



## INTUITIVE EATING with Rena Reiser

# A Menu Full of Soul Food

RENA REISER

The air outside is fresh and crisp. The temperatures are dropping like the leaves. The Yamim Tovim are over and a feeling of calm and stability has returned to day-to-day life. All the inspiration of the last two months combined with this newfound calm causes you think to yourself, “Hmm. Now would be a really great time to delve into some meaningful personal development.” And almost on cue, every other magazine page flashes ads that call out to you, “*Change your life. Fix your life. Be the best you!*” Yes, winter is truly a great time for introspection and growth.

In my work as an Intuitive Eating Counselor, personal change starts with food. Food is important to every living creature on the planet, yet it hardly seems like the focal point of personal development. So why is it so important to be at peace with food when most of us are facing much greater challenges? We are dealing with *chinuch* struggles... less-than-exemplary *middos*...lackluster *avodas Hashem*... the list goes on and on. Sometimes it seems that food is the least of our problems!

Let me open up a new way of looking at the world for you...

Recently, one of my Intuitive Eating clients turned to me for help with a seemingly unrelated topic. Something was keeping her up at night. No, not her baby. Her smartphone. As many are aware, smartphones have a nearly endless myriad of very “important” things with which one can become occupied. Like using Waze to plan out the fastest route for carpool, grocery shopping, and a weekly *shiur*, or adding captions to photos... You can start with it in the evening and before you know it, it’s 2 a.m. and you are over-

tired and restless.

Since self-care is a major part of Intuitive Eating (and overall health), I told my client that I had a suggestion that might help her get her little smartphone to sleep at a reasonable hour.

Now, this can be a touchy subject, and she viscerally tensed up at the notion that I might drive a wedge between her and her smartphone. Still, I pressed forward. “You should try,” I stated simply, “to use a blue light filter app.” “What’s that?” she asked. “It is an app that changes the lighting on your screen at night from its typical blue background, which is stimulating, to a more calming orange light.” I suggested that she set the screen of her phone to match the atmosphere that would be most conducive to sleep at night. A simple, practical, and useful solution.

So why was my client scared of what I would recommend?

If you pay attention to the way we’re told (marketed) to respond to challenges in our lives, it’s all about taking control. Empty your cupboards of nosh so you don’t break your diet. Put holds on your accounts to stop yourself from overspending. Punish yourself for indulgences. This creates self-made boundaries to keep you in line. Sure, you may be dreaming of a juicy steak, or a beautiful new Yom Tov dress, but your newly regimented “self-care” won’t allow for it. You’re just going to have to grin and bear it until that feeling passes.

And here is where food and everything else overlap in a big way.

Lately, the way we eat has become such a major focal point in contemporary society that it's now a rare thing to *not* diet. How many people do you know who have *never* dieted? Remember, that includes any way of eating that one believes affects weight, like eating at specific times, counting calories, or removing food groups from the menu. And whether or not various diets are effective (they're not), they all point toward one shared *middah* — restriction, taking things out of one's life.

The problem with bringing restriction into our lives is that it is contagious. It leaks and spills into everything that we do. Just like our solutions around food are through restriction, we begin to be *mechanech* our children by focusing on what we forbid instead of what we can permit. It comes into our *avodas Hashem*, focusing on *knasim* instead of ways we can connect. And it even shapes our *avodas hamiddos* by causing us to focus on our negative traits and not our positive ones.

This kind of constant restrictive interaction with the world brings us into a place of *pizur hanefesh* (inner turmoil). It moves our focus away from the goodness in our lives and onto the negative aspects. It keeps us from being expansive and open to the full array of opportunities in our lives and instead causes us to be closed and guarded. It creates a feeling of tightness in our stomachs as we close ourselves off in our meager efforts to defend ourselves.

So instead of suggesting that my client hide her phone, limit her usage or punish herself with any other form of restriction, I helped guide her toward a healthier relationship with her phone.

Ultimately, we are all looking to be present and focused in our day-to-day lives. Food, electronics, work, etc., are all things that, at times, we use to distract ourselves from the moments that really count.

Most people start their first diet with the best of intentions.

They just want to lose those pesky few pounds. Over time, diets have a tendency to become our go-to tool when we're unsatisfied, uncomfortable, or unhappy in life. It creates a safety mask that allows us to believe we're making progress while sparing us from the messy yet necessary inner work.

By *hiding* the distraction—locking the cabinet, restricting phone usage, etc.—we don't deal with the underlying challenges that caused us to turn to those distractions in the first place. Rather, we pile on new distractions by imposing restrictions on ourselves and creating battles that don't need to exist. Conversely, when we can grow into healthy relationships with food, electronics, work, etc., we silence the distractions and become open to seeing and dealing with the challenges from which we were working so desperately to distract ourselves.

At the core of it all is the understanding that Hashem created the world for us, to help us with our *avodas Hashem*. Simultaneously, our *avodah* is to elevate everything in this world. Restriction forces us to abandon our relationship with the world by pushing it out of our horizon. When we heal our relationship with the physical world, we can be present and focused for the real work of

evating it.

So, yeah, food *isn't* everything. But when we realize how our relationship with food is a reflection of how we approach life, then learning how to bring *menuchas hanefesh* into our relationship with food can literally be lifesaving!

*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 thoughts about 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.*

We are dealing  
with chinuch  
struggles...less-  
than-exemplary  
middos...lackluster  
avodas Hashem...the  
list goes on and on.  
Sometimes it seems  
that food is the least  
of our problems!