



Treasure that Pleasure

Eating affords us a special opportunity to connect to Hashem as it says Vayechezu Es HaElokim Vayochlu Vayishtu, they saw Hashem when they ate and drank (Shemos 24:11. See the Shelah in Toldos.) In this light R' Simcha Bunim of Peshischa explains Ein Kidush Elah B'Makom Seuda, Kiddush must be recited in the place where the meal is eaten (Pesachim 101a). He says engaging in the physical act of eating with the right intentions elevates the physical eating to Kedusha.

We need to ask ourselves what are we eating, how we eat, how much we eat and why we eat. It comes as no surprise that מאכל is an acronym for אידך, למה אתה אוכל, כמה אתה אוכל, למה אתה אוכל.

The following is a brief elaboration on these four (and not limited to this):

1) What are we eating: We should analyze and see Hashem in the food. Let us contemplate some of what is involved in the food we eat. Look at the ingredients of what we eat and realize each one is a story in itself. Who gave people the idea that putting together these ingredients would create such tasty food? Think of the process of how the food is produced, the factory it is made in and the machines involved. Consider the people who toiled until it reached your plate on your table- who worked the land so that it should be fitting to produce food, who planted it, the employees in the factory, the one who loaded it onto the truck, the one who drove the truck to the store, the workers who put it out on the shelves, the cashier and so on. What about food that is imported from another country- how many more people are involved in that? Let us not forget to give thought to the appetizing color of the food, its texture, shape, smell, taste and so forth. We should do this with each item of food we eat.

There were a group of people that worked to improve their sense of gratitude. The leader suggested thinking for ten minutes about something they have or do. For R' Leibel Benjaminson, these ten minutes turned into 35 as he wrote about his coffee he had in the morning. He wrote about how the coffee beans grew in Brazil. Someone planted the trees and took care of them until the beans reached maturity. Then the beans were picked from the trees followed by being roasted and ground, and packed for shipping. He described the work involved in the shipping industry

that allowed the coffee to reach the United States. This alone required hundreds of people. The coffee then arrived at the port in Haifa from where it was taken to the grocery store in Jerusalem. He wrote about the gas range that boiled the water, and the match he used, which was easier than having to rub two sticks together. He wrote how the gas reached his home and what was necessary to build his stove. The water kettle whistled to let him know the water boiled. The milk he added required many people from the time it left the cow until it reached his coffee cup. This doesn't even include the cup, teaspoon, the table it was placed on and the chair he sat on.

The following can help us get present. When these are done, we can enjoy the experience of pleasure Hashem bestowed so much more. This can be applied to food, a magnificent site, vacation, a wedding and so on. Count from 1-10 and get more present as you count each number. While counting ask yourself these questions: Am I sitting or standing? How am I breathing- heavily or calmly? Where are my hands- are they folded or in my pocket? Are they touching anything? What is in my proximity? After this, focus on that which is external to the body: Do I hear traffic, honking or someone else talking? Is there silence or noise in the room?

2) How we eat: what are our intentions when we eat- to help us learn, daven and be healthy? When we eat, do we do so in accordance with proper etiquette? Do we eat in accordance with Halacha? (See Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 169-180)

R' Alexander Ziskind after a fast would eat small fish with bones so that he would eat patiently and conquer his desire for eating (Yesod V'shosh Ha'avoda, Mevo, p. 39, s.v. B'yom). That is Va'achaltem Sham Lifnei Hashem Elokeichem, eating with Hashem's presence (Devarim 12:7)!

3) How much do we eat: do we overeat? The Rambam writes that undereating is one of the three ways that one avoids illness and increases his strength (Hilchos Daos 4:14). The other two are exercise and soft bowel movements. He says this applies even if one eats bad foods. The Rambam is one we can trust in these areas as he was the physician to Sultan Saladin and his ministers in nearby Cairo. He writes further

(4:15) that overeating is the main cause of illness. (Dr. Steven Smith on his 100th birthday was asked about his secret to his vitality. He replied take care of your stomach the first 50 years and your stomach will take care of you the next 50.) We need to eat in accordance with Tzadik Ochal L'sova Nafsho, a righteous man eats to satisfy his soul (Mishlei 13:25).

4) Why are we eating: To serve Hashem. The Ohr Tzadikim explains V'nishmartem Meod L'nafshosaichem that one should guard his physical health for his soul (L'nafshosaichem), as one who is sick or in bad health can't serve Hashem properly (Mayana Shel Torah, Vaeschanan 4:15). We can eat also to enjoy Hashem's world. The Meshech Chochma (Breishis 2:16) comments on Mikol Eitz Hagan Achal Tochail, of every tree of the garden you may freely eat, that it is a Mitzva to sustain oneself and get pleasure from the fruits of the garden. This is just as the Yerushalmi (Kidushin 4:12) says that in the future one will give a Din V'cheshbon for that which his eyes saw and didn't eat.

The Brisker Rav prepared in advance the exact amount of food he would need for a given Shabbos. Once, after Shabbos, those around him noticed that he had an extra apple and banana. Upon inquiring they got their answer. One should recite 100 Brachos every day. Since on Shabbos there are fewer Brachos in the Shemoneh Esrei, one should recite additional Brachos to make up for the lack. The Brisker Rav explained he had enough food items for the 100 Brachos. That Shabbos however, he received an unexpected Aliya. Since the Aliya covered two Brachos, he did not need to eat these two food items to meet the 100 Brachos.

The Gemara says Kan Kodem Bracha Kan L'achar Bracha (Brachos 35): before one says a Bracha on food it belongs to Hashem whereas after the Bracha it belongs to him. The Afikai Yehuda explains differently: before one says a Bracha it is his, meaning it is Gashmiyus. However, after one says a Bracha it belongs to Hashem since it was just elevated.

The story is told of one who asked R' Ahron Karliner what the difference between him and the Rebbe was when he recites a Bracha. The Stoliner Rebbe responded you make a Bracha in order to eat whereas I eat in order to make a Bracha!

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