90%). AND THE OTHER WAY IS TO HAVE A METAPHORICAL REPLACEMENT THAT COMPETES WITH TEMPTATION AND ERASES IT, LIKE THE MUSIC OF ORPHEUS.

SIMPLY PUT, IF YOU ARE NOT GOING TO HAVE THE PASTRY, THE PIZZA, OR THE CAKE, YOU NEED TO REPLACE IT WITH SOMETHING ELSE. ASK ANYONE WHO HAS KEPT WEIGHT OFF SUCCESSFULLY FOR YEARS. HE OR SHE CAN NEGOTIATE A BUFFET TABLE, A BANQUET, A BUSINESS MEETING, A BIRTHDAY PARTY, AND EVERY OTHER OPPORTUNITY TO EAT BY MAKING A SERIES OF CORRECT CHOICES. THIS IS ACCOMPLISHED BY CHANGING PRIORITIES FROM THE INSTANT GRATIFICATION TEMPTATION PROVIDES TO THE CONTINUAL PLEASURE THAT A DYNAMIC IMAGE AFFORDS.

YOU MAY OCCASIONALLY HAVE TO EAT IN A FAST-FOOD RESTAURANT. YOU MAY HAVE TO EAT QUITE DIFFERENTLY FROM THE REST OF YOUR FAMILY. YOU MAY EVEN HAVE TO COOK "FORBIDDEN FOODS" STARING WISTFULLY AT THEM AS OTHER PEOPLE WINE AND DINE AND ENJOY. ARE THESE REASONS ENOUGH FOR YOU TO BREAK YOUR RESOLVE, JEOPARDIZE YOUR HEALTH, SHORTEN YOUR LIFE, AND WIDEN YOUR DIMENSIONS? I WANT YOU TO BE ABLE TO DEAL WITH THESE POSSIBILITIES SO THAT THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF A FEW WEEKS ARE NOT RAPIDLY CANCELED OUT BY A TSUNAMI OF CALORIES.

MOST PEOPLE THINK OF SELF-CONTROL AS AN ARDUOUS PROCESS, REDUCING THEM TO THRASHING AND RANTING LIKE

POOR ULYSSES TIED UP IN KNOTS ON HIS SHIP. I WANT TO TEACH YOU HOW TO SUBSTITUTE THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR THE WRONG CHOICE AT EVERY TURN OF THE PATH, AT ANY OPPORTUNITY FOR FAILURE TO NEGATE YOUR SUCCESS. YOU WILL PASS DOZENS UPON DOZENS OF CULINARY SIRENS TODAY. MAYBE SOME HAVE ALREADY BECKONED OUT TO YOU. PERHAPS YOU HAVE ALREADY TAKEN A FEW ABOARD. AS YOU REINVENT YOUR LOOKS, WEIGHT, AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONS, THEIR SONGS WILL DRIFT INTO THE DISTANCE AS YOU FOCUS ON THE CORRECT WAY TO REWARD YOUR NOBLE EFFORTS.