

Eating: Elevation & Connection

Parasha Shemini

1 Vayikra - ch. 9 - Artzwell Sfar Chumash - pg. 591

²² Aaron raised his hands toward the people and blessed them; then he descended from having performed the sin-offering, the elevation-offering, and the peace-offering. ²³ Moses and Aaron came to the Tent of Meeting, and they went out and they blessed the people — and the glory of HASHEM appeared to the entire people!

²⁴ A fire went forth from before HASHEM and consumed upon the Altar the elevation-offering and the fats; the people saw and sang glad song and fell upon their faces.

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¹ HASHEM spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying to them. ² Speak to the Children of Israel, saying: These are the creatures that you may eat from among all the animals that are upon the earth. ³ Everything among the animals that has a split hoof, which is completely

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וְאֵת הַחַיָּוִי — These are the creatures. Neither the traditional sources nor the later commentators fully explain the transition from the chapters concerning the sacrificial service to those dealing with the dietary laws.

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At the end of this chapter (vs. 43-45) the Torah stresses the reason for *kashrus* in very clear and powerful terms: By observing these laws the Jew can pull himself up the ladder of holiness; by ignoring them, he not only contaminates himself, he gradually builds a barrier that blocks out his comprehension of holiness. Just as someone who is constantly exposed to loud music and harsh noise, slowly and

imperceptibly, but surely, suffers a loss of his ability to hear fine sounds and detect subtle modulations, so too the Torah informs us, a Jew's consumption of non-kosher food deadens his spiritual capacities and denies him the full opportunity to become holy. And worst of all, it renders him incapable of even perceiving his loss. For this reason, Rama (Yoreh Deah 81:7) cautions that even small children should be prevented from eating forbidden foods, lest their spiritual potential be harmed.

World mark - R. Teitz 145

There are Torah sources which explain that this sentence of mankind, namely the fact that we sustain ourselves by ingesting other forms of life, is in fact its own correction. When one creature eats another, the first becomes part of the body and the life-energy of the second. The eaten becomes absorbed into, and therefore part of, the eater. When plants assimilate inorganic matter and incorporate that matter into their substance, the inorganic elements are elevated into the life-forms of the plant world. When animals eat those plants, the plants in turn are elevated to the level of the animal world. And when humans eat animals, the entire chain is brought to the level of the human.

Of course, this process is vulnerable in that the *tikkun*, or correction, made by the human depends on the spiritual level of the human who brings those elements of the inanimate, the plant and the animal to their completion: when a righteous individual is nourished by food derived from the animal world, that food is elevated immeasurably. When meat is ingested by a person who uses the

nourishment of that meat to perform *mitzvos* and benefit the world, that meat has in a deep sense become those *mitzvos* and that benefit. The food of a person who lives correctly, spiritually, is transmuted into spirituality. There is no higher destiny for any plant or animal than to become part of the life of a spiritually developed person.

As always in the spiritual world, the converse is also true. When food is eaten by a person who makes no effort to develop beyond the level of the physical, that food is simply destroyed. In depth, it is a dismal fate for any element in the world to become part of the life of a person who achieves nothing with the nourishment derived from that element. Food which is brought to such an end has lost its opportunity to be elevated. And the ultimate degradation for an element of the non-human world is to be used by a human who performs negative and harmful acts with the nourishment derived from that element; in a sense, such a plant or animal has been transformed into negativity. This is the depth of the statements found in the teachings of the Sages to the effect that the eating of meat is not to be taken lightly.

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Hence, food is central to the struggle between the animal instincts in man and his soul. Certain foods strengthen the animal traits. Vegetative matter has no character and cannot affect man in any way. Animal matter, however, carries the nature of the animal and may be harmful to the spirit of man by influencing and strengthening his own animal traits or imparting to him a harmful nature. Ingestion of animal matter may affect a Jew adversely through absorption of debasing and defiling elements which will corrupt his soul.

8 Absorption of these carriers of

corruption will make it most difficult to grow in sanctity and closeness to Hashem through the ascendancy of soul and the transformation of the body. It is no wonder that all vegetative species are permitted by Torah law. These have no *nefesh* or character that can be absorbed by one who eats them. Indeed, the animals permitted by the Torah are all ruminators that subsist on vegetative matter alone. Thus the food chain is one of simple foods that cannot affect man in a significant manner. Species of animal and fowl that are carnivorous are those forbidden by the Torah, since one who eats of their meat will be influenced by their cruel nature. While we cannot expect to understand why each of the forbidden species is prohibited, we can understand and accept that Hashem, who created all these species, understands their nature and prohibited those that may impact negatively in a spiritual sense. [For

11 *Shabat Shurim - pg 163*

And Moses told Aaron, and Elazar and Itamar, his remaining sons, "Take the meal-offering which is left from the sacrifice of the Lord, and eat it, in the form of cakes, beside the altar..." Then, Moses urgently inquired for the he-goat of the sin-offering, and he found it had been burnt! And Moses was angry with Elazar and Itamar, the remaining sons of Aaron, and said to them, "Why did you not eat the sin-offering in the holy place? for it was a holy thing of the holiest things, and it was given you in order to lift the sin of the community, and to atone for them before God..." Then Aaron said to Moses, "See this day they sacrificed their sin-offering as a burnt-offering before God, and such things befell me that if I had eaten of the sin-offering this day, would this have been good in the eyes of God?" And Moses listened, and agreed with Aaron's reasoning.

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And instantly he became angry with Elazar and Itamar and as soon as he became angry, the Halachah, the just legal decision, was obscured from him. Immediately, Aaron spoke up, with an 'a fortiori' argument: If even the tithe, which is comparatively trivial, is forbidden to an 'Onen,' then surely the sin-offering, which is more significant, should be forbidden to him? And Moses listened to him, and found his point justified. Then Moses issued a proclamation to all the camp, saying: I made a mistake in decision, but Aaron my brother came and taught me the just verdict. All this while, Elazar and Itamar had known the correct decision, but had kept silent. And for this, they were rewarded by having their names associated with God's during their lifetime—'And God spoke to Moses and to Aaron to tell them'—'to tell them,' referring to his sons, Elazar and Itamar.

13 From the Midrash, the greatness of Elazar and Itamar is one of the main points to emerge. This greatness lay in their silence, a silence of almost super-human restraint. They felt deeply their father's sorrow, and they knew that Moses' reproach was unjustified—that their father had been quite right in not eating of the sin-offering. And yet they did not burst out in contradiction of Moses, in his unmerited anger: did not even attempt to explain his mistake to him. We would be far indeed from the truth, if we were to imagine them as simply lacking in initiative, or in deep feeling. It was, in fact, an extra-ordinary strength that was demonstrated by this silence—a strength of a kind that is rarely appreciated, the strength of repression, of determined control, the refusal to express one's natural reaction.

9 *אנו רואים שאדם הראשון, שהיה*

למעשה מציאות האדם האידיאלי, נאסר עליו בשר. רק בימי נח, לאחר שפשטה השחיתות באנושות, הותרה אכילתו: מוטב שיאכלו בשר בהמה מאשר "יאכלו" איש את בשר רעהו. אף בימי היות ישראל במדבר, כשענן ה' סוכך עליהם כל היום, נאסרו ישראל בבשר-חולין, והותר להם רק לאחר הקדשתו והבאתו כקורבן שלמים לבית-המקדש²¹. כשהתורה מתירה אכילת בשר-חולין בארץ ישראל מחמת ריחוק המקום מבית המקדש, היא מתירה אותו בלשון "מעליבה" כביכול: "כי תאוו נפשך לאכול בשר"²². יש כאן נזיפה נסתרת, אין זה אידיאלי לרצות באכילת בשר. ישנה גערה אלוקית על כך, שלשם קיומו נוטל אדם את חייהם של בעל החיים.

10 *באחרית הימים יתקיים חזון הצמחונות, ובשר לא יאכל עוד. אף בהווה אנו משאירים אותות מצוותיות, שיזכירו לנו את קיומו של אידיאל זה, גם אם העת אינה מוכשרת להגשמתו: המתת בעל החיים נעשית דווקא בשחיטה, שהיא מיתה קלה ועדינה יותר מאשר צורות המתה אחרות. לאחר השחיטה אנו מצווים על כיסוי הדם, כאות של בושה על נטילת החיים. החלב, שהוא שומן המענג, נאסר באכילה כדי שלא נתענג ביותר על בשר בעל החיים המת. גם הדם נאסר באכילה, "כי הדם הוא הנפש", הדם הוא המקיים את החינניות הטבעית, מזרים חמצן ומזון לכל תאי-האורגניזם ומסלק ממנו את הפסולת — וצוונו שלא לאכול את תמצית החיים הזו. אנו נאסרים בתערובת בשר וחלב כדי להדגיש את ההבדל שביניהם: אכילת הבשר הבאה על ידי "רצח" בעל-החיים, ואילו השמוש בחלבו היא רק "גזילה", והתורה מקפידה לסמן היטב את ההבדל ביניהם ולחוקקו בסדרי האכילה שלנו, כדי שנבין שעל כל זה יש חשבון מדוקדק ואין חיינו וקנינו של החי הפקר²³. כל המצוות הללו בקשר לאכילת הבשר אין מובנן שהתורה דורשת מאתנו שנהיה צמחוניים עכשיו. אין זו הדרכה לחיינו בהווה. ראשית כל, עלינו לפתור את בעיית היחסים בין אדם לאדם, ורק לאחר מכן נוכל לתקן את היחסים בין אדם לחי. מעמדה המסורי של האנושות בהווה מחייב תיקון דברים יסודיים וחמורים הרבה יותר, וכמצב כזה אין מקום להדרכה כוללת של זהירות ביחס לבעלי-החיים במובן הצמחונות. יש בזה "קפיצת מדרגות" וצביעות, כשמדובר בהדרכה לכלל כולו. מכל מקום, התורה מצווה עלינו מצוות אלה, כדי לפתח אשנבים אל העתיד, כדי שנוכור שהמצב הנוכחי אינו אידיאלי, אם כי המציאות טרם בשלה להגשמת החזון העתידי.*

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The reward for this kind of restraint is the power to become a teacher of Halachah. R. Chaim Zaichyk¹⁵ elaborates this at first cryptic promise: the pupil who has the ability to keep silent, to cultivate a deep inner intellectual activity, unrelieved by the frequent questionings and objections that are often a psychological escape from the necessity of thought—this pupil who has the power of absorption and inner concentration, that can analyse and discriminate even between the mistakes of his teacher and his justified criticisms—he will be granted the opportunity of developing this faculty of his, for intense reflection and discrimination, for close uninterrupted study, to a point where his grasp of the fine distinctions of Halachah will make him a teacher in Israel.

This, then, is the meaning of the Gemara that we quoted at the outset: the virtue of silence before one's master, even in the face of his unwarranted anger, betokens a deep, reflective inner life, that does not seek the extrovert self-expression of the shallow and the volatile.

15 We find in the Ethics of the Fathers a triple direction that is immediately relevant to this point. הו מתונים בדיו והעמידו תלמידים הרבה ועשו סיג לתורה. —'Be deliberate in judgment, and raise many disciples, and make a fence for the Torah.'¹⁶ These are the stages by which one reaches the position of a Halachic authority, of a teacher in Israel. Why, asks Maharal,¹⁷ is it necessary to be deliberate in judgment, and to raise many disciples? He explains that since man is not, after all, pure reason, since he is clothed in flesh, and his objectivity is obscured by many passions and personal motives, it is his duty to be deliberate, above all—to try to view the question at issue from as many different viewpoints as possible. For this reason, he should raise many disciples, whose varying attitudes and opinions will give him a complete spectrum of reactions, by which to view any problem. Only in this way, by

assimilating the opinions of others, will he deepen his own power of concentrated reflection on the life-problem with which he is faced.

16 In the case of Elazar and Itamar, who actually knew the correct decision in Halachah and yet kept silent, this strength of inner life is demonstrated at its most intense. Their reaction, in a moment when human nature must have been strained to the uttermost, was a paradigm of this intense quality of deliberation, of receiving the words of others, without external self-expression—the quality that ultimately fashions the Halachic leaders of Israel.

We have said that silence can indicate a powerful inner life—that the ability to listen quietly to the opinions of others, for instance, marks out the man of real spiritual substance. In which respect exactly is this true? one might well ask. Where is the connection between silence and intrinsic quality? Obviously, it is not a universal connection... how can we justify, then, the generalisation we have just made?

17 The comment of Rabbenu Bachya¹⁸ on the stones of the Choshen, the priestly breast-plate, is relevant to our question. He explains the significance of the choice of each stone, as symbolic of the nature of each of the twelve tribes. The selection of Benjamin's stone is discussed as follows:

בנימין על יספה היא כלולה מגוונים הרבה אדומה שחורה ירוקה ונתנה לבנימין לפי שנשתנה לבו לגוונים הרבה חשב מחשבות במכירתו של יוסף אם יגלה הדבר לאביו אם לא ואעפ"כ נתגבר על יצרו והיה מעצור לרוחו ולא גלה הדבר לאביו. ולכך נתנה לו האבן הזאת. ונקראת יספה שני מלות יש פה. וזה יורה על מעלתו שאעפ"כ שהיה לו פה והיה לו לגלות הדבר שתק ולא גלה.

Benjamin was symbolised by the Yosphph, which is composed of many colours. This was given to Benjamin, because his mind, too, underwent many changes, and he had had many complex thoughts when Joseph was sold—whether to reveal the whole thing to his father or not. Nevertheless, he restrained himself, and, against his

instinctive desire, did not tell his father. For this act of self-control, he was granted this stone, which is called יספה, composed of two words יש פה (lit. 'there is a mouth') And this is to indicate his greatness, that though he 'had a mouth,' and he could easily have revealed his brother's fate to his father—yet he kept silent, and did not divulge it ...

18 Perhaps now we can understand more clearly the sense in which silence means a deep inner quality. The individual, because of his physical limitations, can only give birth to a single viewpoint on any matter. And if he is hasty to express this, he has deprived himself of the chance to enrich his understanding by absorbing first the view-points of others around him. The man who, on the other hand, can keep silence, can assimilate the opinions of others, turns his energy inwards—on the problem itself.

Moreover, what he is absorbing into himself is the true essence of the human-beings that surround him—and that seem so disparate in their outward forms. And in this essence, all men are united: in all men, the image of God glows from their innermost heart of being. It requires, however, a stilling of the disruptive outside noises, if these pure harmonious voices are to reach one. For this reason, the ability to listen, the gift of stillness and receptivity, is allied with an inner life growing ever richer and more embracing in harmony.

This faculty, of silence, in the creative sense, is, then, a symptom of a very profound quality. The attitude of receptivity, of sensitive and concentrated reflection is what we have, in speaking of Esther, called 'Tseniuth'—a word much richer in its connotations than the usual English equivalent of 'modesty.' This was the quality demonstrated by Elazar and Itamar, who knew, and could easily have retorted against Moses, and yet kept silent, out of a habitual attitude of assimilating the words of others; the quality of Benjamin, who might well have revealed everything to his father, and yet could restrain himself—and was rewarded by the Yosphph—the token of all-inclusiveness, of many faceted unity: and the quality, too, of Esther, whose 'Tseniuth,' was that hidden inner essence that appealed equally to all who knew her.

ערך השתיקה גדול לפעמים מערך הדיבור: "מילה בסלע שתיקה בתרי", ו"מה אומנותו של אדם בעולם הזה ישים עצמו כאלם". צריך לידע מתי לדבר ומתי לשתוק. זו אומנות מאד עדינה. אדם שמדבר כל העת, אינו מסוגל לקלוט מאומה: "אידי דטריד למפלט לא בלע". כיון שטורד הוא לשפוך החוצה אינו פנוי להקשיב לדברים הבאים אליו. יש שתיקה בונה, דממת הקשבה, המביאה לידי רוח הקודש, לעומת הדיבור המפריע ומצמצם. ולא דווקא דממת הדיבור, אלא אף הרממה המחשבת, המשחקת כל שאון חיצוני וכל תנועה של התגבחות במערכת החיים²¹. על ידי שתיקה מעומק הנשמה, על ידי דממה נשגבה, עולמות נבנים. זו שתיקה מלאה חיים, מלאה אצרות חכמה, המסוייגים בסייג השתיקה. זאת דממת עליזונה המתעלה מעל רוח, רעש ואש, "קול דממה דקה... והנה ה' עובר"²². צריך לדעת שלא תמיד עת לדבר, אלא לפעמים עת לחשות. ודיבור שמופיע באותה עת, הוא מרידה במלכות הדומיה ומביא הידוס. על כן, "המשכיל בעת ההיא ידום", ואז יבוא ניב השפתיים ממקור עליון²³. זאת הדממה שמתוכה מופיעה רוח הקודש³⁰.

21 Rashi
אמר שיאמר לאלעזר ואיתמר - [HASHEM] said that [Aaron] should say to Elazar and Ithamar. Or perhaps לאמר means only "to say" to Israel?²⁵ - When it says in the following verse, "דברו אל בני ישראל", "speak to the Children of Israel", - הא מה אני מקים, "לאמר אלכם", "What, then, do I maintain "to say to them" of our verse means? To his sons, - לאלעזר ולאיתמר⁶ - SPEAK TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL. He made them all equal, i.e., God drew no distinction between Moses, Aaron, Elazar and Ithamar,⁷ - להיות שלוחים בדבור זה - לפי שהשוו - and they accepted the decree of the Omnipresent upon themselves with love.

insofar as being messengers from God to the Children of Israel regarding this statement, because they were equal in their silence' - באהבה

22 - חזון ב"ה (הסארה - כג שטק)

ועוד יש לפרש בזה, שהרי ישנם ארבעה סוגים בבריאה, דומם, צומח, בעל חי, מדבר. וכל אחד מעלה את הסוג שלמטה הימנו על ידי כח שהוא ניזון ממנו; הצמח ניזון מהארץ שהוא דומם, בהמות השדה ניזונות מהעשב שהוא צומח, האדם המדבר ניזון מהבהמות. ואמנם המעלה הכיגבוהה היא כשהמדבר מוותר על כל העילוי שלו ועושה את עצמו דומם בשביל יראת השם, וזהו הענין של (יג) "יודום אהרן". נמצא שאהרן וכן משה ואלעזר ואיתמר שהשוו אליו בדמימה כשצידקו עליהם את הדין אז עלו ממדרגת מדבר למדרגת "דומם" של (תהלים לז, ז) "דום לה" והתחולל לו, לפיכך זכו לקבל פרשה זו של "זאת החיה אשר תאכלו מכל הבהמה" להורות את בני ישראל העליה מן החי למדבר, כי הם כבר זכו לעליה ממדרגת מדבר למדרגה עליונה של "לך דומיה תהלה" (תהלים סה, ב).

הענין, כמו שכתב הרמב"ן בפר' משפטים עה"פ (שמות כג) ואנשי קודש תהיון לי ובשר בשדה טרפה לא תאכלו, וכשבא להתחיל באיסור המאכל פתח ואמר ואנשי קודש תהיון לי, כלומר אני חפץ שתהיו אנשי קודש בעבור שתהיו ראויים לי לדבקה

בי שאני קדוש, לפיכך לא תגעלו נפשותיכם באכילת הדברים המתועבים. והיינו כי חפץ הקב"ה שישראל יהיו דבוקים אליו ית', ונתן להם העצה לכך שלא יאכלו מאכלות אסורות המתעבות את הנפש ומונעים הקדושה, וכמש"כ שם עוד הרמב"ן שכל ענין איסורי המאכלים הוא רק טהרה בנפש שתאכל דברים נקיים שלא יולידו עובי וגסות בנפש. וזהו שאמרה תורה ואנשי קודש תהיון לי, כדאי' במכילתא ע"ז, כשאתם קדושים הרי אתם שלי, ע"י שתהיו אנשי קודש תהיון לי שלי ודבוקים בי, ואיך תשיגו זאת ע"י שבשר בשדה טרפה לא תאכלו, כי מאכלות אסורות מרחיקים יהודי מהקב"ה.

ובי' הדברים ע"פ מה דאיתא בספח"ק שכל תכלית התורה ותרי"ג מצוות היא להביא יהודי לדביקות בה', ובאם יהודי מקיים תורה ומצוות ואינו דבוק בהשי"ת הרי חיסר כל התכלית של קיום התורה והמצוות, ולכך הזהירה תורה באזהרת והתקדשתם והייתם קדושים כי קדוש אני על כל הדברים המרחיקים יהודי ביותר מדביקות בהשי"ת, שלא יעשה דברים אלו שהם היפך הדביקות, כעניני מאכלות אסורות המתעבים ומגשמים את האדם ומרחיקים אותו ביותר מהשי"ת. וזהו פי' והייתם קדושים כי קדוש אני, כי צריכים אתם להתדבק בהשי"ת והקב"ה כביכול אינו יכול לסבול דברים אלו המתעבים את הנפש וגורמים ריחוק ממנו ית', ובכדי שתהיו אנשי קודש בתכלית העדינות עליכם.

The All of the Torah. Munk. pg 92

24 explanation seems to be the one implied by the saying of R' Yochanan and R' Eliezer: In the days of the Temple, the Altar brought forgiveness to Israel; now the family table does (Berachos 55a). Having explained at length the laws that make the Sanctuary the focal point of holiness and forgiveness in the Jewish nation, the Torah now turns to the laws that elevate the family table to become the focus for holiness and forgiveness in the Jewish home.

25 Worldmask - R. Tatz

As we have attempted to understand, soul and body represent opposite polarities, and their natural state is separation. A special energy is required to keep them together, and this energy is provided by food. The function of food is to maintain the bond between body and neshama, to keep the neshama in the body. If a person does not eat, the neshama begins to move out, to distract itself from the body; the person becomes faint. If starvation is prolonged, unconsciousness results; a further degree of separation. And of course, if starvation is prolonged sufficiently, the

separation will become permanent. One cannot live without food; in spiritual terms, the neshama cannot be held in the body without the connecting energy of food.

26 The laws of Kashrus.

On the most basic level the act of eating facilitates the remarkable fusion of body and soul. Man is defined as an earthbound creature who has the potential to reach heaven. It is through the life sustaining process of eating that the "dust of the earth" is transformed into a living soul. צדיק אוכל לשוכע נפשו (Mishlei 13:25), the tzaddik (righteous individual) eats for the purpose of satiating the soul. Man is unique in his stature as a creation combining the lowest and simplest nature — earth, and the most sacred and spiritual — the Divine itself. Man in his physical body shares the nature of the animal kingdom but his soul reflects the heavenly angels. The goal of the human experience is to subdue the beast in man and to live one's life in accordance with a standard unique to humans alone. The goal of a Jew goes beyond that to bring holiness from the soul to the body, to raise the mundane to a level of spirituality, and to sublimate and transform the temporal into the sublime.

27

"The heavens belong to Hashem and the earth was given to man" (Psalms 115:16). Said the Chiddushei HaRim "and the earth was given to man — to turn it into heaven." At the same time however, the animal in man wishes to overpower and rule over the spirit, to make heaven into earth. Thus, life is a struggle between the animalistic and spiritual aspects of man.

In essence human existence is a partnership between body and soul in which each "partner" seeks controlling interest. All the vicissitudes of man's life — his triumphs and failures, ascents and descents — are linked to this ongoing struggle. The ultimate victory is achieved when man, who rules over the animal kingdom, can subdue and transform the animal within himself.

Thus, the act of eating, which grants life to the human being, is itself the point of fusion between the spiritual and physical. It is the place where the combatants engage, where the ongoing struggle to forge a productive relationship between the physical and the spiritual is at its fiercest. Since eating, more than any other mitzvah brings about the integration of these two opposing forces, it stands forever at the crossroads of life (See Ruach Chaim 3:3).

28

One of the most recurrent activities, and at times overwhelming responsibilities, of any observant Jew is eating. The Torah places extreme emphasis upon all aspects of eating. The food itself and the manner in which it is eaten is microscopically scrutinized by the Torah and Chazal. In Kabbalistic and Chassidic schools of thought "achilah b'kedushah" — (consecrated consumption), plays an extremely important role in one's service of Hashem.

R' Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin writes that the primal desire of man is to eat of the forbidden. Adam and Chava succumbed to that desire, and as a result it has remained pre-dominant in the human psyche since that eventful day. The overwhelming sway of this desire dawned upon Adam when God confronted him with his treason. "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I ate" (Bereishis 3:12). While the meaning of the word ואוכל is, and I ate, the form literally means, and I will eat. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 19:22) explains this as a new awareness that dawned on Adam. At the moment of truth he realized how powerful a current had now been unleashed. He knew that he would eat the forbidden again, because food and its pursuit were now an intrinsic part of his "nature." Thus it was through "eating" that man emerged from Gan Eden into the darker world of sinfulness.

29

The night of the fifteenth of Nissan celebrates the birth of the "revised" and "corrected" version of humanity — *Knesses Yisrael* — the Jewish nation. For this reason their initiation to *kedushas Yisrael* — the sanctity of Israel — occurs by means of consecrated consumption. The *mitzvah* of eating the *Korban Pesach* (Passover sacrifice), as well as the numerous other food-related *mitzvos* delegated to the holiday of Pesach, are indispensable in the formation of the "second edition" of man. Through *achilah b'kedushah* man's primal desire and basic flaw is redirected toward a higher purpose. This is the beginning of the corrective process.

30

The highest form of this process of elevation is found in the world of *korbanos* — sacrifices. Without a deeper level of insight the idea of sacrifices is difficult to understand: why does the Torah prescribe the sacrificing of animals? What is the purpose of giving up the life of an animal thus — the word *korban*, sacrifice, means bringing close; what exactly is the closeness achieved by a sacrifice? Why is the *Beis Hamikdash*, the Temple, a place not only of sublime music and indescribable incense, but also of animal sacrifice — this is a concept which the modern mind struggles to grasp.

The *Nefesh Hachaim* reveals a depth in this area based on the idea which we have been studying, the idea of connection between worlds. We have noted already that the human body is a microcosmic reflection of the Universe. Any pattern discernible in the body must have its parallel in the world. What is the function in the Universe which parallels eating in the human dimension?

31 The answer is this. Just as the human consists of body and soul, so too does the world in general. At the universal level, the body of the world comprises the entire physical Universe. And the soul of this immense physical structure is none other than the Divine Presence. Hashem Himself, as it were, is the *neshama* of the world.

Now just as Hashem has created the human in such a way that he must eat in order to survive, to maintain the connection between body and soul, so too has He built the world. *The world must eat in order to stay alive*; in order to maintain the soul of the world — Hashem Himself — within the body of the physical Universe, the world must eat. And the food of the world consists of the sacrifices offered in the *Beis Hamikdash*.

32 The *Nefesh Hachaim* explains this startling idea as the reason that the Torah refers to sacrifices as Hashem's "food", as it were; "*korboni lachmi* — My sacrifice, my bread", and many other similar references. The altar is referred to as "*shulchan gavo'a* — the table of the Most High." And many of the laws of the *korbanos* reflect their connection with the idea of meals such as those eaten by humans.

33 Sacrifices are indeed a "bringing close", a way of holding the life energy of the Universe within its physical bounds. And the fact that we lack this practice today reflects exactly the distance manifest now between the physical and spiritual — "*Hashamayim kis'i v'ha'aretz hadom raglai* — The Heavens are My throne and the earth is My footstool," so great is the distance. The world is faint indeed. We have no open revelation of the *Shechina*, the Divine Presence, without the *Beis Hamikdash* as the pulsating core of the Universe.

We must substitute prayer for sacrifices in order to experience some of the closeness we lack; "*Un'shalma parim s'faseinu* — And we shall pay for bulls with our lips," we must use speech, that form of connection generated with our mouths, and speech in the form of prayer which is itself an expression of longing for closeness.

34 The secret of eating as connection manifests in other ways too. It is remarkable that when people eat together there is a special sense of togetherness. Why is it that a unique awareness of connection between people forms around the seemingly mundane and earthy experience of eating? The depth here is exactly the idea we have been studying — eating is intrinsically a function of connection, and when it is done in company a unique experience of human connection can be generated. In *halacha* this is reflected in the laws of *bentching* — grace after meals: when three or more eat together, a special introduction is added. And when ten or more eat together, the Divine Name is mentioned in the *mezuman*. The level of connection achieved is sufficient that the Divine Presence participates, something which takes place when ten gather for prayer — the link is clear.

35 The function of eating has two components: nourishment and pleasure. What is their common element? There is a deep relation between the experience of connection and pleasure. When disparate elements connect, bond, achieve unity, a potential for great pleasure is released. The origin of the world is Unity; the manifest world is all multiplicity, differentiation, breakdown into parts. In spiritual terms it is the particulate nature of the world, its lack of unity, which is the source of all pain. When individual parts of the world bond, when there is movement towards oneness, the result is a taste of the ecstasy of the next world. "*Hashem Echad* — Hashem is One", the deepest declaration of Jewish faith expresses the idea of the Oneness of the Divine. Our task in this world is to bring its parts into the harmony which reveals that supernal Unity. It is no surprise, therefore, that any bonding of separate parts into unity holds such potential for exhilaration.

Food nourishes; it provides the energy for the bond between body and *neshama*. This bond is life, and life itself is the greatest pleasure imaginable. The blessing we pronounce after experiencing the pleasure of food, "*Borei n'fashos*", is worded for the life energy we derive from that food, the energy which connects the opposite poles of body and *neshama* into an integrated whole which can move towards a unity with the Creator.

Many aspects of Jewish life are marked by meals; there are many *mitzvos* which we celebrate with a *se'udas mitzva* – a festive meal honoring the *mitzva*. It is a mistake to think that this is simply a social occasion; nothing in Torah life is superficial. The idea behind this practice is that we celebrate the togetherness with Hashem which we achieve by means of the *mitzva*, and we do so by partaking of a meal which is itself a reflection of togetherness. The root of the word "*mitzva*" contains a deep connotation of togetherness – the word "*tzavta*" means "together" in Aramaic. *Mitzvos* bring us closer to the Divine; we celebrate in kind.

Shabbos is a time of closeness with Hashem, a time when the higher world becomes tangible, and that is why the celebration of Shabbos is built around its three special meals. The Jewish table, compared to an altar even on weekdays, is further elevated on Shabbos. The day is alive with the feeling of connection between this world and the next, between the dimension of striving and the dimension of reward, and there can be no better way of expressing this connection than by meals dedicated to the sanctity of the day.

Inspiration: Insight - Pg 174

When, as a three-month-old, Moshe Rabbeinu was taken from the water by the daughter of Pharaoh, he would not nurse from the Egyptian women. As the Gemara (Sotah 12b) comments, the mouth that was destined to speak with the Shechinah, Divine Presence, could not nurse from a non-Jewess. Rashi (ibid.) explains that a mother's milk has in it the flavor of those foods that she consumes. In this case, the Egyptian women had certainly consumed foods forbidden to a Jew, therefore Moshe could not drink of their milk.

40 פרשת שמות - ע"ה

וידבר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן לאמר אליהם דבר כו' זאת החיה. ויש לדקדק מאי לאמר אליהם והנראה דהנה רש"י ז"ל כתב על פסוק האלך וקראתי לך אשה מניקת מן העגרות שהזוירתו על חזריות הרבה לינק ולא ינק לפי שהוא עתיד לדבר עם השכינה לסיכך לה רצם לינק מטמא משום שעתיד להנבאות לישראל חסי השכינה והרמז"ן הקדוש כתב מה שאסרה לנו התורה אלו הטמאים משום שאנו מולידים טבע אכוריות בנזף האדם וישראל עם קדוש צריכין להיות לסם מדה החסד ולעתיד לבוא עתיד הקב"ה לדבר עם כל איש מישראל כמו שנאמר ונבאו בניכם ובנותיכם וגמלא כיון שהקב"ה ידבר עמהם ואיך שייד שהפה שחכל טמא ידבר עמו השכינה וזהו הרמו ודבר כו' לאמר אליהם הרמו שאני עתיד לאמר אליהם לכל אחד ואחד ולכך לא יאכלו דבר טמא:

Summary:

- > Connection: Inaguration Kosher animals:
 - ◆ Silence before Hashem the highest level.
 - ◆ Eating= connection of higher and lower levels.
- > Primacy on eating:
 - ◆ Elevating all the worldly elements to Hashem.
 - ◆ Connecting body and soul.
- > 'Speak to them':
 - ◆ Elazar and Itamar = reward for silence.
 - ◆ All the Jews = prophets in potential.
- > Lessons:
 - ◆ The importance of silence of thought.
 - ◆ Words of Torah while eating, elevating the connection.

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The Mishnah in Avos (3:4) states:

רבי שמעון אומר: שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ולא אמרו עליו דברי תורה, באלו אכלו מזבחי מתים.
R' Shimon said: "If three have eaten at the same table and have not spoken words of Torah there, it is as if they have eaten of offerings to dead idols."

A table where Jews eat is likened to a sacred altar upon which offerings are brought. It is through the words of Torah spoken during the meal that the mundane act of eating becomes a means of attaining *kedushah*. However, when Torah is not discussed, then the meal is nothing more than a means of satisfying one's physical desires. It is devoid of *kedushah* and may even be spiritually detrimental; thus, it is likened to a meal of אסורות.