



INTUITIVE EATING with Rena Reiser



Sugar Obsessed... Or Are You Just Stressed?

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Dassy has had a long day at work. When she returns home, as per her ritual, she goes straight to little Nachi. She scoops him up into her arms, takes a deep breath and feels her muscles begin to unclench. A feeling of bliss washes over her.

Chevi looks forward to Shabbos all week long. She loves the slow pace, the togetherness, and the family traditions and *minhagim*. Preparing for Shabbos, though, is another story. This particular Erev Shabbos, Chevi is feeling very, very tired and cranky and everything is irking her. Suddenly, she has a burst of inspiration. She goes to the stereo and pops in her favorite CD—the upbeat one that brings back wonderful memories. “I can do this with a smile,” she tells herself as she pulls out a bowl to make challah.

Dovid is a brand-new husband. Shanah rishonah is harder than he thought it would be, but he is always trying to create a positive environment for his new wife. After an invigorating but exhausting day in kollel, he pauses by the door. Following his rebbi’s advice, he removes his favorite chocolate bar from his jacket pocket. He slowly savors every bite as he prepares to knock on the front door. Chocolate is sweet; so is marriage, and life, he reminds himself.

What do the above three scenarios have in common? They all describe the small challenges we face in life, and the small pleasures we use to remind ourselves how wonderful life is. All three of those experiences—holding a baby, listening to music we love, and eating our favorite sugary treat—light up the pleasure center in our brains that

rewards us for keeping ourselves alive.

But when you read the stories above, did you respond to them in the same way? Were you possibly bothered by the fact that the young man turned to food in order to focus on the goodness of life? Do you think that this sort of advice is unhealthy?

I hear a lot of talk nowadays about people being scared of food because they feel out of control around it. Yet *Yiddishkeit* offers no shortage of occasions that encourage us to heighten our joy with delicious foods and wines. Surely, Jews aren’t supposed to ignore the pleasures of food and, furthermore, there is nothing wrong with turning to food for *oneg* in the appropriate way. If you believe you are obsessed with sugar to the point that you need to eschew it completely, then that needs to be explored.

In my work as an Intuitive Eating Counselor, I’ve learned that people crave sugar for one of the following three reasons:

1) You are in the mood for something sweet.

Good news—you are alive and normal. The *meforshim* explain that when we say the words “*lahachayos bahem*” in the *brachah* of *Borei Nefashos*, we are thanking Hashem for foods that make us *feel* alive, as opposed to “*v’chesronan*,” foods that fill our basic needs that we lack and *keep* us alive. The former foods are considered “*oneg*” foods; they fill us with the excitement of being alive.

2) You aren't eating enough.

Your body needs enough calories in order to function properly. If you aren't supplying yourself with an appropriate number of calories over the course of the day, your body will notice. In response, it will send you stronger and stronger signals, begging you to stop moving and start feeding it. Often, the type of lifestyle in which one ignores hunger goes hand in hand with not having a balanced meal available to be slowly and thoughtfully consumed. It usually leads to the person grabbing something quick and easy with a big calorie boost, aka a "sugar bomb."

3) You have a restrictive mentality.

Have you ever watched your child eat some delicious sugary delicacy only to stop halfway through and leave the rest behind? Were you left in complete awe at how he didn't suck the last sugar crystals off the plate? Often, we feel we have a sugar obsession because that is the reality we have created for ourselves. In a cruel twist of psychology, the more we restrict something, the more we obsess over it. We enter into a mental tug-of-war about the true nature of the item that we have labeled in our minds as poison. We end up telling ourselves, *Come on, will one little bite really kill me?* And shortly after that, we find ourselves demolishing an entire box of cookies. Go back and read the *Nachash's* conversation with Chava and tell me if it doesn't sound like a conversation you've had with yourself while dieting.

The first two reasons for sugar cravings are easy to fix. If you are hungry, eat something well-balanced and satisfying. Usually this means actually stopping to take care of yourself. I know that's sometimes easier said than done, but the time you invest in true self-care pays off in the long term by allowing you to be at your best. Your spouse/kids/boss/self will thank you for it. If, after that, you still want a sweet treat at some point during your day, go ahead and have it. If the craving is coming from a physical place and you are well fed, you won't get carried away.

The third cause of sugar cravings is a bigger mountain to climb. If you have been creating a restrictive mentality

around certain foods, then you are in a losing battle with human psychology. The real shocker on this one is that even if you are one of the rare few who succeed in keeping their cravings at bay for long periods of time, you are still losing. The emotional wear and tear you face is overwhelming. By constantly restricting food, you are placing yourself at war every day. Every *simchah* becomes a battleground of will and determination. Every kiddush is a new combat zone of cravings and desires. Every plate of cookies, bowl of candies or gift basket at the office turns into an anguished stand of resistance.

Hashem created us with the ability to live our lives with *menuchas hanefesh*—total inner tranquility. With so much social pressure to look a certain way and the constant dieting to achieve that image, we spend much of our lives in *pizur hanefesh*—inner turmoil. For most of us, the burden is too much to bear. We overeat anyway, and all we have left to show for our dieting is years of stress and feelings of failure.

When we are able to understand that Hashem loves us and that He gave us food in order to *add* pleasure to our lives, that enables us to approach food from a place of

menuchas hanefesh. This *menuchas hanefesh* is infectious and it spreads into our lives in every possible way.

So, the next time you feel like you're obsessed with sugar, ask yourself how your *menuchas hanefesh* is doing. Maybe what you are really craving is some inner calm.

For insights on how to achieve the *menuchas hanefesh* you seek around food, stay tuned for future articles.

Rena Reiser is a Certified Intuitive Eating Counselor and the founder of Mind Over Munchies. She has helped change the lives of countless women all over the world who are "fed up" with dieting and being distracted by food, by bringing them menuchas hanefesh in their eating. Rena can be reached at 347-871-1848, rena@mindovermunchies.com or at www.mindovermunchies.com.

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