

Chew This Over

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“And the rabble among them goaded themselves on to desire The Israelites wept and said, ‘Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the free fish we ate in Egypt, with the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic.* Now ... all we have to look forward to is the manna’” (Numbers 11:4–6).

Don’t eat like a glutton and don’t devour your food. Instead, eat as if you were eating with a king. Blessing rests on the innards of a mensch, not of a chowhound. A chowhound is a spiritual relative of Esav, who said, “Let me gulp down this red red stuff” (Genesis 25:30). Why does such a person have no blessing in his belly? Because the evil Serpent lives there, denying him satisfaction. What’s more, such a person is called a *rasha* (villain), as is written, “The stomach of villains is lacking” (Proverbs 13:25). Therefore one ought to eat unhurriedly, at the table, as if eating with a king (*Zohar Chadash*, Ruth 106a).

A person who eats only for the physical craving, without any longing for *kedushah* (holiness), fails to connect body and soul. As a result, when he dies, he is really dead—namely, his corpse is an empty container, totally devoid of *kedushah* (may God spare us!). On the other hand, to the extent that one eats with conscious craving to be a part of holiness—Shabbat, Torah, prayer, giving charity, etc.—one generates more and

stronger desire for *kedushah*.

Even if you don't feel happy, you can fake it. Pretend to be happy. Who says that if you're feeling down, you can't smile? We fake a smile often enough when trying to be polite, why not now?

Try it. A smile, even a put-on smile, is contagious. Not only will it make others happy when they return your smile, but, as studies have shown, smiling relieves tension and really does make your outlook on life a lot brighter (cf. *Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #43*).

If you're like most people, you probably don't pay much attention to *how* you eat. Yes, you pay attention to *what* you eat: only kosher food that you're careful to cook kosher. Undoubtedly, you make genuine effort to focus and concentrate when saying the *berakhot* (blessings) before and after eating. If you're more aware, you will remember that you are eating to stay healthy and have strength to serve God. You will also learn some Torah at some point during the meal, before saying the after-blessing. Sadly, however, many of us, once we take that first bite, get swallowed alive by the food on our plate, whether it's organic tofu, genetically-engineered beef, or anything in between.

Eating is an opportunity not to be missed, but not because our stomachs are empty or our taste buds ache. When we eat, we are—or could be and should be—joining body and soul, Heaven and Earth, infusing creation with *kedushah*. How do we accomplish this? The first steps are really quite simple. Eat slowly, without wolfing down your food. Eat calmly and with proper etiquette (which may vary with local custom).

The effect is tremendous, much greater than you might have guessed. Your thinking becomes clearer and you are less taken in by foolishness. The converse is also true: if one *fresses* (eats gluttonously), foolish ideas take hold in his mind,

crippling him, God forbid. Even though he learns Torah, he is unable to draw from it awe or love of God.

If you are privileged to be eating with a dignified person—someone so regal that he never “takes a time out” from being noble and dignified—you will auto-matically eat as a Jew should. Even if you sit down at the table by yourself,** imagine that you are sitting with that quasi-royal person. If you are sitting with less-than-dignified others, *you* be the noble person.

* In his commentary on the Pesach Haggadah, Rashba (student of Ramban) writes that it was a kindness of God to exile the Israelites specifically to Egypt, which was so wealthy that it provided all its inhabitants, even the slaves, with plenty of free food. Having a good diet, the Israelites were strong and healthy.

** Many tzaddikim, famous and unknown, past and present, preferred to eat alone. It allowed them to more fully use mealtime as a way of communing with God, in the ways mentioned in this *dvar Torah*, and in many unmentioned ways.

a gutn Shabbos!

Shabbat Shalom!

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