



BILVAVI ON EATING

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01 | Eating With Holiness¹

Asking Hashem To Be 'Satisfied'

In the blessing of **ברך עלינו** we ask Hashem, **שבעינו מטובה** – “Satisfy us, from its goodness.” The simple meaning of this is that we want a good year and to be satisfied from the blessed year as a result.

But upon deeper reflection, the meaning of this prayer is as follows.

The Difference Between How A Tzaddik Eats With How A Wicked Person Eats

It is written, *“A righteous person eats to satisfy his soul, while the stomachs of the wicked are always empty”*. We can understand why the stomachs of the wicked are always empty, because they are never satisfied, for *Chazal* say that “He who wants one hundred wants two hundred”, and “A person does not die with even half of his desires fulfilled.” Therefore, no matter how much the wicked indulge in their desires, they are never satisfied, and thus their stomachs are always considered to be empty.

But what does it mean that the *tzaddikim* eat only in order to satisfy their soul? A *tzaddik* is not eating to satisfy his body, but to satisfy his soul, as the *possuk* says. He is eating only to keep healthy so that he can serve Hashem properly. Why then does the *possuk* say that he eats in order to satisfy his soul? Shouldn't the understanding rather be that he is feeding his body properly, so that his soul can be healthy to serve Hashem? The *possuk* should instead say that he eats in order to keep his body healthy, as opposed to keeping his soul healthy.

It is apparent from the *possuk* of how to define the purpose of eating. A *tzaddik* eats “to satisfy his soul” because he eats the “good” that is in the food - and that is what keeps his soul alive. Now we can understand why the *possuk* stresses that a *tzaddik* eats in order to satisfy his soul.

The Mixture of Good and Evil Contained In Food

Chazal say that a blind person is not satisfied by his food, because he can't see and thus he can't enjoy the food. From here we see that feeling satisfied is dependent on the sense of sight. If a person can't see, he doesn't enjoy the food, and thus he can't be really satisfied from it. This is a matter that needs understanding.

תפילה 081 - שבעינו מטובה 1

Creation was entirely good at its start, but as soon as Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, which was called the Tree of Knowledge of “Good and Evil”, everything in Creation became a mixture of good and evil. There is now evil mixed in with everything. Thus, our food contains both good and evil. This is also the deeper reason why a person has to excrete all his food; it is because the body takes the good from the food and is sustained by it, and it expels the bad in the food as waste. All of our food is a mixture of good and evil which enters us.

Thus, the wicked person, whose stomach is always considered to be empty, is eating solely to fulfill his *yetzer hora*. It is written, “*The inclination of man is evil since his youth.*” The wicked person has never worked to purify himself, thus he remains throughout life with his *yetzer hora* he was born with. He has an undeveloped, “evil heart” that causes him to have an “evil eye”. The kidneys can advise a person, as *Chazal* say; the wicked person listens to the advice which his kidneys give him, which is evil. His food that he consumes continues to feed the evil inside him. The food gets digested and absorbed into his body, where it increases his evil.

A righteous person, however, is eating from an inner place in his soul. Of course, he digests it as well; but it’s not the same kind of eating as when a wicked person eats. He is eating the “good” in the food - he’s eating from a “good heart”, from his “good eye”. This is the deeper meaning of why a person has to “see” his food in order to be satisfied from it.

Thus, the way you “see” the food is the way it affects you when you eat it. The blind person can’t see his food, thus he can’t enjoy it; only when a person sees his food does he enjoy it. When a wicked person sees his food, he sees the food through an “evil eye”, and thus the food goes into him from that evil perspective, and it increases his evil when he eats the food. It resembles a blind person, who is not satiated by the food.

This is the meaning of “*A righteous person eats to satisfy his soul, while the stomachs of the wicked are empty.*” A *tzaddik*’s soul is satisfied from the food because he eats it with a “good eye”. His act of eating comes from a deeper place in his soul, thus it satisfies his soul.

This is the meaning of what we are asking for in *Shemoneh Esrei* here in the words **שבעינו מטובה** – we are asking to be satisfied from the goodness of the year, to be truly satisfied in our souls when we eat in the right manner.

Bringing Holiness Into How You Eat

Now we will try to make this concept more practical to us, with the help of Hashem.

For everything that we eat or drink, we have to recite a *berachah* (benediction\ blessing) over the food, before we eat\drink and after we eat\drink. There is a verse, “*A good eye is blessed.*” When we make a blessing over food, we need to “eat” the good in it, and then it is “blessed.” Everything in creation is a mix of good and evil, and our *avodah* is to sift out the good from the evil. All of our food too is a mix of good and evil. Either we can see the “good” in it and eat it with a “good eye”, or we are seeing it from the “evil eye” and we are eating the food out of an evil desire for the food. Ever since Chavah saw the fruit of the *Eitz HaDaas* and

she desired us, there is a part in us which desires food as soon as we see food, and this desire is coming from evil. It is the desire to simply eat the food and satisfy the desire.

In everything we encounter, we must see the good and evil in each thing [as we began to mention in the previous chapter]. We must first see the “good” in everything, Hashem has placed “good” into everything in Creation. But if a person just eats without doing any thinking at all before he eats, he eats without any *yishuv hadaas* (settled mind), and by default, he will eat simply to satisfy the desire for the food. And if a person goes further with this and he indulges in the food, this is an even more evil part of the desire.

The ideal way to eat is to eat with *yishuv hadaas* - to eat it calmly. For example, when you look at food, think about the following. First of all, there is “good” in this food here. That is why you are making the blessing over it. The food is a creation of Hashem. “*Borei pri ha’etz*”, “*Borei pri ha’adamah*” – we need to recognize how Hashem is the Creator, in each food we eat. This is the “good” we can find in each food. The “good” in each food is how we connect to the good in each food, and this is how we have an *ayin tovah*, “good eye”. Having a “good eye” in this way connects us to the food in the right way: to feel thankful to Hashem for the food right before we it.

When a person pauses for **just half a minute** before he eats the food and he thinks that Hashem created it, he lives a whole different kind of life! Right before you are about to eat, pause a second and remember that Hashem bestows good upon us, and that we are thanking Him for it. Hashem is giving you something **good** – remember that, and thank Him for it. In order to connect to the good in a food, you need a “good heart”. Your soul is then truly satisfied inside from this “good” in the food that you have connected yourself, which is achieved by attributing the food to Hashem’s goodness.

Hashem keeps giving us all kinds of things every day. A large part of this is food. We all know in our brains that Hashem gave these foods to us, but we don’t always remember. We have to remind ourselves before we eat that Hashem gives it to us. We need to sense it right before we eat, and it is not enough just to know about this intellectually. Even if we sense that Hashem gives us so much, we must be able to sense it right before we eat.

For example, if a person takes an apple to eat, remind yourself of how good it is that Hashem is giving it to you. Think about how Hashem’s good is contained in this fruit. This is a deeper kind of awareness than just knowing that Hashem gives you the fruit. Think that it is **good**, for Hashem has placed His good in everything in Creation, and He is now giving it to you.

The *Chovos HaLevovos* writes in *Shaar HaBechinah* that every day, a person has to find something new to thank Hashem for. This doesn’t just mean that each day we receive something else from Hashem. Rather, it is that each day we need to see how each thing is good, and this is a new thing to thank Hashem for each day. Don’t just think that this food is good because it gives you strength to serve Hashem better; that is true, but it is not yet the deeper awareness. The deeper awareness is to realize that the food in your hands is good, because Hashem gives you good each day.

Superficial Holiness Vs. Real, Inner Holiness

We all need to eat, and sometimes we even have a *mitzvah* to eat certain foods. There is no way for us to avoid eating; eating is inevitable. The question is *how* we eat. We can choose to eat in a deeper way. In order for us to receive Hashem's blessing of a good year, we need to make ourselves into a "container" that will hold His blessings, as we explained earlier.

The Rambam says that a person needs to eat a little less than feeling full, which shows us that eating is not about satisfying our body; it is about satisfying the soul. We eat several times a day. How should we go about eating? One kind of person will understand that this means overcoming physical desires and not to indulge in eating. That is wonderful and praiseworthy to do, but it is not yet the depth of how we improve our eating. It is only the outer part of the job. The inner way of how we approach eating is, to eat with the proper awareness; and in this way, we infuse holiness into eating.

This does not mean that a person should not think about the food he's eating and only think about Torah or *mitzvah*-related thoughts as he eats – if he does, he is actually being superficial with this *avodah*. A person's entire *Avodas Hashem* might all be done superficially when a person has the wrong perspective about things.

The inner way is to clarify right before we eat that this food is from Hashem, and that it is good. In all our *Avodas Hashem*, we must not remain satisfied with the superficial level of the act. With regards to how we eat, this is the way of how we can sanctify our eating.

This is not to say that it is the only inner method; it is but one of the ways. We need to eat in an inner way, which is how "a *tzaddik* eats in order to satisfy his soul".

Seeing "The Good" In Everything

In addition to this, we need to approach everything as a mix of good and evil. There is evil contained in everything, but there is also good in everything, so even when we are aware that something is evil, we need to be aware that there is good in it also, somehow.

For example, Esther pointed her finger at Haman and told Achashveirosh, "*This terrible man and enemy, this Haman.*" Was Haman entirely bad? The Sages say that his grandchildren ended up learning Torah in Bnei Brak! So even Haman, who is evil, still contains some good.

This is not to condone evil of course, for as we know, an impure *sheretz* insect cannot be purified. But the point is, when you think about Achashveirosh and Haman, you immediately think of the epitome of evil, but really you need to approach it with the understanding that since everything is ultimately a mix of good and evil, therefore you need to be aware that there is good in it too.

Don't Either Get Carried Away With The Good You Discover

However, if you find that there is some good in something, this doesn't mean that it becomes good. Rather, the point is to see what each thing is made up of, to see how each thing has a good part and a bad part to it. Our Rabbis have already written that we must not try to see how total evil can contain some good; only Hashem knows how to do that. But we must live life in an inner way and try to see how there is good in everything. This is how you gain the trait called *ayin tovah* (the “good eye”).

You can't be naïve and see this world as being an entirely good place; that is being delusional. Rather, the point is to be aware that each thing contains both good and evil, so nothing is totally good, and nothing is totally evil either.

Gaining A “Good Eye”

Thus, besides for we must be aware that each thing in Creation is a mixture of good and evil, we also need to learn how to see the “good” in everything. When a person knows how to see good in everything, he can then view his food through a “good eye”.

However, if his heart still hasn't been purified yet - if his *yetzer hora* is still very in control over his heart - then even if he is aware intellectually about this concept of *ayin tovah* (having a ‘good eye’), his heart is still unaffected by this knowledge, and he will still eat only to satisfy his body; the drives of his *yetzer hora*. But if a person has tried to purify his heart as much as he can, and he also acquires the perspective of *ayin tovah* - at least on an intellectual level - then his heart can connect to his perspective of *ayin tovah* that he knows about, and of him it can be said that “a *tzaddik* eats in order to satisfy his soul”.

The more a person eats in this inner way, the calmer his soul feels when he eats. This is besides for the fact that he will be eating only to keep healthy, and not out of indulgence. It is more than that. It is a deeper act of eating, emanating from his soul.

In Conclusion

These words are very far from those who are living superficially. We can't live like this 24\7 and always eat with such holy intentions beforehand. But one thing we can all do is that **once a week**, before you are about to eat a food, think about this inner method of how to eat that was described here [to think about Hashem before you eat it].

May we merit with Hashem's help to be truly satisfied, as we say in the words **שבעינו מטובה** – to see the good in all that Hashem has placed into everything, and though that to connect to the “good” in everything, through the depths of the soul; and that all evil should be removed from the world, when it will be revealed that Hashem only bestows good upon His creation.²

² For more on how to sanctify eating, refer to Tu B'Shevat #001_Depth of the Seven Species and Rosh Chodesh Avodah_011_Shevat_Elevated Eating

02 | Chodesh Shevat – Pail³

The Mazal of Shevat – D'li\Pail

The *mazal* of the month of *Shevat* is called “*dli*”, “*pail*” [i.e. as in a *pail* or bucket of water].⁴

The word *dli* דלי has the same root letters as the word “*yeled*” (ילד), “child”, which is also from the word דל, “*dal*”, “destitute.” A child is needy and therefore he is in a situation of *dalus* (poverty), for he is dependent on others. It means to be lessened, demoted, to be made small. But we also find that the word *dal* can mean “exalted”, as in the verse, ארוממך ה' כי דיליתני, “*I will exalt You, Hashem, for You have drawn me up.*”⁵

Thus, the term “*dal*” can either imply “lessening”, or it can mean the opposite of this – it can mean ascent, raising, exaltedness, uplifting. The term “*dal*” therefore contains two opposite meanings.

The purpose of a “*dli*”, a *pail*, is to draw water from one place and bring it to another place. A *dli*\pail is lowered into a pit of water and then it is lifted back up, so that it can provide water. Therefore, a *dli*\pail is lowered for the purpose of ascending.

The Sages compare the Jewish people to a *dli* (*pail*) which is sometimes empty and sometimes full; so are the Jewish people sometimes ‘empty’ and sometimes ‘full’.⁶ When a *pail* is lowered into a pit of water, it is usually empty, and when it is lifted up from the pit, it is full. So too, the Jewish people are ‘empty’ when they are in a situation of *dal*\destitute, and they are ‘full’ when they become exalted by Hashem afterwards.

Thus, the word דייליתני (“for You have drawn me up”), which is rooted in the word *dli*\pail, is an expression of thanking Hashem for making one exalted and uplifted, after one has been previously lacking and destitute.

Yosef and Moshe Are Both Compared To The Pail

[There are different instances in the words of our Sages in which certain *tzaddikim* are compared to the *dli*\pail.] In *Pesikasa Zutrusi*, the Sages compare Yosef to a *pail*, for, just like a *pail*, he was lowered into a pit and later raised from the pit. Elsewhere, the Sages also compare Moshe Rabbeinu to a *dli*\pail.

As we will explain, these are two different connotations of the concept of the *dli*\pail.

For more on how to acquire the ability of *ayin tovah*, see *Rosh Chodesh Avodah_05_ Tamuz - Seeing the Good*.

ראש חודש מול 014 שבט-דלי 3

⁴ *Sefer Yetzirah* 5:14

⁵ *Tehillim* 30:2

⁶ *sefer Agadas Olam Katan; sefer Chochmas HaNefesh (Rokeiach)*

The Sages state that “A *dli* (*pail*) is sometimes empty and sometimes full”. When Yosef was lowered into the pit, this was because of Reuven’s plan to save him, and later he descended to Egypt, sold to the house of slavery, which was entirely a ‘pit’ for him (in the spiritual sense, for it was a place of impurity and depravity), and finally, he was imprisoned, where he descended once again into a ‘pit’. In the end, he was raised from the ‘pit’ and made viceroy, but he went through much descent in order to get there.

Thus, Yosef is compared to the *dli*, a *pail*, which is sometimes empty and sometimes full, for he went through descent and ascent. He first descended into the pit and later into slavery. When he was sold to slavery, his entire sense of self was nullified, for a slave does not own anything of his own; everything he acquires goes to his master. The slave is an example of complete bittul (self-nullification), where a person has nothing for himself. He was made truly empty from his own self, and this was his ‘descent’, and this is how Yosef is compared to the *dli*.

Moshe Rabbeinu is also compared to a *dli*, and this is in a different sense than Yosef. Moshe did not have to descend into a pit or into slavery. Although he was placed in a basket to float in the Nile, he did not actually descend into any pits. Moshe was a shepherd, who draws forth water to feed the sheep, but this did not involve any descent. Thus, the *dli* that Moshe is compared to is the kind of *dli* that is full, as opposed to the *dli* which Yosef is compared to, who had to go through descent – like the *pail* when it is empty.

Ascending Through The ‘Pail’ – By Means of A ‘Rope’

Even more so, though, there is a deeper aspect of the *dli\pail*. Although the *dli\pail* is simply an object that descends, we also find that the *dli\pail* can cause ascent. How can the *pail* cause ascent? Through attaching a rope to the *pail*, one can pull the *pail* immediately after lowering it into the pit. In this instance, the *pail* is never considered to have descended into the pit, for it can be easily pulled out. Since it is connected to above the pit, it is never really fully in the pit, for it can easily be pulled out of the pit and go back to above the point.

Thus, the kind of pit which is “sometimes empty and sometimes full” is only when there is no rope in the pit which attaches to above the mouth of the pit. But if at the bottom of the pit has a rope attached to above the pit, that means that the bottom of the pit is always connected to above the pit. In that sense, the pit will be considered to always be ‘full’ - for whatever is in the pit is considered to be above the pit even as it is within the pit. The Nile River would irrigate the land of Egypt through its *deliyas mayim*, through the drawing of its water. A slave could not leave Egypt. In and of itself, Egypt was a place of total spiritual descent. But there was also ascent there, for Yosef is compared to a *dli\pail*, and Yosef was in Egypt, which enables one to remain connected to his source even as he is lowered into Egypt.

Yosef Was In The ‘Pit’ Without A ‘Rope’

When Yosef was lowered into the pit through Reuven’s advice, he was not considered to be totally in the pit, for Reuven was above the pit and was able to save him, so he was connected to above the pit. Reuven

was the like the ‘rope’ that attaches whatever is in the pit to above the pit. But when Reuven came back and Yosef had been sold to Egypt, there was no one waiting above the ‘pit’ to rescue him - and now he was truly in the ‘pit’.

This was the depth of Yosef being compared to a “*dli*”*pail*: when the *pail* is empty and it is in the pit, with nothing to remove it from there. Through being sold to Egypt, he was totally in the ‘pit’ (in a place of spiritual depravity), and with nothing to take him out of there.

Yosef asked the butler to save him and remove him from this ‘pit’ – and the butler did not remember him. The depth of this was that in order to be raised from the ‘pit’, one has to connect to above the point. In asking the butler to save him, he could not be rescued, for the butler was currently in prison, in the pit, and one cannot save someone while he is in prison or when in a pit. And the butler didn’t remember him, because he wasn’t waiting for Yosef from above his ‘pit’ like Reuven was.

The ‘Rope’ That Lifted Yosef Out of His “Pit”: The Torah Learning of Yosef In Egypt

How indeed did Yosef come out of his ‘pit’ he had descended to?

When Yaakov came to visit Yosef in Egypt and he wanted to know if it was really Yosef, Yosef proved it to him by learning with him the laws of *eglah arufah*, which they had been learning on the day he was sold. The depth of this is that Yosef remained connected to above, even as he was in the pit that was Egypt - like a *pail* attached to a rope above the pit. The words of Torah which he had been learning before he went to Egypt were essentially that ‘rope’ above his ‘pit’, which helped him stay connected him to above the pit. Thus, his descent was not total, for even amidst his descent, he remained connected to above.

When water is drawn from a pit, the water has previously been below, inside the pit, and now it is above. The real place of the water is in the pit, but we can draw the water out of its source in the pit and now it is above the pit. In contrast to this, if we are drawing a person out of a pit, in order to rescue him, the person had previously been above the pit - so when we draw him out, we are really returning him to his real place, which was always above the pit.

The lesson we are pointing out from this is that it is easier for a person to be saved, in the spiritual sense, if he remains connected to his upper source, for if he identifies his real place as above the pit, it is easier to return him to his source above.

Connecting Oneself To The “Pail” of “Yosef” and The “Pail” of “Moshe”

Let us now ‘draw’ these matters closer to our souls.

There is much spiritual descent that the Creation has gone through until now. There are levels and levels in *Gehinnom*, in order of descent. One of these levels is called “*Bor*” – “the Pit”. Through sin and other spiritual failings, a person descends into the “Pit” that is *Gehinnom*.

Whenever a person goes through a spiritual fall, if he can be like a *pail* attached to a ‘rope’ that is above the pit, he can then easily rise out of the ‘pit’, so his descent into the pit will never be total. [This is the ‘*pail*’ symbolized by Yosef HaTzaddik, who, even when descended into the ‘pit’ of slavery and Egypt, he remained above all of it, for he remained connected to his source, through the words of Torah that he remembered learning with his father Yaakov].

After that, one can then rise out of the pit by using the power of Moshe Rabbeinu, who always remained above the pit, and was never lowered into the pit in first place – he is compared to the ‘*pail*’ which never descends into the pit, who always remains above.

[Thus, first one needs to be like the ‘*pail*’ which Yosef is compared to – when one can easily pull himself out of his ‘pit’, by making sure to be connected to his pure source, even as he is amidst the lowest levels. After one does that, he can then rise to the level of ‘*pail*’ which Moshe is compared to – to be on a level where you never descend into any spiritual failures to begin with].

Applying This Practically: Acquiring Your “Rope” – Guarding Your Innermost Point

When a person is in the pit, where there is no water and only snakes and scorpions, he needs a ‘rope’ that will attach him to above the ‘pit’.

To apply this point to ourselves practically, a person needs to make sure that he has at least one point in his soul which can be above all failure, which can always remain in its exalted state, a part of himself which never descends into the ‘pit’. If one makes sure to protect this point of the soul well and to never let it descend with him in all his failures, he remains connected through this ‘rope’ to above the pit.

The *Sefer HaYashar* says that even as one is in a time of *katnus* (immaturity) and *yeridah* (spiritual descent and failures), he should protect at least one point in himself which can stay above all the failures, keeping it active, in spite of all the other failures he is going through.⁷ All of one’s inner *avodah*, which includes spiritual failings – as it is written, “A *tzaddik* falls seven times and rises” - requires one to have a “rope” that can attach him to above his “pit”, above all of his spiritual failings and falls.

The Sages said that the *mazal* of the month of *Shevat* is “*dli*”, a *pail*, which is also explained to mean as a ‘*pail*’ of spiritual ‘water’ which Hashem pours upon the nation Yisrael, to purify them.⁸ These “pure waters” can be poured on one who makes sure to have a ‘rope’ that connects him to above.

The Sages also state that “Just as Moshe drew water as a shepherd, so will he draw water on all those in the future.” This is the future redemption, where all those who fell into the pit will be drawn out. But each person, even when he falls, needs to have a point where he remains connected to Above, even if he is going through the worst kind of fall possible. He needs to hold onto it before he falls, as well as after he falls. It is the unchanging aspect of the soul, which must remain as it is in its purity. Therefore, one must make sure to guard it, no matter how low he falls.

⁷ *Sefer HaYashar*: 6

⁸ *Yalkut Reuveni: Beraishis*: 1

From this power, one can strongly connect himself, from within himself, to the power of the *dli\pail* which can raise him from any descent, and to merit the “pure waters” sprinkled upon him. This goes beyond the concept of “descending for the purpose of ascending” (*yeridah l'tzorech aliyah*), for even if the person is going through a kind of spiritual fall which is not for the purpose of later ascending, he can still be saved, as long as he has the ‘rope’ that connects him to above. In that way, even when he does fall, he will not fall completely, for he is always connected to his ‘source’ above the ‘pit’.

When does a person truly fall? Only when his connection to Above is severed. But if he can remain connected to a point above all of his failures, he can then easily rise from the pit of descent after he falls. Then he will know the meaning of אָרוֹמַמְךָ ה' כִּי דִלִיתָנִי – “*I will exalt You, Hashem, for You have drawn me up*” – which is closeness to Hashem.

03 | Shevat – Elevated Eating⁹

The Month of Shevat – Sanctifying the Act of Eating

The month of *Shevat*, as we are taught by *Chazal*, is associated with the act of *le'itah* (chewing), which is otherwise known as *achilah*, eating.¹⁰ When Esav was starving and he wanted food, he said, “Feed me (“*hal-iteini*”) from that red stuff” – from the word “*le'itah*”, to chew and consume food. Let us understand what our *avodah* of “eating” in *Shevat* is.

We know that a person cannot survive without eating. It is possible for a person to go several days without consuming food, but generally speaking, we need to eat every day of our life. Except for the fast days, such as Yom Kippur and the Rabbinically ordained fasts, we eat every single day. If we never reflect into the purpose of why we eat – of how it can be holy to us or of how it can be spiritually detrimental to us - then we will go our entire life without any sense of purpose in our eating.

If you make a simple calculation, each person eats an average amount of 70,000 meals in his lifetime (assuming that a person lives for 70 years, since “*the years of a man are seventy*”, and that he eats about 1000 times during each year of his lifetime). Should a person eat for his entire life, going through 70,000 meals or more, without ever reflecting into the purpose of why he eats?

Clearly, we need to understand what the role of food is in our life, and how it can serve to elevate us spiritually. There's a very big difference between a person who thinks about it and a person who doesn't think about it; being aware of the purpose in our eating can change the whole way we are living our life.

Four Possible Reasons of Why We Eat

Eating takes up a big part of our life. Let's first think into what factors are included in our eating. Usually, when a person eats, there are two factors. The first thing to consider is: What kind of food to eat. It can be bread, eggs, vegetables, fish, chicken, and other foods. Another factor in our eating is the taste of the food. Usually, we want to eat food that has a decent taste to it. We are usually not just looking to eat a certain kind of food – we want it to also taste good.

So whenever we eat food, there are always two motivating factors taking place: a motivation to eat the particular food we are eating, as well as a motivation for taste. If we make a reflection, we can notice that sometimes we eat because we really need to eat, and sometimes we eat because we just want to taste something good, and not because we really have a need to eat right now. We might want to eat because we

⁹ <http://bilvavi.net/english/rosh-chodesh-avodah-011-shevat-elevated-eating>

¹⁰ *Sefer Yetzirah III*

really need to eat, or we might want to eat just to fill up our stomach; both of these motivations are within the desire to eat. But there is also a third motivation of why we eat: to simply taste something that's good.

In the first motivation of why we eat, it is a desire for food, not taste. This itself divides into two categories: (1) Eating because we are hungry, and (2) Eating more than what is necessary to fill our hunger – which is actually a desire to experience more materialism of this world. In the second motivation of why we eat, we eat simply because we feel a need for taste, and we will want to experience various kinds of taste.

If we reflect into it, we can discover these three motivations in our eating. Sometimes we eat because we are hungry, sometimes we eat because we are desiring materialism, and sometimes we eat for a completely different reason: because we are looking for taste.

There is also an additional, fourth reason why we eat, and every person can also discover this motivation in his eating: sometimes we eat because we are feeling bored. We are in the mood of doing something, and sometimes we fulfill this need for action through engaging ourselves in eating. In this motivation for eating, we are not eating because we need to eat, nor are we even trying to fill our stomachs and pursue physical desires, and we are not either doing so out of a need to experience new tastes. Rather, we are in the mood of having some kind of action, and we are using eating to fill that void.

In Summary

So there are altogether four possible reasons why people eat: (1) Because we are hungry, and we are trying to fill the hunger, so that we can feel nourished and full. (2) Because we are pursuing bodily cravings, which is a materialistic kind of desire; (3) Because we want to enjoy a good taste, (4) Because we are bored and we feel a need for action, and eating makes us feel like we are being active.

Developing Awareness of Why We Are Eating Right Now

Before we continue our discussion on this, with *siyata d'shmaya* – we first need to conceptualize the first idea we mentioned, which is that we need to reflect into the things we do and to have an awareness in what we are doing; to know why we are doing something as we are in the midst of doing it. If a person eats and never pays attention to why he's eating, his eating is no different than how an animal eats. But if a person is at least a bit spiritual and isn't entrenched in the materialism of life, he thinks into why he eats, before he is about to eat something, as well as while he's eating. He eats with a sense of awareness.

When a person wants to become aware of why he is eating, he should first reflect: “What is the reason that I am about to eat right now? Is it because I am hungry? Is it because I simply want to nosh? Is it because I want to taste something? Or is it because I'm just bored?”

One must be aware: “Why do I eat?”, and try to find which of the above four reasons are his motivation to eat right now. Clearly, there will not always be one reason that is motivating him to eat. There can be two reasons, three reasons, or even all four of the above reasons, which are all driving him to want to eat right

now. The more a person can “listen” to what’s going on inside himself, he can better discern what his motivations in eating are.

Focused, Calm Eating

By many people, there is a problem that they have of having food in one hand and doing something else with their other hand, and at the same time, they are talking on the phone during all of this multi-tasking. Besides for how this ignores the *halachah* that one must not converse as he’s eating, there is another problem which develops from this unfocused kind of eating.

When a person is doing other things as he’s eating, he usually will not have any awareness of why he’s eating right now. He won’t be able to listen to himself at this moment and be aware of why he’s eating. When a person gets used to eating in this way, he does not pay attention to why he’s eating at the moment, and he will be very far from developing any awareness in his eating and from elevating the act of eating. Therefore, practically speaking, we need to avoid as much as possible this kind of unfocused eating, where a person does various different things as he’s in middle of eating. One should view eating as a time to work on his *menuchas hanefesh* (serenity). Eating should always be done calmly, and that will enable a person to have the calmness to listen to himself and reflect into the reasons of why he’s eating.

Therefore, in order to carry out this advice, try to make sure that you don’t eat during a time of the day where you are harried or feeling pressured with lots of tasks to take care of. Every person needs to set aside a part of the day where he will have some *menuchah* (serenity), and for part of this time, he should eat calmly.

When a person isn’t focused and calm as he eats, he doesn’t digest it as well. Not only is it unhealthy to our physical body, but it damages us as well on a more inner level. When a person eats as he’s not calm, he will eat more than he really needs to, because he can’t think properly about how much he needs to eat right now.

If we do not see the importance of paying attention to our eating, we damage ourselves both physically and spiritually, and as we mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, we would go through about 70,000 meals during our lifetime having never given any thought to our eating, and all of those meals would be eaten without any purpose.

1) How We Can Elevate Hunger

Let us now continue, with the help of Hashem, to discuss the last point we mentioned.

We need to have the proper perspective towards eating. Eating is an important part of our life, both in the physical and in the spiritual. However, we mainly need to consider how eating affects us spiritually. We need to have a serious attitude towards eating, by setting aside some time of the day where we will work on mindful eating. But if we never think into why we are eating and we don’t take it seriously, we will probably not care to set aside the time each day to work on mindful eating, and then we will go through a lifetime of

meals with no sense of purpose in them, and all of the meals of our lifetime then become wasted opportunities.

That was the introduction to the discussion here, of how we need to generally view eating. Now we will elaborate upon the four motivations of eating which we mentioned earlier, and go through each of these with greater depth.

The first reason we mentioned, of why a person eats, is to eat out of hunger. When a person feels hungry to eat, he should ask himself the following: “Who made me hungry? Did I make myself hungry? No, that can’t be.” Whenever a person feels that he is “hungry” and he immediately goes to eat something, without thinking it through enough, he might open up the fridge and eat whatever he finds there. But this resembles the way an animal eats. A person who wishes to live a more inner kind of life doesn’t act upon his impulses so fast. He first thinks, calmly, about this simple thought: “Who made me hungry?”

If a person immediately answers to this, “The nature of my body made me hungry”, he should then counter to this thought, “And who made the body have this nature?” After simply reflecting onto this, you discover simply that it is Hashem who made you hungry. Now ask yourself, “And why did Hashem make me hungry? Ah, so that I will need to eat, and then make the required *berachah* (blessing) to Him before I eat it, so that I can thank Hashem for it. In this way, I am elevating the materialistic act of eating.” And, on a deeper level, perhaps you are also elevating the souls who may have been reincarnated in the food you are eating, who are raised to holiness when a blessing is made over them.

The point of this thinking is so that you become aware that there is a more spiritual source to your hunger. The reason why your hunger has appeared is not simply because your body has made you hungry, but because Hashem made you hungry so that you will be able to elevate the act of eating, and on two levels. First of all, you make a *berachah* over the food, where you thank Hashem for the food you’re about to eat, and that itself elevates the mundane act of eating. Secondly, by making the *berachah*, you can feel gratitude to Hashem for this food, and this elevates the materialistic aspect of the food, bringing Hashem into the picture.

As you are feeling a hunger for food, be clear about this attitude: “When I get hungry, it is because Hashem made me hungry, so that I should eat in a more elevated manner, which enables me to elevate the food I am eating, from the material to the spiritual.”

In summary of until now: When you are aware that the reason that you’re eating is because you are hungry, don’t act upon it so fast. Train yourself to start thinking like this before you are about to eat, and get used to the habit of making reflection before you eat. Even if it is only a little amount of reflecting, it is helpful, because it trains you not to act upon impulse as soon as you get hungry. You can try waiting for 60 seconds, or 30 seconds (and if you can’t do that, try it for 20 seconds) before eating upon the hunger.

Whatever amount of self-control you can muster when it comes to this, the point is not to eat immediately when you feel hunger. When you get used to reflecting a bit before you eat, your eating becomes more spiritual, it becomes more refined and loftier, and it becomes elevated from the normally animalistic eating that it would have been. This advice has been mentioned in the works of the *Rishonim*: whenever you are hungry, wait a little bit before you eat [and reflect into the purpose of eating].

2) What To Do About Cravings

Until now we explained about what do when you're eating of hunger. Now we will learn about what to do when we are eating due to the second possible motivation in our eating: when we are eating simply because we are getting a craving for food, which is really a desire to attach ourselves to the materialism of this world.

First of all, let's go deeper into this motivation. Every person contains a *guf* (body) and *neshamah* (soul). Our *neshamah* doesn't need anything to eat, because it is completely spiritual. It is only interested in the spiritual, as it is written, "*When there will be no hunger for bread, no thirst for water, except to hear the word of Hashem.*" But we also have a body, which needs physicality in order for it to be sustained. For that reason, we need to eat when we feel hunger.

But our body also causes us to pursue the second motivation in eating: to eat food simply because we feel a craving for materialism. The body is interested in more and more materialistic desires, and that is what causes us to pursue food and other desires which we don't really need to sustain ourselves. It is simply a desire to attach ourselves to the thick and heavy materialism of this world, and it comes from our physical body.

We can see this in different meals we eat. Sometimes we have a lighter kind of meal, and we don't feel heavy afterwards, and sometimes we eat in order to feel full, where we will eat heavier and thicker kinds of foods, and we feel heavy after such meals. Many times people will intentionally eat a thicker kind of food which makes them feel heavier afterwards, because they want to have this feeling of "feeling full" after they eat. This is a bodily desire, which wants to experience more materialism. It causes cravings in a person for more food that is necessary for him to eat, and it is rooted in the body's desire to "feel full" after a meal.

It is written, "*A righteous person eats to satisfy his soul, and the stomach of the wicked always feels lacking.*" The *posuk* is saying that a *tzaddik* eats until he feels satisfied, whereas a wicked person eats in order to feel that his stomach has been filled up. Many times people mix up the two motivations, and they think that to feel "satisfied" from a meal means to "feel full". But if a person has trained himself to eat calmly and with awareness, as we spoke about before, he will be able to make a distinction between eating to feel "satisfied" and eating to "feel full", and he will be able to see how they are not the same thing.

The Rambam says that a person should eat less than a third of his portion, but even if a person can't eat on the disciplined level that the Rambam reached, he can still train himself not to eat his entire portion at once, and to instead eat slowly and calmly. He can try eating a bit, then pausing, then continuing to eat, and repeating the cycle, during his meal. When a person gets used to eating like this, he will suddenly begin to feel a deeper place in himself, where he will realize that his hunger was not actually hunger, and that he had really been satisfied all along. It was simply a desire to have a "full stomach", and not a desire to become satiated.

When a person keeps eating continuously and without pause, he might think that he is doing so in order to be satisfied from the meal, but in actuality, it is stemming from a desire to have a "full stomach". But by getting used to taking breaks as we are eating, such as by pausing for 2 minutes every here and there during

the meal, a person will suddenly discover that his will to keep eating is not stemming from a will to be satisfied, but from a will to feel like he's "full" afterwards, a "full stomach".

This is a very subtle differentiation to discern in oneself. The practical way to work on this is by pausing every so often as you eat, and the point of it is to be able to eat in a serene way, where you can listen to the real needs of your body.

There is an inner power we have of listening to the body. It is hidden from most people, but the more a person is living a serene kind of life and he does things calmly and with reflection beforehand, he is better able to listen to the messages of his body. As a person is eating, pausing, and continuing to eat, he can listen to the body and discern if his need to eat right now is stemming from a desire for hunger\satiation, or because he simply has a desire to have a "full stomach" – which is not necessary, and it is merely a desire rooted in materialism.

Another point to mention here is, about what we actually eat. In order for a person's eating to be on the level of a *tzaddik's* eating and to avoid the kind of eating that is about having a "full stomach", a person needs to get used to eating lighter and more refined kinds of food. We know that some foods are heavier, thicker, oilier and fattier, with many different ingredients, whereas other foods are lighter, more refined, and contain fewer ingredients. If a person wants to live a more truthful life and he wants his eating to become more spiritual and less materialistic, he should get used to generally having a lighter diet.

Much of the cooked meals that we eat are heavy and thick, which are not meant to merely satiate us and nourish us, but to make us feel like we have a "full stomach" afterwards. A person needs to get used to eating foods that are closer to the nature which Hashem Himself prepares. This doesn't mean that you should only eat vegetables and fruit, but the point is to eat lighter foods, with most of your meals being lighter in their nature, and to avoid heavy, thick foods with all kinds of ingredients. By getting used to a lighter diet, the body will become trained to eat for the purpose of satiation, and much less for the purpose of "feeling full".

In summary, when a person feels cravings to eat more food than what he needs, the first part of the advice for this is to get used to takes pauses in between the meal. The second piece of advice is to train ourselves to eat lighter kinds of foods, and to avoid eating heavier and thicker kinds of food. All of this should be done with conscious attention that you are trying to eat calmly, and it should be done during a time of the day that you set aside specially for this, where you will work on eating with more *menuchas hanefesh*. There are also loftier and more spiritual ways than this to elevate our eating, and if a person can have those lofty thoughts while he is eating, that will also serve to help him avoid heavier, thicker foods and to stick to a lighter diet.

3) What To Do About the Need for Taste

Now we will deal with the third reason of why people eat: when a person feels a need for taste.

Our body has a nature to want to taste things, and this is especially the case ever since the sin of Adam, where man tasted of the *Eitz HaDaas*. Ever since then, there has become a genuine need to taste things. This

need is used for holiness when we taste of the Shabbos food, as it is written, “*Those who taste of it* [Shabbos], *merit life*” [and this refers to tasting the Shabbos food]. But even during the weekday as well, almost all people need to have a good taste in their food, and they will not be able to have tasteless food.

However, we need to have the proper attitude towards the need for taste. The Hebrew word for “taste” is *taam* (טעם), which has the same letters as the word *me’at* (מעט) – which means “a little”. This hints to us that the need for taste is only meant to be utilized “a little”, meaning, to eat the food in order to taste it, and not more than that. But if a person eats more than that need, he is mixing in a craving for more food, which is the motivation in eating that we discussed earlier, where a person eats in order to feel full; he will keep eating it until he feels heavy afterwards. This is a double motivation contained in one act: a motivation for taste, and a motivation for more materialism.

For this reason, most people, when they taste a certain food, they will keep gorging on it, even though they didn’t plan on having more than a taste of it. When people keep eating the food after they have tasted it, this is not stemming from the original need for taste. If it would be a need for taste, the person would taste it and no more.

A person should first identify this when he tastes something. When he tastes it, he should realize that this came from a need to taste it. If he keeps eating after the original bite, he should identify that this is not coming from his need to experience taste, but from a craving to eat more food and to feel full and heavy afterwards. To counter this problem, one should taste the food, then pause, and then taste a little bit, and then repeat the cycle. In this way, he will calm the desire to engage in unnecessary eating. He will still want to taste it, but he will have calmed his desire to gorge on the food.

When most people overeat, it is due to these combined factors in their motivation. They usually began with a desire to taste of the food, and this awakens the desire for materialism, where a person will want to finish what he tasted, so that he can “feel full”. The motivations of taste and materialism become mixed with each other in the act of eating.

As we mentioned, the advice that can work for this is to take pauses after you taste something. Taste it, then pause, then take another bite, and repeat the cycle. Make sure not to go overboard as you are tasting it, leave it at just a taste of the food, pause, then taste it again, making sure not to eat beyond that amount, and repeat. In this way, you will identify in yourself the two different motivations, the desire to eat more and the desire to taste something, and by getting used to this, not only will you calm the desire to eat more, but you will also be able to calm the desire for taste itself.

This is a subtle matter which requires you to listen to your body, and when you identify the motivating factors that are taking place in your body, you are then able to deal with them accordingly.

To bring out this idea, the *Shelah HaKadosh* writes that the *mitzvah* to taste of the Shabbos food is precisely to take a little taste of each thing [on Shabbos]. But when people taste the *cholent* on Shabbos, and they like the taste of it, they will usually keep eating it, until they feel like they have full stomach from it.

However, Shabbos is the time to elevate our eating. By having a little taste of the food on Shabbos and by leaving it at that, we elevate the act of eating, on the holy day of Shabbos. Even during the weekday as well,

there is this concept, where a person can elevate his eating by having a mere taste of the food, in order to calm his anxiousness; but nothing more than that.

Based upon the above, a person should make sure to taste things, so that his body will be calmed, and he should try this with lighter kind of food which doesn't have too many ingredients. Throughout the day, if you ever feel a need to taste something – and we should emphasize that it's only when you feel a need to taste something, and it should not be brought on deliberately – make sure to put something tasty in your mouth, so that you can satisfy the need for taste; and leave it at that.

You can try this with the Shabbos food, which is the main time to work on this *avodah*. But even if you can't do it with Shabbos, you can still try it during the weekday, as we explained.

This is something that can be worked upon by almost anyone. There are others who can elevate their eating even more than this, because they have worked very much on purifying themselves from materialism. But the words here are geared towards most people, who still struggle with the pull towards materialistic desires.

The words here are about a very basic level, which can be worked upon by anyone. Understandably, if one can achieve an even higher level of self-control than this, it is certainly praiseworthy.

4) Eating Out of Boredom

Now we will address the fourth reason of why people eat: boredom. When a person feels a need for movement and action, he may ease this tension by eating, which gives him the feeling that he is “doing” something.

Here is an example of it. Many times, when people nosh on glazed nuts or the like, it makes them move around a lot as they eat it. There is much movement in their mouth as they crunch on the food, and they are moving around their hands a lot too as they eat it, so it can feel very engaging. There is also a lot of digestion taking place from this kind of eating, which is internal movement, and all of these movements make a person feel like he is active, which eases his boredom.

Firstly, one needs to become aware of this motivation in his eating. If he is bored and he is eating, the first thing he should realize is that he does not need to eat this, and that it is only because he wants to feel like he is having some kind of movement.

When this is the case, a person needs to set up a schedule for himself where he will be able to engage in productive kinds of movement, in order to satisfy his need for movement. If he wants, he can taste something as he's involved in the activity that he chooses, in order to calm his desire. The main thing to do, upon becoming aware of his need for movement, is to find other movements to do, which can calm his body's need for movement.

With some people, this desire for movement is calmed if they go for a walk. Another person is calmed by engaging in conversation. Another person can calm himself by reciting verses of *Tehillim*. Another kind of

person can calm himself by listening to a *shiur*. The point is to replace the eating with another kind of movement that will calm the body, and each person will have to find what kind of movement calms him from boredom; it is mainly about being aware that his desire to eat food right now is not coming from a need to eat, but from a need for movement.

By replacing the food with some other engaging act of movement, he calms his body's need for movement which is causing the boredom. As we mentioned, he can also try eating something as he's involved with that other activity he chooses, so that he can feel calmer. This is similar to the idea we mentioned earlier when we spoke about how to calm the desire for taste. Once he becomes aware of the motivation of why he wants to eat, there is much less of a chance that he will be dragged after the eating, if he just takes a taste of it to calm himself and no more.

By finding some engaging activity that makes him feel like he is doing something, he calms his desire to eat out of boredom, which is entirely a need to experience movement.

In Summary

We have learned here about four motivations of why we eat. These are subtle and complex matters to understand, and there is a lot more to say about this topic. But the most important thing to remember is the point we started out with, which is that a person should always reflect into what is motivating him to eat. It is a whole different kind of eating when a person eats with this awareness, which spans an average of 70,000 meals a lifetime – it would be a shame to have all these meals go to waste.

We should first internalize the fact that eating with this mindfulness causes us to be better off physically, but we should mainly think of its spiritual benefits. Thus, we should try to bring an inner attitude into our eating. We should eat calmly, with *menuchas hanefesh*, and from “listening to our body” as we eat. Eating calmly includes avoiding eating while standing, avoiding eating quickly, and not to multi-task while eating. Therefore, we should set aside time every for “*menuchas hanefesh*” eating.

Slowly but surely as we get used to this, we will be able to better feel what our motivations are as we eat, and direct ourselves accordingly.

Avoid Talking About Food So Much

There is also another important point we will mention now: we shouldn't make such a big deal out of eating and talk about food so much. It has become common in our generation for people to talk about food for hours and hours, discussing all kinds of foods and tastes. People will talk about what kinds of food they ate at a wedding the day before, and how it tasted, and wonder how it is made. But if we want to live a more truthful kind of life, we need to develop an inner attitude towards eating. We need to avoid talking about food and how it tastes, and instead we need to view eating as part of how we can serve Hashem in an inner way.

With the help of Hashem, if we reflect into these matters well, our eating will be elevated, and then all of us together will merit to eat from the *korbonos*, with the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash* - Amen, and Amen.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *I do not make a deal out of food that much, but I make sure to have certain foods and drinks when I eat breakfast, which doesn't take up much of my time. I just eat a quick breakfast and then I'm done. Is there anything wrong with this kind of rushed eating, since I'm not eating normally and I'm just eating and drinking enough to stay healthy?*

A: It sounds like you are eating in order to stay healthy. What is wrong with this?

Q2: *What I want to know is: Is this a lack in elevating my eating?*

A: If you are referring to how you eat during the weekday, and not Shabbos, there is no problem with this. It is totally fine. However, you need to know for sure if it's indeed coming from a reason to stay healthy, as opposed to a motivation to become physically slim. You need to know for sure if you're eating less because you are indeed keeping away from physical indulgence, or if it's just coming from a desire to "look good" [which is not a holy desire].

Q3: *I make sure to eat only healthy foods, and I educate women on how to eat healthy foods, by informing them of how necessary it is to eat healthy and how to avoid the unhealthy foods which are so common in our generation. Since the Rav said that we shouldn't make such a big deal talking about food, how much should I talk with others about the need to eat healthy food, and how much shouldn't I talk about it? It seems from the Rav that the main thing is not about what you eat, but about how you eat. So what is the amount of time that I can spend talking to people about what to eat?*

A: This is a very, very good question. There's a problem in our generation where people talk a lot about health, but it does not come from a balance between the physical and the spiritual. In fact, it has become like a form of *avodah zarah* (idol worship), where people emphasize physical health so much, to the point that they only care for their physical well-being. The *Chovos HaLevovos* has a term for this: "They made their stomachs into their own gods." When the body becomes the central aspect in people's lives, this is what causes people to talk about health so much and to make such a big deal out of it, because the physical body is their priority, and therefore, much effort is expended by people to make sure that the body is being well taken care of. After all, they see their body as the main thing in their life.

Therefore, when we want to speak about health with others, we need to have the appropriate balance between a concern for our body and our soul. We can inform others of what the healthy foods are and what the unhealthy foods are, and to guide them to eat the right foods, but not as a purpose unto itself. The reason why we need to keep our body healthy is because it is the *kli* (vessel) which contains our *neshamah*, and we need to maintain our "vessel" and keep it strong, so that the light of our *neshamah* can shine properly within us.

If a Jew does not have this perspective towards health and he/she is a health practitioner, then his attitude towards health is no different than a gentile's outlook, for a gentile can give over the very same health education. If a person teaches other people about how to stay healthy, he/she must be clearly aware of the reason of why he/she practices this: the Torah's view of health is that our body needs to be a proper vessel to maintain the spiritual effects of our

neshamah. When the focus is purely on physical health and there is no awareness that we are a *neshamah*, this is purely the gentile attitude towards living, and it is not the way for the Jewish people.

Q4: In today's generation, where food is out of control and people overeat, just for the sake of taste and enjoyment and for no other purpose, how can we raise our children to make sure that they shouldn't eat too much nosh and candy? Are there guidelines of nosh that we should try to formulate, like what to give out and what not to give out to them, and what the limitations should be?

A: This is a very good question. In today's generation, you can find no less than 1000 different types of candy in the stores, all with a *hecsher*. It is a giant ocean of desires. To simply tell a child, "Don't eat all of this stuff!" will not do much for the child. There is really a deeper issue we need to address when it comes to all of this. We need to train a child to understand that we have a body as well as a *neshamah*, and that our need for taste is actually a spiritual need that comes from the *neshamah*, only, it is often channeled in the wrong direction; and that when we pursue physical tastes, we prevent ourselves from tasting the spiritual. The same is true vice versa – the less we pursue physical taste, the more we can taste of what is waiting for our *neshamah*.

Therefore, our task in *chinuch* (child education) is really a task to bring to them to live more spiritually, and part of this includes experiencing spiritual enjoyment and tastes. To tell our children not to eat so much is perhaps a little bit helpful, but it will not do much for them. Instead, we need to emphasize to our children what a life of *ruchniyus* (spirituality) is like, and to explain to a child that pursuing physical gratification prevents us from experiencing the taste and enjoyment of *ruchniyus*.

We must know that there is a spiritual kind of taste, which is pleasurable to our *neshamah*, and there is also physical enjoyment and taste, which prevents a person from tasting the spiritual. A person has the free will on this world to choose what kind of taste he wants to have – either to taste of the spiritual, which is of the higher realms of our existence, or to taste the physical, which is of the lower realms. That choice is what we need to convey to our children.

Understandably, we will not be able to convey this information 100% to our children. We are only speaking of percentages. It is an inner way to live life, which we can bring our children into slowly, but this does not happen in a day or two. It is also not just about the issue of food, but about how to live life in general. We need to train ourselves, and our children, to live a more inner kind of life. We need to slowly show a child how he needs to choose between pursuing the physical vs. the spiritual. The point is not to tell him what to eat and what not to eat. Rather, we need to convey the message to the child that it takes several years to work on ourselves when it comes to this, and to deepen our sense of taste, so that we can reveal a taste in the spiritual. If the child gets the message correctly, we can then do appropriate *chinuch*.

So it is really a very good question, and it is a big problem which our generation struggles with, where there are so many different kinds of indulgence everywhere we turn.

Q5: So is the Rav saying that there is nothing we can practically do about this, and it is just that we need to have the proper hashkafah (perspective) about it?

A: A young child is not at the point of desiring so many candies and nosh, but as a child gets a bit older and he begins to want things, we can start training him to choose between living a more hedonistic kind of life versus a more spiritual kind of life. Again, it is not about telling him what to eat and what not to eat, but to help him decide and make the right choice, of what kind of life he wants to live.

How should we help him choose? This is what we should ask him: “Do you want to live a life of *gashmiyus* (pursuing physical gratification)? Or would you rather live a life of *ruchniyus*? Do you want to be a person who chases after *gashmiyus* or do you want to be a person of *ruchniyus*?” If he says that he does want *ruchniyus* over *gashmiyus*, then we can guide him slowly and in steps from there.

For example, on Shabbos when giving out candy and sweets to the children, we can tell a child to put aside one candy and not eat it. If he gets a full bag full of nosh, tell him to put aside one candy that he won’t eat. Don’t tell him not to want it. Instead, train him into the inner perspective that we have described here. Again, the point is not to tell him how to behave. The point is to bring him to a certain awareness, a more mature perspective towards life, where he thinks about the spiritual and he chooses between *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus*.

Q6: Can we also get others to follow these principles, and not just to use them for our own children?

A: If a person is in charge of a shul or school, where children bring in nosh and candy, the person in charge can try to set guidelines about what can be brought in to *shul* school and what should not be brought in. It’s really impossible to control this, though, because there are so many children in these places, and we can’t control all the *nosh* that comes in. But it would be good if one community would set guidelines about these things. The message behind it, though, should be clear: Life is not meant to be *hefker* (free to pursue whatever desires we want). The fact that everything today has a *hecshe* on it is a lifestyle that is totally *hefker*, and it doesn’t make sense.

Q7: If a person feels hungry, could it also be because his soul is feeling hungry, and the body intercepts this message and translates it into a hunger for food?

A: That can certainly be possible, but in order to discern this, we would have to explain this point more in-depth. Most people are not aware of the messages that their *neshamah* is sending them. In order for a person to recognize if a desire is coming from the *neshamah* or not, he would have to know how to identify that the desire is coming from the *neshamah*, and that the desire of his *neshamah* for more spirituality is merely being clothed under the “garment” of a physical desire for food. But I did not speak about this point in this class, because most people do not pay attention to the sounds of their *neshamah*. It is certainly possible, though, for a person to identify his hunger as a spiritual hunger that is coming from his *neshamah*, and that it is being translated by the body into physical hunger; but this is a much higher level of *avodah* than the level that was discussed in this class.¹¹

¹¹ The Rav has also spoken about how to elevate our eating in the shiurim of *Fixing Your Water.005* and *Tefillah #081 – Eating With Holiness*.

04 | Seeing The Pure Root¹²

Some Questions To Ask About The Meaning of the “Rosh HaShanah of Trees”

We are approaching the “Rosh HaShanah for trees”: *Tu B'Shevat*.

This concept needs to be understood: why, indeed is *Tu B'Shevat* termed by our *Chazal*[1] as the ‘Rosh HaShanah’ of trees? Furthermore: What does it mean that *Tu B'Shevat* is “Rosh HaShanah of trees”? It is understandable that it is the beginning of trees, but why is it called the “head” of the year for trees? Does a tree have a “head” to it, or does it merely have a beginning to it? It seems that that a tree has no “head”, and it just has a beginning to it [its roots]. So what does it mean that *Tu B'Shevat* is the “Rosh HaShanah” for trees?

The meaning of the “Rosh HaShanah for trees” means that it is the “*raishis*”, the beginning, of trees. But we can ask: Is it about the beginning of trees in general, or is it about the beginning of the time of the year when trees grow? We know that it is the time of the year when trees begin to take root. This leads us to our next question: Is it a Rosh HaShanah for the *trees* themselves, or for the *fruits* which will come from the tree?

It seems to be a beginning for the fruits that will come from the tree, and not about the tree itself. If so, why is it called the “Rosh HaShanah of trees”...? We will try to explain this matter, with the help of Hashem, of how there is indeed both a Rosh HaShanah for trees as well for the ‘fruits’ of trees.

How Is It the ‘Rosh HaShanah of Trees’?

So far, we have explained so far it is the “Rosh HaShanah” for the “fruit” of trees. How is it the “Rosh HaShanah” for the trees themselves?

Simply speaking, it is because when a tree is planted, that is considered to be the beginning of the tree; thus the planting of the tree can be called its “head,” its *rosh*. That is why it can be called the “*rosh l'ilanos*”, the “head of the trees”. This only explains, however, how it is the Rosh HaShanah for the fruits of the tree, and not about the tree itself. So it still requires more understanding.

Connecting Our “Head” To Tu B'Shevat

Let us ask a very simple question: The “Rosh HaShanah for trees” that is *Tu B'Shevat* is called “*rosh hashanah l'ilanos*” (ראש השנה לאילנות) in Hebrew, which contains the words “*lan rosh*” (לן ראש). Is there a

¹² <http://bilvavi.net/english/tu-bshvat-005-seeing-pure-root>

connection between these two concepts, of *rosh* (head) and *ilan* (tree)? Yes, because they are both about the concept of “*Li rosh*” (לי ראש), “*A head unto me*”, which is written of the Jewish people, that we are called a “head” unto Hashem, being that we are His prominent nation.

If so, we see that there is a connection between the *Rosh HaShanah* for trees with the *rosh*\head of a person.

The Mishnah lists four kinds of *Rosh HaShanah*. One of them is the *Rosh Hashanah* for trees. How does one connect himself to the concept of “the *Rosh Hashanah* for trees” [*Tu B'Shevat*]? He can connect to it through his *rosh*, his head. In other words, when *Rosh Hashanah* for trees is connected to my *rosh*\head, I am then connected to the *Rosh Hashanah* for trees. Thus, we must connect our ‘head’ to *Tu B'Shevat* - if we want to be connected to the “*Rosh Hashanah* of trees” and experience it.

Of course, we need to explain how exactly we do that, but first, we must know that we have to become connected to it in the first place, which is: through our *rosh*, our head.

The Power of Rosh\Head – Seeing The Beginning

When we want to connect to anything, we first need to clarify how we connect to it. For example, if you want to know how to ride a bus, you know how to use your bus card. So what power in your soul are you using to connect to *Tu B'Shevat*? It is through your *rosh*, your head. There is a power in the soul called “*rosh*”, the head.

Now, let us understand how we use our *rosh*\head to connect to the *Rosh Hashanah* of trees.

The first word in the Torah is *Beraishis* (בראשית) which is from the word *rosh* (ראש). So the concept of *rosh* (which includes *Rosh Hashanah* for trees, as well as *Rosh Hashanah* itself, as well as the *rosh*\head of person) are all rooted in the concept of “*Beraishis*”, the beginning of Creation.

Shlomo HaMelech said, "החכם עיניו בראשו, והכסיל יהלך בחושך", “*A wise person’s eyes are in his head, but a fool walks in darkness.*” What is the meaning of this *possuk*? Does a fool not have eyes?! He has eyes too. We all have eyes. If so, what makes a wise person different than a fool? Shlomo HaMelech means that a wise person is one who knows how to “see”. When a person sees another person, he sees him with his eyes, and he generally looks at the others’ eyes, face to face. (If a person doesn’t look at another’s face while he talks, this is unusual behavior).

Now, when a person looks a tree, what does he look at? He usually looks at either the branches or at the trunk, or at the leaves. It depends on what he wants to see. If a person sees a table, what does he see? It depends on what he wants to see. Does he want to see the surface of the table or the legs of the table? Initially when you look at a table, what do you see? (Besides for what you see on the table). Your eyes first fall upon the size of an object. First you see the center of something, and then you look at its limits. So first you see the center of the table, then, you analyze how long it is.

Hashem created heaven and earth. The Sages argue if the world was created from its center or from the sides. According to either opinion of the Sages, though, the meaning is that a wise person either first sees the center or the ends of something. A “wise person” sees the center or the sides of something first, before he analyzes the rest of the object. A “fool”, though, doesn’t know how to focus correctly on what he sees.

Thus, a wise person sees the “beginning” of something. (Either he sees the beginning of it by first noticing the center of what he’s seeing, or he sees the beginning by first seeing the ends). That is the meaning of “a wise person’s eyes are in his head” – in whatever he thinks about it, he sees its beginning. A fool, though, walks in the dark.

(The ability to “see” correctly is otherwise known as “*einei haseichel*”, “eyes of the intellect”).

So when we speak about the concept of *rosh*\head, or *raishis*\beginning, we must know, that when a person knows how to see the *rosh*\raishis\beginning of something, he sees the beginning source of everything in all that he sees.

When a person sees the sky, what does he see? A wise person sees it and immediately thinks how it was created on the first day of creation. He sees something and looks for its source. On a deeper note, it becomes his nature to see the beginning of all that he sees.

Seeing The Pure Source of Things

Man is all-inclusive; all wisdom and foolishness are contained in man. A person who lives an inner kind of life has much less weaknesses, though. A “wise” person is one who lives an inner kind of life, and he has much less weaknesses in his character. A “foolish” person is a person who lives superficially, whose weaknesses will be greatly magnified.

For example, all people have the trait of *gaavah* (conceit), but the difference between a wise person and a foolish person is that a foolish person has a lot of conceit in himself, whereas a wise person has only up to “a sixty-fourth of arrogance”, as the Sages say.

When it comes to how we view the world, all of us have a “foolish perspective” and a “wise perspective” contained in ourselves. Surely our *avodah* is to increase our good and lessen our negative aspects, but there is more to it.

If we all have both wisdom and foolishness in ourselves, what difference does it make in what we see in something? There is a very big difference; we will explain.

Adam was created on the sixth day, and he was pure. After a few hours, he contaminated himself with the sin. For a few hours, he was pure. That was his beginning state. Man in his essence is good. Even the Serpent was good when it was first created before it sinned, and it was almost as holy as man himself. So at the root of things, everything is pure. The more something is distanced from its root, the dirtier it becomes. Compare this to water that goes away from its source. By the time it reaches your sink, it’s not as pure.

A “wise person’s eyes are in his head”, meaning, when he sees the ground, he doesn’t just see dirt. He sees its beginning; he knows that originally, earth was clean. So you can connect to the clean and pure root of each thing you see.

How To View Others As Pure Souls

All people contain wisdom and foolishness in themselves. All creations are inside you. Even all the animals are in you. (We can see snakes in a lot of people!). When you see a person today, you don’t see such pure *middos*. You see many desires and thoughts and words and deeds in him which are unclean. But you can also view him as a pure being at his source.

If you are used to looking at what is here and now, that is “the fool’s view”; you will see both good and bad in a person, and it is a choice for you to connect to his good or to his evil. But that is all from “the fool’s viewpoint”, which sees good and evil in front of him equally. But a “wise person” sees the pure source of each person. He also meets a person who has bad *middos* and bad deeds, but he can view him as a pure being at his original essence.

A superficial person will say: “Who cares if one time he was once pure? Right now, he is evil. If a nice house is now dirty, is it a nice house? No. Same goes with people.” But it’s really not like that. When something gets dirty, like if a table gets dirty, there is dirt on the table, but the table itself is clean. So too, when a person becomes dirtied, his inner essence always remains pure, just as Adam on the first day of creation. All the problems in our soul, all the dirt that’s on us, are not our essence. We are all a pure soul – now, not just in the past.

Every day we say the blessing of “*Elokai Neshamah*”, where we say that we were created with a pure soul. “*My G-d, a pure soul You created me with.*” How can it be that we are pure every day? Don’t we have sins? It is because our essence is always pure. It is not just an aspiration. It is a reality: our essence our pure. It remains as pure as it was from the first day of creation before the sin of Adam.

Although we experience many evil deeds, emotions, and thoughts and desires, our actual soul is pure. The prophet calls it “dirty clothing”, but our soul is always pure. This is the meaning of “a wise person’s eyes are in his head.” Yes, we have an *avodah* to purify our external layers, but we must always remember that the essence of our soul is always good, pure, and intrinsically holy. So every day when you say *Elokai Neshamah*, you can connect yourself to it and receive new vitality from this.

Finding Holiness In The World Today – In Our Own Souls

What is the holiest place in the world? The *Beis HaMikdash*. Who is there now? The Arabs. There is no holiness there. So is there no holy place in the world anymore. But in our soul, there is a holy place, where no impurity can enter. It exists in all of us, and every day we talk about it, in *Elokai Neshamah* – just, we aren’t always connected to it.

But we can choose to connect to it, if we want to. In fact, when you experience your inner purity, that can greatly help you to purify your outer layers as well. But first you must experience your inner purity.

As long as there is “dirt” on a person, though, it needs to get purified – through Gehinnom. But all of us have in us a retained experience of Gan Eden, which we were first placed in.

Superficial Purity Vs. Inner Purity

The words here, when practiced, can simply give a person a whole new life.

If someone doesn't seek purity, he won't be interested in the words here. If he does seek purity, either he will seek others who are pure, or he will seek a pure place to be in, or he will seek to purify the outer layers of his being. But these are all superficial methods, and he will still feel like he's “dirty” on his inside. We need to experience our inner purity – we can't live with “dirt” on us all the time.

Turning Darkness Into Light

Thus, we need to learn how to see the beginning of each thing, which is always pure. Here is a simple example of this concept. There is a fire raging in Israel right now. There are tragedies. We see a lot of pain going on. *Baruch Hashem* you can feel the pain of others. But think about fire for a second. Is fire a bad thing? No. Fire is pure at its root!

Of course, don't think about this if you haven't yet felt pain of other people who were affected by the tragedy of the fire; that is a cruel reaction. First feel the pain of what people are going through because of the fire, but amidst all the pain you are feeling for them, you can still know that fire at its root is pure. In this way, you “turn darkness into light”.

Rav Dessler writes that the future is all a fantasy. You can't live from the future. But if you live mainly from present along with past and future, that is life. You need to mainly experience the present, and a little of the past and future. Your experiences from the past affect the present, but there is a place in your soul which remains pure from all experiences, no matter what it went through. We all went through all kinds of experiences. The experiences contained both good and bad. But our essence, which is beyond our experiences, remains pure and unaffected by anything we experienced.

“The heart of man is evil from his youth” – the *yetzer hora* cannot reach the essence of a person. It cannot kill a person; it can get a person to do evil, but it cannot kill the person's essence. There are no bad people. There are people who have bad “garments” on them, and some of them have so much bad garments on them that we can't work with them to improve them, but there is no such thing as a [Jew who is a] bad person. Each soul is pure at its essence. If I look at another as a bad and dirty person vs. if I look at his as a clean person with dirty garments, it's a huge difference.

So you need to see the beginning root of each thing, which is pure. A “wise person” can always connect himself to the pure source of each thing. And not only does he see good in evil, but he can shine good onto all evil and darkness. It is written “*For as I sit in darkness, Hashem is a light to me.*” A person can see purity even amidst darkness, for there is always a pure point that he can see. A “fool” walks in the dark, because all he sees is darkness - his various fantasies. A “wise person” sees the root of each thing, which is always pure at its root.

Seeing Good In The Nations of the World

Let us now return to discussing *Tu B'Shevat*. We have explained that our *avodah* is to see the root good point amidst all of the bad, to see the pure root amidst all evil. The Sages explained that the Jewish people were exiled only in order to gain converts from the other nations, which shows us that the purpose of our exile is to pick up the good points contained all over the world. This is true in spite of the fact that there is much evil contained in the nations. It is because there is always a good point to find amidst all of the evil.

There are people who go to the other extreme, and they only see good in the nations of the world. For example, there are some people who only see good points in the Arabs, and therefore they are concerned for the well-being of the Arabs. This is a mistaken mentality, because I should only be concerned about someone if I can live in peace with him. But if I worry for him and I am concerned for him and he might kill me later, there is no place to be concerned for him. People still counter to this, “But they too are people!” But you are also people, and your lives are in danger from them if you try to make peace with them.

Yet, the other extreme is not either correct: it is mistaken to think that all Jews are good and therefore all of the gentiles are wicked. Rather, the Jewish people come from the Avos, from the righteous Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, whom we inherited good *middos* from; and there are certainly good Jews and bad Jews, and there are good gentiles and wicked gentiles.

But if Israel wants to be safe, we cannot take into account that there are some good Arabs out there; the bigger picture needs to be viewed. Even if there are some good points in something, that doesn't show you the whole picture.

With the fire raging now in Israel, the fact that it is burning forests is a small problem, the fact that it is causing monetary damage is a bigger problem, and the fact that it is killing people is a severe problem. It seems to be nothing but a bad thing, and that all this fire is causing is nothing but darkness and destruction. But the perspective of the “wise person” is that he sees fire at its pure root, which brings light. True, this particular fire is causing destruction, but the root of the fire is still good, pure, and holy.

The “Rosh HaShanah of Trees” – Seeing The Pure Root of Each Thing

So far, we have explained that *Tu B'Shevat* is called “*Rosh HaShanah L'Ilanos*” not only because it is the *raishis* beginning of the trees, but because it is the *rosh*, the “head”, of the trees, hence it is called *Rosh*

HaShanah L'Ilanos. We explained that if a person wants to connect himself to the *Rosh HaShanah L'Ilanos*, he needs to use his *rosh*\head.

Now let us explain how we can connect to *Rosh HaShanah L'Ilanos* using our *rosh*\head. What is the “*rosh*\head” that connects us to the *Rosh HaShanah L'Ilanos*?

We need to know what *Rosh HaShanah L'Ilanos* means. It means that we shouldn't just look at the branches of the tree, but at its root.

The first tree which Hashem created – was it good? When Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, all trees became ruined. Every tree produced perfect fruit; there was no such thing as rotten fruit being produced, or barren trees. If we look at trees today and at fruits today, sometimes we see good fruit, and sometimes we see rotten fruit. But if we look at the beginning of all these trees, we see the pure root.

That is the concept of *Rosh HaShanah L'Ilanos*. It tells us a clear concept: The many trees which we see, even the empty and rotten trees, are all part of a good root. When I look at the “*Rosh HaShanah L'Ilanos*” - when I see the *rosh*, the “head” of each thing, its beginning point - I see that it is all good there.

Creation was ruined only because Adam ate from one tree, the *Eitz HaDaas*. The “*Rosh HaShanah L'Ilanos*” shows us how to look at something before it became ruined. There is no evil at the root; the evil only begins with whatever spreads from the root. “*Rosh HaShanah L'Ilanos*” reminds us that we need to see the pure source of something, of how trees were before they became ruined by sin.

We can only see with our *rosh*, with our head; we can't see things with any of the parts of the rest of our body, and the depth of this is because our body cannot see the proper perspective in something; it cannot see the root. Only our *rosh*\head can see the root of something.

The Depth of Eating The Seven Species of Eretz Yisrael

There are seven species which Eretz Yisrael is blessed with. The world was created from Eretz Yisrael (specifically Jerusalem), and the message of the seven species which Eretz Yisrael is blessed with is that we should see the beginning of something. If we look at the world today, we see much bad. The world has become soiled with much sin. The good fruit which other countries are blessed with are all a continuation of their good root, before the world became a mixture of good and evil.

What is the depth of the seven species which Eretz Yisrael is blessed with? Is it because they are the best fruits of the world and they are the biggest? That cannot be the meaning, because many times there are fruits from other countries which are even better than the fruits here. Fruits from outside Eretz Yisrael are imported to Eretz Yisrael sometimes. Simply speaking, it is because the land cannot produce as good as it used to, now that we live after the sin. But the deeper meaning of the seven species of Eretz Yisrael is not because the fruits here grow the best. It is because they grow in a place where the world was created from. They come from a root which is pure.

Now we can understand the depth of why we eat the seven species of Eretz Yisrael, on *Tu B'Shevat*. How many different kinds of fruit are there today in *Eretz Yisrael*? There are 70 nations in the world, who have all come here to Eretz Yisrael. We are but a tenth of the nations that are found here. So we have at least 70 kinds of fruit here, and in fact there are even more than this. What are the seven species which Eretz Yisrael is blessed with? They are the roots of all fruit. They are not merely seven species that are part of the 70 different species that are found here. They are the root of all the fruits. The place where they grow in is the beginning point of the world, and these fruits are the roots of all fruit.

That is the meaning of the “*Rosh HaShanah L'Ilanos*”. It is Rosh HaShanah both for the tree and for the fruit. It is Rosh HaShanah for the trees because it reveals the source of all trees, which was not a mixture of good and evil yet; there was only an *Eitz HaChaim* and an *Eitz HaDaas Tov V'Ra* at the beginning of Creation, and the *Eitz HaChaim* was the root, with the *Eitz HaDaas* being a continuation of it. Eretz Yisrael is called “*Eretz HaChaim*”, “land of the living”; the depth behind this is because the fruits of Eretz Yisrael are rooted in the *Eitz HaChaim*.

When one lives within the perspective of the “*Eitz HaDaas Tov V'Ra*”, he does not see the root of things. When one lives within the perspective of the “*Eitz HaChaim*”, he lives in a perspective of seeing beginnings. “*Rosh HaShanah L'Ilanos*” means that from the beginning of something, you connect to the pure root in something.

Our Avodah On Tu B'Shevat – Eating The Fruits With Awareness of Their Source

On *Tu B'Shevat*, why do we eat all of the fruit? We see a table full of fruit, with bottles of wine, and what is the point of all of this celebration? So that a person can simply fill up his stomach and try all of the different fruits, until he says, “*Our souls are dry*”, from all of these dry fruits? What is the reason for eating the fruits on *Tu B'Shevat*??

(Think about the following simple thing: eating “dried fruit” on *Tu B'Shevat* is really the antithesis to truth. We are supposed to be looking for vitality on *Tu B'Shevat*, not things that are dry!) Of course, it is a holy *minhag* to eat fruit on *Tu B'Shevat*. But we must know what the proper way is to go about this *avodah* and to eat them in a proper and holy fashion. If a person is eating the fruits simply for the sake of eating them, he is being entirely superficial. What is the way to eat it properly? It is really contained in the *berachah* (blessing) which we make before we eat them. The word *berachah* begins with the letter *beis*, which is preceded by the letter *aleph*, alluding to how a person draws forth *berachah*\blessing from the Source, the *Alupho shel Olam* (Chief of the world). What is the depth of why we make a *berachah* over food? It is because we are thereby taking the food and connecting it to its Source.

In Summary

Let us summarize this matter and make it clear. “*The eyes of the wise person are in his head*” - a wise person’s perspective is to connect to the pure source in everything. We are in a world mixed with good and

evil, and this is a difficult situation for our soul, because our soul yearns for purity, because it comes from a pure place. But when we find the pure source in everything, our soul can find some solace even as we are on this world. In this way, we draw forth some of the higher dimension into the lower dimension of this earth, and then we can find a pure source amidst all of the dirtiness of this world.

From this inner place that a person can reach, he can eat, make blessings over food, and view other people. This is how a person can live the verse, עולמך תראה בחיך, “*Your world (To Come) can be seen in your life.*” The higher dimension is a place of purity, whereas the lower dimension is mixed with good and evil. The “wise person’s perspective” can see, even on this world, a place that is entirely pure. Of course, he will not be able to be there completely, but he can see it on a prominent degree.

In Conclusion

May Hashem merit us to eat fruits of vitality, to live a life of true vitality, to connect to the beginning source of each thing, to reveal the purity within us, and that all of the world merit to live a pure and holy existence.

05 | Eating With Presence of Mind¹³

Eating The Seven Species on Tu B'Shevat Is Like Eating From The "Eitz Chaim" – When We Eat With Presence of Mind, As Opposed To Bodily Desire

This month of Shevat is about the concept of *le'itah*, eating.¹⁴

Clearly, on the day of *Tu B'Shevat*, which is called the “Rosh HaShanah of the trees”¹⁵, where there is a custom to eat the seven species of Eretz Yisrael, it is a day to clarify the power of *le'itah*/slow eating that describes the essence of the month of Shevat.

Why is *Tu B'Shevat* called the “*Rosh HaShanah* of trees”? It means the beginning of trees, hence, *Tu B'Shevat* represents a beginning point. The beginning point, the root of each thing, is always good and holy. *Tu B'Shevat* is the “beginning” of the trees, meaning that it is a day which returns something to its beginning state. In every concept that we can find, there is always a root as well as branches. The root is always good.

A clear example of this is Esav. The head of Esav is buried in the holy Cave of Machpeilah¹⁶, because Esav's root – symbolized by his head - was good. Therefore, Esav's head deserved to be placed in the holy Cave of Machpeilah. When Esav demanded to be fed, the Torah uses the term *le'itah*, when he said, “*Haliteini*”, “Feed me now this red stuff.”¹⁷ Esav's act of eating, which the Torah refers to with the term *le'itah*, would have been a holy act of eating, for *le'itah* is holy at its root. However, the rest of Esav's bodily senses became involved in this eating. Once the food entered his throat, he lost his presence of mind as he ate, and his eating was no longer holy.

What was the ruination of Esav's demand to be fed quickly, which was the impaired use of *le'itah*? What was essentially wrong with the way he ate? Isn't it the way of *tzaddikim* to eat in a rush?

It was because it reflected the act of eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*, which was a desire to eat “*for the tree was desirous to the eyes.*”¹⁸ In contrast, holy eating is when one does not eat out of lust for the food, but out of clarity, presence of mind. Eating is impaired when it stems from excitement and lust for the food, from *taavah* (desire). Eating is holy when one remains with clarity of mind as he eats. When the mind is present, one's beginning point is still present. Esav's problem was that he didn't eat with presence of mind, and instead he ate from his body's desire.

¹³ <http://bilvavi.net/english/tu-bshvat-mind-eating> [ראש חודש מהות 013 שבת] [clip from about 37m until end]

¹⁴ *Sefer Yetzirah* 5:3

¹⁵ *Tractate Rosh HaShanah* 1:1

¹⁶ *Targum Yehonasan Parshas Vayechi (Beraishis 50), Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer* 39

¹⁷ *Beraishis* 25:30

¹⁸ *Beraishis* 3:6

Thus, eating with clarity and presence of mind is like eating from the *Eitz HaChaim*, while eating from desire is like eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*. When Esav began to eat, he was eating quickly, not out of a desire for the food but simply because he needed to sustain himself. This was the proper use of *le'itah*/eating, and therefore his head was deserving of burial. But after the food entered Esav's throat, he was now eating the food purely out of a physical desire for the food, and this was impaired *le'itah*/eating. Therefore, the rest of Esav's body did not deserve a proper burial.

There was a desire for Adam and Chavah to eat from both the *Eitz HaChaim* and the *Eitz HaDaas*. However, although they were both a desire to partake of the tree, they were different kinds of desire. Had Adam desired to eat from the *Eitz HaChaim*, he would have been desiring to partake of wisdom, for the *Eitz HaDaas* symbolized the wisdom of the Torah, of which it is said, “*And wisdom sustains her owner.*”¹⁹ But instead Adam desired to eat the *Eitz HaDaas*, which stemmed from desire for the eating itself as opposed to a desire for more wisdom.

Thus, on an inner level, eating from the “*Eitz HaDaas*” is when we eat solely out of a physical desire and yearning for the food. Eating from the “*Eitz HaChaim*”, on an inner level, is when we eat with presence of mind and we don't lost our clarity while eating, and that is how we sanctify the act of *le'itah*, eating.

Our Practical Avodah In The Month of Shevat: Eating Slowly, With Presence of Mind

The holy power in the month of Shevat of *le'itah*/eating is the power to eat in a way of “*le'at, le'at*” – slowly. In this month, we have the power to sanctify our eating by separating the good from the bad in this act – separating ourselves from the physical desire for the food as we eat it – by maintaining our awareness and presence of our mind.

This concept is expressed through the act of eating seven species of Eretz Yisrael on *Tu B'Shevat*. Eretz Yisrael is called *Eretz HaChaim*, “land of the living”.²⁰ It represents *chaim*, true life. It is the land that Hashem's eyes were on. When one removes himself from this “life”, from awareness of Hashem's presence, there is absence of “life”, and, one is left with death [in the spiritual sense]. Egypt was a land of spiritual death, desolate from any holiness. That represents the entire situation of exile. In contrast to this, Eretz Yisrael was the “land of the living”, a land of clarity and presence of mind. Eating the seven species that the land of Eretz Yisrael is blessed with is, on a deeper level, a kind of eating which involves the presence and awareness of our mind (*mochin*).

The seven species of Eretz Yisrael represents the revelation of the holy mind of a Jew. As a hint, the head contains seven openings in it (the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and mouth). Each of these places reveal the mind. The eyes reveal the mind's wisdom, for it is written, “*My heart has seen much wisdom*”.²¹ The mind is also revealed through the hearing of the ears, for the Sages speak of a quality called “listening of the ears”.

¹⁹ *Koheles* 7:12

²⁰ *Tehillim* 142:6 and *Midrash Tanchuma parshas Vayeitzei* 23

²¹ *Koheles* 1:16

The mind is also revealed through the ability of smell of the nose, as well as through the act of eating of the mouth.

The seven species which we eat on *Tu B'Shevat* correspond to each of the seven openings in the head which reveal the mind's wisdom. Thus, our eating of the seven species on *Tu B'Shevat* is a way to eat from the "*Eitz HaChaim*" [within our souls], otherwise known as "eating of the *Eretz HaChaim*, the land of the living."

Of such eating, it is said, "*And you shall eat and you shall be satisfied and you shall bless Hashem your G-d.*"²² The Hebrew word for "satisfying", which is "*soveia*", is from the word "*sheva*", which is equal to the number 7, corresponding to the 7 species of the land of Eretz Yisrael which we eat on *Tu B'Shevat*.²³

When one eats because his body desires to eat, this is like Esav's act of eating, when he said, "*Feed now of that red stuff.*" This is the impaired use of *le'itah*. When one eats purely out of physical desire for the food, the body takes the food and absorbs it into the blood, and the red color of the blood is symbolic of Esav, who is called *Edom*, which also means "red". The *pesoles*, the undesired parts of the food, are absorbed by the blood. However, the higher aspect contained in eating does not become absorbed by the blood. It is like the *manna* which fell from Heaven.

When Esav ate and he said, "*Feed me now of that red stuff*", he used the word "*haliteini*", "feed me", which is a quick, rushed eating. In contrast to this, the act of eating becomes holy when one breaks up the "*haliteini*" and instead he eats *le'at le'at*, chewing his food slowly. We rectify the act of *le'itah*, eating, when we leave Egypt in a "haste", to transform our eating into an eating with presence of mind. Eating slowly is one part of the rectification, but it is not yet the complete rectification of the act of eating. The complete level of rectifying the act of eating will be at the complete Redemption, when Hashem's name of *havayah* will be revealed and complete, when it shall be revealed that "*He was, He is, and He will always be.*"

This complete level of rectified eating can be reflected during these days of the month of Shevat: when we eat with presence of mind, as opposed to eating purely out of a physical desire for food. May we merit to leave unholy eating and to enter into a holy eating, and then we will merit to know of Hashem, Who is called a "*fire that consumes fire.*"²⁴

²² Devarim 8:10

²³ The seven species are: wheat, barely, grape, fig, pomegranate, olive, date

²⁴ Devarim 2:24

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How A Tree Represents The Design of Creation

As is well-known, *Tu B'Shevat* (the fifteenth day of the Hebrew month of “Shevat”), is the *Rosh HaShanah* for trees.²⁶

It is written, “*For man is a tree of the field.*”²⁷ The commentators explain this verse simply that man is **reminiscent** of a tree. We are explaining it from the inner perspective that man is like a tree – like a “small world”.²⁸ A person is an entire world of spirituality; the spiritual world is designed like an upside-down tree, with roots [coming from Above] and branches [which channel everything from the roots above downward to here].²⁹

The Ramchal³⁰ wrote an entire *sefer*, *Kelalos HaIllan HaKodesh*, which explains the spiritual realms. The roots of how Hashem conducts Creation is through the use of *sheimos hakedoshim* (holy names) that Hashem uses. The two main holy names which Hashem uses are the *sheim havayah* (His actual name), and the *sheim adnus* (*Adon*, “Master”), which have the same numerical value in hebrew as the Hebrew word for “tree” – *ilan*.

Understanding the Essence of Tu B'Shevat

Tu B'Shevat is not just simply a day to eat fruits. We have to understand the essence of this day, and when we gain that understanding, we will be able to eat fruits in the **proper way**.

The first thing we should all know is that eating on *Tu B'Shevat* is not just a physical act of eating fruit. The same is true when it comes to all other *mitzvos* and *minhagim* (customs) we do; they are not just a physical act – they are much more than that.

As we have begun to mention we can find the design of the entire Creation in a tree. Even more so, the entire fabric of Creation was affected by a tree; Adam sinned by eating from the *Eitz HaDa'as* (the Tree of Knowledge), and this has changed the orientation of Creation ever since. He was told not to eat of the fruits from the forbidden tree – by transgressing this commandment, everything was ruined.

²⁵ <http://bilvavi.net/english/tu-bshvat-001-depth-eating-seven-species>

²⁶ *Rosh HaShanah 2a*

²⁷ *Devarim 20:19*

²⁸ *Chovos HaLevovos, Shaar HaBechinah 4; and sefer Shaarei Kedusha, 2:3*

²⁹ *Maharal*

³⁰ *Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, 17th century Kabbalist, author of Mesillas Yesharim (Path of the Just), Derech Hashem (Way of G-d), Da'as Tevunos (Knowing Hashem's Plan) [Feldheim Publishers, 2015], Derech Eitz Chaim, and many esoteric works of Kaballah*

It is the custom of the Jewish people to eat fruits on *Tu B'Shvat* and by eating fruits on this day we can rectify the sin of Adam, who ate forbidden fruit.

When a person makes a small mistake, he doesn't ruin his life since the mistake isn't such a tragedy. But sometimes a person makes a really big mistake, like accidentally touching an electrical wire, which can harm him for the rest of his life.

When Adam sinned, the entire fabric of Creation was ruined. His mistake to eat from the tree was a grave error, and it was much more than just a minor slipup. Since a tree represents the entire design of Creation (as we mentioned), eating from it affected the Creation in a deep way. Had Adam eaten from it in the proper way, it would have brought the world to its completion, but he didn't, and instead destruction came to the world.

The Motivation Behind Our Eating

The negative use of eating is when a person eats solely out of desire for food. [Obviously,] the positive use of eating is when someone eats with spiritual motives. For this reason, *sefer Shaarei Teshuvah*³¹ brings from the *Raavad*³² that a person shouldn't gratify his appetite totally when he eats, and instead he should leave over a bit, and he should do this precisely when he's feeling the strength of his appetite.

An easier avodah to implement is for one to pause a bit before starting to eat. When a person pauses to reflect a bit before eating, his act of eating will then stem from a more internal place in himself.³³

When The Tree Tasted Like Its Fruit

We previously mentioned that the tree was formed by Hashem from two of His [divine] Names, but there is another component in a tree: the taste of the tree's bark. The Sages say that the bark,³⁴ tasted the same as the fruit, before the sin. Whereas, after the sin, the tree no longer tasted like the fruit it produced.

A tree thus connotes two things – its bark, and its fruit. After the sin, only the fruit has a taste, but before the sin, in the original plan of Creation, Hashem desired that the bark should also have a taste. We need to understand: why is this so? What difference does it make to us if the bark had a taste or not? Even more so, we can ask: If trees would remain with their taste, then we would eat from them, and that would harm the development of the trees and thus harm the fruits as well. So why, in the original plan, did trees taste like their fruit?

³¹ *Gates of Repentance*, written by Rabbeinu Yonah, early 10th century scholar

³² Rabbi Avraham ben David, 10th century scholar and author of many classic Kabbalistic works

³³ Later, the author brings that this was the practice of Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein zt"l, spiritual dean of Yeshivas Mir in mid-1900's).

³⁴ Rashi, Bereishis 1:11

The deep answer to this is that the Sages' statement was not just referring to a physical tree, but to a spiritual kind of tree and its fruit. The spiritual tree and its fruit is the meaning of the statement, "A person eats of their fruit [reward] in this world, yet its *keren* [essence] still remains in the next world."³⁵

In other words, there are two kinds of trees with fruit. One kind is the physical, and the other kind is a spiritual one. Concerning the physical, had Adam never sinned by eating the forbidden fruit of the tree, the earth would have produced trees that tasted like their fruit. In addition, had he not sinned – had he eaten from the tree first, before eating the fruit - he would have entered immediately into the Next World.

Now that he sinned, not only did the trees no longer taste like their fruit in the physical sense, but now he could no longer enjoy the spiritual tree – the essence of his reward, which he would have enjoyed had he gone to the Next World . Instead he can only enjoy reward in this world.

However, this is also a good thing, because if man would be able to access his future reward already on this world, then he would use it up by the time he gets to the Next World [and then he wouldn't have any reward left]. This reflects the statement, "From the wound itself comes the remedy."³⁶

The Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge

To understand this better, we need to understand the difference between the tree that was permitted to eat from – the *Eitz HaChaim*, the Tree of Life – and the Forbidden Tree of Knowledge, the *Eitz HaDa'as*.

The *Eitz HaChaim* consisted of only one element – *chaim*, life. The *Eitz HaDa'as* was called *Eitz haDa'as Tov v"Ra* ("Tree of Good and Evil Knowledge.") It contained two elements to it – good, and evil.

The *Eitz HaDa'as* is reminiscent of the fruit that comes from the tree. Just as a tree produces many fruits, so did the *Eitz HaDa'as* have a lot going on in it, because it contained more than one element. By contrast, the *Eitz HaChaim* is reminiscent of a tree and not of the fruit, for a tree only contains one trunk. The *Eitz HaChaim* only consisted of one element.

This shows us that oneness is represented by the actual trunk of the tree, and not in the fruits of the tree. The fruits of a tree can be many, representing **dis-unity**. The tree itself consists of one thing alone – its tree trunk. Its oneness represents the concept of **unity**.

Had Adam not sinned and had eaten instead from the *Eitz HaChaim*, he would have immediately entered the Next World. Now that he ate the fruit from the *Eitz HaDa'as*, although he sinned, he can still merit the Next World, because he did not eat up his actual reward; he only ate the "fruit", and not of the *keren*/trunk.

Since Hashem knows everything that will happen, He already knew that Adam would choose to eat from the *Eitz HaDa'as*. (The fact that Hashem knows what someone will choose is the deep concept known as "*yediah kodmoh l'bechirah*", "knowledge precedes free will". A person has free will to choose between good

³⁵ Tractate Peah 1:1

³⁶ Shemos Rabbah 23:3

and evil, but Hashem still knows beforehand what the person will choose.) Therefore, there was already a remedy built in beforehand, so that Adam wouldn't lose everything from the sin. The built-in remedy was that if even if Adam eats the forbidden fruit, he's only eating the fruit, and not of the actual tree; and because he did not partake of the actual tree trunk, the *keren*, he will not lose his *keren* – the essence of his reward - in the Next World.

Therefore, although he sinned, the outcome of the sin was lessened, in contrast to having eaten from the *Eitz HaChaim*, which was the real tree. Had he eaten the “real” tree – the *Eitz HaChaim* – then he would have forfeited his *keren* in the Next World, since he had just eaten from the *keren* and thereby used it up on this world. Of course, the original plan was that he should eat from the *Eitz HaChaim*, but because Hashem knew that Adam would eat from the *Eitz HaDa'as*, He reversed the outcomes, as we explained.³⁷

What Kind of Fruit Was It?

In the *Gemara*³⁸, various opinions are discussed concerning exactly what kind of fruit the *Eitz HaDa'as* was. One opinion is that it was a grape, because just as the wine produced from grapes can intoxicate a person and sadden the person, so did the sin bring sadness to the world. Another opinion was that it was a wheat kernel; another opinion was that it was a fig.

In either case, the *Eitz HaDa'as* was a fruit of the Seven Species which the Land of Israel is blessed with.³⁹ This requires thought: what is the connection between the Seven Species and the *Eitz HaDa'as*? The fact that the tree was one of the Seven Species requires contemplation; let us try to find out what the connection is.

The Ten Species of Eretz Yisrael

First, we must preface the discussion with the following. It is well-known that the Seven Species represent the seven nations who were conquered when we won the Land of Israel from their hands. However, there will be three nations in the future who will gain a share in the Land: the *Kinnites*, the *Kenizites*, and the *Kadmoneans*.⁴⁰ Thus, there are another three species that the Land of Israel is blessed with that we do know about yet, and these three species will be revealed in the future. These three species are the roots of the seven species, with the seven species being the branches that stem from these three roots.⁴¹

³⁷ In the Hebrew sefer (*Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Chanukah: p100*) there is also an even deeper explanation of this matter, but we have not included it in the translation, as it is a bit esoteric to translate.

³⁸ *Sanhedrin 70a-70b*.

³⁹ The Seven Species are: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates/honey.

⁴⁰ As stated in *Bereishis 15:18-21*

⁴¹ Note from the Hebrew sefer: This is similar to how the seven sefiros (Heavenly spheres) branch out from the three higher sefiros. [The seven lower sefiros are: chessed, gevurah, tiferes, netzach, hod, yesod and malchus. The three root, higher sefiros are: Chochmah, Binah and Keser].

The three species of the Land which we do not yet know about represent the *keren*, which, as we have begun to explain, is the part of the reward that stays intact in the Next World, which is where we enjoy it. These three species of the future represent the “tree” itself – the *keren*. In today’s times, we only have the “branches” of the tree – the fruits of the reward, and not the actual reward itself.

These three hidden species of the Land are forbidden to eat, and for this reason, they are hidden, so that we shouldn’t come to eat them; it is forbidden to eat the actual reward itself as we are on this current world.

In the Future, All Trees Will Bear Fruit

There is also a different approach how to explain this. The *Gemara*⁴² states that in the future, all barren trees in the Land of Israel will bear fruit. The depth of this matter is that in the future, when we will be allowed to eat the tree itself – the reward itself – this will make all barren trees into edible trees. In other words, the barren trees themselves will become like fruit.

This is because if we can’t eat the tree itself, then surely we cannot eat a barren tree. But when we will be allowed to eat the tree itself, then even barren trees will be useful to eat.

If we go with this approach, perhaps we can say that the three species of the future, which are the roots of the other seven, are from barren trees. In the future, we will be allowed to eat these “barren trees” – the three root species. But in today’s times, we cannot eat trees – in the physical sense and in the spiritual sense. We cannot eat a physical tree, because they have no taste, and they are unfit for consumption. But on a deeper level, this is because we have to protect our “tree” for the Next World, and that is when we will be allowed to eat our “tree”, our *keren* - our actual reward.

Awareness As We Eat the Seven Species

So in our current state, we cannot eat a tree itself, only its fruit. For this reason we are only able to eat of the Seven Species that we know about, because these represent the “fruit” of our reward, and we are allowed to partake of the fruit of our reward. But we are not yet able to enjoy our actual reward itself – our *keren* – and for this reason, we aren’t able to eat of the other three hidden species in the Land.

[That is the outline of the concept, and now we will apply this practically in our life.]

The fact that we can only enjoy the “branches” these days, and not the root, represents the fact that we are missing the root of our very eating. Our eating is superficial, and when we eat, we simply destroy the food as we eat it, consuming it. We are missing a kind of eating in which we can be attached to Hashem from it. How do we see that eating can be a form of connecting to spirituality? We find that by Yosef, his wife was called the “bread” that he ate. However, although we are missing the root kind of eating, we can still attain it to some degree, on our own level. Let us explain.

⁴² *Kesubos 112b*

Eating can be something completely spiritual, as we find in the statement, “*Go eat my bread*” – go eat the bread of Torah.”⁴³ Or, eating can be a physical act of eating. Even when we simply eat in the physical sense, it can be a superficial kind of eating, or it can have an inner depth to it.

We need to eat because we need to give ourselves energy. This is the source of our eating, and this is the ideal kind of eating. The negative side of eating is when a person just eats without the intention of nourishing his health simply because he wishes to. Both of these options are the superficial layer of our eating: either to eat for our health (which is positive) or to eat out of indulgence (which is negative).

But there is an even more inner layer to our eating, and this is true even as we physically eat. We are able to eat in an inner way, and we can achieve this inner kind of eating, each person according to their own level.

Whenever we eat, there is a part we see, and a part we don’t see. What we see is the fruit in front of us, but what we don’t see is the root that it grew from. The root of the fruit tree plays a big role in the fruit – when we eat the seven species that grew in *Eretz Yisrael*, we have to be aware that it is coming from *Eretz Yisrael*.⁴⁴ If we just eat the fruit and we never think about where it came from, then it doesn’t make a difference if it came from either Israel or Turkey...

When we are aware of the root of eating as we eat, then we connect to the inner root of eating to some degree, on our own level. But if a person just eats the seven species without thinking where they come from, and he just eats the fruit or species in front of him simply because he wants to eat, then he’s only eating in a superficial manner.

He is separated from the root of eating; he is disconnected from the root. Although in the end he is still being nourished from the root whether he thinks about this or not, still, he will be missing the pure kind of nourishment he could be having, if he doesn’t think about the root of what he’s eating.

An In-Depth Analysis Of Wheat

We will now begin to explain the depth behind each of the seven species which *Eretz Yisrael* is blessed with. The seven species are written in the verse, “*A land of wheat (c’hittah), barley (se’orah), grape (gefen), fig (te’ainah), pomegranate (rimon); a land of olive oil (shemen zayis) and honey (devash).*”

Let us begin with the first species – wheat (*c’hittah*).

As we mentioned before, one of the Sages’ opinions were that the *Eitz HaDa’as* was wheat. The other two opinions of the Sages are that it was either a fig or grape. There is a rule that whenever our Sages argue, “Their words, and their words, are the words of the living G-d.”⁴⁵ Therefore, each of the opinions in our

⁴³ *Bereishis Rabbah* 70:5; see *Raishis Chochmah, Shaar Anavah*, 4

⁴⁴ See *Devarim* 8:3

⁴⁵ *Gittin* 7b

Sages is correct, and they are rather just different views on understanding the sin of eating from the *Eitz HaDa'as*.

We will try to explain each of these views – the view that it was wheat, the view that it was a grape, and the view that it was a fig.

If we go with the first view, that the *Eitz HaDa'as* was wheat, the following question arises: How could it be that wheat, which was one of the blessed Seven Species of *Eretz Yisrael*, should be a catalyst in the sin?

If we reflect, the Hebrew word for wheat, *c'hittah*, has the same letters as the word *cheit*, sin. Another word that it is related to is the Hebrew word *c'hituy*, which means “cleansed.” These two words, understandably, are opposite concepts. A sin is the opposite of being cleansed, as sin is called “soiled clothing.” *C'hittah* thus can allude to either *cheit*, or its opposite – *c'hituy*. (This is an example of how one concept can contain two opposites.⁴⁶)

Let us reflect on the “*cheit*” aspect of *c'hittah*, which is the negative side to *c'hittah*. When Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDa'as* – which was wheat, according to one opinion – he came to commit a *cheit* through eating the *c'hittah*/wheat. When a person doesn't fulfill another person's will, the other person feels that the other has done a *cheit* toward him; so a *cheit* is essentially whenever something is lacking.

Eating also reflects this idea. When a person eats, he eats because he is missing something, and he's trying to fill what he's missing. Sometimes this is because a person is simply hungry, and sometimes this is due to a negative reason – the person is indulging in his desires. Either way, eating is always about filling what a person is missing.

This can be the depth of Adam's sin. When he ate from the *Eitz HaDa'as*, he was eating because he felt like he was missing something, and he was trying to fill what he was lacking. That was really the depth of the sin.

Eating For The Sake of Heaven

The question is, though: How do we correct this attitude? What are we supposed to do? Is it ever possible for us to eat for loftier purposes, other than to fill what we are missing? Is there a different kind of attitude we can be having when we eat?

The answer is that there are two kinds of eating. There is a kind of eating which is called “eating from the *Eitz HaDa'as*”, and there is a kind of eating called “eating from the *Eitz HaChaim*.”

Eating from the *Eitz HaDa'as*, as we said, is when a person eats because he's trying to fill a certain lacking. But there is another kind of eating which is totally different, in which a person isn't trying to

⁴⁶ **Editor's Note:** This is the concept called “*dovor v'hipucho*” (a concept and its opposite). To learn more about this concept, listen to the Hebrew audio files of [Da Es Da'atcha 007](#) and [008](#), in which the author explains how a person can get used to seeing opposites of every concept, and that this completes a person's understanding of any certain concept.

complete what he lacks just as the Creator lacked nothing in spite of the fact that He created the world. It is obvious that although Hashem created the world, it wasn't because He lacked anything, *chas v'shalom*.

If a person eats simply because he needs to, or because he wants to enjoy food, then he is eating because he wants to complete what he lacks. This is called “eating from the *Eitz HaDa'as*.” But if a person eats and he is aware that it is Hashem who is sustaining him – not the food – then he connects to Hashem through his eating; he feels nullified “in front of” Hashem as he eats.

This leads us to the following deep point. When a person is totally attached to Hashem, he doesn't have to eat. Moshe *Rabbeinu* didn't eat or drink for forty days as he sojourned in Heaven. In our current state, our soul is concealed from having the total connection with Hashem, since our body gets in the way. We thus have to eat.

If a person were to ignore this fact of life, then he is being delusional, since we are not on the level of Moshe *Rabbeinu*. It's suicidal for a person to attempt to ignore his body and only consider his soul. The *Gemara*⁴⁷ says that we are not allowed to withhold anything that our body needs to survive, and if one does so, he is called a sinner. Because we are now after the sin of Adam, we must eat.

Yet, at the same time, we can still reveal from within ourselves a degree of inner eating. When we eat only in an external and superficial manner, such eating connotes that *cheit* is at the root of our eating, just as *c'hittah* is the first and head of all the Seven Species.

But in the original perception [which will return in the future], *c'hittah* is not at the head of the Seven Species, since there are really an additional three roots to the Seven Species, as we mentioned before.

C'hittah represents *cheit*, and thus it not the root of the Seven Species; the root of everything is called “*Ratzon*,” the “Will” of Hashem. The Seven Species we are familiar with represent the seven “branch” forces in our soul:

1. *chessed* (kindness/love),
2. *gevurah* (strength),⁴⁸
3. *rachamim* (compassion),⁴⁹
4. *netzach* (eternity),
5. *hod* (beauty),⁵⁰
6. *yesod* (foundation)⁵¹ and
7. *malchus* (royalty).

There are three root forces of these seven powers in our soul, and the root of all the root forces is *Ratzon*, Hashem's Supreme Will. Thus, when we eat because it is the will of Hashem that we eat, then we are not eating to fill what we lack – rather, we are eating for a higher purpose.

⁴⁷ *Nazir 19a*

⁴⁸ *Gevurah* is also sometimes referred to as *Yirah*/restraint, and it is also called *Din*/Judgment.

⁴⁹ *Rachamim*/compassion is also referred to as *Tiferes*/Harmony, and it is also referred to as *Emes*/Truth.

⁵⁰ *Hod* is also known as *hodayah*/gratitude, which is also known as *bittul*/nullification.

⁵¹ *Yesod* is generally referring to *kedushah* (holiness).

Of course, no one should fool himself and believe that he is solely eating because it is the will of Hashem. This is not true, because when we eat, we are trying to fill our hunger. Anyone who tries to convince himself otherwise is delusional. We all eat because we are hungry. We need to try to awaken within ourselves at least some spark of this level, that there is a kind of eating that exists in which a person eats because it is Hashem's will.

There is a salient statement said in the name of Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l: One kind of person makes a *beracha* (blessing) so he can eat, but another kind of person eats so that he can make the *beracha*.

The *Gemara* says that if a person eats without making a *beracha* beforehand, it is as if he stole. Yet, even if one makes a *beracha* before he eats, there is still more to be done. We aren't just eating so we can enjoy this world in the right way and not be liable for stealing. We are supposed to be eating, ideally, so that we can be able to make the *beracha*.

Revealing Hashem's Will Through Eating the Wheat

Now let us think about the positive use of the word *c'hittah*/wheat, which is *c'hituy*/cleansed.

Our *avodah* on *Tu B'Shevat* is to cleanse ourselves from sin – to accomplish a *c'hituy*/cleansing of our *cheit*/sins. In order to understand how we can do it, we'll illustrate as follows. Let's say we have a chain smoker who, one day, discovers that he develops cancer because he's a heavy smoker. It's clear that if he wants to be healed, the first thing he has to do is to quit smoking, so that he can prevent any further damage to his lungs.

This is the beginning of cleansing his body. But this is just the superficial solution. The deeper solution is for the smoker to **give up his very will** to smoke. We aren't just trying to convince him to stop smoking; what we really want to do is that he shouldn't even have a desire for a cigarette. We can do this by getting him to desire taking responsibility for his life, and in turn, this will overpower his negative will to smoke and eliminate it.

The lesson from this parable is clear. All people, initially, eat in the familiar manner: eating because we want to fill what we are missing. When we go through life just eating in the usual, superficial manner that we are familiar with, then we will never touch the inner reason to eat, which is to eat in order to fulfill Hashem's will.

If we wish to begin cleansing ourselves from sin on *Tu B'Shevat*, we need to reveal within ourselves some spark of the inner reason to eat. It can then motivate us to eat all the time with purer motivations.

Therefore, if a person takes the *c'hittah*/wheat and uses it to recognize the Creator through it, he fulfills the purpose of the *c'hittah*. If a person even eats just one kernel of wheat with this intention – aspiring to recognize the Creator through it – then he has begun to reveal a spark of correcting the first sin. If we eat the *c'hittah* with this intention, we reveal the inner kind of eating – “eating from the *Eitz HaChaim*.”

Understanding That Eating Is A Curse

When a person eats something and he's enjoying it, he should feel somewhat pained that he's enjoying it. The *Gemara*⁵² says that as soon as Adam was cursed with having to eat from the earth, he cried terribly. He thought that the curse meant that he would have to eat out of the same bowl as animals do. In the end he wasn't cursed with this. He had still lost so much, compared to the previous level he was enjoying in *Gan Eden*. The angels roasted meat and strained wine for him in *Gan Eden*.⁵³

In the future, Torah scholars will once again enjoy these special wines that were prepared in *Gan Eden*.

Since we are after the sin, we were cursed with having to eat fruits and vegetables that come from the ground. In *Gan Eden* it wasn't like that, and in the future we will have the state of *Gan Eden* again. Right now, however, we have to eat things that come from the lowly earth.

Therefore, when we eat, we should be aware of this: the foods that exist today are a curse placed upon mankind. They resulted from the sin. In the future, we will return to the kind of eating that Adam would have had if he had eaten from the *Eitz HaChaim*. What is that eating?

It is stated in the possuk, “*And you will cling to Hashem your living G-d, all of you, today.*”⁵⁴ If our eating is revealing a connection to the Creator, then it resembles the inner kind of eating which simply is eating from the *Eitz HaChaim*. But if we are only eating because we feel like we are trying to fill what we feel we are lacking, then it resembles eating from the *Eitz HaDa'as*.

An In-Depth Analysis On Barley

We could really spend an endless amount of time discussing each of the Seven Species, but there's not enough time.⁵⁵ The Torah is “wider than the earth and vaster than the sea”, so each topic in Torah is really endless. We have no choice but to limit the time we spend studying each topic, and therefore, we have to leave the topic of wheat and begin to discuss the next of the species, barley.

Barley is called *se'orah* in Hebrew, which is related to the word *shiur*, amount. The *Gemara*⁵⁶ says that each of the Seven Species listed in the Torah hints to show us various required amounts (*shiurim*). For example, a bone has to be the size of a barley grain in order to impart the status of impurity to one who touches it, and a piece of food has to be as large as fig in order to be liable for carrying it on Shabbos.

All of the Seven Species teach us about different amounts, but barely is the root teaching about all amounts, because barely/*se'orah* is from the word *shiur*/amount.

⁵² *Pesachim* 118a

⁵³ *Sanhedrin* 59b

⁵⁴ *Devarim* 4:4

⁵⁵ See *Viduy HaGadol of Rabbeinu Nissim, in the beginning of Tefillah Zakah (of Yom Kippur)*.

⁵⁶ *Berachos* 41a

What is a *shiur*/amount? When we think of amount, we usually think it must mean a set amount. But we can also find a kind of *shiur* which means “no amount”! We find this in the statement, “There is no difference between *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom* except for the size of a hair (*chut hasa’arah*).⁵⁷ *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom* are obviously not near each other but from the viewpoint of our soul, the difference between accessing *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom* is extremely subtle; “like mountains suspended on a hair.”⁵⁸ This is the kind of *shiur* which has no amount to it: a “hair”, a *sa’arah*, [which is from the word *se’orah*].

So on one hand, *shiur* can mean a “set amount.” On the other hand, *shiur* can also refer to a subtle amount, such as a hair.

The first definition of *shiur* applies to our physical world. Every table, for example, has a certain size it has to be. But when it comes to spirituality, there is no *shiur*. The levels we can reach in spirituality are unlimited; they cannot be measured and planned. Each person has a different amount of spirituality and inwardness that he reaches.

Even the physical world can show us this concept. There is no one size for all houses; each person needs a differently sized house to accommodate his specific needs. We also find that each person has a different height and weight; there is no set amount for these things. The same is true for our inner world; it is different with each person.

If we try to give a set *shiur* for anything in the physical world, it can be accurate, but when a person tries giving a set *shiur* to what he can attain spiritually, he is often inaccurate. Why? Because there is no *shiur* to the possibility of one’s spiritual attainments. You can’t measure it and plan it out.

There is another implication to the word *se’orah*, which is *hashaarah*/wealth. A person can have wealth either physically – or spiritually. When it comes to physical riches, each person has a set amount of wealth to how much he will earn, yet people still have endless ambitions to make more money and become wealthier. The same power exists in us when it comes to the spiritual. We can have ambitions to constantly enrich our spiritual level, to constantly develop a richer inner life.

This is the *avodah* represented by the barley/*se’orah* – it hints to how we must enrich our inner world, and that we shouldn’t place any limits/*shiur* on spiritual attainment. But *se’orah* also contains in it a negative side which counters this: it comes from the word *shiur*, which means that a person is apt to place a set amount for how much he wants to achieve spiritually.

A person has to always seek to be growing spiritually. There should be no “*shiur*” to his spiritual attainments, in that he constantly has ambition for more growth, in that he always desires to enrich his inner world of the soul. But when a person decides how much he wants to grow, he places a limit on his spiritual growth, and he will go his whole life without any hope of growing further than these limited aspirations he has set for himself.

Thus, one should be ambitious when it comes to spiritual growth. He should understand that yesterday’s achievement does not have to be today’s goal; he can strive for more than yesterday. And what you wish to

⁵⁷ A statement of Rebbi Bunim of P’shischa in the *sefer Kol Mevasser*, *cheilek beis*.

⁵⁸ *Chagigah* 10a

attain today doesn't have to be the same wish as tomorrow, because tomorrow, you should want to grow even more than how much you've grown today.

We Are Closer To The Light of Moshiach

We will now [skip to] discuss the sixth of the Seven Species, which is olive (*zayis*) [and it is related to our discussion on *se'orah*/barley].

It is well-known that the *shiur*/size for many foods is smaller than it was in the times of the *Gemara*. One of these examples is olives; in the *Gemara*'s times, a *kezayis*, the size of an olive, was bigger than the size of an olive today. The fact that *shiurin* of today are smaller than what they used to be is related to another fact that the fruits used to be bigger. We find that the Spies brought back fruits from the Land which were tremendous in size.⁵⁹ It is reminiscent of the fact that Adam's height was shortened after the sin.⁶⁰

Sizes have gotten smaller since the olden days, and so has the spiritual level of the generations. There is a concept of *yeridas hadoros* – the generations' spiritual level decreases as they go on. However, Rebbi Simcha Bunim of P'shischa⁶¹ stated a novel concept: that although the soul level in people has gone down since the previous generations, our **purity of heart** increases as the generations go on.

Reb Pinchos of Koritz used a parable to explain this concept. Once a person was traveling at night to a certain city, and he couldn't find his way in the dark. Usually when a person is nearing the city, the path is more lit up. When he's in between the path of one city to the next, the middle of the road is where it is darkest, because there is no light from either city to light it up. When he left the first city, there was light, and when he gets near to the second city, there will also be light, but when he's in middle of the path, it's dark.

The lesson from this is that on the first day of Creation, there was a light which Adam was able use to see from one end of the world to the other, but as time went on, our level decreased. However, because we are nearing Moshiach, we are closer to the light, and the closer we get to Moshiach's arrival, the stronger the light shines.⁶²

Thus, in today's generation, when we are at the end of the 6,000 year era of this world, the spiritual light of the future is at its zenith.

However, not everyone is able to feel the light we are approaching. When someone doesn't feel the light, not only won't he proceed, but he will probably turn back, because the path is so dark....

⁵⁹ Rashi, *Bamidbar* 13:23.

⁶⁰ *Chagigah* 12a

⁶¹ See *sefer Pri Tzaddik, parshas Vayechi*.

⁶² Based on this concept, the author has devoted an entire sefer, *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh: Part 8*, which explains our avodah of "ohr shel Moshiach", "light of Moshiach." These concepts are further elaborated upon in *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh: Part 9*, and they are also touched upon in *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Volumes 6 and 7*. However, the author stresses that the nature of this avodah is on a higher level than most of the matters we hear about, and therefore, before attempting to draw ourselves close to the avodah of ohr shel Moshiach, we must be firmly rooted in in-depth Torah study and in the strict adherence to all of halacha.

A person, as he goes through this world, has two ways how he can choose to travel. Either he can strengthen himself and be like a ship, forging forward through the ocean; but if he doesn't have the strength to go forward, he will resemble a raft floating in the ocean, which tosses and turns with the wind, sometimes getting forward, and sometimes getting thrown backwards...

When it comes to spirituality, no one ever stays in one place. The Vilna Gaon writes that we are either ascending – or falling – in our spiritual level.⁶³ We thus have to be very ambitious about spiritual growth. Just as a person can become money-hungry and never lose his constant ambition to become wealthier, so must we be very ambitious when it comes to spiritual improvement. The *shiur* for our spirituality must be that of constant growth.

The Avodah of Eating the Wheat and the Barley

Barley (*se'orah*) thus represents our *avodah* to become aware of our spiritual level and which direction we are going in. For example, when we eat the wheat, we need to be aware of our motives in the eating: are we seeking to eat out of Hashem's will that we eat, or are we simply eating because we are trying to fill what we lack...

If we discover that we are eating for the second motivation, than it shows that our level has changed – it has been lowered. But if we are eating for the higher motivation, then we are connected to Hashem even as we eat, and this shows that our spiritual level is rising.

The Mishnah⁶⁴ lists several *mitzvos* which have no *shiur*/set amount. One of these is the *mitzvah* of Torah learning; Hashem and the Torah are one⁶⁵, and therefore, Torah learning is limitless.

If a person raises his spiritual level, this reflects the lesson of *se'orah*/barley, which is synonymous with *shiur*/amount. But when a person merits to become attached to the Creator, he reaches a level higher than *shiur* – he realizes that he can be above the concept of *shiur* and be unlimited in his spiritual attainments.

To summarize the *avodah* we have learned thus far: *c'hittah*/wheat represents our *avodah* of sanctifying the motivations in our eating, and this can rectify the sin of Adam, who ate from wheat (according to one opinion of the Sages, as we mentioned). After we achieve this goal, we can progress to the *avodah* of the next species, *se'orah*/barley – which is that we must become aware of the spiritual direction we are in.

C'hittah is an inner kind of work. *Tzaddikim* (the righteous) would fight their physical desire for the food – in three different methods.

One method is the method of the *Raavad*⁶⁶, which is to leave over some food from the plate. An alternative method the *Raavad* gives is to pause a bit before eating. There is a third method as well, and it

⁶³ *Even Shelaimah*, 4:9

⁶⁴ *Peah* 1:1

⁶⁵ *Zohar*, *parshas Achrei Mos*, 73a

⁶⁶ *Rabbi Avraham ben David*, early 10th century scholar and author of many *Kabalistic works*

was practiced by Rav Yechezkel Levenstein⁶⁷, which is to decide before eating on how much you will eat; this prevents a person from eating more than he has to, and in this way, a person eats only to maintain his health, and not out of indulgence.

An In-Depth Analysis On Grapes

We mentioned before the opinion in our Sages that the *Eitz HaDa'as* was a grapevine. Let us now contemplate the *avodah* which grapes (*gefen*) symbolize.

There is a well-known statement of the Sages: “When wine enters, secrets come out.”⁶⁸ Wine [which comes from grapes] has a special power enabling it to reveal something outward.

If we reflect, we can discover that there are two ways how reveal something outward. One way is to simply release it outward. To illustrate, a person takes out all his money from the bank, and he is apt to spend it all irresponsibly, until he is left with no money in his account. It would have been better had he never seen the money; if he wouldn't have laid eyes on his savings, his heart would never have desired to spend it. Once he sees the money, his heart burns with the desire to spend it on what he wants, and so he uses up all his money.

Another way to reveal something outward is to bring out something's potential, without using it up. For example, when a person blows upon a fiery coal, the fire gets bigger; the fire had been there all along, in small embers, and now it has grown into its full strength. This is a different kind of release than in the first example above, because here, the fire isn't being used up; it still remains even after it has been released, because there are always small embers hidden in the coals. But in the first example we gave, releasing the money essentially will mean that the money is being used up.

The same two possibilities can apply to our own soul. There are matters which we can reveal from our soul, and they will still remain intact even after they have been let outward. There are also matters which, if we release them from our soul, they will be gone, and we will be left with nothing. The first kind of releasing is beneficial, and these are matters which are permitted for us to release from our soul. But the second kind of releasing is prohibited, because it will leave us empty afterwards.

Now that we have outlined the concept, we can know the following matter: who we are supposed to try to influence, and who we shouldn't. How do we influence others to grow spiritually? The Dubna Maggid gave a parable to answer this: If we want to fill up an empty cup, there are two ways how we can do it. Either we can fill up a cup until it overflows onto another cup, or we can simply pour from the first cup into the second cup. If we use the first method, the first cup remains full and doesn't lose any of its liquid; this is the sensible way. If we use the second method, we use up some of the liquid in the first cup as we pour its

⁶⁷ *Mashgiach (dean) of Yeshivas Mir in mid 1900s, known for his powerful talks on the topic of emunah (Faith); his talks have been compiled in the seven-volume Hebrew series, Ohr Yechezkel.*

⁶⁸ *Eruvin 65a*

contents into the second cup, and although the second cup has been filled, the first cup has lost some of its content.⁶⁹

Who Can Get Drunk on Purim?

*“When wine enters, secrets come out”.*⁷⁰ There are two kinds of secrets. There is a kind of secret that one should not ever reveal to others, and there is the kind of the secret that we are supposed to reveal through the wine we drink [on Purim].

If a person has an idea that will make him profit him a lot in business, and, while intoxicated, he tells his friend about it, then his friend might go and use his idea to profit for himself. That’s one kind of secret that a person shouldn’t tell another.

But there is another kind of secret which should not be told to others. There are people who, deep down, are seething at some people they know, and they keep all their negative emotions inside of them during the year. When they get intoxicated, and they encounter their friends whom they’re upset at, how do they act?

If a person’s Torah learning has been internalized into his being, he will be able to silence his negative emotions toward others, because he will be able to succeed in using the wine to destroy all the internal barriers he erected during the year towards others. This is ideal way to utilize the *mitzvah* of getting drunk on Purim, and this is the intended way to go about the *mitzvah*.

But if someone’s Torah learning hasn’t been internalized into his inner being he will let out all his rage and fury at others that he’s upset at when he gets drunk. He will let all those people know about all the grievances he really has against them. Such a person is actually **not** allowed to get drunk on Purim. He is not doing a *mitzvah*, and to the contrary, he’s making a fool out of himself. His intoxication does not foster any sense of brotherliness and friendship with others. Of him, it cannot be said *“And to the Jews there was orah, simcha, sasson and yakar”*.

If a person’s Torah’s learning has become a part of his inner self, then when he gets intoxicated and his mind is relaxed, words of Torah will spring forth from him, and he fulfills the *mitzvah* of Purim. The secrets that come out of his mouth are essentially secrets that still remain with him even after he releases them, and thus he is permitted to reveal those secrets.

But when a person’s Torah learning isn’t infused into his being, than when he reveals his secrets to others, those secrets don’t remain inside him, because he revealed them only in order to release these feelings outwards. These secrets were not supposed to be revealed. Only a secret that can remain inside the person

⁶⁹ **Editor’s Note:** To clarify, the meaning of the parable is that if a person will be negatively affected by the person he is trying to improve, then he should not be involved with trying to influence others, because even if he helps others improve, he will be harmed in the process and lose some of his own spirituality. But if he is the kind of person who will not be negatively affected by the person he is trying to help, then he can help the other, because then he is just letting his spiritual level “overflow” into the other, so he’s not losing some of his own spirituality, but he’s merely “donating” his extra amount of spirituality to the other.

⁷⁰ Eruvin 65a

even after they have been revealed – such as in the case of one who has internalized his Torah learning – can come out of one’s mouth on Purim.

What We Are Thinking As We Eat

After having understood this, let us now return to what we mentioned in the beginning, that the tree used to taste like its fruit. When the tree tasted like the fruit, did it lose out on its own taste in giving it to the fruit, or did it transfer its taste to the fruit, leaving itself tasteless? The first possibility is reminiscent of the ideal way to release something outward, while the second possibility represents the detrimental kind of releasing that we discussed. The second possibility was really what took place when Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDa’as* [as we will explain].

Bearing this in mind, let us now explore the view of the opinion in our Sages that the *Eitz HaDa’as* was a grapevine. According to this approach, that it was a grape, the depth of the sin was as follows.

When Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDa’as*, it was a negative use of “when wine enters, secrets come out.” He ate of the fruit and revealed his inner depths outward in doing so, but whatever he released outward did not remain inside him afterwards. Had his inner secrets remained inside even after he had released it, his act wouldn’t have become a sin; to the contrary – had he done that, he would have achieved unity between his external and internal layers, and the goal of Creation would have been reached. But he failed the test, and instead he caused disparity between his inner and external layer. His inner secrets came out, but they did not remain inside him afterwards – they were released outwards. This is the depth of why he was banished from *Gan Eden*. Since he had released his inner secrets outward without being able to maintain them internally, he was punished in retribution, and he was expelled from being inside *Gan Eden* to having to leave it.

The Sages say that “Jealousy, desire and honor take a person out of the world.”⁷¹ The desire to eat is one of the main physical desires of man. When a person indulges in food, it’s as if he left the world, because when he indulges, he has exited his inner self. Thus, the view of the Sages that the *Eitz HaDa’as* was a grapevine is essentially saying that Adam’s sin was that his eating caused him to exit his inner self.

We should emphasize, though, that we have no comprehension of Adam’s greatness, and therefore we cannot judge him. Rather, we are studying this narrative so that we can take out from it lessons that apply to us, on our own level.

Here is the lesson we can take out from this. When a person is eating – for example, let’s say he’s eating a grape – where are his thoughts? If he’s immersed in the grape he’s eating, he is basically in the grape, for all purposes! [The grape might bring him to all the detriment that wine can cause.] This is because the Baal Shem Tov said that a person is found where his thoughts are.⁷² If he’s thinking totally about the grape, he is basically exiting himself and turning himself into a grape!

⁷¹ *Avos* 4:21

⁷² *Sefer Keser Shem Tov (HaShalem)*, p.309-310, gloss 147; based on *Zohar parshas Noach*, 69b.

If we reflect about his deeper, the act of eating essentially causes one to exit himself and bring in something else into his insides. The person, in his indulgence for the food, leaves himself. This is the detriment caused by indulging in food. [Soon, we will say what the true way to eat it is].

Compare this to a person who wants to tell his friend a secret. Does he go over to his friend in the street and tell him a deep secret? No, he does not; he speaks to the person privately, in a house. He will reveal his innermost secrets only in utmost privacy. This is the ideal way to reveal a secret – the secret is revealed outward, but at the same time, he has brought the listener into his house; [in other words] he has released something outward, but he has brought something ‘inside’ him as well.

Now let us return to a person indulging in food. When a person is eating and he’s thinking totally about the food, what he has essentially done is that he has brought the food from the outside into his inside. He has left his inner self in doing so, and he instead enters into the food!

The Proper Way To Eat

In the ideal way to eat, a person takes the food and brings it toward him, as opposed to leaning toward the food in order to eat it. This reflects the well-known concept that the act of eating uplifts the food from the level of plant or animal to the level of man, and this sanctifies the food.⁷³

For this reason, *tzaddikim* would conduct their eating in a manner in which they didn’t lean their heads toward their plate, and instead they brought the food towards their mouth. [Unfortunately, there are people who devour their food mindlessly, totally immersed in their food, and they lower their worth in doing so].

Adam cried as soon as he found about the curse, because he thought that now he would have to eat out of the same trough together with animals. Adam cried about when a person eats mindlessly! It’s a shame if a person lowers himself toward the food; he is supposed to uplift the food, instead of lowering himself to the food. When a person mindlessly indulges in food, it is like the negative use of “when wine enters, secrets come out.” The person leaves himself as he eats, and he lowers his self-worth to the food, when he could have sanctified the food instead.

Being Drunk: The Revelation of One’s True Essence

We have already mentioned that when a person becomes intoxicated from wine, either one of two things will happen. Either he will fall into its trap and lower his self-worth, or he will connect to a higher source. In order to understand how this works, let’s explain the depth behind the view of our Sages that the *Eitz HaDa’as* was a grapevine.

Originally, in *Gan Eden*, there was the *Eitz HaChaim* and the *Eitz HaDa’as*. The *Eitz HaChaim* was meant to provide vitality (*chiyus*), while the *Eitz HaDa’as* served to provide knowledge (*da’as*). However, on

⁷³ *Sefer Shaarei Leshem, cheilek beis, 2:1:2; this concept is brought in many other sefarim hakedoshim as well.*

a deeper note, our own heart can provide us with both of these abilities (that is, if it is truly coming from our heart).

There are two kinds of knowledge. There is information we acquire from outside ourselves, like when we learn a *sefer* or when we hear something from our teachers. But there is another kind of information which we learn from ourselves; it's a knowledge coming from within. The knowledge that comes from within ourselves will be much clearer and accurate to the extent that we have worked hard to purify our heart.

In *Shemoneh Esrei*, in the fourth blessing (*Attah Chonen*), we ask Hashem for *da'as*. We are basically asking Hashem for life, because just as Hashem can bestow *da'as* upon us, so is He the source of our life. When someone draws his vitality from the Creator, not only will he have true vitality, but he will have the true source of knowledge as well. The vitality of the Creator, so to speak, can reside in a person, as it is written, “*And He blew into his nostrils a breath of life*”.⁷⁴ This means that Hashem blew of His own essence into a person, to provide him with life-sustaining energy.⁷⁵ Our whole life is being sustained entirely by the life-giving energy that Hashem provides us with.

We need to nurture all our *da'as*/knowledge from an inner source of vitality – from the vitality of the Creator. “*For the source of life is with You, in Your light there appears light; for Hashem gives wisdom from His mouth, knowledge and understanding.*”⁷⁶ The source of all our *da'as* can only come from Hashem.

When a person becomes intoxicated, his *da'as* leaves him. This is the exact definition of being drunk – when a person's *da'as* exits. What happens to a person when his *da'as* has temporarily left him? If he is connected to the Source of all vitality – the Creator – then he is uplifted to that Higher Source. But if he is only connected to a lower source, he will descend to the abysses of that lower source.

There is a story told about the Apter Rov ז"ל, that once he had to travel through a path that was known to be treacherous for its ice and snow. He traversed the path safely, without even falling or tripping once. The students asked him: “Teach us what miracle you performed.” He answered, “When a person is attached to Heaven with a string, there is Someone above controlling the strings so that the person won't fall. If someone is attached by a string to the earth, then he will be pulled lower toward the earth, which will make him fall. I am attached with a string to Heaven, and that is why I don't fall.”

In the same vein, when a person is intoxicated and his *da'as* has left him, if he is connected to his Higher Source, then He will be prevented from having a fall. He has connected himself to the Source of all life. This is the intended kind of intoxication that *Chazal* wanted us to achieve, and it is holy. If a person can remain connected to his Higher Source even as his *da'as* leaves him, such a person is eligible to fulfill the *mitzvah* of drinking on Purim. But if, *chas v'shalom*, a person isn't connected to his Higher Source, then as soon as his *da'as* leaves him, he will have a great fall and lower himself.

Thus, the only thing that can protect a person throughout his life from falling from his level is *da'as*. When a person is connected to Hashem, his inner essence will never leave him, even as his innermost depths

⁷⁴ Bereishis 2:7

⁷⁵ Sefer Tanya, chapter 2

⁷⁶ Tehillim 36:10

are being released outward. The true “I” of a person that is deep within a person is really connected to its Heavenly source.

Understanding the Sin of Adam

We can now understand the view of our Sages that the *Eitz HaDa'as* was a grapevine. Had Adam been connected to the *Eitz HaChaim* before partaking of the *Eitz HaDa'as*, he indeed would have lived forever had he then eaten from the *Eitz HaDa'as*. Had he first been connected to the Source of all life to begin with, eating of the *Eitz HaDa'as* would not have been detrimental; it would have instead been a holy usage of “Wine enters, secrets come out.”

But he didn't eat first from the *Eitz HaChaim*, and instead he decided to eat first from the *Eitz HaDa'as*, which, according to the view of the Sages we are discussing, was a grapevine. A grapevine, which can produce wine, represents the fact that wine can make a person lose his *da'as*; and since he was not connected yet to his Heavenly source, the grape/wine caused him to fall abysmally. As soon as he ate from the *Eitz HaDa'as*, he viewed his *da'as* as the main thing, and because he lost his *da'as* [due to the grapes/wine], he didn't have what to hold onto. He fell into the evil kind of “Wine enters, secrets come out.” He left himself, and he didn't remain with his inner essence.

There were thus two aspects to the sin: 1) He tried pursuing *da'as*, when he wasn't yet connected to the Source of *da'as*; 2) He fell from his own *da'as* into the evil that is present in *da'as*.

The Seven Species Must Come From Israel

Thus, eating of the Seven Species from the Land of Israel can **only** be effective if the species were grown in Israel. When we eat of the Seven Species that Israel is blessed with, we are able to connect through them to their Source, the Creator – and therefore, even if we were to lose our *da'as*, we still remain connected to our Source. But if a person eats of these Seven Species and they didn't grow in Israel, then such species do not connect him to Hashem; if his *da'as* leaves him when he's intoxicated, he will fall to degrading behavior. It resembles eating from the *Eitz HaDa'as* – the partaking of food without being connected to our Higher Source.

An In-Depth Analysis On Figs

Let us now proceed further and discuss the next of the Seven Species: figs (*te'ainah*).

There are many Jews today who have accustomed themselves not to eat figs, due to the common presence of worms in this fruit. There is more depth behind this matter.

As we mentioned before, the other view in our Sages was that the *Eitz HaDa'as* was a fig tree. This Sage came to the conclusion that it was a fig, since we know that Adam used fig leaves to cover himself after the sin. “From the wound itself comes the recovery”, so if the sin was caused by figs, the way to recover from the sin was with a fig; since we already know that Adam used figs afterwards to cover himself, it must be that the sin was caused with a fig.

The depth behind this matter is as follows. Before the sin, man lived a completely internal kind of existence, and he had no connection to superficiality of the external. There was thus no need for clothing, because there was no concept yet of external appearance. Once Adam ate from the tree – which was a grapevine, as we mentioned – “Wine enters, secrets come out”, and he left his internal kind of existence and instead entered into an external and superficial kind of existence.

After he ate from the tree, he felt the need for clothing, because now that he identified with externalities so his external appearance needed to be dealt with. This reflects the view of the Sages that the *Eitz HaDa'as* was a fig tree. The sin caused the need for Adam to sew fig leaves and cover himself.

The simple understanding is that if the *Eitz HaDa'as* was a fig tree, it must be that Adam made the fig leaves to repair his sin, which involved a fig. However, a deeper explanation is that the very fact that he ate from the *Eitz HaDa'as* already put himself in the direction of having to cover himself with the fig leaf. Before the sin, man was completely internal, and he did not care for any externalities; there was thus no need for clothing, which gives importance to one's external appearance. When he sewed the fig leaves, he was leaving his internal kind of existence and instead entering into superficiality.

Therefore, the opinion in the Sages that the *Eitz HaDa'as* was a fig tree is stressing a different aspect of the sin: that Adam became superficial, and as a result, he now needed clothing – the fig leaves, which were sewn from the *Eitz HaDa'as* itself...

One Lamb, Surrounded By Seventy Wolves

Before the sin, Adam possessed spiritual kinds of clothing, called *kosnos obr*. One of the Sages, Rebbi Meir, had a Sefer Torah in which the word “*obr*” was spelled with the Hebrew letter “*aleph*” (א), while the Sefer Torah we currently use spells it with the letter *ayin* (ע).⁷⁷

Why was the Sefer Torah of Rebbi Meir spelled like this? In order to understand this, let us reflect on the following.

Before, we mentioned that in a tree, there are two aspects – the actual tree trunk, and its fruits. The actual tree represents our reward in the future, because just as the tree trunk is called *keren*, so is our future reward called *keren*. Our actual reward is currently hidden from us. The fruits of a tree represent disparity, because fruits can be spread out.

⁷⁷ *Bereishis Rabbah* 20:12

The letter *aleph*, which has the numerical value of one, represents unity. Hashem is called the “*aleph*” (ruler) of the world⁷⁸, because He is One. The Jewish people are also called “one” nation, in contrast to any of the other seventy nations, who are not called “one”.

When the Jewish people fall from their level of *aleph*/oneness, they fall into seventy/disparity. They will then be surrounded by the seventy nations of the world, who are deemed seventy dangerous “wolves” surrounding one lamb – the Jewish people.

Wine in Hebrew is *yayin*, which has the numerical value of 70; when “wine enters and secrets come out” in a negative way, the Jewish people fall from “one” and are surrounded by “seventy.”

Thus, before the sin, which was before any secret motivations of man had been released, Adam had spiritual clothing, *kosnos ohr*, and it was then spelled with the letter *aleph*; because at that point, Adam was still connected in oneness with Hashem. After the sin, his *kosnos ohr* was now spelled with the letter *ayin*, and not *aleph*, because now disparity in the world was created, and now there would be disparity between the Jewish people and the other seventy nations. Before the sin, Adam’s soul contained every soul – the souls of the Jewish people, as well as the souls of all the other nations, in one unit. Jewish souls and non-Jewish souls were all unified. The separation of the souls only began with the sin; once there was a sin, the souls of the Jews and the souls of the non-Jews were apart from each other.⁷⁹

Ever since the sin, we are “one lamb, amidst seventy wolves.” We are one nation, surrounded by seventy nations. However, we also have an aspect of “seventy” as well. For example, on Sukkos we brought “seventy” sacrifices in the Temple, and there were also “seventy” souls that descended with Yaakov *Avinu* to Egypt.

The seventy descendants of Yaakov *Avinu* counter the seventy nations, and this “seventy” came into Creation after the sin. This is reflected by how the Torah spells the word *kosnos ohr* with the letter *ayin* (70) after the sin; these *kosnos ohr*, made after the sin, were sewn from fig leaves.

This is the deep reason why figs are often infested with worms!

In today’s reality, we are basically at war with the other nations. We are fighting evil. With all this, however, there is an inner layer to reality taking place at the same time: we are “one lamb, amongst seventy wolves.” Those are the two aspects going on at once, in the current reality – we have an aspect of “seventy” in us, yet we also have the aspect of “one” in us.

We are currently amongst the seventy “wolves” of the world, and we have an aspect of “seventy” in us that can counter this. Our aspect of “seventy” is represented by wine (in Hebrew, *yayin*), which has the same numerical value seventy.⁸⁰

In the future, however, Hashem will return us back to the original state of our oneness, “*aleph*”. As it is written, “*The King has brought me to His chambers; we will rejoice and be happy in You.*”⁸¹ Right now, we are

⁷⁸ *Rashi to Mishlei 16:28*

⁷⁹ **Editor’s Note:** *In the potential sense, the disparity existed even before the sin; but after the sin, the concept of disparity was outwardly revealed.*

⁸⁰ *The Hebrew word for wine is yayin יין, which contains the letters yud ך yud ך and nun ך. Yud is the numerical value of 10 and nun has the numerical value of 50. So, therefore, the gematria of yayin יין is 70. 10+10+50=70.*

amongst the seventy nations, and we must reveal our oneness to the degree that we can. Thus, the true meaning of “*When wine enters, secrets come out*” is that we have to reveal our oneness amidst the current situation of “seventy”.

As we are currently in exile, our *avodah* is paradoxical. On one hand, we have in us an aspect of “seventy” which can counter the seventy nations of the world, as we explained; and the other hand, we are also “one” amidst seventy. The depth behind the paradox is that we are supposed to reveal oneness precisely in a situation where there is disparity.

The fact that we are surrounded by seventy nations and that we continue to survive is not just a miracle – it is because our goal is to reveal our oneness amidst the seventy nations so that we can return to our original state of before the sin. Therefore, our *avodah* is to return to the true kind of eating – and if we do so, we reveal oneness amidst the seventy.

An In-Depth Analysis on Olive Oil

We have explained at length thus far that grapes represent wine, which reveals our innermost secrets. Olive oil bears some resemblance to wine, because just as wine causes our secrets to be noticed [to rise to the top], so does olive oil always float to the top in a cup of water.

The olive represents how we must always seek to ascend in spirituality. This repairs the sin of Adam, who descended from his level as a result from the sin.

Oil is what is used to anoint the kings and High Priests of the Jewish people.⁸² *Moshiach* will also be anointed with olive oil. A person’s status is raised when their head is anointed with oil.

The *Gemara* says that eating olives [on a regular basis] causes one to forget his Torah learning.⁸³ However, the *Gemara* says that if one eats the oil from the olive, it will help his learning. This is perplexing! The olive makes a person forget his learning, yet its oil does the opposite?! The depth of the matter is because the olive is a food, and food does not connect a person to his Heavenly source. Oil, however, can connect a person to his Heavenly source, since oil is used to anoint someone to raise them to a higher status. Thus, olive oil helps us fix our eating.

Oil has several uses. It can be eaten; it can be used to anoint; or it can provide light. In the *Beis HaMikdash*, pure olive oil was required for the Menorah. But when it came to the *Mincha* offering, the oil did not have to be pure; the *Gemara* says that this is a decree of the Torah, as the logic dictates the opposite: we would think that oil used for eating (the *mincha* offering) is better to use than oil used to light with.⁸⁴

This shows us that the olive contains two contradictory aspects. The olive by itself wouldn’t be able to bring us to spiritual perfection, because since the olive is eaten, it is a food, and food always has some

⁸¹ *Shir HaShirim* 1:4

⁸² *Rambam, Hilchos Melachim* 1:7

⁸³ *Horayos* 13b

⁸⁴ *Menachos* 6:1

drawback to it. Although the olive is one of the Seven Species, and it represents a way of higher eating, still, it cannot bring a person to ascend spiritually. Only its oil can accomplish spiritual ascension, and we can see this from how olive oil always floats to the top of the water.

For this reason, the Torah does not just call it *zayis*/"olive", but rather *zayis shemen*, olive oil. The olive itself causes one to forget his learning if he eats it. Although the olive is one of the Seven Species, its main benefit lies in its oil.

On a deeper note, oil represents the hidden light contained in everything. The possibility to grow in spirituality is only when a person searches for the hidden light in something – "*In Your light, light can be seen.*"

When a person only focuses on the materialistic aspect of something, he falls from his level. A person has to look for the spirituality contained in food – the "word of Hashem" that exists everywhere, even in food – for the G-dly spark is contained in everything.⁸⁵

An In-Depth Analysis of Dates/Honey

Now we will briefly discuss the depth behind dates, which the Torah calls "honey" (*devash*).

It is written, "*Honey and milk under your tongue.*"⁸⁶ This hints to us that honey is meant to go under our tongue – in other words, honey represents something which is supposed to remain inside of us, something which we should not release outward. It is the opposite of the concept of wine, which is meant to bring out our innermost secrets into the open.

Before, we explained that it is not always a good thing when we reveal our insides outward. This is when we reveal something which doesn't remain inside us as a result of releasing it. If it is something that can still remain inside even after we reveal it, it is the kind of secret which wine serves to reveal.

But on a deeper note, there is an opposite concept to this, which is that we have to also realize that are supposed to internalize matters, and we do not have to seek to reveal them outward.

In other words, the Seven Species teach us to internalize their lessons. We take them in from the outside, where they enter our mouths – and we are supposed to let their lessons stay inside us, internalized.

The point behind this is that we are meant to reveal spirituality in matters that appear to be superficial. We have a power to take external matters and reveal an inner layer to them – in other words, when we internalize a matter, we reveal the inner layer of a matter.

This is based upon what we mentioned in the beginning: Creation resembles a tree. When we look at a tree, it appears as if we see of what the tree has revealed, because we see its fruit. But the inner perspective is that even when we see fruits growing on a tree, we aren't seeing the actual fruit yet – for they are still

⁸⁵ A statement of the Baal Shem Tov.

⁸⁶ Shir HaShirim 4:11

considered part of the tree, for all purposes.⁸⁷ When the fruits are still on the tree and they haven't been picked yet, they are considered to be part of the tree.

What we can understand from this is that even when something is revealed outwards, the purpose is not only to reveal. There is a more inner purpose, and that is to internalize matters which we take in from our outside. This is the inner depth to “When wine enters, secrets come out.” It is that even when we reveal our secrets, the point is not simply to reveal them outward, but to internalize all of our understandings. This concept – to bring in matters from the outside, so we can internalize them – is represented by honey, which goes “*under your tongue.*”

The Pomegranate

The next of the Seven Species we will discuss is the *rimon* (pomegranate).

A pomegranate has a crown to it⁸⁸, and a crown means *Keser*. A pomegranate has 613 seeds in it, parallel to the 613 *mitzvos*.⁸⁹ Above the 613 seeds in the pomegranate is its crown – in other words, above all the 613 *mitzvos* is the point called *Keser*.

The word *keser* in Hebrew has the numerical value of 620, while the number of *mitzvos* are 613. There is a difference of 7 which hints that the Seven Species are what connects our 613 *mitzvos* to the point above the *mitzvos* which is *Keser*.⁹⁰

The *Kohen Gadol*⁹¹ was anointed with olive oil. The oil was placed on his forehead, yet the forehead is not the highest place of the head. Higher than the forehead is the actual top of the head, where a crown can be placed. Thus, *Keser* “Crown” – which is represented by the pomegranate – is at a higher level than the olive oil. In this way, a Jewish king⁹² is at a higher spiritual level than the *Kohen Gadol*, because the king wears the “crown” – he is at the level of *Keser*.

Keser is also identified in the *sefarim hakedoshim* as *ayin*, which means “nothingness”.⁹³ When we negate our ego, we nullify our existence to Hashem - we feel like “nothing.” This brings us to the very high point known as *Keser*.

The lesson we can take out of this is that when we eat, we are supposed to feel totally nullified to the Creator. When we nullify our ego before Hashem, we are going above our comprehension in doing so by tapping into our state of nothingness, *ayin*.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ See *Makkos 12a*

⁸⁸ *Tractate Uktzin 2:3*

⁸⁹ *Malbim to Shir HaShirim 4:13*

⁹⁰ *Hagahos Beer Yitzchok, 5, in sefer Mayim Adirim.*

⁹¹ *High Priest of the Temple*

⁹² Editor's Note: Understandably, this was only true with the righteous kings of Israel such as *Shaul, Dovid, Shlomo and Chizkiyahu*, and not the wicked kings of Israel.

⁹³ *Eitz Chaim, 342:1.*

A person who doesn't merit to nullify himself through his eating – what happens? He merely digests the food and excretes it, and the food he ate turns to waste, exiting outward. The eating could have exited and ascended upwards to Heaven, but instead of doing that, the food merely exits downward and turns into human waste.

Conclusion

When the Jewish people merited the miracle of *Manna* in the desert, there was no bad *manna* left over from it; all of it was fit for consumption.⁹⁵ This represents the fact that “Torah is not given except to those who eat the manna”⁹⁶; in other words, eating of the manna is the holy kind of eating, and holy eating merits a person to truly receive the Torah.

The word *manna* has the same numerical value in Hebrew as the word *ilan* (tree). This alludes that the true kind of eating is like the eating of the *manna* – a kind of eating in which there is nothing bad leftover. When the people ate *manna*, it did not come from a desire to fill what they lacked, but as a way to connect to Hashem. The eating of the *manna* represented a level in which a person only ascends in spirituality, and he never falls from his level.

We, of course, are not on the level of eating in a way that reflects how the Jews in the desert ate *manna*. We do have our falls in spirituality. But we are able to reach a spark of this great level, in which we eat so that we can ascend in our connection with Hashem, and that we aspire to reach a level in which we never fall.

May we be granted by Hashem, through the eating of the Seven Species on *Tu B'Shevat*, as well as through all the other times we eat – that we should reach some spark of true eating. And when we merit even a tiny spark of that truth, it will light up all the darkness, and it will reveal light in its place. May we merit this, speedily, in our days, *Amen*.

⁹⁴ The concept of *ayin* is further elaborated upon by the author in [sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh Part 6, Chapters 3-7](#) (with English translations of this available at the Bilvavi website), as well as in *Bilvavi Volumes 7, 8, and 9*.

⁹⁵ *Yoma* 75b

⁹⁶ *Midrash Tanchuma, Beshalach: 20*.