



## HEART ATTACK ON A PLATE

Dear Esther,

*I need help! I grew up with a mother who led a pretty unhealthy lifestyle. A few years ago, my mother became a health and exercise nut, and she is all in on her newfound commitment to wholesome living. Her middle-aged paunch is gone, her health problems have baruch Hashem disappeared, and she is an inspiring role model to my siblings and me. I am really happy for her and while I appreciate and admire her radical eating habits and regimented exercise routines, I have yet to adopt them myself.*

*I spent my childhood years watching my mother finish off boxes of ice cream late at night. We were served cereal (white flour, sugar) and milk (from a cow!) for breakfast, and pizza or hotdogs for dinner. Screens were our babysitters, and my mother used our love of Uncle Moishy videos as an opportunity to make an uninterrupted phone call to her sister or to read the Nshei. We seldom biked, we never hiked, and walks were to shul and back on Shabbos. Now, as a young mother, though my habits are not as unhealthy as my mother's were when she was my age, I am not on par with my mother's golden-age lifestyle (yet).*

*My kids and I have taken baby steps towards healthier living. We make fruit smoothies every morning and I try to make wholesome dinners most nights. My pantry is empty of sugary snacks and candies, and we spend a lot of time outdoors. Still, I do bake cakes, my kids do watch Uncle Moishy, and I can be found vegging on my couch being shamelessly unproductive.*

*Now here's my issue: My mother visits us often, which I am so grateful for. Baruch Hashem, we all enjoy her visits. When she comes, I cook all the healthiest recipes I know of,*

*especially for her. Even if I am hosting a Shabbos dinner for 30 carnivorous yeshiva bachurim, I will make my mother her own special meal that is organic and vegan, so her extra-sensitive digestive system is not offended by Duncan Hines brownies and red meat.*

*With a personalized main course perfectly arranged in front of her, my mother will eye a platter of meat coming out to serve the table and mutter to me, "Heart attack on a plate!" And when a second platter of chicken appears (it's 30 yeshiva bachurim!) she will roll her eyes and sigh, "Do you really need both?"*

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*When it is finally time for the embarrassingly-high-sugar-content dessert, there is my mother again, mouthing, "Root of all evil," like a health freak fanatic preacher.*

*She comments on how much time my kids spend on electronics and how little time they spend being active.*

*I love my mother, but I do not love her vocally critical and judgmental attitudes in my home. Esther, what do I do?*

*Signed,  
At Times Binging, At Times Cringing,  
From My Mother*



Dear At Times,

It is completely natural for a child to be hypersensitive to the words, looks, and attitudes coming from a parent. Even when we are all grown up, one critical glance from Mother can send us into a spiral of self-doubt. It can take years to become a confident adult who, rather than cowering from a perceived criticism, can examine and consider it.

Your parents love you, as you love your children, and want only the best for you. Sometimes they see things that you do not see and can't help trying to help you. Be open to hearing them and allowing their wisdom to guide you. It's up to us to see the pure motives behind the sometimes-offensive words our parents use. Accept the love and leave the offenses behind. When your mother makes a judgmental comment about your food or parenting, hear it for what it actually is: an expression of love and concern, and respond accordingly. "Thank you, Mommy, for looking out for me!" Consider her words thoughtfully and then choose what to do with them.

As I read your letter, I wondered if your mother's comments at the table are being said in such a way that most people at the table chuckle at her wry observations but continue to indulge in their double heart attacks and roots of all evil, unperturbed. Your kids may also be unbothered by Bubby announcing GET OFF THE SCREENS AND GET OUTSIDE. You are bothered by your mother's comments, because you feel judged when in fact, she is not judging you, she is judging the food and the screens as bad ideas.

When you recognize that your mother cannot stop being your mother, and so at times she may fail to control her motherly urge to help and protect you, you'll be able to see her critical comments for what they are: motherhood.

A note to all parents: Modeling is the most effective tool for influencing our children. The writer of this letter shared that she is inspired by her mother's journey, not by her critical comments, and because of her mother's healthy lifestyle that led to obvious positive results, she implemented healthier habits in her own home. Her mother's critical comments did not lead her to Whole Foods or the gym, they led her to me. Let go of the criticism and judgments (children of any age see criticism as a personal attack) and just be the way you want your children to be.

**Signed,  
Esther Etiquette**



*Chana Kornfeld, the creator and writer of Esther Etiquette (arguably our most popular column since its inception in 2011), lives in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, but was raised in Atlanta, Georgia, below the Mason-Dixon line, where good manners are taken as seriously as fried food. Chana was raised by parents and grandparents who taught her that derech erez kadmah laTorah: First, be a mentsch.*

## **Batya Lerner, D.D.S F.A.G.D Aron Gamss, D.D.S**

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