



You Are What You Think

In Parshas Shemini, the Torah outlines the various animals, birds, and fish that are allowed or prohibited for consumption. The Torah articulates the rationale for abstaining from certain foods with the phrases, 'do not defile yourself' and 'do not make yourself detestable.' In contrast, it instructs regarding the permissible species, stating, 'and you shall sanctify yourself.' This admonition from Hashem to His beloved people underscores the principle that one's diet influences a person's spiritual well-being. Moreover, our sages indicate that consuming forbidden foods results in a spiritual impediment that obstructs the heart, making it more challenging for an individual to connect with G-d.

Eating is certainly a source of pleasure; however, like most forms of gratification, it is inherently temporary. A sumptuous meal or a delectable dessert is only savored in the present. Nonetheless, the Torah tells us that the food a person eats affects an individual. The thoughts and images that populate a person's consciousness create an even more lasting effect. The ideas that occupy one's mind become part of the person's psychological identity. Although thoughts are often fleeting, when they receive focus and intensity, they wield the power to dramatically steer and control the course of a person's life.

Declining Confidence

Informal research suggests that as children mature, their self-confidence frequently decreases. Preschoolers are usually enthusiastic about sharing their talents, such as drawing or singing, in front of others. Yet, as they advance through the school system, this initial enthusiasm and confidence tend to decline. This phenomenon raises important questions about the underlying factors contributing to this shift in self-esteem among children.

Sadly, those closest to them are often the ones at fault. The expectations imposed by educators, guardians, and peers frequently convey detrimental messages about their skills and potential. While many of these remarks may be well-meaning, they inadvertently erode the natural confidence that children inherently possess. In our enthusiasm to guide them towards their best selves, they frequently absorb the idea that 'this' is acceptable, yet it could be improved. Each instance of this message reinforces a belief within them that they are not measuring up or are lacking. This message continues to replay in their thoughts until they become convinced of their lack of ability and feel inadequate in meeting expectations. Unfortunately, this message can continue into adulthood and remain with a person throughout their life.

Changing the Trend

The reality of life is that every person has unique strengths and abilities. Not every individual who wields a paintbrush will achieve the level of Picasso, nor will all who swing a bat attain the legendary status of Babe Ruth. Each person is endowed with distinct talents and skills. Many



individuals forgo their ambitions or refrain from starting new endeavors out of fear that they may not achieve total success.

This attitude can and should be revised. Rabbi Yisachar Frand, at the 13th Siyum Hashas, famously stated, 'Perfect is the enemy of good.' Children who are encouraged to explore new opportunities and take part in a range of activities and are allowed to express their abilities in multiple ways will sustain their passion and confidence. The internal dialogue they cultivate will convey that perfection is not a prerequisite for success. They can shine in their unique fashion, acknowledging their talents and circumstances. When this message is absorbed during an individual's formative years, it facilitates the development of a positive self-image, which is essential for success in all areas of life.

Check your Messages

A person may wonder, 'As an adult, does this mean it is too late for me?' The answer is an emphatic no! Individuals continuously engage in internal dialogues, and while it requires effort and commitment, it is achievable. Concentrate on the positive elements of actions already undertaken. Develop a mantra that emphasizes 'doing your best' instead of striving for perfection. Each improvement over previous efforts constitutes a success. A wise individual once stated, 'A person's existence is summarized on their tombstone, Year X – Year X; the years are less significant than the deeds accomplished during the dash.'

The Torah emphasizes the importance of being careful about the foods one consumes, which, while temporary, can have significant long-term effects on the individual. Thus, it follows that it is even more essential for a person to critically evaluate the internal narratives they embrace, ensuring these are 'Kosher' and advantageous. Life is, in essence, a journey, and our self-image profoundly influences the course we take. Embrace great thoughts, and you will be great.

Have a wonderful Shabbos

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