

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Eat drink and be merry - is that Quality of Life?

Ask the average person to sum up what, emotionally, they really want, they may say to eat drink and be merry. This is emotionally very much what we all want. It is quite obvious, isn't it? We want to live in our emotions, to do what feels good at the time.

But is living in our emotions the goal of life? Recreation, pleasure from the spatial world? Would that suggest that the only people with meaningful lives are those fortunate to have such ability to easily pursue 'eat drink and be merry'? Let's take a closer look at eat, drink and be merry – is it quality of life?

Trees, flowers, and plants eat and drink – they never get fat, they grow, and they thrive.

But people experience consequences for this – we become overweight, develop alcohol addictions, and pass on transmittable contact diseases. We have a Shepherd who gives us consequences so that we do not pursue physicality unchecked. Nature tells us that this CAN'T be our mission, for if it were, we, like the trees and flowers, would grow and thrive the more we eat and drink and pursue merriment. Instead, we must find a balance – and what balances it? Various things but the tool to achieve balance is self-control.

Self-control requires us to have a thought that our best interest is served if we listen to a diet that is healthy for us, rising above our hunger in order to choose health. We find a new mental space – a place of knowledge that benefits us and when we conform to it, we see progress and we experience a feeling of pleasure and deep satisfaction because we gain control over our weight or bad habits. Let's call that feeling of pleasure and deep satisfaction self-respect. We now have a different perspective on our bodies. That new perspective is our expanded "me" and the body messages that we used to think were "me" are now seen as our lower self messages. We gain confidence knowing that we have control over our weight.

We have just discovered the world of soul. It is the mind that helps us get there, and the body that conformed. But the feeling of self-respect comes from serving the expanded "me" the soul. When we see our ability to choose well for our higher selves as the source of our self-esteem, then everything is properly aligned. It requires effort, it is not natural, but it becomes more natural and ingrained the more we do it. We have a new place from which we view ourselves.

Many of us have energy that is trapped in similar lower self (pre-)occupations, ranging from hatefulness to egoism, to laziness, to anxiety – these are pre-occupations of the lower self, functions of having bodies. We obviously need to care for our bodies to do our mission, but our mission is far more than acting out our body's agenda, no matter how important survival is to our selves and our families. And all too often our body's agenda is unhealthy all together, not even good for our survival.

There is a component of balance that matters. If we have a taking agenda to pursue the occupations of the lower self, or we do not balance basic needs so as to build our expanded "me", one might compare that to getting up and dressed every day and then standing still and just waiting for the end of the day to get undressed and go to sleep. What did we use the body and time for? Did we connect it to something of the higher self? Did we take from this world alone or utilize our energy to build something positive here and for eternity? Do we realize that our energy is given to us so that we can build eternity for ourselves?

Why does our energy get misdirected? Do we pursue things that are fruitless – like worry, hatred, vengeance and more? The energy that is trapped in the idea that these will solve anything or bring pleasure needs to be liberated! Just like a diet, we form a higher thought – take the energy wrapped up in the lower self and say out loud "Hashem, please help me take the energy that is wrapped up in _____ and re-direct it to serving You (i.e. pick any of the 13 attributes of Mercy or a simple dedication of the energy to serving Hashem)

So many of us, no matter what our background, do not necessarily understand the value of our religion or

the purpose of our existence. If you have never asked yourself this question, ask it now – what does it mean to be Jewish, why does it matter? And before you shrug your shoulders and move on, think again about self-respect – are the rules that we live by rules of survival and pleasure from this world alone or are we willing to begin climbing a mountain to reach a greater pleasure – the pleasure of utilizing our creativity and energy to serve our Creator?

What ideals do we aspire to? Jewish wisdom is the user manual for our bodies and for this world. Our bodies and this world are very complex – if not used in the right way, we can do great harm to ourselves and others, even without intending to.

Whatever your answer was to “what does it mean to be Jewish” – it is a part of you that is connected to greatness and pleasure, a pleasure far beyond eat drink and be merry. The greatness and pleasure of being in rapport with the Creator, of unifying with His Will, is something worth exploring.

Rabbi Noah Weinberg’s book “What the Angel Taught You” discusses this concept of pleasure in great depth.