



## INTUITIVE EATING with Rena Reiser

# How Not to be Mechanech Your Body

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It was another 6pm battle of wills.

Tomorrow was going to be an early morning, so bedtime needed to be on time. But there were art supplies everywhere and two mischievous toddlers sitting among them, unfed and unbathed. “Moishe...Chanie...” Rivka intoned in her best keep-it-cool mommy voice. “Time to stop coloring and clean up.”

“I don’ wanna,” Chanie glibly replied.

“No!” barked Moishe.

Rivka slowly inhaled. She went over the rules of good *chinuch* in her head. Firming her voice, she repeated, “Time to stop coloring and clean up. I am your Mommy, and you need to listen to your Mommy.”

Unmoved, Moishe and Chanie continued coloring away, their mother’s voice a faint echo in the distance. Time was passing, the early morning was looming, and all those *chinuch* classes were losing their sway. “Moishe and Chanie!” Not calm. “Put down the brushes and clean up right now... **or else...**” Not cool.

It was over. The children were cowed into submission by Rivka’s threats. She would get them to bed reasonably on time, but would need to pepper them with reminder threats along the way. Sure, the kids listened; Rivka got her desired results. But at what price? Was it worth it?

For most of us mortals, this is an all-too-familiar tale. We often slip into that “do it or else” style of *chinuch*. We know it’s not right, we know the results will only be short

term, and we know it isn’t good for our relationship with our children, but we do it anyway. Then we recover, we give our children large doses of love and *rachamim*, and when things get tough we resort to it again. Why?

In the heat of the moment, we often lose sight of the big picture. In that instant, we can only see that we want our children to do what we are telling them to do, and that they are stubbornly refusing to listen to us. So we respond by doing something that we fully acknowledge is not proper *hishtadlus*.

Throughout our lives, every one of us is raising a metaphorical little Moishe or Chanie: Our body. It does things we don’t like. It doesn’t listen to our demands. It can be weak where we wish it to be strong. It can change in all sorts of ways that frustrate us. And then, as we do with our children, we often resort to the *hishtadlus* of using “*chinuch*” methods that we know we shouldn’t.

Our understanding of the marvels of the human body has flourished over the last 100 years. One area where our insights have grown is in how food affects it. This has led to an increase in our ability to manipulate it and the explosion of a diet industry that generated *60 billion* dollars just last year. Diets are everywhere, and they all come with a guarantee to change your life.

Yet among all the many “guaranteed” diets, there has never been a diet that’s really guaranteed to be successful. If there was, we would all be on it, and every doctor would recommend it. Instead, there are as many diets out there as there are snowflakes, no two exactly alike, and just as

many conflicted doctors and experts. And much to our dismay, the typical diet only has an estimated 1% permanent success rate by the lowest estimate, and only 15% beyond 5 years by the highest estimate. What's more, nearly 50% of dieters actually end up heavier than they were before they started. And long-term studies show that dieters are more likely to end up obese than non-dieters, even when they start out at the same weight. So, as far as *hishtadlus* is concerned, diets consume a tremendous amount of energy with limited results.

But as diets have become exposed as the scientifically shaky money magnets that they are, the food industry has grown savvy. Instead of calling them diets, they now talk about "healthy lifestyles." They focus on "toxic foods" and the "psychology" of eating. But while the talk may have changed, the results have stayed the same. Science has yet to find the healthy tool for permanent weight loss. Many diets can actually be harmful to overall health by restricting foods we need to stay healthy (e.g. fats, cholesterol and, *yes*, carbohydrates), or even oversaturating us with foods that are harmful in high doses. This is because, despite what they may claim, most diets focus on weight loss and tragically ignore overall health.

Ask yourself: has dieting ever created a permanent change in my life? Chances are, your answer is "no."

So why do we diet? Why do we put ourselves in a position time and time again which will eventually fail? Why do we continue to do so much *hishtadlus* that only yields short-term results? Like a mother trying to be *mechanech* her child by using force tactics, a typical dieter makes the mistake of forcing her (or his) body to obey...or else. We want so badly for our bodies to change that we do whatever we can to achieve our desired goal. The result is that even if we do reach that goal, it comes at a steep price.

This is because weight loss is transactional—that means that we behave in a certain way in order to achieve a specific result—which keeps us in constant battle. When we diet, we become obsessed. Obsessed with weight. Obsessed with food. Obsessed with looks. We are overtaken by obsessive thoughts.

Obsession is a state of *pizur hanefesh*, the opposite of *menuchas hanefesh*. It is the belief that my actions *must* yield my desired results; it is transactional. When we are in a state of *pizur hanefesh*, we are unable to focus on our ultimate goals—being a devoted mother, loving wife, contributing community member and, most importantly (especially at

this time of year), being *mamlich Hashem*.

The ultimate *menuchas hanefesh* is realizing that *hishtadlus* is our duty as humans, but that all results come from Hashem. The dieting industry promises us guaranteed results, yet no one can do that. In addition, they don't offer reasonable *hishtadlus*.

So, what does it look like to approach our weight from a place of *menuchas hanefesh* instead?

When we exercise, we do it because we know it benefits the heart, lungs, immune system, endocrine system, mood and more—not because we need to look a certain way. When we eat healthfully, we do it because we know that a balanced approach to food will benefit our health and help us feel good—not because we have a dress to fit into by the next bar mitzvah.

Bodies are like little children. There is no magic formula to get them to do what we want. Sometimes we can force them to do it for a while, but with what long-term results? Does it feel good, or is it stressful? What about trust levels? Is your body more or less likely to listen the next time around?

Rosh Hashanah is a time when we focus our thoughts on serving the Highest Power. We recognize that our life's mission is to be *mamlich Hashem*. We remind ourselves that Hashem is the guiding force behind all

that we do, and that only the *hishtadlus* is in our hands, not the results.

Here's a practical tool to bring *menuchas hanefesh* into your eating:

Next time you are about to eat, examine your thoughts. If you are concerned that eating this food will cause you to either gain or lose weight (counting calories, points, carbs, avoiding certain ingredients, etc.), notice how that thought brings you into *pizur hanefesh* (it brings you to a place of obsession, a transactional relationship with food). What happens if you eat the food with the thought that you are nourishing yourself and that you are enjoying it? Which brings you closer to Hashem? Because that's the ultimate *menuchas hanefesh*. ●

*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 and rena@mindovermunchies.com. To listen to a demo class, visit www.mindovermunchies.com.*

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