

SOUL FOOD

written by Chaim Kramer
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Food – it's what keeps you alive. Food – it's what binds your body to your soul. Food is the very life of man. Or is it? Eating can either be a very great mitzvah or the antithesis of a mitzvah. Sometimes, it can be a lust – one of the three major lusts that prevent you from reaching out for Godliness. It all depends on you!

When he was young, Rebbe Nachman tried extremely hard to free himself from all physical lusts. As this required tremendous effort, he began by drawing all his physical desire into his appetite for food. He ate a lot, even more than most people, while at the same time he made every effort to rid himself of all his other desires. Only after suppressing all of these, did he begin to work on subduing his lust for food as well. He fasted frequently and repeatedly, until he no longer desired food at all. Eventually he had to force himself to eat in order to stay alive (*Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom, His Praises* #16 and 21).

Later on, the Rebbe said, "If I had known the greatness

of *hitbodedut* earlier in life, I would never have wasted my body through fasting. The body is too important a vehicle with which to serve God, to have been subjected to such strenuous self-abnegation” (*Hishtafkut HaNefesh, Introduction*).

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Through this lesson, Rebbe Nachman teaches that you can eat, as long as you keep your mind on serving God. You can break the desire or lust for food, and it can be accomplished without anorexia or self-destruction. “Eat and sleep. Just watch your time,” the Rebbe told his follower, Reb Dov (*Kokhavey Or*, p.25). Make sure that you use all your time – even time spent getting, preparing and eating your food – in the service of God.

Reb Noson noticed someone studying Torah after the Morning Prayers. The man seemed to be pained by hunger, yet he persisted in studying. Reb Noson said to him, “That’s enough! It’s time to desist from your craving desire for food” (*Aveneha Barzel*, p.65 #37). The message is clear: Eat when you have to. Just don’t make a big deal out of it.

taken from the book [Crossing the Narrow Bridge](#), Chapter 12 – Daily Needs