



INTUITIVE EATING with Rena Reiser

What Are You Truly Hungry For?

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Once a year, Chavie strives for the ultimate in *balabusta* perfection. She works out strategies and implements initiatives so this year's event will run smoother than the last. She walks around, day after day, repeating affirmations that even though last year didn't meet her aspirations, this year, all will be better.

What annual event has Chavie working so hard? The yearly visit from her in-laws. Every year, Chavie does her best to be the best daughter-in-law in the world. And every year, Chavie wonders what she can do to avoid the missteps in her well-laid plans.

Amongst the rubble of Chavie's preparations are usually countless bags of potato chips, dozens of iced coffees, and several pints of ice cream. Chavie isn't a high-school student anymore, but for some reason she can't make it through her preparations without the calorie spike from late-night binges. Somehow, it's only nosh that gets her through it.

What's the correlation between stressful events and unchecked eating? Why do we turn to food when things get rough and we're lacking *menuchas hanefesh*?

There's one general principle underlying all our eating, and if you remember this principle it can inform your eating choices for the rest of your life:

People only eat when they're hungry.

That may be hard to believe, but it's true.

Let's take the case of Chavie's pre-in-law eating sprees

as a perfect example. During those days leading up to and through their stay, Chavie is starving for control. She is hungry for acceptance and confidence. She craves approval. In food, Chavie finds comfort, support, and control.

When we typically think of hunger, we think of those uncomfortable pangs in our stomachs signaling our brain that it is time to eat. But hunger takes on many forms. And whenever you find yourself beyond the brink of healthy eating, there is always some form of hunger at its root.

So how does this principle change things for those of us who are searching for *menuchas hanefesh* with the foods we eat?

If we find ourselves eating for reasons other than physical hunger, we can ask ourselves where this hunger is really coming from. If we understand its source, we can fill it in ways other than with food.

All that sounds straightforward enough, so why do people still seem to turn to food so frequently?

Food is fun. It's easy and it feels good in our bodies. To truly feed some of the other types of hunger we feel in our lives, it could take a lot of time and hard work—so we often turn to food instead. In the end, however, food can only fully satisfy physical hunger. When the hunger comes from a deeper place, satisfaction will only come when we feed the source of that hunger.

Some days, you just need a bagel. And others, you need a "bagel" (i.e. 12 hours of sleep). When you see that you

keep eating from a place that's not physical hunger, stop. Breathe. Ask yourself, "What am I really hungry for?"

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Hunger manifests itself in many forms, and each form can have multiple variations. Here are some of the "hungers" you may be feeling:

A "hunger" to connect: You realize that you've been using cookies to fill a gap in your life that's craving connection. That's a very important realization to have about yourself. Instead of turning to food, you could be finding productive ways to get yourself engaged with those around you. But don't stop there! What type of connection are you craving? Do you wish to be more connected to a *kehillah*? Is it your family with whom you need more bonding time? Maybe you need to "date" your spouse more often. Or maybe, you just need some quiet time to connect to yourself. Depending on how you answer this question, you'll be searching for a whole different remedy.

A "hunger" for excitement: Sometimes the bottom of a bowl of popcorn is the most entertaining sight on a blah day. You realize that you've been turning to food to fulfill a deep desire for adventure. Now you can hone in on the adventure your soul has been pining for. From where is that sensation originating? Do you need to find a way to spice up your job? Maybe it's just the afternoons at home with the kids that lack pizzazz? Perhaps your spiritual life has gone dry, and you need to find a new *shiur* that keeps you inspired and excited.

A "hunger" for calm: As your life gets more hectic, so does your eating. You understand that you react to stress by eating. What type of calm will quench this craving? Is your schedule too much of a burden for just one person to shoulder? Which part of it is the root of the problem? Can you delegate some of your tasks? Maybe your schedule isn't so hectic, but the calm you need is an inner calm? Maybe you need to find tools to quiet that inner engine when you start to feel scattered?

A "hunger" for authenticity: When you feel judged, you get lost in a pint of ice cream. You've known your whole life that when you are out of sorts you find solace in food. What can you do to connect with your "real" self? How can you get the right kind of support? Do you need to find a group



of people who recognize your unique strengths in vulnerable times or new ventures? Is it your own inner voice that needs encouragement in building you up in the way you deserve?

When you see that you keep eating from a place that's not physical hunger, stop. Breathe. Ask yourself, "What am I really hungry for?"

Pinpointing the type of hunger you are experiencing is just the beginning of your work. When I counsel a woman on intuitive eating, we try to avoid focusing on negative traits like anger or incompetence. Instead, by concentrating on the important values she craves, it helps us create a plan to reach personal goals. Then, we get as specific as possible about which *value* she is missing in her life. Similarly, try to understand where you specifically need to make change. Remember, the more time you spend getting down to the fine details, the more effective your solution will be.

This won't always stop you from grabbing a chocolate bar in frail times, but it will provide long-term solutions that will help you feel more fulfilled and tranquil in your life. You will have more and more tools you can turn to when times are tough...and then you can eat your cake and enjoy it too! ●

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.