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# Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

## Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner on...

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12 Adar Rishon

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### Eat Right!

Forty percent of the Jews in Israel suffer from obesity. For some, the situation is more severe than for others. In any event, there is room for improvement, and amongst men more than women. I am not referring to aesthetics. Who says that a thin person is more handsome than a fat one? Rembrandt, for one, did not feel that way with his paintings. The human being comes in a variety of shapes, beauty is subjective, and there is no arguing about tastes and aromas. Only, obesity constitutes one of the greatest threats to the health of modern man, leading to heart disease, diabetes, gallstones, arthritis, hernias, varicose veins and more.

I am not telling you to go on a crash diet using appetite reducers. This can lead to malnutrition, dehydration or other side effects. Moreover, when people on such diets stop them, they almost all go back to their previous habits and become even more obese. Neither am I telling you to start obsessive physical exercise. Even strenuous exercise takes off little weight while increasing appetite. Obviously, regular exercise has enormous worth for preserving one's health, but not necessarily for weight loss. I also am not telling you to afflict yourself and constantly starve yourself, living in morose suffering. The Torah is a Torah of the living. What I am suggesting is to eat a little bit less and to avoid unhealthy food. That isn't hard, it's pleasant and it's also a good behavior trait. The Rambam writes, "One should not eat everything one desires, the way a dog or the donkey does. Rather, one should eat food that is good for him" (Hilchot De'ot 3:2). We are already advised in our Torah not to overeat.

It is true that sometimes there are medical causes to people being obese, such as having a slow metabolism, but that is rare. Almost always, the reason is very simple: taking in too many calories. Even if each day you only take in ten grams too many, that will add you four kilos per year, forty kilos over ten years, eighty kilos over twenty years, etc., etc... The solution is simple: methodical reduction in calorie intake (obviously I am not talking here about people who have special medical problems warranting their seeking a doctor's advice, but about regular people who just keep on adding weight). That same calculation of grams works in the opposite direction as well.

One must always preserve a balanced, varied diet, including: carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins and minerals. G-d did not create anything in His world in vain. "A person shall ultimately have to render an account before G-d over everything he saw that he didn't wish to eat, even though it was permissible to him and he could have eaten it" (Mesillat Yescharim, chapter 13, quoting the Jerusalem Talmud). This is referring to what people need for their health (ibid.). Yet one should avoid fattening, unhealthy food. 1) Fat - One should consume lean meat, poultry and fish, low-fat milk products, and one should avoid fried foods. 2) Sugar - One should avoid candy, ice cream, soft drinks, cake, jams and chocolate. One can eat a lot of fruit, but one shouldn't go too far, since fruit has sugar too. Rather, one should eat one fruit, or fruit portion, at a time. One shouldn't drink fruit juices, but rather one should eat the fruit itself, chewing well. Vegetables are excellent, cooked or fresh. Eat as much as you like. You can see that I am not torturing you. Quite the contrary, you'll feel a lot better.

It's true that sometimes there are psychological factors that cause overeating. A nervous, frustrated person finds a substitute for happiness in eating. If this is a serious problem for you, then I recommend that you contact Overeaters Anonymous, which consists of support groups, or more precisely, self-help groups, located everywhere, for men and for women. Everyone there is in the same boat, and they help one another.

Sometimes people also suffer from bad eating habits from childhood. Don't worry. Anything can be improved. Eat a lot of small meals and don't wait until hunger overtakes you and then you binge. In this the Jews from Germany are right. At 7:00 AM they eat a good breakfast; at 10:00 AM something small; at 1:00 PM a good lunch; at 4:00 something small; at 7:00 PM a good supper, and at 10:00 PM something small. Everything in good measure. This is highly recommended.

At the same time, don't eat all sorts of between-meal snacks. That's really foolish. Moreover, be careful not to binge at all sorts of social affairs, even at ceremonial meals, and even at dinners giving thanks to G-d. If G-d performed a miracle for you, it is a mitzvah to thank him, a mitzvah to repent, but not necessarily a mitzvah to eat. How good it would be if we could avoid eating anything outside our own homes! The Rambam wrote: "When the wise man sparingly consumes the food that is appropriate for him, he should only eat it in his own home, at his table" (Hilchot De'ot 5:2). One way to trick yourself into eating less is to stop eating when you feel that you've still got room. As Rambam wrote, "One should not eat until satiation. Rather, he should eat about a quarter less than that" (Hilchot De'ot 4:2). There's no need to measure. The principle is what is important.

Chew your food well and don't swallow quickly. Eat slowly and that way you'll eat less. You'll also digest it better. In the same spirit, don't eat fresh bread, but old bread that is dry or toasted. It's very tasty. And obviously, eat whole wheat bread. Also, in general, try to eat food with cellulose (fruit, vegetables and unprocessed vegetarian foods, which aid in digestion).

Put on your plate an appropriate portion that you plan to eat, and don't add to it. At night, before you go to sleep, there is no need to eat. Even the Jews from Germany who eat at 10:00 PM are eating "something small".

Drink a lot of water, a liter or two a day. A disposable cup holds 180 cc. If you engage in physical labor, obviously you'll need a lot more. By the way, water is delicious. All of this advice should not be adopted all at once, lest it break you. Rather, you should adopt it bit by bit, conveniently. Don't think all day about dieting. Think about loving G-d and loving your fellow man.

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Yom Kippur 5768]