



Excessive Eating

The Ramban (Vayikra, 19:2, s.v. l'fikach) tells us that included in kedoshim tiyu is ribui ha'achila ha'gasah, excessive eating, as that is sanctifying ourselves with that which is permitted to us.

Excessive eating has halachic ramifications. In explaining why one should leave room in his stomach for the third meal of Shabbos, the Mishna Brura (291:4) writes that if he doesn't leave room for it and still eats this meal, it may be achilas gasah which is not considered eating. Indeed, the Avudraham (Inyan Shalosh Seudos Shel Shabbos, s.v. kasav.) tells us that we have three meals on Shabbos because if we know there are three meals, we won't eat achilas gasah, since one will eat at each meal what he needs then. The Sefas Emes writes in a letter that kidush shouldn't be lavish in order that you should have an appetite for seudas Shabbos (Nitei Gavriel, 3, he'ara 15).

What about reciting a bracha when one is satiated? One who is satiated before he eats and yet eats (achilas gasah)—if he is disgusted by it and doesn't get pleasure then he shouldn't recite a bracha before or after since it is not considered eating (Mishna Brura 197:28, see Mishna Brura 476:6, 612:15).

In addition to this we know that overeating is physically dangerous. The Rambam writes achilas gasah is a poison and is the cause of sickness (Hilchos Daos 4:15). Likewise, Rabbeinu Yonah (1200-1263) warns us (R' Yonah, Avos 2:12, s.v. v'kol) against achilas gasah as it can cause great damage. The Rambam also states the secret of continual good health is to avoid overeating, which causes great damage to the digestive system.

In his medical writings, 1. The Pele Yoatz (achila u'shtiya, s.v. v'chein) writes some of the evils caused by overeating: it is bal tashchis since it is a waste of food. Excess eating is a waste of time since it is unnecessary. That is not even including the time he spends in the bathroom because of it. Additionally, one may

become ill due to overeating (see also Sefer Charedim 66,94).

Besides that being overweight makes such a person more susceptible to diabetes, heart disease and a host of other serious medical problems, it also can make him unhirable when he is looking for a job. Also, many times, one earns more if he weighs less. There are diets named after places where rich people live—for example, The Scarsdale Diet (1978), The Beverly Hills Diet (1981) or The South Beach Diet (2003)—since such people are considered to be slimmer than poor people.

There was a study done in which formerly heavy men and women were asked by researchers from the University of Florida if they would choose to be obese again or be afflicted with another malady. Each one of them chose another malady with 91 percent saying they would rather have a leg amputated and 89 percent saying they would rather be blind. What is the reason for such responses? The shame and lack of empathy heavy people endure as a result of their appearance. As someone said, "When you're blind, people want to help you. No one wants to help you when you're fat."

The Rambam (Hilchos Daos 4:14) writes that undereating is one of the three ways that one avoids illness. He also (Hilchos Daos 4:2) writes that you shouldn't eat until your stomach is full (see Shemos 16:8, Rashi) rather eat until you are about three-quarters full. What if one is unsure if he is satiated? To see if one is full, he should wait 20 minutes because that is when the food is partially digested.

We were told that the shulchan in the Mishkan was to have a zer zahav, gold crown (Shemos 25:24). This hints to our desire for eating as this is what the shulchan represents. Explains the Kli Yakar (Shemos 25:25), if we have control over our desire for food then it is a zer, crown as we are free and like a king with a crown. If our desire controls us then it is zer,

stranger, outsider (The word zer means a crown as well as stranger.). The Gra (Aderes Eliyahu 8:10) writes that if one merits, he consumes his food. If not, the food consumes him as he has great loss from it.

The Malbim (Mishlei 13:25) remarks that a tzadik eats what he needs for ruchniyos, spirituality, just that which he needs to sustain himself. This is what is meant in the pasuk, tzadik ochail l'sova nafsho, a tzadik eats to satisfy his soul meaning that which he needs for spirituality. The wicked on the other hand eat to fill their stomachs. The saying goes "some people eat to live whereas others live to eat." The Pri Tzadik (Pri Tzadik, volume 2, Rosh Chodesh Shvat, p. 53a) notes Eisav exclaims hal'itaini na min ha'adom ha'adom hazeh, pour into me some of that red stuff (Bereishis 25:30), as it stemmed from his tremendous desire for food.

Some people may eat a food item because it is starting to spoil. However, this is not a reason to eat the food if you are not hungry. The son of the Divrei Chaim (1793-1876) once ate the half of an apple his father left over because it was beginning to rot. His father said, "Was the apple created to serve you or you to serve the apple? If you need to eat an apple now then eat it. If you don't need to, then don't. What difference does it make if the apple is about to rot?" We must keep in mind bal tashchis d'gufa'i adif li, bal tashchis with respect to my body is more important (Shabbos 129a) meaning one's health comes first.

R' Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg was once asked if it is considered bal tashchis to leave over some food (and not eat everything just because it is on one's plate) in order to control one's desire. He answered that just as it is permitted to make a potato into a doll, and it is not bal tashchis, since you are using it for a constructive purpose, likewise the same applies here since what can be better than working on your middos and controlling your desire for food.

Rabbi Yehoshua Alt

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