

Do not make your souls abominable by means of any teeming thing; do not contaminate yourselves through them lest you become contaminated through them. (11:43)

Through the vehicle of a number of *mitzvos*, the Torah exhorts us to distance ourselves from prohibited foods. The prohibitions come in various forms: Some foods have once been kosher/appropriate for eating until they contracted a form of *tumah*, ritual contamination, rendering them spiritually unsuitable for Jewish consumption. *Neveilah* is a dead carcass, which has not been ritually slaughtered, rendering it unkosher, so that it is *tamei*, unclean. *Sheratzim*, creeping creatures, in various sizes and physical build, may not be eaten. Bugs and insects, both land and water based, are restricted from Jewish consumption. They are all included under the rubric of *maacholos asuros*, prohibited foods. The Torah concludes these laws with the admonishment: *V'nitmeisem bam*, "Lest you become contaminated through them." *Rashi* quotes *Chazal* (*Yoma* 39a): "If you contaminate yourself by eating forbidden foods in this world, I will render you *tamei*, contaminated, in *Olam Habba*, the World to Come." Frightening. It is as if one who eats forbidden foods become what he eats. It transforms his spiritual makeup.

Consuming prohibited foods dulls one's spiritual potential. A Jew is initially holy, and his mission in life is to continue sanctifying himself, so that he is worthy of a "seat at the table," a place in the World-to-Come. Hashem is holy. He is our Creator and Heavenly Father. What father does not want his son to follow in his footsteps?

Sadly, despite all the opportunities available to sustain *kashrus* observance, it is still a challenge for many people who simply do not understand the significance of *kashrus* or why a Jew must sanctify himself and maintain himself on a level of *kedushah*, holiness. For a Jew, being good, moral, ethical is not sufficient. He must be *kadosh*, strive to be holy.

A teenager fell in with the wrong crowd. His friends convinced him that the life of a Torah Jew is archaic and out of touch with the world. Life is all about fun – the more fun, the more life. To live life in the fast lane without "speed limits" requires money, considerable amounts of money. Unless one is born into money, or has a very good source of income, lots of money (especially for a teenager) cannot be obtained legally. As a result, Shimon (the teenager's name) resorted to a life of crime. Thus, in addition to rebelling against Hashem, he turned his back and sinned against his fellow Jews. Stealing and drugs – both using and dealing-became a way of life.

The youth had not always been like this. Growing up in a *frum*, observant, home, where Torah study and *mitzvah* observance were paramount, he was, at first, no different than his siblings. It was when he fell under the influence of a boy in his class (a boy who was sorting out his own family issues), that Shimon began to descend to the spiritual nadir of depravity. It all came to a halt when a policeman caught up with him, arrested him, and availed him of a prison cell in exchange for his nice room at home.

Prior to standing before the judge for sentencing, he met with a prominent psychologist to discuss his fate. The psychologist felt that Shimon had always been a nice boy until he had fallen into a funk and sought the comradeship of others who did not have – or adhere to – his way of life. He ended up falling under their influence and here we are today; deciding how and where he will spend the next few years of his life. It was the judge's feeling that Shimon had two opportunities for rehabilitation: prison; or a working *kibbutz* where the discipline is strong and responsibilities are demanding. There is one major difference between the two: In prison, he would be permitted to eat kosher food. The downside is the clientele with whom he would be consorting 24/7: prisoners, offenders, felons and worse. The *kibbutz* would provide him with a far better selection of friends, but kosher food would not be available.

Obviously, this was a non-observant *kibbutz* where *kashrus* observance was anathema. What would it be: *Kashrus* or total exposure to the dregs of society?

The parents asked *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, for a *halachic* ruling in the matter. *Horav Yitzchak, Shlita*, deferred to his father-in-law, *Horav Yosef Shalom Eliyashiv, zl*, who rendered his decision: return to prison. He explained that it is forbidden to feed non-kosher food even to a child. To place this boy in a non-*frum kibbutz* that does not ascribe to the laws of *kashrus* is similar to feeding him non-kosher food. While it is true that in prison he would be exposed to degenerates and other dregs of society where he may pick up more unsavory ways of living, it is something that he would do on his own. If he goes to the *Kibbutz*, we would be feeding him non-kosher food.

Second, living in the *kibbutz* with people who, for the most part, maintain ethical, cultured behavior, the boy might become like them and be led to believe that he is fine, that he is lacking nothing as a Jew. Under such circumstances, he would have little likelihood that he would ever do *teshuvah*, repent, his past/present way of life. If he were to go to prison, however, he will realize that, at best, he will become a model prisoner – but a prisoner nonetheless. If he wants to achieve more and better, he would have to repent. Imagine, this boy had fallen so much that prison for him was the best chance of rehabilitation. How careful we must be concerning the friends with whom our children socialize. One unsavory friend can destroy a budding future. Children are not experienced in discerning good from bad; parents, however, should be. It is their responsibility to monitor their children's relationships. While they might offend someone now – they could be saving their child's future.