

Raise the Sparks Newsletter #20 - Why Eating Kosher is not Enough

But It's Kosher

Years ago there was a television commercial with an actor dressed as Uncle Sam poised to eat a hot dog. Each time he went to eat, he was interrupted by a heavenly voice. Finally, he is given permission by the voice to eat with the words, "we're kosher, we have to answer to a higher authority". For many people today, once they hear that a food product is kosher, no other requirement is needed to eat it.

The reality is somewhat different. In addition to kosher, the types and amounts of food we eat have a definite effect on our health. We are currently experiencing a flood of obesity, diabetes, cardio-vascular disease and other maladies which are directly related to the foods we eat.

Thousand Year Old Advice

The medieval Torah scholar and physician the Rambam also known as Maimonides had words of advice on proper diet and health. These are found in his tractate Hilchos Deot (The Laws of Personality Development) in chapters 3 and 4. His advice, which follows is as timely today as it was almost a thousand years ago.

“One should not eat until his stomach his full. Rather, he should eat to three fourths of satiation.” (Hilchos Deot 4:2)

Based on this advice, people in this country are eating too much food at every meal on a daily basis. Part of the issue is that our stomach does not send a message of satiation to our brain in real time. By the time the brain has received a message of satiation, we have already overeaten.

One of the ways to remedy this is to slow down the speed at which we eat. When we make a conscious effort to slow down the tempo of our eating, our brain is able to synchronize with the messages from our stomach. The first step is to learn exactly what satiation feels like. Once we are able to establish a baseline of satiation, we can begin to practice eating till we are three quarters full. When you begin to follow this way of eating, you will feel lighter, healthier and full of more energy. As an added benefit excess weight will begin to disappear.

“One should always eat in his place while seated or reclining on his left side.” (Hilchos Deot 4:3)

The Rambam advised people to recline to the left when eating so that food would not accidentally enter the windpipe and cause choking. From this, we can infer, the Rambam wanted us to become more conscious of our eating. I'm sure that in addition to being

seated while we ate, he would have wanted us to be free of external distractions. That would mean eating your meal without talking on the phone, surfing the internet, eating at your desk at work or any of the other distractions people engage in while they eat.

Consider doing the following within the next week. Prepare your meal and bring all the food to the table. Turn off all electrical devices so there is no multitasking on any level. You might even be adventurous and turn out the lights and eat by candlelight. Eat slowly, savoring every mouthful. Pay attention to the appearance of the food, its' texture and aroma. You'll never want to eat and multitask again.

He should not eat all that the palate desires like a dog or a donkey. Rather he should eat what is beneficial to the body...He should not eat what is harmful to the body even though it is sweet to the palate.” (Hilchos Deot 3:2)

The last sentence of Maimonides should be a wake up call to any American who overly consumes sugar; which according to researchers at Emory University includes almost everyone. In a recent study of 6100 Americans, they found that on average, table sugar usage and consumption of sugar in processed foods equaled 21.4 teaspoons of added sugar per day per person. That is like sitting down at the table and eating almost a half a cup of sugar per day. Beyond the threat of obesity and diabetes, the researchers found that people with a higher intake of added sugar had a correspondingly increase in cholesterol levels.

Just because candy or cakes or prepared foods are marked as kosher doesn't mean we should feel free to consume them. Much of the sugar Americans consume is hidden in prepared and fast foods in the form of corn syrup and other additives. As the Rambam says we are higher than donkeys and dogs. We have the ability to discriminate when it comes to food and the ability to say no to foods that though attractive to the palate are harmful.

“He should not eat until he has taken a stroll which is sufficient to raise his body temperature. Alternatively, he should work or exert himself in some other way.” (Hilchos Deot 4:2)

It is clear from the Rambam's words that aerobic exercise should be a daily requirement since he relates it to eating which is a daily action. This is in total alignment with the US Department of Health which in 2005 said that “at least 30 minutes of daily physical activity is required in order to reduce the risk of chronic disease in adulthood.” The government felt that following this exercise regimen would help establish a healthy weight. Added benefits would include lowering the risks of cardiovascular illness, osteoporosis, diabetes and hypertension.

The Unwritten Rambam

By the unwritten Rambam I'm referring to concepts which probably would have been advocated by him although they are not found in his writings. Let's look the Rambam

from an historical perspective. He was a man who lived almost 1000 years ago in medieval times. As such, I believe we can make the following assumptions about the food the Rambam ate:

- The food was organic.
- The food was pesticide free.
- The food was locally grown within a 100 mile radius.
- Foods were only eaten during their growing season.

We would be wise to follow these “unwritten” food guidelines. By eating organic and pesticide free foods we are insuring that we do not ingest harmful and often dangerous chemicals. Our food is not farm fresh when it is being shipped 1000’s of miles to get to our table. In most cases fruits and vegetables are picked at an unripe stage and then more dangerous chemicals are used to artificially ripen them. By eating what is in season you will avoid food that have been shipped long distances, and save money too.

Kosher and Conscious Too

By following the advice of the Rambam you are on your way to better health. Of course we want to eat kosher, because G-d told us to do so. We also want to eat consciously because we strive to eat in order to live as opposed to living in order to eat. When you become more conscious of what and how you eat, you begin to become more a conscious person in many other areas of your life. Food is a good place to begin your journey of personal transformation.

As a certified life coach, I am available to help you with your health, dietary and personal issues. Check out my website www.raisethesparks.com to learn more. You will also find additional articles to help in your personal transformation as well as upcoming events. Please feel free to share this newsletter with others. You can place someone’s name on our e-mail list by sending their address to moshek@aol.com Once we receive it we will make sure they receive all of our future mailings. Feel free to e-mail me via the contact button on my webpage with any comments or questions.

Yours in peace,
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