



# Traveling Light

## Battling the summertime weight blues

**A**hhh... summer time. Long, lazy days lying by the pool, enchanted evenings chatting with friends. Summer conjures up sweet anticipation of both relaxation and invigorating outdoor activities.

However for my friend, Chanah\*, summer provokes a mild feeling of dread. She is embarrassed by the surprised expression of her summer friends when she shows up at the bungalow colony heavier than last year, again. And the heat — carrying excess body weight makes the weather unbearable for her, but she's too self-conscious to get into a swimsuit and cool off in the pool.

Chanah and many others amongst the 67 percent of Americans who are overweight resolutely decide each year at this time that enough is enough. We're sick and tired of being sick and tired. We're really going to change our eating habits for good this time. And yet, we've been motivated before — temporarily. How can we maintain that momentary inspiration beyond the first few resisted ice cream cones?

### The Essential Key

You don't need to be extremely overweight to have an unhealthy relationship with food. Weight is just a symptom of the problem and some people who are at a normal body weight can be just as obsessed with food or weight as someone who is morbidly obese. A little self-evaluation can help you gauge if you are suffering from a more serious problem with food than just needing to lose a few pounds. If you can't concentrate on your daily tasks because you are constantly thinking of what to eat next, if you are using food to escape from life's pressures, if you feel you are battling a force too great to overcome — and hence, are not successful no matter how many weight-loss techniques you try — then it may be time to look into another method of losing weight. Perhaps it's time to get help from a new Source.

Before you turn to your husband or

best friend or even a professional, the very first address for help is Hashem. Take your resolve and ask Hashem to strengthen it and to give you the willingness and ability to turn it into action.

Many people don't want to "bother" Hashem with something as "minor" as asking for help with improving their eating habits. This couldn't be more misguided. Hashem is extremely interested in how and what we eat. One look at the myriad *halachos* regarding kashrus and *brachos* and we see that each morsel we put into our mouth is noticed by our Omnipotent Creator. Hashem expects us to not only eat kosher food and to express our gratitude for it, but also to protect our body and soul by eating healthy and nutritious food.

We are commanded, "*V'nishmartem me'od l'nafshoseichem* — You shall surely guard your soul." Eating food with proper nutritive value in the right quantities is the single most powerful and frequent action we take that fulfills this obligation. It is a holy obligation to eat with dignity.

Hashem doesn't command us to do anything that is beyond our reach, and doesn't want us to run from challenge. So if He expects us to eat appropriately, then even if we find it difficult, it is certainly possible. But we can only be successful at anything we hope to accomplish if we have *siyatta diShmaya*. Therefore, before we embark on any new food regime, we must beseech *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to help us.

A lot of us have prayed to be thin. But not many have *davened* for the fortitude to make the necessary changes to get thin. Because the bottom line is — it takes work and dedication. There is no magic pill, no perfect surgery. Our

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As Jews, we don't run from challenge. We ask Hashem for help and we do our *hishtadlus*. In that order. And we keep asking for help and putting in our effort on a daily basis. And that's when the supernatural happens. Suddenly the magnetic pull of the food which may have ruled over you before is not so strong. With Hashem's help, somehow your perseverance doesn't wane like it usually does. The task doesn't seem so daunting.

Ask Hashem for the help you need, perhaps like this (tailored, of course, to your individual struggle and history): "Please, Hashem, help me to overcome my desire and craving for unhealthy foods. Give me the clarity and commitment to stick with the necessary changes. Help me overcome my fears — fear of giving up foods I enjoy, fear of the extra work involved in preparing healthy food, fear of being hungry or feeling deprived. Please send me the

right *shaliach* to guide me with what I should eat so I can properly care for the precious body You have entrusted to me. Without this body working properly, I cannot fulfill Your *mitzvos* and carry out the many responsibilities You have given to me. I've tried so many times to eat right and failed just as many times with this difficult *nisayon* — I can't do it without Your limitless power behind me."

**Gathering Motivators — From Within and Without**

In *Pirkei Avos* (2:1), Rabi Yehudah HaNasi tells us to "Calculate the cost of a *mitzvah* against its reward, and the reward of a sin against its cost."

We can apply this idea to our eating behaviors. When it comes to eating, what's the *mitzvah*? We are commanded to guard our health by maintaining a

properly and that we must *daven* to Him for help, then it's time for the second step — putting our enthusiasm into action by getting support from the people around us.

The path to healthy change is not easy to travel alone. We need to surround ourselves with people who can be our enthusiastic cheerleader or wise coach, who can listen with compassion to our trials and celebrate our triumphs. We should be able to commiserate and

accepting their suggestions. Think about the source of the information you are receiving and if it is a reliable and healthy recommendation. Crash diets can be dangerous and damaging, and simply don't work in the long run. Your neighbor's impassioned plug for a no-carb diet may sound very convincing, but realize that unrefined, complex carbohydrates are an essential nutrient that our body needs.

The diet and weight-loss business is a

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healthy relationship with food, or making the necessary changes to attain that. What's the cost of the *mitzvah*? It may require effort, sacrifice, loss of spontaneity, and prioritizing. What's the reward of the *mitzvah*? Improved health, weight loss, integrity, loss of mental obsession with food and weight, better self-esteem, enhanced relationships, and a closer connection to Hashem.

What's so bad about an unhealthy relationship with food? Harming your health, giving in to the *yetzer hara*, dropping commitments. What's the reward of the sin? Temporary, counterfeit pleasure, physical gratification, or momentary escape from problems. What's the cost of the sin? Poor health, frustration, despair, self-loathing, obesity, and being an inadequate role model for our children.

Once we realize that it's Hashem's *ratzon* for us to guard our health by eating

rejoice with someone else who's also walking in the same direction, and to get sage advice from a professional who can guide us.

Of course, we have to be discerning in who we rely on for support and guidance. A recent client, Miriam, shared with me that she is nervous about enlisting support from her loved ones. "I'm afraid to tell my family I started a new program because I wonder if I'm going to fail again. It's a bit humiliating to have them watch me repeatedly try and fail," she confessed. "Also, I don't like them watching over me and commenting on what I'm eating or not eating."

Obviously, if a family member or friend is not supportive of your efforts, it's best to find support elsewhere.

There are many people who are more than willing and eager to give you their opinion or experience about weight loss. Be prudent and discerning about

multibillion-dollar industry. If you are unsure about whom to trust and where to get professional advice from, go back to the first step. Ask Hashem to lead you to the proper plan. Listen to your inner voice, your intuition, which is one of the ways that Hashem speaks to us. When something is *emes*, it often resonates within us and "feels" right. Often the wrong decision leaves us with a nagging doubt and insecurity. Sometimes we have to wait patiently and continue to *daven* until we feel the clarity we need to take the next step forward.

**Taking Steps**

After you have found the support you need and the right program for you, the third step is to put your new plan into practice, one day at a time. Shaindel\*, a client who has lost a significant amount of weight and is feeling much better physically,

emotionally, and spiritually, recently divulged to me that even though she is thrilled with her progress, she has a constant fear that it won't last. Shaindel has been a chronic passenger on the diet roller coaster and is understandably waiting for the next big drop.

I told Shaindel that if she does today what worked successfully for her yesterday, then today will be a smooth ride. We can't worry about tomorrow, or next week, or next year. The *yetzer hara* tries to sabotage us by telling us that our success won't last, so we may as well give up now. We combat that irrational fear by staying in the present moment. If I tell myself that I only have to stick to my plan today and I'll worry about tomorrow when it comes, then I can "trick" the *yetzer hara* into leaving me alone right

time to prepare it, then chances are we'll grab something quick and easy and unhealthy. I recommend writing down each morning everything you plan to eat that day. This is a very useful tool for monitoring the quality, quantity, and timing of your food intake.

Prioritizing is a critical element for implementing and sustaining healthy eating habits. If you're too busy to eat healthily, then it's important to look at how you are utilizing your time and honestly assess if the activities on your to-do list are all more important than your health. Even if the tasks on our agenda are legitimate and praiseworthy, like tending to our children, working, or doing *chessed*, we must realize that we can't perform these wonderful acts if we are not physically well, *chas v'shalom*. We'll never *find* the time needed to make healthy lifestyle changes; we must *make* the time by utilizing time previously spent on other things.

It's not enough to change our behavior with food — we must also change our attitudes. Many people perceive eating healthily as restriction and denial of pleasure. However, true pleasure comes from feeling healthy,

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now!

On the other hand, there is quite a bit of planning needed for continual success. If we don't have healthy food in the house and we haven't made the

accomplished, and successful and from connecting with Hashem. Eating is a fleeting pleasure that often ends in pain and frustration if we have broken our commitments. I'd rather deny

myself that kind of pleasure.

All three steps of this plan must be utilized each day — *davening* to Hashem for help, surrounding ourselves with support from friends, family, or professionals, and diligently implementing our plan. If we leave out one of these steps, then we are like a three-legged stool missing one leg. It won't take much to topple us over.

All beginnings are hard, but it does get much easier with practice, experience, and learning shortcuts. The physical rewards of looking nice in our summer wardrobe and enjoying a brisk walk in the warm air are minuscule compared to the eternal rewards of feeling the accomplishment of defeating the *yetzer hara* and developing a closer relationship with Hashem. **B**

\* Name changed to protect privacy.

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