

Guilty Pleasures

I love junk food. The sensation of biting into a warm, freshly baked, chewy chocolate chip or peanut butter cookie is ecstasy for me. The way the dough just melts in my mouth leaves me craving another bite. And then there is the crunch of a perfectly fried French fry, dipped into any of a multitude of sauces. Or a nice, juicy hamburger with a perfectly grilled bun and onions grilled just right on top. If I'm having a bad day, just put any one of these foods in front of me and my day will instantly improve. I'm certain that we all have our comfort foods, drinks or activities, the "go to" vice after a long hard day when everything seems to be depending on you.

As with everything in life, moderation is key. If you have everything in moderation, there will be no problems. A recent study by Health Magazine lists 10 common vices that Americans have and how each one is actually good for you . . . in moderation. Drinking a glass of wine, eating a piece of chocolate, sleeping in, playing hooky, massages, coffee, full fat dressing, gender-specific nights out, and more were found to have a positive effect on daily living, when used in moderation.

This week we read *parshat Noach*, which tells of the evil impulses running rampant in society, Noah's building of the Ark, a covenant with God through a rainbow and the building of a tower to approach God. Noah is the man in charge. He receives God's call to build the Ark and the call to put his family and pairs of animals on this Ark. And, when the flood waters have subsided, he is supposed to regenerate the earth and be in covenant with God. One can imagine this to do list and the weight of responsibility here sitting heavily on Noah's shoulders.

But even though Noah is chosen for the job, he isn't perfect. Noah has his vices as well. The text teaches us that Noah, as he came out of the Ark, was not only the father of three sons, and not only the one responsible for accepting the covenant with God, but Noah was also the first to plant a vineyard. We learn in chapter 9, verses 20-21 that "He [Noah] drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent." Noah was a man who enjoyed a nice glass of wine after a rough day, but in this instance, he over indulged. Perhaps Noah found himself alone or burdened with guilt that he survived the flood. Whatever the case may be, Noah turns to wine and in turn is discovered by his sons, leading them to act immorally and cause shame not only to themselves, but to Noah as well.

Moderation. The *Torah* teaches us that there is always a need for balance. When the people are behaving only on the side of evil, God wipes them out, working to start over again. And when the people build a tower to reach God, they are reminded that there is a difference between belief in God and wanting to be God. Here too, while perhaps a moment late, Noah learns that a little wine is acceptable, while too much causes problems.

Judaism is a religion that appreciates celebration and marks time with pleasurable things: delicious cakes for the holidays, a sip of wine for *Kiddush*, making a *l'chaim* at a momentous occasion. But, each of these is also marked with community, family and moderation. We can have as many pieces of apples and honey and cake at *Rosh HaShannah* as we want, as long as we endure the eight days of *matzah* later on. Let us work to find and maintain the balance in our lives so that our joyous times are distinguished from our tougher times, making both that much more meaningful.

ללמוד To Learn: ללמד To Teach: We all struggle with finding the balance between our daily lives, family, technology and a myriad of other things. Think about your own life and where you'd like to achieve greater balance. If you're thinking about balancing *mitzvot*, consider It's a Mitzvah by Rabbi

Bradley Shavit Artson. If you're looking for balance in meditation or time to cool down, try [The Busy Soul: Ten-Minute Spiritual Workouts from Jewish Tradition](#) by Rabbi Terry Bookman. If you're looking for time management, try [7 Habits of Highly Effective People](#) by Stephen Covey (He also has a version for teens).

לשמור To Keep: לעשות To Do: Balance is often about knowing your limits. If you're feeling off kilter in your home, or notice your kids slipping towards one extreme, sit down together and discuss this. What does a balanced day look like? How do you achieve balance in your own family life? The best way to teach moderation and balance to our kids is to model it ourselves.