

Parashat Chukat

Does Juice-Fasting Help Maintain Health and Alleviate Cravings?

In Defense of My Annual Juice Fast

I'm on my 6th day of my annual juice-fast, going strong. Every summer when the apples begin to ripen on our trees, I know it is my time for internal cleanse. Not long ago, we scrubbed our home inside and out. Now, it is time to tend to our body. Why do I spend money and effort on organic produce with so much of my precious time going into preparing veggies and fruits and pushing them through the juicer? Then, comes the hardest part. At the end of the day, I stand fretting over my kitchen sink, cleaning all the small pieces of my twin-gear juicer and the spurts of juice and veggie scraps sticking to the kitchen-cabinet doors. Why do I go to bed on a nearly empty stomach, withstanding temptation for even the smallest bite? My husband, the MD doctor, doesn't believe in what I'm doing. He thinks it all a waste of time, effort and money. At this point, upon my earnest request, we avoid discussing the issue. He quietly withholds expressing his disapproval, since a supportive environment is important for success. The reason I'm so determined to exert myself every summer is to maintain my health and alleviate cravings. What's so healthy about juice fasting? Some people call juice-fasting 'the biggest scam in the fitness industry.' Their main argument is that there is no scientific research proving its effectiveness. They believe that it is impossible to detoxify the body, because the digestive system already eliminates waste material and bacteria from the small intestines and colon. Therefore, no fecal matter sticks to the sides of the intestinal wall. However, anyone who has tried a colonic (colon hydrotherapy) can testify otherwise. No scientific proof is needed after seeing with your own eyes what emerges from your colon, even after having consumed no food for days or weeks. My hydro-therapist, Marina, shared the story of one of her clients, a famous professor of medicine who needed a liver transplant. His doctor, who happened to be Marina's client, recommended a liver cleanse and a colonic as a preparation for the transplant. At first, the MD professor was, needless to say, extremely skeptical. But when he experienced the amount of fecal matter, visible through the transparent tube, emerging from his supposedly self-cleaning colon, he was dumbfounded.

Why Would Your Colon be 'Self-Cleaning' If Your Mouth is Not?

As I clean my juicer from all the plant material sticking to its various parts, I am reminded of the digestive system of the body. Food enters the top and waste material exits the bottom. Just as eating too much or the wrong foods can cause constipation, also when you put in a lot of veggies, especially soft ones like tomatoes, the juicer can get clogged up, and then needs to be cleaned out, before putting in any additional produce. If you want to argue that the human body is more sophisticated than an electric appliance, then just recall the last time you went to your dental hygienist. Did she not remove specks of plaque or tartar from your mouth? Why would your colon be 'self-cleaning' if your mouth is not? As for scientific proof, it is known that scientific research is undertaken by the medical establishment, which apparently has not yet been sufficiently motivated to carry out such a study. Nevertheless, it is possible to find scientific research proving the effectiveness of colon hydrotherapy. For example, surgeon Zhao Fa, Guo Linli, concludes from a 98% success rate in a case study of 690 patients that colon hydrotherapy is more effective in cleansing the large bowel than the use of either oral mannitol or magnesium sulfate. (*Colon*

Hydrotherapy for Pre-endoscopy preparation Hebei Medical Journal, Dec 2004, Vol 25, No. 12). The reason why keeping our colon clean, especially in our generation, is so vital for maintaining our health, is that more plaque builds up on our bowel due to the prevalent unhealthy SAD diet. Toxins from processed/refined foods (artificial food additives, preservatives, chemicals, etc.), and the polluted environment may clog our digestive system causing diseases and inflammation. Furthermore, constipation among kids is a growing problem because of the junk foods they consume.

The Israelites Derided the Most Wholesome Food in the World

The human tendency to reject a wholesome and healthy lifestyle goes all the way back to Biblical times. The healthiest and purest food ever in existence is the manna that the Israelites consumed during their 40-year desert wandering. Manna, like the fruits of Eden, is a form of supernal light. It included no mixture of evil (since no evil descends from Heaven) and therefore, contained no waste. Every spark of it was completely absorbed by the body (Rabbi Chaim of Vollozin, *Ruach Chayim, Pirkei Avot* 3). Yet, the Israelites rejected this superior food, in their desire to fulfill their cravings:

ספר במדבר פרק כא (ה) וַיְדַבֵּר הָעָם בְּאֵלֵהִים וּבַמֹּשֶׁה לֵמָּה הֶעֱלִיתָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם לָמוּת בַּמִּדְבָּר כִּי אֵין לָחֶם וְאֵין מַיִם וּנְפָשׁוּנוּ קָצָה בְּלֶחֶם הַקֶּלֶקֶל:

“The people spoke against G-d and against Moshe, ‘Why did you make us leave Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread and no water, and we have come to loathe this light food’”

(*Bamidbar* 21:5).

The children of Israel craved heavy, material food that would give them a sense of greater physical satisfaction than they experienced when consuming the very light and spiritual sustenance of the manna. They didn’t care that the manna supplied them with all their nutritional and even spiritual needs. All they wanted was to fill their stomachs with something more substantial, even if the body wouldn’t absorb it completely. As a punishment for rejecting the pure manna, Hashem sent them the plague of the poisonous, impure serpents (*Bamidbar* 21:6-7).

Why is it so Hard to Overcome Cravings?

I identify with the common craving for comfort foods, so widespread today. Our brain, which works unconsciously in accord with stimulus and response, so often causes us to eat things we know we shouldn’t. A vicious circle is caused by overeating and snacking. This dysregulates our leptin and insulin levels, causing fluctuations of the blood sugar, which in turn triggers more food cravings. Moreover, carbohydrates and sugar increase the release of serotonin which provides a quick energy fix. When our blood-sugar levels bounce back and become low, we go for the sugar. Since 90% of serotonin is produced in the gut, a healthy colon cleansed from toxins and parasites is vital for overcoming food cravings. Many people testify to passing worms when juice fasting. We all have a very diverse community of microbes in the gut. They have one primary goal: survival (their own and not necessarily ours). Different species prefer different nutrients. Some like sugar, while others prefer fat. Rather than just passively living off whatever comes their way, they release certain chemicals, which induce specific cravings.

Killing Our Cravings

In order to live a true Torah life, we need to eradicate the physical cravings which prevent us from serving Hashem with our entire being. *Parashat Chukat* teaches that in order for our Torah to endure, we need to work on overcoming desires for anything other than the Torah.

ספר במדבר פרק יט (יד) זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל...

“This is the Torah law, when a person dies in the tent...” (*Bamidbar* 19:14).

Our sages read this Torah verse as follows, “This is the Torah of a person, when he dies in the tent.” The ‘tent’ is a metaphor for Torah. Thus, the verse can be understood to mean that in order for a person’s Torah to endure, he has to be willing to die for it (*Babylonian Talmud, Berachot* 63b). What does this mean on a practical level for people who do not risk their life for the sake of keeping the Torah? We must be willing to “die for Torah” on a smaller scale by renouncing anything that pulls us away from the Torah. Certainly, giving into our cravings and overeating, pulls us away from the Torah way. Therefore, if juice fasting followed by colonics eradicates craving-causing parasites from the gut, it certainly helps us live a better Torah life. Perhaps, we may even venture to say that the self-discipline and abnegation entailed by juice fasting for the sake of killing our cravings is a way of “dying for the Torah.”