

**Sermon/Drasha Parshas Matos-Masei "What's your Favorite Ice Cream Flavor?"
Rabbi Ze'ev Smason, NHBZ 7/6/2013**

Are you irritable, pessimistic and suffering from low self-esteem? Chances are, you might like strawberry ice cream. Are you're aggressive when it comes to playing sports, and an orderly perfectionist who never breaks the rules? You very well may be a butter pecan fan.

Maybe you can't judge a book by its cover, but your favorite ice cream speaks volumes about you - at least if you believe a study by Chicago's Smell & Taste Treatment and Research Foundation. "It was amazing to discover how distinct personalities corresponded with ice cream flavors,"; said Dr. Alan Hirsch, the neurologist who conducted the study. "If your spouse suddenly switches flavors, I'd watch out."

The study -- commissioned by Edy's Grand Ice Cream -- is a serious report with scientific validity. The goal was to determine how ice cream preferences relate to personality. And since we all like ice cream-- right? -- there's something in this study for all of us.

-- If your favorite flavor is chocolate, you are lively, creative, dramatic, charming, enthusiastic, and the life of the party.

-- If you like vanilla, you are a colorful, impulsive risk taker who sets high goals and has high expectations of yourself. You also enjoy close family relationships.

-- If you like strawberry ...you don't really want to know any more than what I've told you!

-- Anyone out there whose favorite is chocolate chip? If so, I want you on my team! You are generous, competitive and accomplished. You are charming in social situations, ambitious and competent. A visionary, a conqueror, and a persistent, determined go-getter, intolerant of defeat.

So -- what's the point of all this ice cream-ology? No one should think that you can make yourself a better or worse person simply by switching your favorite flavor of ice cream -- though it might be nice if it were that easy. But if we're to believe what the good Dr. Hirsch says, there's a lot to be admired in our chocolate-chip ice cream loving friends; they're leaders and high achievers who owe their success in life to determination and persistence.

A story is told about former NFL halfback, George Cafego, during the early days of pro football. Playing for the old Brooklyn football team against the New York Giants, one

day Cafego brought the ball up field practically by himself. Just before the half ended, he broke away over left tackle.

First one man hit him, then another. But Cafego kept going. Finally, about five Giants ganged up on him, and he still plowed goalward. At last he got tackled and fell down over the goal line -- just as the timer's gun exploded.

"My gosh!" a spectator shouted. "They had to shoot him to stop him!"

John D. Rockefeller said

I don't think there's any other quality so essential to success of any kind as the quality of perseverance. It overcomes almost everything, even nature.

Determination and persistence are invaluable qualities for achieving the most in life. And it's these qualities that take center stage as we approach the 9 Days and Tisha B'Av.

Rabbi Norman Lamm, chancellor of Yeshiva University, said, "Ours is an age which has forgotten how to cry."

In a sermon given on Rosh Hashana called "Three Who Cried", Rabbi Lamm spoke of three types of tears. First, tears that come when our myths of absolute security and certainty are shattered. Second, tears of those who resign themselves to hopelessness. And third, tears of those who cry over reality; not tears of frustration or resignation, but from a determination to change and renew that reality.

'Jewish crying' fits the last of these categories. The act of crying that is the beginning of transformation -- the tears of protest, resolute purpose, and determination. *Eicha* (The Book of Lamentations, read on Tisha B'Av) returns to the motif of crying again and again. Our crying in *Eicha* expresses, "We won't give up! We won't capitulate or allow ourselves to be broken!"

Shiv Khera, author of "You Can Win," writes that failures most often occur for several reasons -- one of which is a lack of persistence and determination.

More people fail not because they lack knowledge or talent, but just because they quit. It is important to remember two words: persistence and resistance. Persist in what must be done and resist what ought not to be done. We all have had setbacks in life. Failing does not mean we are failures!

The persistence that is needed is like the sign on a certain long-established dry cleaning store: "Thirty-eight years on the same spot"

Three facets of determination and persistence come to mind in seeking to integrate these qualities in our lives. First is understanding that achieving your dreams requires hard work.

A woman came running up to famous pianist Arthur Rubenstein after he'd finished another brilliant concert. "Oh, Mr. Rubenstein!" she said, "I'd give anything to be able to play the piano like you do!" Rubenstein replied, "No you wouldn't, because you didn't!"

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (2:20) teaches:

"Rabbi Tarfon said, the day is short, the work is great, the workers are lazy, the reward is great, and the Master of the house presses."

The day is short. In the Jewish world there exists a long-standing custom of giving a gold watch to a groom. The concept behind this custom is that when a young man has the responsibility of a family, it's imperative that he realize that time is more precious than gold.

The work is great. The Torah is endlessly deep. There always exists additional *chesed* (acts of loving kindness) to perform. We can never see ourselves as being perfect.

The workers are lazy: The soul wants greatness, but the body desires the couch.

The reward is great. Why is there no reward for *mitzvos* in this world? Imagine a lottery winner trying to cash his \$200 million check in a small, rural bank. He would be told, "I'm sorry, we just don't have enough cash on hand to cash a check for that amount." There is no currency in this world that can possibly pay the reward for a single *mitzvah*.

The Boss is insistent. If we had a Boss who didn't care when we finished -- or if we had unlimited time to do the job -- or if we felt we weren't being paid enough -- or if we're not sure we'll receive our salary -- then perhaps some degree of sluggishness would be warranted. But the Boss is insistent, and we have no right to be lazy.

Achieving your dreams requires hard work, determination and persistence. Are you giving your most important aspirations the time and energy they deserve?

A second facet of determination and persistence is to consider whether you are living life reactively, waiting for someone else to make the decisions, looking for some exterior sign, hoping for the "perfect time"?

Two construction workers were sitting on a building site in their lunch time. As they

opened their lunch boxes, Joe said to Bill, 'Yuk, peanut butter sandwiches again! I swear if I have the same sandwich for lunch tomorrow I'll jump off the top of that crane!', pointing to a large 20ft high crane on the building site. This same scenario repeated itself each day; Joe would open his lunch pail, and complain to Bill about the peanut butter sandwich.

Several weeks of Joe's complaints reached a breaking point: Finally one day at the lunch break, Bill said, "Joe -- every day for the past two weeks you've been complaining about your lunch. If you so dislike peanut butter sandwiches, why does your wife keep making them? Joe said, "Bill, leave my wife out of this -- I make my own sandwiches!"

Some pain in life can be attributed to circumstances beyond our control. But a sizable amount of our suffering is the result of self-inflicted wounds -- our mistakes of commission, and our mistakes of omission.

A high school math instructor once issued this challenge at a school assembly: "I hope you all fail." These surprising words were then explained: "Because if you don't, you haven't set your goals high enough."

You can get by without setting goals. Most people do. They fall into a routine and inertia carries them through life. They never suffer great disappointments in their work, but they never get very far along the career path either. Then, before you know it, it's all over, and they realize that they could have accomplished so much more if only they had been willing to risk failure. Getting by without setting goals is the ultimate form of self-delusion. It is a guaranteed way for people to achieve failure without ever having to admit it to themselves.

It takes determination and persistence to set goals and follow through.

The Chofetz Chaim zt"l wrote the Mishna Berurah over the course of twenty-five years - during this time he suffered many tribulations which hindered the writing of the sefer. Rashi wrote his voluminous commentaries on the Torah, Prophets, Writings and Talmud while living through the Crusader Era in 11th century France.

Don't be reactive: Take charge of your life by making ambitious goals, and following through.

Third and finally, we must fight to keep unimportant distractions from ruining our sense of determination.

To protect our self-esteem, psychologists have found that people use all sorts of self-handicapping strategies:

- Not trying very hard.
- Procrastination.

- Listening to music or using another type of distraction.
- Drinking alcohol and taking drugs.

The beauty of not trying too hard is that, should we fail, we can always say that it doesn't reflect our ability. In some ways it's a rational strategy. If you succeed you look especially gifted, if not then your excuse is already there. And we also sabotage ourselves by, at time, setting unrealistic goals.

We're often like the lady who stepped into an elevator and told the young man who operated it: "11th floor, please." The young man asked politely, "Whom did you wish to see on the 11th floor?" She snapped back, "That's none of your business, young man." "I'm not being nosy, ma'am, it's just that this building only has eight floors."

In conclusion:

There are four kinds of people. First are the cop-outs. These people set no goals and make no decisions.

Second are the hold-outs. They have a beautiful dream, but they're afraid to respond to its challenge because they aren't sure they can make it.

Third are the drop-outs. They start to make their dream come true. They know their role. They set their goals, but when the going gets tough, they quit.

Finally, there are the all-outs. They are the people who know their role. They want and need and are going to be stars — star students, star parents, star waitresses. They want to shine out as an inspiration to others. They set their goals. The all-outs never quit. They're committed.

Be determined and persistent by working hard, setting goals and avoiding distractions. And one day, you too may enjoy chocolate-chip ice cream as your favorite flavor!