EAT AND BE SATISFIED
Rabbi Anonymous
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The very first sin in the bible involves food; Adam eats an apple that is not on his diet and our people have had problems with food ever since. Think about what this says about Judaism, our first rebellion, first act of defiance of God's commandments is not an act of murder, or sex or stealing fire or creating knowledge as with other cultures and religions. Of all the possibilities what did Jewish culture choose as the symbol of asserting our autonomy? We broke our diet, we ate forbidden fruit and for this act of compulsive eating Adam & Eve are punished.

A short explanation of Jewish holidays goes, "They tried to get us, God rescued us, lets eat." I don't mean to mock the importance of food in Jewish life, but I do mean to point out just how much a part of Jewish life it actually is. Food serves as the conduit for our memories of family, childhood and community. Remembered foods open up the floodgates of the past, as we describe in exquisite detail how Bubbie used to make her chopped liver for Passover – we recall the people around the table, the sights, sounds and smells. Food transports us; it comforts us in times of sorrow and helps us celebrate the joys of life. Our tradition teaches that food contains within it manifestations of holiness and the Torah commands that human beings should not only eat but should eat and be happy. *Vahalta v'svachta* we sing at the end of a meal, we ate and we are satisfied.

But some of us eat and we are never satisfied. Some are full but still feel empty. There are three types of hunger in the world, physical hunger, emotional hunger and spiritual hunger. We eat because of each of them, but only one can be solved with food. People eat compulsively, because they do not feel inner joy. They are trying to fill with food the emptiness they feel inside.

Around the time of the High Holy Days last year people I cared about and who clearly cared about me brought up the subject of my weight and offered me a hand out of the hole I was digging for myself with a knife and fork. In the biblical tradition of *Tochecha* (giving a rebuke) they spoke with me honestly and lovingly about my weight and their concern for my well being. I pushed back for sure, but to their credit they didn't love me less because I was stubborn – they loved me more and the chorus for change grew louder.

At the lowest moments in our lives we pray to hear God's voice but what we so often fail to realize is that God is already talking to us through the people that love and care about us. Those friends and family, who have our best interests at heart, tell us the harsh truths that we need to hear but so rarely listen to. God works through them. *'lo bashamayim he'* the Torah tells us, the voice doesn't

come from the heavens, it comes from the people in our lives who care about us so much so that they are willing to risk our anger or resentment in order to help us.

Their love and concern led me on a path to recovery and wholeness. Over this past year I joined a 12-step program for food addiction and have lost more than 100 pounds and added years to my life. My family, friends and doctors are amazed – though not nearly as much as I am myself. It is a daily struggle, you are never cured from addiction and compulsive behaviors – but you can through prayer and structure arrest the behavior and learn to live with your disease a day at a time. But far more than the weight that I lost it is the insight I have gained that has changed my life. I've learned in recovery that strength comes from our weaknesses, when we are aware of our weaknesses we can grow strong in the face of them.

Our Rabbis teach that if you are going in one direction your whole life and you want to change course all you have to do is take a step in the other direction. To turn around. That is the essence of *T'shuvah* (Repentance) and of 12-step recovery. We begin by examining our path in life and making the necessary adjustments so that the course we take leads us closer to the person we were created to be. For some it may take 12 steps, for others just a few. But for each of us the first step is to look in the mirror and be honest with the person we see there.