

# AN OPINION

By Bette-Jane  
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## ON MY OBSESSION ABOUT WEIGHT

Have you ever tried to buy a portable scale? I have—and you can't. Which may mean I have to cancel my trip to Israel. I can get a portable iron or a travel hair dryer, but a folding scale nobody ever heard of. The problem is that I'd gladly run around the desert with a wrinkled skirt and damp hair, if only I can check my weight daily. But to date the closest thing I've been able to find is a postage scale.

forbid. I must weigh a million grams.

For some people getting on the scale in the morning is a routine health procedure. For me it is a religious rite, since the scale gives not only my weight, but, by extension, my worth as a human being. Five pounds over my "ideal weight" (as the charts say) and I am a blight upon the Earth, bad; two pounds under and I am One Of The Just. (This computation is

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What I've decided to do is wire ahead to all the hotels I plan to stay at and book a room with a scale. They can keep the bath. I'd gladly run around the desert *dirty* (with a wrinkled skirt and damp hair) as long as I know how much I weigh. My only fear now is that the scales will be on the metric system or some other hideous foreign conversion—stones or kilos, or grams, God

complicated by the fact that I have never actually figured out what exactly my ideal weight is. Am I small—again the charts—medium or big boned? And, even more mysterious, are the charts accurate? Can someone medium boned, five feet four, really be all right at 130? Can anyone? At 130 I was suicidal. But at 102, which seemed all right to me, my father kept

muttering "Auschwitz" under his breath when he looked at me. So? Go know.) My weight determines not only my moral place in the world, but my mood (a bad person has no right to be happy), my lovability (nobody can love a bad person) and my mental health (I must have been crazy to eat all that food).

How I absorbed this lightness-is-next-to-godliness principle is a bit of a mystery, but I have an idea it is somewhat culture-specific. In America, the thin, like the meek, inherit the Earth—and the fat inherit the wind. There they all were in front of me: Audrey Hepburn; Lauren Bacall; Loretta Young. I was no dummy; I got the point.

It is a point that's become rather deeply ingrained. Some women have fantasies about sexual submission. Mine are about weight reduction. I figure if I can devise the perfect weight-loss plan, one that combines a reduction of poundage with no corresponding reduction of food intake, I have not only made my paradise on Earth, I have guaranteed wealth for myself and my posterity. I understand Ponce de Leon, because I search for The Fountain of Thin.

Not only do I obsess about my own weight, I obsess about other people's. It is relevant. If, for example, my friend Amy weighs 118 and I weigh 114, does that mean I am thin? Perhaps. But if, at the same time, my friend Anthea weighs 102, does that mean I am fat? Certainly. But Amy is my height and Anthea is two inches shorter, so what do I make of that? What indeed!

Outsiders enter into my weight obsession in other ways. When, upon seeing me after a short or long hiatus, someone says, "Hey, you look thin," I quickly calculate what my weight was at our last meeting. (An easy task, since I have stored in my head my exact weight on any given day of my life since the age of sixteen. For instance, at my Sweet Sixteen I weighed 134, including lump-sugar corsage.) Then, if that weight is not significantly more than my weight at present, I wonder why I should appear thin to my friend now. Answer: People think of me (the way I think of myself) as a fat person. Result: suspicion, depression and hostility.

But if that same person should say that I look as if I'd put on a few pounds, that on me "it looks good," and that I was really too thin before, I suspect not only their good will but their sanity. How can someone, a friend yet, think that three extra pounds are a good thing? Obviously I must rethink my relationship to a person whose values are so distorted.

If someone tells me I look healthy, I translate it to fat. Tired might mean thin. It might also mean tired. Even a comment on my clothes is unsafe. If something "looks well" on me, mightn't that mean that it hides my excess weight? I can't win, and neither can my friends, so when it comes to physical appearance I prefer them to ignore the fact that I have one.

(My focus on weight is not, by the way, confined to my conscious state. Sometimes I wake in the middle of the night wondering how much I weigh. Once I had a dream that my teeth were fat.)

Every day is more than simply the first

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