

Insatiable Podcast with Season 3 Episode 1

(INTRODUCTION)

(0: 00:47.4) AS: Welcome back Insatiable listeners. I'm excited for season 3. You'll hear more about the theme when we get into the actual episode. But before we do I want to give you a little context and highlight some of the favorite parts that I want you to listen for that I really enjoyed. So today I'm joined by Varsha Mathur who is going to help us learn how to say no to food pushers.

There're a couple reasons in particular I wanted to have Varsha on. First of all, she is an excellent communicator. She is a coach herself. She previously owned a management company that practice law in the areas of mediation real estate and land use. In other words, she's an excellent communicator in high-stakes situations. I'm sure for any of you who have ever bought and sold a house or any property, you know how nerve-wracking that, and people's stress responses are out in full force.

Professionally, she's got this background. Personally, she has listened and rewritten her story of divorce and remarriage and talks about it eloquently to help remove the taboo of these topics that still exist in certain communities. Varsha comes from South Asian culture that heavily influenced her and her norms, obviously. However, she was born and raised in the United States.

So one of the things that I really want you to pay attention to today is Varsha's excellent ways of communicating that make your boundaries clear. Part of why we get into trouble or feel bad saying no about food we eat everything or a foodwiz, is because we're not clear on our own boundaries. So Varsha's going to help us learn to navigate that better.

Also, I really want you to understand the beautiful metaphor of food. We often hear, “Oh, food is fuel, or food just shouldn't – Food is bad,” and we're reducing food to these very simplified meanings that don't bring out the abundance and the nourishment and the connection that food really can offer in healthy way.

So we're going to talk about how to navigate that really nuanced territory. What I particularly loved is Varsha explaining some of the Hindu culture to me and some of the stories that come from that culture and that religious background illustrates how food can be this metaphor of devotion and hospitality. So you're going to have a little bit of a paradigm shift, I hope, and also walk away with some solid tools so that next time you are out and about in social situations, you can feel confident eating what's right for you and what works for you.

You can find more about Varsha at knowingluxe.com, and also on my website at alishapiro.com/podcast where we'll have some show notes, more about Varsha, the transcript and, of course, some of the sentences that she's going to offer us on how we can say no to food pushers. Enjoy today's episode. I walked away just so inspired to relook at food in a more dynamic metaphor, and I hope you do too.

(INTERVIEW)

(0:03:55.1) AS: I am so excited for this season. We have so many great guests, including Varsha Mathur who is here with me today. Before we get to Varsha's interview, a couple of fun updates that I wanted to share with you. First of all, our theme this season is renewal. I wanted to be in sync with nature and that energy we're feeling right now, like let's burst out. Let's do some things in a refreshing way. So we're going to focus on new ways of looking at food, our relationship to food and health this season from various viewpoints.

So I'm really excited about this theme. In continuing the theme of renewal, I have a brand new website. So you guys have to check it out, alishapiro.com. It's a big healthy rebel cry for people who love Insatiable and the people who really want to be healthy, because to be healthy in a culture is to be rebellious.

But one of the things I wanted to let Insatiable listeners especially know is, if you guys like these podcasts, there is a [“What’s My Comfort Eating Style?” quiz](#). So if you go to [alishapiro.com](#), you can take that quiz and you’re going to start to learn one of the three main patterns that keeps you stuck, and then I’m giving people a secret Insatiable episode with some tools to get unstuck. I’ll probably – I will be giving more secret episodes for people who have taken the quiz and are on my list. So you definitely don’t want to miss out on that. So check it out at [alishapiro.com](#), that’s my new website, and [take my eating quiz](#) so you can figure out your patterns and get some secret Insatiable episodes.

Okay. Now, on to Varsha and how to say no to food pushers. Thank you so much for being here.

(0:05:43.9) VM: Thank you, Ali. I really am excited to be a part of this, because I love your work.

(0:05:47.6) AS: Oh, thank you. I love your work and you’re such a clear communicator, which is part of the reason that I wanted to have you on. In addition too, you come from the Hindi, Hindu. Yes, I told Varsha I’m putting my white girl hat on today. So this is going to be culturally awkward maybe at a of couple places. But your Hindu lens of food being such an integral part of your culture, like many cultures do. So what we want to talk about today is that food isn’t just food. It carries this whole other level of meaning. So when someone is offering you food, it’s often not just, “Hey, will you eat this?” It’s when you take my love, all that stuff. I can’t wait to dive into that.

Before do, how to really understand the different layers of food, you have to have an interest in it and a curiosity. It’s not something that we just talked about, especially in America. It’s reduced to calories or points. So how did you come to have such these deep insightful thoughts about food?

(0:06:46.5) VM: Yeah. So for me, all my life, I've been — Probably since middle school, like a plus size person. That's how they've always labeled it in the states. Knowing my family history and knowing my sort of even broader South Asian history of health, I know I need to be mindful of heart disease and diabetes. So now that I'm getting a little bit older, I am just more mindful of being healthy, keeping weight under control, keeping diet under control and seeing doctors regularly so I know what's going on with my body and can prevent and catch all the issues that could potentially be there as an Indian woman. That's kind of what motivates me to stay healthy and to know more about why food is what it is in my life and in the life of my family.

(0:07:37.0) AS: I'm curious if — Do you still have relatives in Southeast India or Southeast Asia?

(0:07:40.9) VM: In India, yeah. So my father's side is predominantly there and we have other family sprinkled everywhere. My husband's family, his parent's side, they're all there in India.

(0:07:50.6) AS: And do they have the same health challenge American, the Indian Americans or are they getting them as our fast food and culture become curious of that dynamic?

(0:08:00.4) VM: Yeah. It's a pretty complex dynamic, because I would say for the most part generations who are here in the States have a lot of similarities to what's happening with people in India, because they're new immigrants. So maybe two or three generations of people are living an American lifestyle. So you're starting to see that change with like third and fourth generation people with how their lifestyle and their diets, having more access to eating out, things like that, are affecting it. But now in India you have a lot more families where both parents work, a lot more fast food restaurants, a lot of restaurants in general, a more westernizing culture that wants to eat out, and that's a trend and it shows well, and things like that.

It's going to be an interesting thing to monitor, because it used to be that in India, you ate a home-cooked meal and it was pretty simple and it was pretty low in calorie unless you were out and doing fieldwork or something like that. So it'll be interesting to watch.

(0:08:56.7) AS: It's so interesting that fast food and being able to eat out is a sign of wealth. I think that definitely is here. Also, in America is even though it's unconscious, to be healthy is now a status symbol. We can all get knocked off Coach bags and you can get the lower — And I put these in quotes, “lower end BWM”. The research system want to spend on that, but I also don't care about cars. This sign (inaudible 0:09:22.5), you can afford the green juice. If you are thin in this country, it usually means that you have time to cool. You have access to grocery stores, all that stuff. So it's a double bind of health, I think, in food also being about a status of wealth. But then there's also eating out is not so healthy.

So tell me a little bit about part of why we want — You and I were talking personally about this and I was like, “We need to have this on the podcast,” because you were talking about how deeply ingrained eating a lot of portions, eating certain types of foods in your culture. So can you give us a little background on what the food dynamics are in a Hindu culture?

(0:10:03.5) VM: So family gatherings are always about love and fun, but also very much about food, and that's wonderful. I think a lot of people can associate with that. In Indian families though, you also tend to see the pressures that are involved with that. Maybe parents telling kids like, “Oh! If we were in India, there would kids suffering on the streets wanting our food. Let's eat this food. Finish your plate.”

Then you go to party or you go to somebody's wedding and they're insisting on serving you seconds. It's get to the point where you have to throw your arms over your plate to say, “No. Thank you,” and sometimes that's considered rude. Then just kind of having the pressures of the hospitality and not wanting to waste, and especially during family occasions that are auspicious, like birthdays, anniversaries, weddings of course. You're going to have a lot of sweets served to you, and that can be — Even the smallest bite can be very high in calorie, because they're very rich in things like ghee and sugar and honey and carbs

These are the kind of things that you'll see a trend of that all comes from love and hospitality, which makes it very hard to say no to.

(0:11:14.8) AS: Yeah. I think that's a really important point. Even you were saying about events being about like love and connection, to me food is ultimately about ritual, which ties us to our traditions especially as traditions are getting mixed and matched and blended, like Indian-American families. But I think food is always about a big for connection. It's for emotional intimacy. We're connected either through tradition in this moment.

So to almost say no, or you say, put your hands over your plate is — For some, if we're not conscious of what we're actually making it mean, we can feel as the person saying no really guilt. Like to your point, like, "Oh my God! I don't know why, but I feel like I should take it. I don't know why, but I just feel like I should. I'm doing the wrong thing." Or it's like, "They're going to be mad even though I don't necessarily wanted this, or I want a bite. Not so many of the portions."

How did you start to extract yourself from this layered meaning of food where you don't want it to be — Let me back that up. Where you wanted to be about food. Like I still can connect with you. I can still love you. We can still be part of something bigger than ourselves. How do you start to do that?

(0:12:22.2) VM: For me, I'm big on communication. Through my coaching business and through my own personal life, I've always found that the more you tell people, the easier it is for them to understand you. Obviously, they can't guess. So letting people know in advance, for example, that, "Hey, I'm not going to have this. I know it might be there. Can I help you make something else?" Or just know in advance that we don't eat this, but we can bring something instead. Those are the kinds of things that I've started to do to prevent having to eat the things that I don't want.

As part an analysis on why this is even there, there are some interesting things both in the Hindu culture and also like society. Then also in the Hindu philosophy scripture ritual that basically is hospitality and devotion and love built in to this food. For example, sweets, often include, like I said, ghee, the sugar, the honey, the grains.

(0:13:22.6) AS: All the good stuff.

(0:13:23.2) VM: All the good stuff that you want to eat, and it's delicious, but why is it considered auspicious? Even in some families, they'll serve you the sweets first, because get the good stuff first.

(0:13:34.4) AS: That's amazing. Oh my God! That is puritanical bullshit. Like sacrifice and then you get you rewards. Like, "Let's just do it."

(0:13:40.4) VM: It's usually because when you're serving somebody, it's a celebration. It's offering everything that you have to offer. I think it comes from when people were farmers. It shows that you have this abundance that you can give to people. For example, like Diwali, which is the holy holiday for Hindus. Probably the biggest one in most families. You give sweets. Why is that? It comes at a time where they celebrate a new year. So whatever your harvest was for that year, whatever you have an abundance of, you can give and you can serve and you say, "Look at what I have," and share it with the community, and who ever doesn't have can enjoy it. So the richer the food, the better it is for people who don't have.

(0:14:23.6) AS: Yeah, that's so beautiful, because I think often here in America, I hear well-intentioned health people being like, "Food isn't comfort. It's fuel." I've never been comfortable with that, because it reduces food down to this like militarism — Is that the right word? Just like it reduces it down to something and it takes away from the beautiful metaphor it can be. Like we don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. When you think about it, as you were explaining, I thought about like, "Wow! It's part of why I love when I'm with people who are Christian and we stop and pray. I myself am not, but I love taking the moment and the reverence for, "Oh my God! Thinking about earth cycles that have had

to happen, the people who have farmed, the seeds that have had — The generations before that who preserved these seeds.” Like it really reconnects you to that cycle of life, and when we think about food just as fuel or as bad, we’re not thinking about the bigger metaphor, which is a really beautiful one that you just shared.

(0:15:22.5) VM: Even when you’re saying no to these things, it doesn’t mean you can’t respect why somebody is giving it to you, right?

(0:15:28.1) AS: Yeah.

(0:15:29.0) VM: It’s a great point.

(0:15:29.7) AS: I like your point. It’s not either or. Like either I’m participating this — Like I can actually take in. Wow! Being part of this bigger cycle even if I don’t actually eat ten of sweets.

(0:15:42.0) VM: Right. Exactly.

(0:15:42.6) AS: That’s so beautiful. What other metaphors and allegories come from your culture? Because I feel like — I know a lot of Insatiable listeners are yoga teachers and into the (inaudible 0:15:51.9) world, but I don’t know if they learn this side of things in (inaudible 0:15:55.5). I doubt it.

(0:15:57.5) VM: Yeah. A lot of the Hindus believe in eating *sattvic* food, and that means pure food. So those are things like ghee, like premier cheese.

(0:16:07.2) AS: I love premier cheese.

(0:16:08.3) VM: Right. So there are all these like delicious foods that are considered *sattvic*. So even like priests and people who follow very strict diets, Hindu diets, can eat these foods, and they tend to be the richer foods. They’re also considered pure in the way that they — Or

because of where they come from and how they're processed or not processed, and they're just very natural.

The sweets that are served in Indian or Hindu rituals, even the non-Hindu rituals in India and Pakistan even, they're made of *sattvic* ingredients. So you can serve them at a temple. You can serve them to a priest. Again, this is really important, because in the ritual of Hindu ceremonies, you're going to find that God is asked to become present in front of you when you're performing a ceremony, and then treated like a guest.

He or she, feet are cleaned, and then food is offered and that food has to be this *sattvic* clean wholesome food. Again, hospitality is built into that. God being seen as a guest is built in to that. These are all deep rooted reasons why food is important.

(0:17:18.5) AS: Yeah. I love that, because if you take God as a metaphor, again, it's a life force that requires food to be cultivated, created. We need the brain cycle. We need nourishing soil, all of that stuff. So I know that a lot of Hindu stories are very allegorical. So I'm kind of taking that metaphor.

I find it also interesting that pure foods in Hindu culture, like ghee, I feel like here in America we think of pure foods as like low fat and bland, and like who hasn't done the steam vegetables and chicken breast but nothing on it. I love that the idea of pure is different. Can you explain too, a lot of my clients are just introduced to ghee when we start working together. So can you talk about what ghee is before we go on?

(0:18:00.1) VM: It's a purified butter. I've never tried to make it myself. I buy it from the store. That's what I do. I don't personally use it for cooking, except for maybe on a special occasion when I'm making one of these very chloric foods. But it is used in Hindu rituals to make the actual — It's called the diya, to use it as a lamp at the actual altar. It's used, again, for the food, and there's a number of other uses for it. But it's a very purified butter.

(0:18:28.8) AS: Yeah. So for those of you listening, what you do — At least this is what my sister's boyfriend, who's Indian, has told me. When you actually make it, you put butter on a very low heat for several hours and the casein, which is a protein found in butter, in milk, in dairy, rises to the top. Then you skim all of that off, so even if you have dairy allergies, you can eat ghee. A lot of parents I know whose kids struggle with ADHD or ADD or even people who have autoimmune issues can tolerate ghee, but not butter. It's very medicinal.

(0:19:02.0) VM: That's right. Actually now that you say that, before there were Indian stores, especially from the small town I come from, in Southern Maryland, my used to do that. She used to make her own ghee at home. I totally forgot about that. But, yeah, it's a cool process. It's a strenuous process, but it's delicious afterwards.

(0:19:18.1) AS: Yeah, it's so good.

(0:19:19.3) VM: Yeah.

(0:19:19.5) AS: I'm also laughing, because it is pricy and like I use it on too many things, especially in the winter because it has a cooking heat, right? Olive oil, you can heat at like high heat. So if you want to boil some potatoes, it's just so good. Yeah. Carlos is like, "I don't care how much ghee you eat, but this stuff is not free and not cheap." I'm like — If you listen to this episode, he's going to have a (inaudible 0:19:41.8) for me cutting back on how much ghee (inaudible 0:19:43.8).

So before we started the episode, you were telling me about this amazing allegory, and I would love for you to share that, because I think it's so pertinent to our conversation that we're having here.

(0:19:57.2) VM: Even in the Vedas, which are the spiritual scriptures for Hindus. These rituals of serving God food is embedded there, and in the Ramayan, which is a mythological story about the avatar of Krishna coming down as Ram — Sorry, Vishnu coming down as Ram to earth at a time when there were demons and they needed to be fought. It's a beautiful story

that should be read just for fun, if not for spiritual growth. But there are so many wonderful morals in that story, and one of them is about a woman named (inaudible 0:20:30.9).

She was told by her guru, or her teacher, that she would be visited by God at some point. So for the rest of her life after the death of her guru, she prayed and waited and waited for God to come, and in the process she would harvest these berries — I don't know if it was berries or grapes, but she would harvest them and she would take a bite of each one, and if it was bitter, she would throw it out, and if it was sweet, she would keep it in the basket for God when he came to serve him.

Finally, one day Ram and his brother, as part of the story, are traveling and they come to her house and she serves him these half-eaten berries. Ram's brother looks at him and he's like, "Why are we going to eat these? They're un-pure. She's taken a bite out of every single one that you're eating." His brother, Lakshmana, won't take a bite, and Ram says to him, "When somebody with so much devotion and love and care is serving you something, we're going to appreciate that, and I'm going to eat it and I'm going to value it the way I would any other meal I've ever had."

It's a beautiful story about devotion, about this woman who has what's called Bhakti, which is devotion for God, and that's an important story in itself. But what I see here also is this understanding that when somebody is your host, you accept from them what they're serving you without question and without negativity. So in a way, I have to take from that also being mindful of what's important for me first, which isn't always accepting that hospitality.

There are something to take and something to not take from that story, and I think the concept of Dharma, which is doing your rightful duty in life is also important. For me, at any given time, not eating what is being offered to me and not having to feel guilty about that is more important. I have to do that first. Perhaps at a cost of saying no to my host.

(0:22:40.8) AS: Yeah. What you're talking about is discernment, right? Like when am I having to look out for myself? When it is okay? This is like a lot more nuanced to find your — I call it

almost like a discernment rod, when it matters. I also think, as you're saying that, I think that a lot of times we assume that the guest, we're going to sever the connection. Like we're going to make a host or the other person feel bad that we've ruined the hospitality, when it's often not quite the conflict. If we can see them and see that they're offering us a spirit of generosity, nourishment, and then we can return that maybe not by taking the food, but by acknowledging them and all that stuff.

I think that's what – It can be this win-win, right? I think part of – One of the comfort eating styles actually is the accommodator, and it's about – the accommodator has framed things as either/or, rather than and. It's like you can – The woman or man wants to be hospitable and you can take in the total sum of their hospitality, maybe it's not only focused on the food. Like what about commenting on the ambience, or the guest list or all that stuff? So getting clear on what everyone really needs at times.

However, to your point, and I've had a lot of clients, especially my clients whose grow up in like meat and potato families and they get a diagnosis, like Hashimoto's or depression and they have to start to change the eating habits. There has to be much more delicate conversations about why I can't this, because the family does take it as like, "Oh, you're different than us. You're (inaudible 0:24:13.0) now."

One of the most controversial things Obama said was arugula was expensive. So we have to be mindful. So at the end of the day, I think most of us, our goal is to connect with our host, with the company, with the event wherever we are. So we have to figure out what that looks like, and it sometimes it's maybe eating the food and sometimes, to your point, it's like, "No. I have to look out for myself," and it is an either/or at times.

(0:24:40.7) VM: Yeah. My mother-in-law is a perfect example of this, and I think most of modern India is becoming so health conscious and so modern that this is not a regular problem for a lot of people, but it's still there, especially special occasions. One of the things that my husband and I do now is we know my mother-in-law is going to want us to have these wonderful rich foods, because she loves us and she wants to serve it, but she's also

super — Like what is the right words? She's just really accepting of what we want, and she's willing to, instead, have alternatives that work for our diets and work for our lifestyle. It's been very easy to communicate that with her, and that kind of goes to the whole point of this podcast, which is kind of understanding how to communicate this "no" and doing so in a way that doesn't disrespect the person who's offering you something.

(0:25:33.6) AS: Yeah, I love that. So let's go through some of the tips you have. For everyone, Varsha has been so generous to like actually write these down. So that they will on her podcast episode, if you go to alishapiro.com/podcast, you can get all of these seven lines that she's going to share with us, and I'm obviously going to ask — Have some feedback and ask some questions as well. But before we get to that, and maybe in — Oh! I want to ask you about waste, because this is a big thing that's actually coming up with my Truce With Food group right now. It comes up with a lot of clients, is they've either been — They've grown up in families that were depression era, very poor, or like one of my clients, her parents were alive in Germany after World War II and they had no food. It's like — And you kind of internalize these things of like, "I can't waste food." Here in America, they show you starving children. Elsewhere, you don't realize that it's because of colonization and all these stuff. But you start to realize, "I shouldn't waste when I have all these abundance." How did you work around that particular?

(0:26:35.8) VM: That is such a good question, because it becomes more and more obvious to me when I have parties and we have all these leftovers. Maybe we allow ourselves to have these things for that one Saturday night, but the leftovers mean that we need to finish this stuff before it goes bad. But my husband and I have now basically decided that we have to make choices that work for us and that are more important for us first. If we can avoid the waste, great. If I can calculate how much people are going to eat and make it less waste later, that's fine. But we've really just come to terms with the fact that what matters to our health comes first, and we will do other things for the environment. We will do other things for the needy and providing food for them, but in our home we have to do what's right for us. The food sometimes does go to waste.

(0:27:23.6) AS: Well, you bring up an interesting point though, especially as I think about [412 Food Rescue](#) here and all that stuff. It's like saying yes so you don't waste isn't actually getting to the root of the problem, right? I mean, it doesn't mean you don't want to work on the problem, but the bigger resource of the problem is like government subsidies for wheat and sugar. Like if we really care about this, we could tackle it at the root instead of just kind of not overstuffing ourselves. It's that win-win again and finding what that looks like for us.

Again, to your point, I wrote a book. It was a self-published book in grad school, but I went to Sweden to study the sustainable system, because they've been — In the 80s, they sent out to their citizens about climate change all these stuff, and it really challenged my assumptions about what is green, what is not, what is useful. You start to realize some of the things you think you're doing aren't necessarily helpful, but maintaining our own health, because our healthcare system takes up so much energy.

If you really want to look at the cost and the waste, do that and figure it out, but don't just assume because you're (inaudible 0:28:26.6) out food that you're wasting and contributing.

(0:28:31.2) VM: Exactly. Yeah. I'm a big believer that on a macro-level, the universe, the world, if you're wanting to do good on that level for somebody else, it's never going to require you to do something that hurts yourself. So if eating the wrong foods all week long because they're sitting in your fridge, if you think that's the right thing, it's really not and you're really not going to be harming anybody by getting rid of that food.

(0:28:55.1) AS: Yeah. That's really beautiful, that philosophical, like when I'm well, that just adds — Which is so different than the scarcity mentality that fighting food often brings out in us. All right, let's talk about these seven ways to say no to food pushers. The first thing you have is, "No. I won't be having that. Thank you though."

If I'm thinking of some of my clients, they're going to be like, "Oh my God! I'm just going to feel guilty the entire time after I say that." How do you work with that?

(0:29:24.7) VM: The guilt factor can be mitigated by some other versions of these sentences, but using the actual word no is so important, because a lot of times we brush it off by saying, “Oh, not right now,” or “I’m good.” What does that even mean? Does that mean you’ll have it later? Because that might be what a host will suggest and then they’re going to bring it up to you again and you’re going to have that temptation again. Using no once, twice, and I don’t mean be aggressive. I don’t mean fight the person. I mean say it with a smile politely, but saying no, no thank you is really powerful actually, because people don’t use it.

(0:29:59.6) AS: I love that you bring that up, because I think I’m good is like a procrastination technique, right?

(0:30:04.4) VM: Absolutely.

(0:30:06.0) AS: It’s like I hope you’ll forget, but the host is like trying to be a good host then and then they’re like, “Oh, I thought you (inaudible 0:30:10.0).”

(0:30:11.0) VM: Yeah.

(0:30:11.2) AS: I think that’s so important. That’s a really, really excellent profound point of like no is clear, right? Then we all know each other’s expectations rather than —

(0:30:20.7) VM: Exactly.

(0:30:21.3) AS: I love that.

(0:30:22.3) VM: Then as far as the guilt piece goes, similar to what I was saying earlier with my mother-in-law, kind of jumping the gun and saying things like, “Can I help you bring something else to the party? I really love that you make this dish, but no, I’m not going to have any today,” or “Can I help you serve it to other people, but I’m not going to have any,” or “Well, you always have the best parties, but this is not what I’m having today.”

Kind of mitigating and letting them know that you appreciate what they've done for you and that it's not about the food for you, but it's about their hard work and effort. That might be one way to feel a little less guilty, because at least you're helping them feel better, because that's really why they're asking. They're not trying to force food down your throat, right? They just want to make sure you're happy.

(0:31:07.6) AS: Yeah. Also, you bring up a deeper point of all of us just want to be seen and acknowledged. That's ultimately what makes us feel grounded and safe and able to relax and enjoy. If you acknowledge the host, like, "Wow!" like, "This spread looks beautiful, and I've enjoyed this," or "and this ambience," and you really — Obviously, all of it should be genuine, but like really seeing the effort that — To your point, the effort that they put in is really which will make them feel good and alleviate that you're doing something wrong. I love that.

(0:31:41.2) VM: Yeah. Being assertive is one thing, but you also don't — You can be polite by keeping that smile on your face, but you also don't need to go into a long explanation. I mean, if you think the person will understand by explaining your diet or your restrictions for whatever reason, go for it. But the longer the explanation, the more likely they're going to be able to get in there and negate your point.

(0:32:03.7) AS: It's a good point.

(0:32:03.7) VM: Keep it simple. Like they'll get the point after the second or third time you say it, really.

(0:32:08.0) AS: You just reminded me too of like when you say be clear about no, that's so important, because we don't have to justify. I think women specially are so used to explaining, almost to like convince themselves. But just being clear — And a big thing when I work on with clients is maybe there might be a moment of uncomfortability or whatnot, but that's not going to ultimately sever your relationship with the person, right? Your relationship is the sum total of like years or the entire evening. Not just that food piece. So knowing that

it's not like all or nothing black and white like, "Oh my God! I've pissed them off." Versus like, "Hey, let me open up a line of connection elsewhere."

(0:32:47.1) VM: Yeah, and I've always found that when I have to say no to somebody, whether it's food or anything, by making it up to them in a different way, you reestablish that relationship. Even though it might be this family deep root of relationship, by saying like, "Hey, let me help you clean up," or "let me help you serve," instead of eating, that helps.

(0:33:05.2) AS: Ooh! I like that. I like that. So you feel like you're connecting in your efforts.

(0:33:09.3) VM: Right, exactly.

(0:33:10.7) AS: That's good-good. All right. Do you want to share a couple of other ones?

(0:33:14.5) VM: Yeah. The only other thing I think that's really, really heavy is to make sure that you are not saying I'll just have a little, because then you're opening yourself up for just a little bit more later. If you're really steady on not having any, then give yourself the strength to say no completely. Because a little bit sometimes is a lot. That's just something that I found for myself to help.

(0:33:40.9) AS: Yeah, but if you do want a little bit? You're like, "I just want to taste."

(0:33:44.8) VM: I mean, I guess that's a choice, but for me I always think about the pressure of eating Indian sweets. A very small amount is a piece of candy, really, if you think about the amount of sugar in this very dense sweet. Sometimes that's not what I want, but it kind of depends. It kind of depends. Make that decision ahead of time so you know what your limits are and what are not.

(0:34:06.3) AS: Yeah. I love these. Again, everyone, there is a bunch of — There are seven statements that will be on the website. Do you want to read all of them now or —

(0:34:13.8) VM: No, we don't have to. They're there. I'm going to put them on my website just to kind of share your podcast as well on knowingluxe.com, which is my site, and [@knowingluxe](https://www.instagram.com/knowingluxe) on Instagram.

(0:34:23.4) AS: Yeah, wonderful. So one question. You mentioned your in-laws and how this is like deep in your relationship with them actually. Do you have any examples — I would love to know if you have any other examples with like friends, because sometimes people will feel comfortable with their family, but not people that they don't know that well. So do you have some like examples or an example of when this really help things for you?

(0:34:46.6) VM: Yeah. I'm trying to think. I think, for me, the biggest thing, even still, is like when you go to lunch or brunch or dinners with your friends and you're not the ordering the big entre like everyone else, because you just want to order a salad and a soup. For a while, it took me some time to recognize that it's okay. Nobody is judging me for what I'm ordering. They're all preoccupied with their ordering. Half the time I don't even know what everyone else is ordering, but it was in my mind that self-conscious feeling.

At times like that I just remind myself that this was, again, more important for me and no one else care, but I care. I'm just going to do what's right. I mean, I don't know if that touches on your point.

(0:35:25.9) AS: No. I think that's a great example, because I hear this a lot with my clients. Like one hand it's like, "I don't want everyone to think I'm on a diet and trying, because I'm not where I want to be. So it looks like I'm failing." But then the other half is I don't want to be the person who's left out. Again, it comes back to — Is the only way that you can connect over this meal by eating and ordering the same things. Like what about the conversation? What about other things? I think though this brings up — Again, I'm looking at this through the lens, the work I do, is we all want this emotional intimacy to be seen and to be heard, but we are often taught that only the most perfect version of our self can be seen or heard, the one who does the right thing, the one to make everyone else happy.

So people really have to understand that, to your point in your story, food brings this cultural context. It brings meaning, but if you can clarify what your choices mean to the person, the group you're with, if it's even necessary. Because like most of my friends — Or most of my clients realize, yeah, no one is paying attention. I'm paying attention, because I'm paying attention to myself, but no one else is.

(0:36:33.5) VM: I mean, the one place where for some people it causes a little bit of tension is when the bill comes at the end of the night and you feel like, "Well, I only ordered \$20 worth, but splitting it evenly means everyone puts in \$40 or something like that." For me, I've decided that that's the cause of having fun with my friends sometimes.

Kind of going into it prepared that this might be some extra money that we spend, because we want to go out to dinner, but that does not — Money does not equal calories, so you can just kind of plan that in advance and know that so it doesn't become this awkward situation.

(0:37:05.4) AS: Yeah. I've had to learn to stick up when it comes to alcohol, because I usually don't drink. I do like on occasion, but I've had sometimes where like I would have to add like an extra 25 to 50 bucks. Most of the time my friends will be like, "Okay, wait. Ali didn't drink." Let's factor that out. I definitely stick — If it's like one glass of one (inaudible 0:37:24.5) I don't care. There's just like this sense of fairness to me that it's like, "I didn't drink."

(0:37:30.0) VM: That's good, because you know that in advance and you can just say ahead of time, "Hey, this is not we're going to handle the bill." Don't even let it get to the end of the night. Great. Yeah.

(0:37:37.9) AS: That's a good point. Yeah. I should have done it. I'm doing it next time. Although now, I don't go out that much. (inaudible 0:37:37.9). That's a whole other issue. Varsha, this is just been so wonderful, and I think you are such a great communicator and talking about the tone that we deliver this and coming from a place of, "I want to connect with you," rather than defensiveness, which these statements have offered and looking at that cultural context that all families bring to their traditions and whatnot. I think it's interesting

that most people's culture has some sort of traditions (inaudible 0:38:11.4) in food. I don't even know if there's one that doesn't.

(0:38:14.5) VM: Yeah. I mean, I have so many Jewish friends, so many Italian friends. This is the same. I think they're my friends, because we come from the same place, really. It's all the same things with them too.

(0:38:25.6) AS: Yeah. Thank you so much for your time. Is there any parting words of wisdom?

(0:38:30.3) VM: I really appreciate you having me. This is great. I can't wait to hear it.

(0:38:33.7) AS: Yeah, wonderful. Again, you can find Varsha at —

(0:38:37.9) VM: knowinglux.com, and find me on social media everywhere @knowinglux.

(0:38:47.0) AS: Yeah, she's always traveling to great places. So you can live (inaudible 0:38:49.8). Remember, Insatiable listeners, if you want to take that quiz, "[What's My Comfort Eating Style?](#)", where you can learn more about the accommodator that I mentioned here and the other two styles based on whatever one you are and access secret Insatiable episode, go to alishapiro.com, and we'll see you next time.

(END OF INTERVIEW)

(0:39:12.3) AS: Thank you, health rebels, for tuning in today. Have a reaction, question or want the transcript from today's episode, find me at alishapiro.com. I'd love if you leave a review on Apple Podcast and tell your friends and family about Insatiable. It helps us grow our community and share a new way of approaching health in our bodies. Thanks for engaging in a different kind of conversation. Remember, always, your body truths are unique, profound, real and liberating.

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