



## AVODAH ON TU'BSHVAT

### QUESTION:

What is the avodah of a person on Tu B'Shvat? What points should I focus on? I have heard in some derashos from the Rav on Tu B'Shvat that a person should connect to the "beginning point" of the soul and also elevate the act of eating. But how can I work on this practically? I would like to add more depth to the custom of eating the symbolic fruits on Tu B'Shvat, and I would like to know which points I should think about when I'm eating the fruits on Tu B'Shvat.

### ANSWER:

1) Since Tu B'Shvat falls out during the days of Shovavim, there is a connection between Tu B'Shvat and Shovavim. The Arizal says that Chanukah, Purim, and Tu B'Shvat correspond to the spiritual Sefiros of Hod-Splendor (corresponding to Purim), Netzach-Eternity (corresponding to Chanukah), and Yesod-Foundation (corresponding to Tu B'Shvat). Hence, Tu B'Shvat is connected with the spiritual sphere of Yesod [the idea of connecting to one's personal holiness]. This is also known as the soul faculty of hiskashrus (connection), and it is also referred to as the trait of the tzaddik. Therefore, it is appropriate for a person on Tu B'Shvat to connect himself to the trait of tzaddik-yesod, the soul's power of hiskashrus/connection.

2) The Talmud Yerushalmi (Sheviis 5:1) states that if any trees have produced a shlish, one third of its produce, one has an obligation of maaser (giving away a tenth of produce grown in Eretz Yisrael) on it, whereas any trees that haven't yet produced a third of its produce are set aside for the next year's calculation of maaser. Hence, when it comes to produce [i.e. fruits], a third of the produce must be present, in order for the fruit to be deemed as a fruit. On an inner level, this hints to us that fruits remind us of the concept of

shlish, a "third". This is a hint to our "tri-fold" connection: "Hashem, Yisrael, and the Torah are one."

There are three main sections to the body, which are called rosh (the head and face), geviyah (the middle section of the body, including the chest and torso), and the beten (from the stomach and downward). The upper third section of the body, where the head is housed, represents the spiritual. It is the place in the body where we use our intellect. The middle section of the body houses our emotions and desires. It represents the intermediate level between the intellect and the physicality of the body. The lower section of the body, from the stomach and downward, is used for our basest functions, and it represents gross physicality.

On Tu B'Shvat, our personal avodah [when eating the fruits, where we are reminded of this concept of shlish, a "third"] is to rise to the highest third section of the body, the head, by becoming more connected with our "head", the power of analytical thought. We must not allow ourselves to remain at the level of the middle section of the body [desires and emotions which are divorced from intellect], and certainly not at the lowest section of the body [gross physicality].

Our avodah on Tu B'Shvat is to become connected with the highest "third" of the body, our head [our thinking abilities], for it is the head which is connected with Heaven, as it is written, "And its head reached the Heavens."

## PROPER EATING

### QUESTION:

What is the ideal kind of diet? Vegetarian? Or to eat a bit of meat and also fish?

### ANSWER:

Eat a bit of meat and also fish, especially on Shabbos, Yom Tov, Rosh Chodesh, and by any seudas mitzvah!

## HEALTHY EATING

### QUESTION:

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?

### ANSWER:

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

### QUESTION:

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

### ANSWER:

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].

### QUESTION:

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?

### ANSWER:

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.

### QUESTION:

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?

**ANSWER:**

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 hechsher. 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.

**QUESTION:**

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?

**ANSWER:**

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.

**QUESTION:**

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

**ANSWER:**

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.

**QUESTION:**

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?

**ANSWER:**

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.

**RECTIFYING AVEIROS OF EATING****QUESTION:**

I am a baal teschuvah who ate treifos and other forbidden foods that dulled my heart. I now want to purify my heart of these aveiros. What can I do to rectify these transgressions in such a weak generation?

**ANSWER:**

Before eating, you should pray a prayer before your Creator, that your eating will be permitted and not forbidden. You should also conquer the lust for food by not eating immediately - wait before eating. In this way, you will be healed for the rest of your life,

**SELF-CARE****QUESTION:**

When a person is in middle of learning, davening, or hisbodedus and he feels a sudden physical need for comfort, eating, coffee, relaxing, going outside, or chatting, or simply just wanting to do nothing, is this always bittul Torah or is it a sign that the person really needs to unwind? Is the body rebelling against ruchniyus in these scenarios? Many people can't sit and learn an entire seder without interruptions and they feel a need to "schmooze" in middle - perhaps these are their basic emotional needs and therefore there's nothing wrong with how they are acting and it's not bittul Torah for them. Is that true?

**ANSWER:**

If a person will lose his yishuv hadaas (basic level of calmness) at a noticeable level if he doesn't do any of these things (chatting, relaxing, eating, coffee, etc.) then he is acting above his level. Usually this will also cause an imbalance between the abilities in his soul. Also, there are some who need to chat a lot, much more than the average need, and there are also those who can't sit and learn uninterrupted for long and they need to take breaks. Every person has to act according to the level he is on right now.