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The Month of Shevat - Sanctifying The Act of Eating

The month of *Shevat*, as we are taught by Chazal, is associated with the act of *le'itah* (chewing), which is otherwise known as *achilah*, eating.^[1] When Esav was starving and he wanted food, he said, "Feed me (*"hal-iteini"*) from that red stuff" - from the word "*le'itah*", to chew and consume food. Let us understand what our *avodah* of "eating" in *Shevat* is.

We know that a person cannot survive without eating. It is possible for a person to go several days without consuming food, but generally speaking, we need to eat every day of our life. Except for the fast days, such as Yom Kippur and the Rabbinically ordained fasts, we eat every single day. If we never reflect into the purpose of why we eat - of how it can be holy to us or of how it can be spiritually detrimental to us - then we will go our entire life without any sense of purpose in our eating.

If you make a simple calculation, each person eats an average amount of 70,000 meals in his lifetime (assuming that a person lives for 70 years, since "*the years of a man are seventy*", and that he eats about 1000 times during each year of his lifetime). Should a person eat for his entire life, going through 70,000 meals or more, without ever reflecting into the purpose of why he eats?

Clearly, we need to understand what the role of food is in our life, and how it can serve to elevate us spiritually. There's a very big difference between a person who thinks about it and a person who doesn't think about it; being aware of the purpose in our eating can change the whole way we are living our life.

Four Possible Reasons of Why We Eat

Eating takes up a big part of our life. Let's first think into what factors are included in our eating. Usually, when a person eats, there are two factors. The first thing to consider is: What kind of food to eat. It can be bread, eggs, vegetables, fish, chicken, and other foods. Another factor in our eating is the taste of the food. Usually, we want to eat food that has a decent taste to it. We are usually not just looking to eat a certain kind of food - we want it to also taste good.

So whenever we eat food, there are always two motivating factors taking place: a motivation to eat the particular food we are eating, as well as a motivation for taste. If we make a reflection, we can notice that sometimes we eat because we really need to eat, and sometimes we eat because we just want to taste something good, and not because we really have a need to eat right now. We might

want to eat because we really need to eat, or we might want to eat just to fill up our stomach; both of these motivations are within the desire to eat. But there is also a third motivation of why we eat: to simply taste something that's good.

In the first motivation of why we eat, it is a desire for food, not taste. This itself divides into two categories: **(1)** Eating because we are hungry, and **(2)** Eating more than what is necessary to fill our hunger - which is actually a desire to experience more materialism of this world. In the second motivation of why we eat, we eat simply because we feel a need for taste, and we will want to experience various kinds of taste.

If we reflect into it, we can discover these three motivations in our eating. Sometimes we eat because we are hungry, sometimes we eat because we are desiring materialism, and sometimes we eat for a completely different reason: because we are looking for taste.

There is also an additional, fourth reason why we eat, and every person can also discover this motivation in his eating: sometimes we eat because we are feeling bored. We are in the mood of doing something, and sometimes we fulfill this need for action through engaging ourselves in eating. In this motivation for eating, we are not eating because we need to eat, nor are we even trying to fill our stomachs and pursue physical desires, and we are not either doing so out of a need to experience new tastes. Rather, we are in the mood of having some kind of action, and we are using eating to fill that void.

In Summary

So there are altogether four possible reasons why people eat: **(1)** Because we are hungry, and we are trying to fill the hunger, so that we can feel nourished and full. **(2)** Because we are pursuing bodily cravings, which is a materialistic kind of desire; **(3)** Because we want to enjoy a good taste, **(4)** Because we are bored and we feel a need for action, and eating makes us feel like we are being active.

Developing Awareness of Why We Are Eating Right Now

Before we continue our discussion on this, with *siyata d'shmaya* - we first need to conceptualize the first idea we mentioned, which is that we need to reflect into the things we do and to have an awareness in what we are doing; to know why we are doing something as we are in the midst of doing it. If a person eats and never pays attention to why he's eating, his eating is no different than how an animal eats. But if a person is at least a bit spiritual and isn't entrenched in the materialism of life, he thinks into why he eats, before he is about to eat something, as well as while he's eating. He eats with a sense of awareness.

When a person wants to become aware of why he is eating, he should first reflect: "What is the reason that I am about to eat right now? Is it because I am hungry? Is it because I simply want to nosh? Is it because I want to taste something? Or is it because I'm just bored?"

One must be aware: "Why do I eat?", and try to find which of the above four reasons are his motivation to eat right now. Clearly, there will not always be one reason that is motivating him to eat. There can be two reasons, three reasons, or even all four of the above reasons, which are all driving him to want to eat right now. The more a person can "listen" to what's going on inside himself, he can better discern what his motivations in eating are.

Focused, Calm Eating

By many people, there is problem that they have of having food in one hand and doing something

else with their other hand, and at the same time, they are talking on the phone during all of this multi-tasking. Besides for how this ignores the *halachah* that one must not converse as he's eating, there is another problem which develops from this unfocused kind of eating.

When a person is doing other things as he's eating, he usually will not have any awareness of why he's eating right now. He won't be able to listen to himself at this moment and be aware of why he's eating. When a person gets used to eating in this way, he does not pay attention to why he's eating at the moment, and he will be very far from developing any awareness in his eating and from elevating the act of eating. Therefore, practically speaking, we need to avoid as much as possible this kind of unfocused eating, where a person does various different things as he's in middle of eating. One should view eating as a time to work on his *menuchas hanefesh* (serenity). Eating should be always be done calmly, and that will enable a person to have the calmness to listen to himself and reflect into the reasons of why he's eating.

Therefore, in order to carry out this advice, try to make sure that you don't eat during a time of the day where you are harried or feeling pressured with lots of tasks to take care of. Every person needs to set aside a part of the day where he will have some *menuchah* (serenity), and for part of this time, he should eat calmly.

When a person isn't focused and calm as he eats, he doesn't digest it as well. Not only is it unhealthy to our physical body, but it damages us as well on a more inner level. When a person eats as he's not calm, he will eat more than he really needs to, because he can't think properly about how much he needs to eat right now.

If we do not see the importance of paying attention to our eating, we damage ourselves both physically and spiritually, and as we mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, we would go through about 70,000 meals during our lifetime having never given any thought to our eating, and all of those meals would be eaten without any purpose.

1) How We Can Elevate Hunger

Let us now continue, with the help of Hashem, to discuss the last point we mentioned.

We need to have the proper perspective towards eating. Eating is an important part of our life, both in the physical and in the spiritual. However, we mainly need to consider how eating affects us spiritually. We need to have a serious attitude towards eating, by setting aside some time of the day where we will work on mindful eating. But if we never think into why we are eating and we don't take it seriously, we will probably not care to set aside the time each day to work on mindful eating, and then we will go through a lifetime of meals with no sense of purpose in them, and all of the meals of our lifetime then become wasted opportunities.

That was the introduction to the discussion here, of how we need to generally view eating. Now we will elaborate upon the four motivations of eating which we mentioned earlier, and go through each of these with greater depth.

The first reason we mentioned, of why a person eats, is to eat out of hunger. When a person feels hungry to eat, he should ask himself the following: "Who made me hungry? Did I make myself hungry? No, that can't be." Whenever a person feels that he is "hungry" and he immediately goes to eat something, without thinking it through enough, he might open up the fridge and eat whatever he finds there. But this resembles the way an animal eats. A person who wishes to live a more inner kind of life doesn't act upon his impulses so fast. He first thinks, calmly, about this simple thought: "Who made me hungry?"

If a person immediately answers to this, "The nature of my body made me hungry", he should then counter to this thought, "And who made the body have this nature?" After simply reflecting onto this, you discover simply that it is Hashem who made you hungry. Now ask yourself, "And why did Hashem make me hungry? Ah, so that I will need to eat, and then make the required *berachah* (blessing) to Him before I eat it, so that I can thank Hashem for it. In this way, I am elevating the materialistic act of eating." And, on a deeper level, perhaps you are also elevating the souls who may have been reincarnated in the food you are eating, who are raised to holiness when a blessing is made over them.

The point of this thinking is so that you become aware that there is a more spiritual source to your hunger. The reason why your hunger has appeared is not simply because your body has made you hungry, but because Hashem made you hungry so that you will be able to elevate the act of eating, and on two levels. First of all, you make a *berachah* over the food, where you thank Hashem for the food you're about to eat, and that itself elevates the mundane act of eating. Secondly, by making the *berachah*, you can feel gratitude to Hashem for this food, and this elevates the materialistic aspect of the food, bringing Hashem into the picture.

As you are feeling a hunger for food, be clear about this attitude: "When I get hungry, it is because Hashem made me hungry, so that I should eat in a more elevated manner, which enables me to elevate the food I am eating, from the material to the spiritual."

In summary of until now: When you are aware that the reason that you're eating is because you are hungry, don't act upon it so fast. Train yourself to start thinking like this before you are about to eat, and get used to the habit of making reflection before you eat. Even if it is only a little amount of reflecting, it is helpful, because it trains you not to act upon impulse as soon as you get hungry. You can try waiting for 60 seconds, or 30 seconds (and if you can't do that, try it for 20 seconds) before eating upon the hunger.

Whatever amount of self-control you can muster when it comes to this, the point is not to eat immediately when you feel hunger. When you get used to reflecting a bit before you eat, your eating becomes more spiritual, it becomes more refined and loftier, and it becomes elevated from the normally animalistic eating that it would have been. This advice has been mentioned in the works of the *Rishonim*: whenever you are hungry, wait a little bit before you eat [and reflect into the purpose of eating].

2) What To Do About Cravings

Until now we explained about what do when you're eating of hunger. Now we will learn about what to do when we are eating due to the second possible motivation in our eating: when we are eating simply because we are getting a craving for food, which is really a desire to attach ourselves to the materialism of this world.

First of all, let's go deeper into this motivation. Every person contains a *guf* (body) and *neshamah* (soul). Our *neshamah* doesn't need anything to eat, because it is completely spiritual. It is only interested in the spiritual, as it is written, "*When there will be no hunger for bread, no thirst for water, except to hear the word of Hashem.*" But we also have a body, which needs physicality in order for it to be sustained. For that reason, we need to eat when we feel hunger.

But our body also causes us to pursue the second motivation in eating: to eat food simply because we feel a craving for materialism. The body is interested in more and more materialistic desires, and that is what causes us to pursue food and other desires which we don't really need to sustain ourselves. It is simply a desire to attach ourselves to the thick and heavy materialism of this world, and it comes

from our physical body.

We can see this in different meals we eat. Sometimes we have a lighter kind of meal, and we don't feel heavy afterwards, and sometimes we eat in order to feel full, where we will eat heavier and thicker kinds of foods, and we feel heavy after such meals. Many times people will intentionally eat a thicker kind of food which makes them feel heavier afterwards, because they want to have this feeling of "feeling full" after they eat. This is a bodily desire, which wants to experience more materialism. It causes cravings in a person for more food that is necessary for him to eat, and it is rooted in the body's desire to "feel full" after a meal.

It is written, "*A righteous person eats to satisfy his soul, and the stomach of the wicked always feels lacking.*" The *possuk* is saying that a *tzaddik* eats until he feels satisfied, whereas a wicked person eats in order to feel that his stomach has been filled up. Many times people mix up the two motivations, and they think that to feel "satisfied" from a meal means to "feel full". But if a person has trained himself to eat calmly and with awareness, as we spoke about before, he will be able to make a distinction between eating to feel "satisfied" and eating to "feel full", and he will be able to see how they are not the same thing.

The Rambam says that a person should eat less than a third of his portion, but even if a person can't eat on the disciplined level that the Rambam reached, he can still train himself not to eat his entire portion at once, and to instead eat slowly and calmly. He can try eating a bit, then pausing, then continuing to eat, and repeating the cycle, during his meal. When a person gets used to eating like this, he will suddenly begin to feel a deeper peace in himself, where he will realize that his hunger was not actually hunger, and that he had really been satisfied all along. It was simply a desire to have a "full stomach", and not a desire to become satiated.

When a person keeps eating continuously and without pause, he might think that he is doing so in order to be satisfied from the meal, but in actuality, it is stemming from a desire to have a "full stomach". But by getting used to taking breaks as we are eating, such as by pausing for 2 minutes every here and there during the meal, a person will suddenly discover that his will to keep eating is not stemming from a will to be satisfied, but from a will to feel like he's "full" afterwards, a "full stomach".

This is a very subtle differentiation to discern in oneself. The practical way to work on this is by pausing every so often as you eat, and the point of it is to be able to eat in a serene way, where you can listen to the real needs of your body.

There is an inner power we have of listening to the body. It is hidden from most people, but the more a person is living a serene kind of life and he does things calmly and with reflection beforehand, he is better able to listen to the messages of his body. As a person is eating, pausing, and continuing to eat, he can listen to the body and discern if his need to eat right now is stemming from a desire for hunger/satiation, or because he simply has a desire to have a "full stomach" - which is not necessary, and it is merely a desire rooted in materialism.

Another point to mention here is, about what we actually eat. In order for a person's eating to be on the level of a *tzaddik's* eating and to avoid the kind of eating that is about having a "full stomach", a person needs to get used to eating lighter and more refined kinds of food. We know that some foods are heavier, thicker, oilier and fattier, with many different ingredients, whereas other foods are lighter, more refined, and contain fewer ingredients. If a person wants to live a more truthful life and he wants his eating to become more spiritual and less materialistic, he should get used to generally having a lighter diet.

Much of the cooked meals that we eat are heavy and thick, which are not meant to merely satiate us and nourish us, but to make us feel like we have a “full stomach” afterwards. A person needs to get used to eating foods that are closer to the nature which Hashem Himself prepares. This doesn't mean that you should only eat vegetables and fruit, but the point is to eat lighter foods, with most of your meals being lighter in their nature, and to avoid heavy, thick foods with all kinds of ingredients. By getting used to a lighter diet, the body will become trained to eat for the purpose of satiation, and much less for the purpose of “feeling full”.

In summary, when a person feels cravings to eat more food than what he needs, the first part of the advice for this is to get used to taking pauses in between the meal. The second piece of advice is to train ourselves to eat lighter kinds of foods, and to avoid eating heavier and thicker kinds of food. All of this should be done with conscious attention that you are trying to eat calmly, and it should be done during a time of the day that you set aside specially for this, where you will work on eating with more *menuchas hanefesh*.

There are also loftier and more spiritual ways than this to elevate our eating, and if a person can have those lofty thoughts while he is eating, that will also serve to help him avoid heavier, thicker foods and to stick to a lighter diet.

3) What To Do About The Need For Taste

Now we will deal with the third reason of why people eat: when a person feels a need for taste.

Our body has a nature to want to taste things, and this is especially the case ever since the sin of Adam, where man tasted of the *Eitz HaDaas*. Ever since then, there has become a genuine need to taste things. This need is used for holiness when we taste of the Shabbos food, as it is written, “*Those who taste of it [Shabbos], merit life*” [and this refers to tasting the Shabbos food]. But even during the weekday as well, almost all people need to have a good taste in their food, and they will not be able to have tasteless food.

However, we need to have the proper attitude towards the need for taste. The Hebrew word for “taste” is *taam* (טעם), which has the same letters as the word *me'at* (מעט) – which means “a little”. This hints to us that the need for taste is only meant to be utilized “a little”, meaning, to eat the food in order to taste it, and not more than that. But if a person eats more than that need, he is mixing in a craving for more food, which is the motivation in eating that we discussed earlier, where a person eats in order to feel full; he will keep eating it until he feels heavy afterwards. This is a double motivation contained in one act: a motivation for taste, and a motivation for more materialism.

For this reason, most people, when they taste a certain food, they will keep gorging on it, even though they didn't plan on having more than a taste of it. When people keep eating the food after they have tasted it, this is not stemming from the original need for taste. If it would be a need for taste, the person would taste it and no more.

A person should first identify this when he tastes something. When he tastes it, he should realize that this came from a need to taste it. If he keeps eating after the original bite, he should identify that this is not coming from his need to experience taste, but from a craving to eat more food and to feel full and heavy afterwards. To counter this problem, one should taste the food, then pause, and then taste a little bit, and then repeat the cycle. In this way, he will calm the desire to engage in unnecessary eating. He will still want to taste it, but he will have calmed his desire to gorge on the food.

When most people overeat, it is due to these combined factors in their motivation. They usually began with a desire to taste of the food, and this awakens the desire for materialism, where a person

will want to finish what he tasted, so that he can “feel full”. The motivations of taste and materialism become mixed with each other in the act of eating.

As we mentioned, the advice that can work for this is to take pauses after you taste something. Taste it, then pause, then take another bite, and repeat the cycle. Make sure not to go overboard as you are tasting it, leave it at just a taste of the food, pause, then taste it again, making sure not to eat beyond that amount, and repeat. In this way, you will identify in yourself the two different motivations, the desire to eat more and the desire to taste something, and by getting used to this, not only will you calm the desire to eat more, but you will also be able to calm the desire for taste itself.

This is a subtle matter which requires you to listen to your body, and when you identify the motivating factors that are taking place in your body, you are then able to deal with them accordingly.

To bring out this idea, the *Shelah HaKadosh* writes that the *mitzvah* to taste of the Shabbos food is precisely to take a little taste of each thing [on Shabbos]. But when people taste the *cholent* on Shabbos, and they like the taste of it, they will usually keep eating it, until they feel like they have full stomach from it.

However, Shabbos is the time to elevate our eating. By having a little taste of the food on Shabbos and by leaving it at that, we elevate the act of eating, on the holy day of Shabbos. Even during the weekday as well, there is this concept, where a person can elevate his eating by having a mere taste of the food, in order to calm his anxiousness; but nothing more than that.

Based upon the above, a person should make sure to taste things, so that his body will be calmed, and he should try this with lighter kind of food which doesn't have too many ingredients. Throughout the day, if you ever feel a need to taste something – and we should emphasize that it's only when you feel a need to taste something, and it should not be brought on deliberately – make sure to put something tasty in your mouth, so that you can satisfy the need for taste; and leave it at that.

You can try this with the Shabbos food, which is the main time to work on this *avodah*. But even if you can't do it with Shabbos, you can still try it during the weekday, as we explained.

This is something that can be worked upon by almost anyone. There are others who can elevate their eating even more than this, because they have worked very much on purifying themselves from materialism. But the words here are geared towards most people, who still struggle with the pull towards materialistic desires.

The words here are about a very basic level, which can be worked upon by anyone. Understandably, if one can achieve an even higher level of self-control than this, it is certainly praiseworthy.

4) Eating Out of Boredom

Now we will address the fourth reason of why people eat: boredom. When a person feels a need for movement and action, he may ease this tension by eating, which gives him the feeling that he is “doing” something.

Here is an example of it. Many times, when people nosh on glazed nuts or the like, it makes them move around a lot as they eat it. There is much movement in their mouth as they crunch on the food, and they are moving around their hands a lot too as they eat it, so it can feel very engaging. There is also a lot of digestion taking place from this kind of eating, which is internal movement, and all of these movements make a person feel like he is active, which eases his boredom.

Firstly, one needs to become aware of this motivation in his eating. If he is bored and he is eating, the

first thing he should realize is that he does not need to eat this, and that it is only because he wants to feel like he is having some kind of movement.

When this is the case, a person needs to set up a schedule for himself where he will be able to engage in productive kinds of movement, in order to satisfy his need for movement. If he wants, he can taste something as he's involved in the activity that he chooses, in order to calm his desire. The main thing to do, upon becoming aware of his need for movement, is to find other movements to do, which can calm his body's need for movement.

With some people, this desire for movement is calmed if they go for a walk. Another person is calmed by engaging in conversation. Another person can calm himself by reciting verses of *Tehillim*. Another kind of person can calm himself by listening to a *shiur*. The point is to replace the eating with another kind of movement that will calm the body, and each person will have to find what kind of movement calms him from boredom; it is mainly about being aware that his desire to eat food right now is not coming from a need to eat, but from a need for movement.

By replacing the food with some other engaging act of movement, he calms his body's need for movement which is causing the boredom. As we mentioned, he can also try eating something as he's involved with that other activity he chooses, so that he can feel calmer. This is similar to the idea we mentioned earlier when we spoke about how to calm the desire for taste. Once he becomes aware of the motivation of why he wants to eat, there is much less of a chance that he will be dragged after the eating, if he just takes a taste of it to calm himself and no more.

By finding some engaging activity that makes him feel like he is doing something, he calms his desire to eat out of boredom, which is entirely a need to experience movement.

In Summary

We have learned here about four motivations of why we eat. These are subtle and complex matters to understand, and there is a lot more to say about this topic. But the most important thing to remember is the point we started out with, which is that a person should always reflect into what is motivating him to eat. It is a whole different kind of eating when a person eats with this awareness, which spans an average of 70,000 meals a lifetime – it would be a shame to have all these meals go to waste.

We should first internalize the fact that eating with this mindfulness causes us to be better off physically, but we should mainly think of its spiritual benefits. Thus, we should try to bring an inner attitude into our eating. We should eat calmly, with *menuchas hanefesh*, and from “listening to our body” as we eat. Eating calmly includes avoiding eating while standing, avoiding eating quickly, and not to multi-task while eating. Therefore, we should set aside time every for “*menuchas hanefesh*” eating.

Slowly but surely as we get used to this, we will be able to better feel what our motivations are as we eat, and direct ourselves accordingly.

Avoid Talking About Food So Much

There is also another important point we will mention now: we shouldn't make such a big deal out of eating and talk about food so much. It has become common in our generation for people to talk about food for hours and hours, discussing all kinds of foods and tastes. People will talk about what kinds of food they ate at a wedding the day before, and how it tasted, and wonder how it is made. But if we want to live a more truthful kind of life, we need to develop an inner attitude towards eating. We need to avoid talking about food and how it tastes, and instead we need to view eating as part of how we can serve Hashem in an inner way.

With the help of Hashem, if we reflect into these matters well, our eating will be elevated, and then all of us together will merit to eat from the *korbonos*, with the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash* - Amen, and Amen.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: I do not make a deal out of food that much, but I make sure to have certain foods and drinks when I eat breakfast, which doesn't take up much of my time. I just eat a quick breakfast and then I'm done. Is there anything wrong with this kind of rushed eating, since I'm not eating normally and I'm just eating and drinking enough to stay healthy?

A: It sounds like you are eating in order to stay healthy. What is wrong with this?

Q2: What I want to know is: Is this a lack in elevating my eating?

A: If you are referring to how you eat during the weekday, and not Shabbos, there is no problem with this. It is totally fine. However, you need to know for sure if it's indeed coming from a reason to stay healthy, as opposed to a motivation to become physically slim. You need to know for sure if you're eating less because you are indeed keeping away from physical indulgence, or if it's just coming from a desire to "look good" [which is not a holy desire].

Q3: I make sure to eat only healthy foods, and I educate women on how to eat healthy foods, by informing them of how necessary it is to eat healthy and how to avoid the unhealthy foods which are so common in our generation. Since the Rav said that we shouldn't make such a big deal talking about food, how much should I talk with others about the need to eat healthy food, and how much shouldn't I talk about it? It seems from the Rav that the main thing is not about what you eat, but about how you eat. So what is the amount of time that I can spend talking to people about what to eat?

A: This is a very, very good question. There's a problem in our generation where people talk a lot about health, but it does not come from a balance between the physical and the spiritual. In fact, it has become like a form of *avodah zarah* (idol worship), where people emphasize physical health so much, to the point that they only care for their physical well-being. The *Chovos HaLevovos* has a term for this: "They made their stomachs into their own gods." When the body becomes the central aspect in people's lives, this is what causes people to talk about health so much and to make such a big deal out of it, because the physical body is their priority, and therefore, much effort is expended by people to make sure that the body is being well taken care of. After all, they see their body as the main thing in their life.

Therefore, when we want to speak about health with others, we need to have the appropriate balance between a concern for our body and our soul. We can inform others of what the healthy foods are and what the unhealthy foods are, and to guide them to eat the right foods, but not as a purpose unto itself. The reason why we need to keep our body healthy is because it is the *kli* (vessel) which contains our *neshamah*, and we need to maintain our "vessel" and keep it strong, so that the light of our *neshamah* can shine properly within us.

If a Jew does not have this perspective towards health and he/she is a health practitioner, then his

attitude towards health is no different than a gentile's outlook, for a gentile can give over the very same health education. If a person teaches other people about how to stay healthy, he/she must be clearly aware of the reason of why he/she practices this: the Torah's view of health is that our body needs to be a proper vessel to maintain the spiritual effects of our *neshamah*. When the focus is purely on physical health and there is no awareness that we are a *neshamah*, this is purely the gentile attitude towards living, and it is not the way for the Jewish people.

Q4: In today's generation, where food is out of control and people overeat, just for the sake of taste and enjoyment and for no other purpose, how can we raise our children to make sure that they shouldn't eat too much nosh and candy? Are there guidelines of nosh that we should try to formulate, like what to give out and what not to give out to them, and what the limitations should be?

A: This is a very good question. In today's generation, you can find no less than 1000 different types of candy in the stores, all with a *hecsher*. It is a giant ocean of desires. To simply tell a child, "Don't eat all of this stuff!" will not do much for the child. There is really a deeper issue we need to address when it comes to all of this. We need to train a child to understand that we have a body as well as a *neshamah*, and that our need for taste is actually a spiritual need that comes from the *neshamah*, only, it is often channeled in the wrong direction; and that when we pursue physical tastes, we prevent ourselves from tasting the spiritual. The same is true vice versa - the less we pursue physical taste, the more we can taste of what is waiting for our *neshamah*.

Therefore, our task in *chinuch* (child education) is really a task to bring to them to live more spiritually, and part of this includes experiencing spiritual enjoyment and tastes. To tell our children not to eat so much is perhaps a little bit helpful, but it will not do much for them. Instead, we need to emphasize to our children what a life of *ruchniyus* (spirituality) is like, and to explain to a child that pursuing physical gratification prevents us from experiencing the taste and enjoyment of *ruchniyus*.

We must know that there is a spiritual kind of taste, which is pleasurable to our *neshamah*, and there is also physical enjoyment and taste, which prevents a person from tasting the spiritual. A person has the free will on this world to choose what kind of taste he wants to have - either to taste of the spiritual, which is of the higher realms of our existence, or to taste the physical, which is of the lower realms. That choice is what we need to convey to our children.

Understandably, we will not be able to convey this information 100% to our children. We are only speaking of percentages. It is an inner way to live life, which we can bring our children into slowly, but this does not happen in a day or two. It is also not just about the issue of food, but about how to live life in general. We need to train ourselves, and our children, to live a more inner kind of life. We need to slowly show a child how he needs to choose between pursuing the physical vs. the spiritual. The point is not to tell him what to eat and what not to eat. Rather, we need to convey the message to the child that it takes several years to work on ourselves when it comes to this, and to deepen our sense of taste, so that we can reveal a taste in the spiritual. If the child gets the message correctly, we can then do appropriate *chinuch*.

So it is really a very good question, and it is a big problem which our generation struggles with, where there are so many different kinds of indulgence everywhere we turn.

Q5: So is the Rav saying that there is nothing we can practically do about this, and it is just that we need to have the proper hashkafah (perspective) about it?

A: A young child is not at the point of desiring so many candies and nosh, but as a child gets a bit older and he begins to want things, we can start training him to choose between living a more

hedonistic kind of life versus a more spiritual kind of life. Again, it is not about telling him what to eat and what not to eat, but to help him decide and make the right choice, of what kind of life he wants to live.

How should we help him choose? This is what we should ask him: “Do you want to live a life of *gashmiyus* (pursuing physical gratification)? Or would you rather live a life of *ruchniyus*? Do you want to be a person who chases after *gashmiyus* or do you want to be a person of *ruchniyus*?” If he says that he does want *ruchniyus* over *gashmiyus*, then we can guide him slowly and in steps from there.

For example, on Shabbos when giving out candy and sweets to the children, we can tell a child to put aside one candy and not eat it. If he gets a full bag full of nosh, tell him to put aside one candy that he won’t eat. Don’t tell him not to want it. Instead, train him into the inner perspective that we have described here. Again, the point is not to tell him how to behave. The point is to bring him to a certain awareness, a more mature perspective towards life, where he thinks about the spiritual and he chooses between *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus*.

Q6: Can we also get others to follow these principles, and not just to use them for our own children?

A: If a person is in charge of a shul or school, where children bring in nosh and candy, the person in charge can try to set guidelines about what can be brought in to *shul* school and what should not be brought in. It’s really impossible to control this, though, because there are so many children in these places, and we can’t control all the *nosh* that comes in. But it would be good if one community would set guidelines about these things. The message behind it, though, should be clear: Life is not meant to be *hefker* (free to pursue whatever desires we want). The fact that everything today has a *hecsher* on it is a lifestyle that is totally *hefker*, and it doesn’t make sense.

Q7: If a person feels hungry, could it also be because his soul is feeling hungry, and the body intercepts this message and translates it into a hunger for food?

A: That can certainly be possible, but in order to discern this, we would have to explain this point more in-depth. Most people are not aware to the messages that their *neshamah* is sending them. In order for a person to recognize if a desire is coming from the *neshamah* or not, he would have to know how to identify that the desire is coming from the *neshamah*, and that the desire of his *neshamah* for more spirituality is merely being clothed under the “garment” of a physical desire for food. But I did not speak about this point in this class, because most people do not pay attention to the sounds of their *neshamah*. It is certainly possible, though, for a person to identify his hunger as a spiritual hunger that is coming from his *neshamah*, and that it is being translated by the body into physical hunger; but this is a much higher level of *avodah* than the level that was discussed in this class.[\[2\]](#)

[\[1\]](#) Sefer Yetzira III

[\[2\]](#) The Rav has also spoken about how to elevate our eating in the shiurim of Fixing.Your.Water.005

and Tefillah #081 – Eating With Holiness.

Source: <https://bilvavi.net/english/rosh-chodesh-avodah-011-shevat-elevated-eating>