



INTUITIVE EATING with Rena Reiser

Forgiveness, Perspective, and Guilt with Our Eating

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There was once a *rav* who was on his way to an important event wearing a freshly laundered suit. He was walking hurriedly through the busy streets and as he passed under a balcony, a housewife unwittingly dumped a bucket of dirty mop water right on his head. The *rav* turned around, as calmly and briskly as before, and went straight home to change into something clean, leaving the hapless housewife none the wiser.

Stories like this make my jaw drop. Our nation is so blessed that such giants are our leaders.

But what is the purpose of hearing such stories? They are mostly meant to raise the bar for us and make us realize that we can become better. When I ask myself how *I* would react if I was walking down the street, minding my own business, only to have someone dump a bucket of dirty water onto my clean, expensive clothes, my answer is that I hope I would eventually be capable of moving on, of feeling *menuchas hanefesh*, of forgiving and forgetting. But in that moment...I think I would be furious. Stunned. I would instinctively shout out, "Hey! Watch it!" I might even harbor deep resentment toward this innocent water-tosser.

Now, I know that it is forbidden to hate a fellow Jew who has not purposefully transgressed. I know that everything is *b'yedei Shamayim*. I know that all is for the good. But in the moment, I would know nothing but shock and frustration.

Yom Kippur is a time of year where we take stock of ourselves. We try to raise the bar. We acknowledge

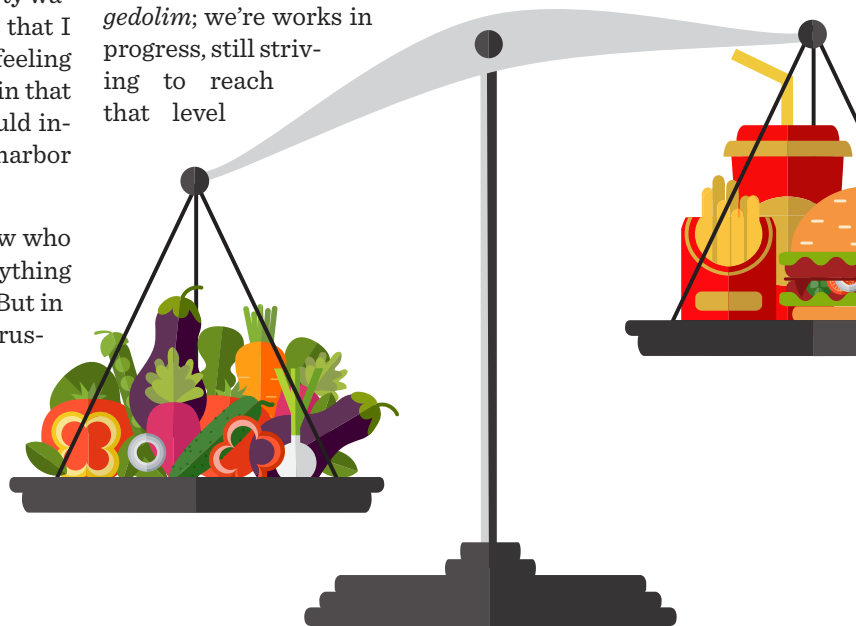
where we have fallen short and that there is room to grow.

I would like to take inspiration from Yom Kippur to help us with three concepts by which people on diets are often challenged: forgiveness, perspective and guilt.

forgiveness

Many of us come into Yom Kippur in the midst of an ongoing battle with food and diets. We berate ourselves for our lack of self-control around food. We languish in the conviction that when it comes to food, we are broken.

Yet when we read stories about *gedolim*, we don't react that way. We know that we aren't broken, we view it with the perspective that we are not yet *gedolim*; we're works in progress, still striving to reach that level



of *gadlus*. We are keenly aware of what we are capable of doing, what is in the realm of our free will, and what we can realistically accomplish with hard work.

Many people do not have a normal relationship with food. It is less common now than ever, with over 70% of women reported to have disordered eating, and men catching up at an alarming rate.

But binge eating is not an inborn defect. Stress eating is not genetic. Mindless eating is not incurable. And none of them are born out of a lack of control. They are all natural psychological and physiological responses to some form of deprivation, either real or perceived. Until we have a healthy relationship with food *it is not in our control to change our behavior* any more than a regular person who gets a bucket of dirty water dumped on him can coolly return home for a change of clothes.

Just like Yom Kippur is a time to see where we can raise the bar, it is also a time to look realistically at where we can change and where we are not quite ready. A person first has to be in a place of *menuchas hanefesh* about her current reality with food in order to make deep, foundational shifts. We have to be able to forgive ourselves. We aren't meant to be perfect just yet.

Perspective

On Yom Kippur, there are many forms of *vidui* a person can say. Some are longer, some are shorter; some are formulaic, and some are personal. There is the short, succinct listing of the 23 major transgressions, and there is the massive, many-paged *vidui* of the Chida. The lines of *vidui* on Yom Kippur help us gain perspective on which actions and *mid-dos* are important and desirable for us year round.

Many of us realize how much we still need to work on our *bein adam l'chaveiro*. We need to have more patience with our kids and spouses. We need to be more cautious with our speech to avoid *lashon hara*. We need to give more *kavod* to the people around us.

Many of us also realize how much we can improve *bein adam l'Makom*. We need to brush up on our understanding of major areas of halachah like Shabbos and *kashrus*, we need to have more *kavanah* in our *brachos*

or *tefillah*. We need to work harder to light Shabbos candles before *zman hadlakah*.

Ask yourself honestly, how often do you find yourself “saying *vidui*” for being 10 pounds too heavy? How often is your “*teshuvah*” focused on eating junk food? How many times did you say “*chatai*” for not making it to the gym regularly?

How often during the year do you berate yourself for food-related “sins”? Contrast that with how often you focus on real self-improvement or do *teshuvah* for some of the *aveiros* listed above.

Does that give you some much needed perspective?

Guilt

Guilt has gotten a bad rap recently. Many people associate guilt with that uneasy feeling in their stomach that burdens them and keeps them from reaching their goals. For a striving, growing person, though, the feeling of guilt is actually an opportunity to check in and realize there is room for change. Yom Kippur is that moment where we can take a good look at ourselves, see if a behavior we feel uneasy about needs changing, and do *teshuvah*.

For dieters, that guilty feeling in the pit of the stomach is probably all too familiar. *I can't believe I ate two servings of dessert at the chasunah; I'm so bad. I finished my mousse and Sara barely touched hers; I'm such a pig. I didn't stick*

to my diet today; I am a failure.

At the root of meaningful guilt is an act which is wrong. And for that we say *chatai, avisi, pashati*.

However, eating two desserts at a *simchah* isn't bad unless one was stolen from someone else. Finishing mousse isn't animal-like unless it was eaten without silverware. Not sticking to a diet isn't wrong, unless that diet is the mitzvah of *kashrus*.

Yes. There are mitzvos that pertain to eating. There is guarding our health. There is staying away from *achilah gasah*, overeating.

But if we eat two portions of dessert with mindfulness and it enhances our *simchah*, and we generally maintain a



healthy lifestyle, then we have done nothing wrong and everything right. If other people make comments about the way we eat, we need to remind ourselves that our choices are between us and Hashem. If we go off our diet, then maybe our diet doesn't actually work for us and we need to rethink it.

Let's reserve our guilt for actions which truly and clearly distance us from Hashem. Another important point to make about guilt is that it is not shame (as used colloquially). Generally, when we describe ourselves as not being good enough, being broken, being less than everyone else, or being unworthy, we place ourselves in a position of shame from which we cannot grow. For if we're broken, if we're not worthy, how can we improve?

Menuchas hanefesh is predicated on the understanding that our *neshamah* is *tehorah*. That means we're always worthy. We can always improve. We can always come closer to Hashem, no matter how far away we are and how desperate the situation seems. A healthy dose of guilt allows us to feel badly about our actions, with the understanding that they can never sully our pure *neshamah*, and that we're always capable of doing *teshuvah*. Unhealthy guilt just paralyzes us, not allowing us to move on.

Yom Kippur is a unique and powerful opportunity to learn the lessons of forgiveness, perspective, and healthy guilt. Without these three tools, we cannot make peace with our eating. If we can't forgive ourselves, we won't be able to learn and to grow. If we don't have perspective, we'll overemphasize all the wrong angles. If we harbor unhealthy guilt, we won't feel capable of even starting the process.

What if your *kabbalah* for this Yom Kippur would be to forgive yourself for breaking your diet yet again, or to put into perspective how much of your mental space is being consumed by "diet thoughts," or to let go of unhealthy guilt that tells you that there's something fundamentally wrong with you and that's holding you back from growing?

Wouldn't that take so much weight off your shoulders and give you the mental and emotional strength to create long-lasting change?

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 or rena@mindovermunchies.com. To listen to a demo class, go to www.mindovermunchies.com.