



A FAT-FREE YETZER HARA *Harav Y. Reuven Rubin*

There comes a certain point in life when you are made aware of the fact that you are what you eat. All of a sudden, you become interested in the fat or salt content of everything you have loved to imbibe for more years than you care to remember.

We have always been taught that it is only good manners to eat everything served us. Now, all of a sudden, this no longer holds true. You feel vulnerable. Everything you thought was great turns out to be a potential time bomb in terms of your heart, blood pressure and who knows what else.

Most people going through this stage learn a few handy tricks. You read labels with an eye to fat content, saturated or otherwise. Calories start coming in several forms, energy giving and plain fat making. Salt is now called Sodium — and traces of all and sundry are listed on foods ad infinitum. Instead of tucking into a tub of ice cream with an impassioned bracha, you now have to take a course in food technology.

This all usually starts when your friendly GP looks down his nose at you, hands over a printed warning list of foods to be avoided and tells you that your blood pressure is up, your cholesterol is beyond measure and he can hear your arteries hardening as he speaks to you. Go out and lose a few stones — or else!

Now, this can be a bit disconcerting. You are, after all, a mature adult, one with a certain amount of credibility. Your children have, baruch Hashem, their own children, and yet you are now being told to change one of the most fundamental attitudes you've acquired throughout your life. At first, fear reigns supreme. It's sort of like erev Yom Kippur. You walk around with the GP's list as if it was the Daf Yomi. You become a diet bore, telling all who will listen (and



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some who won't) what you can and cannot eat. It becomes a bit much.

After a short while, you settle into a new phase called the "just a little bit won't hurt" stage. You're cheating, but at least you admit it.

Finally, you enter the worst level of all, the self-righteous "I'm allowed this" stage. Here you cheat but do so totally convinced you're not.

Let me give you an example. There are certain frozen desserts with "Fat Free" written on them in bold, impossible-to-miss letters. This sounds like manna from heaven. "Fat free, that's for me," you say. Fat free means you can eat as much as you want without wreaking havoc to those silent partners, your blood pressure and your heart.

If you read the fine print, though, you'll soon find that although the stuff is fat free, it's jam-packed with sugar and so loaded with calories that every delectable teaspoon placed on your craving tongue adds an inch to that disaster zone called the waistline. "Don't worry," you say. "I'm allowed this."

There is a Mishna in Avos (2:3) that tells us to "beware of the authorities, for they befriend a person only for their own purpose." The Chiddushei HaRim notes that authorities, or in the wording of the Mishna "reshus", also means permitted actions.

It seems the yetzer hara can hide behind the seemingly permissible things we love so much and fool us into thinking they are, in fact, okay. He can even get us to believe it's a mitzva to do them, all the while hiding his own nefarious purposes of leading us astray.

During summer vacation, the risk increases of falling afoul of this dynamic. While on vacation many people allow themselves leniencies. They skate on the edge of halacha and minhag, with the blasé excuse that it is summertime and, anyway, it's "permitted."

Permitted, maybe, but is it good?

No one is going to buy non-kosher food chas vesholom, but is it right for a family to let slip the standards it keeps at home? Even if circumstances make maintaining standards hard, shouldn't children hear parental discussion about those choices, so that they know that their parents are doing things according to halachic guidelines?

Holidays can sometimes leave us wide open for spiritual slippage and even when certain acts are permitted, we should ask, "Who or what is behind this decision?"

Vacations are special occasions, when children share more time with parents. It is a perfect opportunity to show our youngsters total, parental Yiddishkeit as a full-time achievement. What we do today makes for tomorrow's fond memories. It's not the big splash that makes a lasting impression on a child, it's all the small unrehearsed events that form the tapestry of his future memories.

Vacations are tailor-made for bonding with our young at a level not always available during the rest of the year. The question we must ask ourselves is whether we want that bonding to take place between our young and their full-time, fully committed parents or some permitted-even-if-doubtful hybrid?