

# Shvilei Pinches

## Parshas Ekev

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Parshas Ekev 5770

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**“ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את ה' אלקיך”**

**“Three Who Ate Together at the Same Table”**

**Refers to the Brain Heart and Liver that Are Nourished by Our Food**

In parshas Ekev that we read this week, we learn about the mitzvah of “Birkas Hamazon” (Devarim 8,10): **“ואכלת** “you will eat and you will be satisfied and you will bless Hashem, your G-d, for the good land that He gave you.” The biblical obligation to recite three blessings over our food is derived from this possuk; a fourth blessing was later instituted by our blessed sages in Yavneh. This is discussed in the Gemorah (Berachos 48:):

**“תנו רבנן סדר ברכת המזון כך היא, ברכה ראשונה ברכת הזן, שניה ברכת הארץ, שלישית בונה ירושלים, רביעית הטוב והמטיב... מניין לברכת המזון מן התורה... רבי אומר ואכלת ושבעת וברכת, זו ברכת הזן... על הארץ זו ברכת הארץ, הטובה זו בונה ירושלים, וכן הוא אומר ההר הטוב הזה והלבנון, הטוב והמטיב ביבנה תקנה”.**

The words **“ואכלת ושבעת וברכת”** refer to the first blessing of Birkas Hamazon, **הזן**; the words **“על הארץ”** refer to the second blessing, **הארץ**; while the word **“הטובה”** is a reference to the third blessing, **בונה ירושלים**. The fourth blessing of Birkas Hamazon, **הטוב והמטיב**, was instituted in Yavneh.

We wish to propose a novel approach concerning our biblical obligation to recite three blessings over our food. First, though, let us address a teaching of the divine Tanna, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, in the Mishnah (Avos 3,3):

**“רבי שמעון אומר, שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ולא אמרו עליו דברי תורה, כאלו אכלו מזבחי מתים, שנאמר (ישעיה כח ח) כי כל שלחנות מלאו קיא צואה בלי מקום, אבל שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ואמרו עליו דברי תורה, כאלו אכלו משלחנו של מקום ברוך הוא, שנאמר (יחזקאל מא כב) וידבר אלי זה השלחן אשר לפני ה'”.**

“Rabbi Shimon states that three who ate together at the same table without discussing divrei Torah, resemble those who have eaten from offerings to idols . . . ; however, three who ate together at the same table and discussed divrei Torah are likened to those who have eaten at the table of the Holy One Blessed is He . . .”

The reason Rashbi specifies three who ate together is enigmatic. After all, surely, two who ate together or even a single person eating alone, are also required to discuss divrei Torah over their meals.

### **Our Food Travels from the Liver to the Heart to the Brain**

Let us address these issues by delighting in the incomparable teachings of the Sefas Emes (Ekev 5652):

**“הענין דיש בחינת מוח לב כבוד, כדאיתא שהכבוד מקבל מקודם המאכל, ואחר כך הלב מוציא חלק הדק מובדל מן הפסולת, אחר כך מעלה הלב חלק היותר דק אל המוח, כי כל אבר הרוחני ביותר צריך לקבל חלק דק מבורר... ואלה הג' הם כלים לבחינת נפש רוח נשמה, וכולם מקבלין חיות מן המזון”.**

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He explains that the body is comprised of three compartments—the brain, the heart and the liver. Food passes through the liver first; next, the heart receives the filtered food, devoid of some of the waste; then the highest quality nutrients reach the brain. The more spiritual limbs and organs require higher quality, less contaminated nutrients. These three major organs serve the **Nefesh, Ruach and Neshome**, respectively, and they are all nourished by our food.

This explanation is founded on the words of the Zohar hakadosh (Terumah 153.): **”הכבד נוטל בראש, ואחר כך הוא מקרב הכל ללב, ונוטל הלב מובחר של המאכל, כיון שנטל ונתחזק מאותו חוזק ורצון שלקח, הוא נותן .”** The Arizal clarifies the matter for us by explaining that man’s Neshome, soul, has three main components, referred to as **Nefesh, Ruach and Neshome**.

The lowest level of the soul, the **Nefesh**, dwells in the liver; the more spiritual **Ruach** dwells in the heart; the most spiritual of all, the **Neshome**, dwells in the brain. When a man eats, the liver—the residence of the Nefesh—receives the food first, for processing and purification. It sends the higher quality, purified extract to the heart—the residence of the Ruach. The heart processes and purifies the food even further and the most select fraction of the food is passed on to the brain—the residence of the Neshome.

### The Essence of the “Mahn” Went to the Brain First and then to the Heart and Liver

Based on this concept, the Sefas Emes explains that the manna that fell from heaven, provided nourishment in the opposite direction. Rather than nourishing from the bottom up—from the liver to the heart to the brain—it travelled from the top downwards—from the brain to the heart to the liver. Here are his inimitable words:

**”אכן המן היה בחינת לחם מן השמים, ונראה שהוא סועד המוח, והוא היפך מזון הגשמי שבא דרך כבד ולב אל המוח, והמן אדרבא סועד המוח, ונמשך ממוח ללב ולכבד מלמעלה למטה שהוא לחם מן השמים, ורמוז לדבר דכתיב (שמות טז טז) עומר לגולגולת.”**

It seems clear that **”לחם מן הארץ”**—food that grows from the ground—is a physical form of sustenance that travels through the body from the bottom up. The liver begins the process by nourishing the Nefesh from the raw, unrefined foodstuff; the refined portion that remains is utilized by the heart to nourish the Ruach; the most refined and spiritual portion of the food then goes up to the brain to nourish the Neshome.

The “mahn,” however, **”לחם מן השמים”**—food from heaven—was spiritual sustenance. The Gemorah describes the “mahn” as follows (Yoma 75:): **”לחם אבירים אכל איש, לחם שמלאכי השרת אוכלין אותו”**-- food that was consumed by the ministering angels and fell in the desert in order to sustain our forefathers. It functioned in a manner directly opposite to that of the bread of the land. First, the brain extracted the purest, most spiritual elements of the “mahn”; what remained moved on to the heart; the least spiritual, most corporeal elements proceeded down to the liver. The Sefas Emes finds support for this concept in the very language of the possuk (Shemos 16,16): **”זה הדבר אשר צוה ה' לקטו ממנו איש לפי אכלו עומר לגולגולת”**—each person was to gather the amount that he was able to consume, **עומר לגולגולת**—the measure of an omer per head, i.e. the “mahn” nourished from the head down, providing the brain its portion first.

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## Torah Achievement Nourishes the Brain

Following the path blazed for us by the Sefas Emes, let us forge on to better understand why the Holy One found it necessary to deviate from the natural scheme of things. Why was it advantageous, or even crucial, that the generation that sojourned in the desert receive its sustenance from the “mahn” –which provided for the brain first, then for the heart and, lastly, for the liver—in direct opposition to how normal food, “lechem min ha’aretz,” functioned?

Let us introduce an insightful explanation from the author of the Tanya found in Likutei Maamarim (chapt. 5). He addresses the fact taught in the Gemorah (Chagigah 14.) that the Torah is also referred to as “lechem,” bread or food. An illustration is found in Mishlei (9,5): “**לכו לחמו בלחמי**” —“Come, partake of My lechem”--My food (bread)—referring to Torah. When we eat, the food enters the body and the essential nutrients become inseparable from one’s flesh and blood. So, too, when a Jew struggles mentally to comprehend the Torah, his comprehension and his Torah achievements are incorporated into the brain; thus, the Torah becomes mental fuel for the brain—the dwelling place of the Neshome.

Nevertheless, it is not sufficient that the Torah nourish only the brain. It must extend its light and influence to the heart, as well. This point is made in the Eretz Tzvi, written by the gaon from Kozhiglov (beginning of parshas Shoftim) where he cites his teacher and master, the author of the Avnei Nezer. Man’s purpose and mission in this world is for his brain to illuminate the way for the heart. When the intelligence and wisdom in the brain perceive that an act is unworthy, it must guide the heart with its light to prevent the remaining limbs of the body from performing that particular act.

It is clear, therefore, that by means of the toil and effort expended to achieve a greater understanding of the Torah, the Torah is able to illuminate all three of the aforementioned compartments—the brain where the **Neshome** resides, the heart where the **Ruach** resides and the liver where the **Nefesh** resides. I have found an explicit source for this idea in the Zohar hakadosh (Tzav 29:): “**דמזונא דאורייתא איהו מזונא דנשמתא ורוחא ונפשא**” —in other words, the Torah provides nourishment for the Neshome, the Ruach and the Nefesh.

## The Ability to Expound the Torah Was Only Given to Those that Ate the “Mahn”

We can now explain why the Holy One chose to sustain our forefathers, Yisroel, in the desert with a spiritual bread from heaven that nourished and influenced from the top down--from the brain to the heart to the liver--rather than the usual way that earthly bread functioned—from the liver up to the heart and then up to the brain. Our sages of blessed memory state in the Mechilta (Beshalach 17): “**לא ניתנה תורה לדרוש אלא לאוכלי המן**” —the ability to elucidate and expound on the Torah was given only to those who consumed the “mahn.” We see, therefore, that HaKadosh Baruch Hu fed Yisroel this heavenly bread as a means of purifying their bodies and preparing them to receive the Torah.

Seeing as the purpose of receiving the Torah is in order to enlighten the Neshome in the brain, which will descend to enlighten the Ruach in the heart, and then will continue to descend to enlighten the Nefesh in the liver, the reason for providing the “mahn” to Yisroel is evident. For, this spiritual sustenance, followed this identical pattern—first, it

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nourished the brain, then it went down to nourish the heart and, lastly, it nourished the lowermost liver. This entire process served to prepare Yisroel to receive the Torah—which also nourished the body from the top, the brain, down to the liver.

We find that eating the “mahn” and receiving the Torah are intimately related and inextricably bound to one another. Had Yisroel in the desert not consumed this spiritual food—designed to accustom them to this top to bottom process—had they sufficed with earthly bread, receiving the Torah and attaining any significant Torah insight—also a top to bottom process—would have proved much more difficult.

In this light, see how beautifully the verses are now understood! **“הנני ממטיר לכם לחם מן השמים ויצא העם”**—“Behold! I will rain down for you bread from heaven; the people will go out daily to gather each day’s portion.” The narrative continues as if to explain why the Holy One deviated from the usual pattern observed in nature, where the food proceeds upward from the liver to the brain. **“למען אנסנו הילך בתורתי אם”**—“so that I may test them and see if they follow the ways of my Torah or not”—the “mahn” not only prepared them to receive the Torah but also served as a test to see if they were truly ready to follow in its ways.

### מ'וח ל'ב כ'בר Is an Abbreviation for מל"ך

This concept will provide us with an insight into the sages statement in the Gemorah (Kiddushin 30:): **“כך הקב"ה”**—the Holy One explains to Yisroel that He created the yetzer horah and he also created the Torah as its antidote. First, though, let us present an incredible idea from the holy, Rabbi Yisroel of Rozhin, zy" a, commenting on the Gemorah (Avodah Zarah 4:):

**“אמר להן הקב"ה לישראל, עמי ראו כמה צדקות עשיתי עמכם שלא כעסתי כל אותן הימים, שאם כעסתי עליכם לא נשתייר משונאיהם של ישראל שריד ופליט, והיינו דקאמר ליה בלעם לבלק מה אקוב לא קבה א"ל ומה אזעום לא זעם ה'. וכמה זעמו, רגע, וכמה רגע, אמר אמימר ואיתימא רבינא רגע כמימריה. ומנלן דרגע הוה ריתחיה, דכתיב כי רגע באפו חיים ברצונו.”**

Concerning the time when Bilam attempted to curse Yisroel, we are taught that Hashem mercifully withheld His wrath and anger during that entire period of time. Otherwise, Yisroel could have been annihilated. The Gemorah inquires as to the duration of Hashem’s wrath; it concludes that it is but a moment.

Tosafos raise the following question: **“ויום תאמר מה היה יכול [בלעם] לומר בשעה מועטת כזאת, ויש לומר”**—what damage could Bilam possibly accomplish in a mere moment? They answer that he could utter the word **“כל"ם”**, meaning to destroy them; nevertheless, the Holy One transformed the order of this utterance to **“מל"ך”**—the same letters in the reverse order. The holy, Rabbi from Rozhin, zy" a, clarifies Tosafos’ meaning. Man’s mission in this world is to increase the dominion of the brain and its intelligence over the whims and desires of the heart and to subjugate them in the service of Hashem. By so doing, the heart will resist the harmful influences of the animalistic part of the soul, the Nefesh. He whose brain and intelligence reign successfully over the heart, whose actions are guided and determined by his “sechel,” is able to serve his Master loyally.

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This was the desired intent of Bilam's curse "kalem," כל"ם. He wished to reverse the proper chain of command for Yisroel so that they would be controlled from the bottom up, as signified by the letters of כל"ם—which are an abbreviation for כ'בד (liver), ל'ב (heart), מ'וח (brain). He wished that the animalistic Nefesh residing in the liver, would rule over the desires of the heart, awakening physical and materialistic goals and priorities—thereby, enlisting the brain to devise schemes to fulfill those desires. As Tosafos point out, however, the Almighty confounded Bilam's plans and transformed כלם into מלך. This ordering of the letters dictates that the proper chain of command is מ'וח (brain), ל'ב (heart), and then כ'בד (liver)—from the top down and not vice-versa.

This teaches us an important lesson concerning our constant battle against the yetzer horah. The yetzer will employ all of its powers to turn the bodily chain of command upside down. He wants the animalistic Nefesh in the liver to reign over the Ruach in the heart, which will, in turn, control the Neshome in the brain. Our responsibility, of course, it to serve Hashem by maintaining the desired chain of command, ruling from above downward as symbolized by the word מל"ך—the מ'וח on top, then the ל'ב and, lastly, the כ'בד.

We can now begin to appreciate to some small degree the Holy One's message: בני בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו "בני בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו" "בני בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו" Although it is true that I created the yetzer, who makes every effort to persuade a person to follow a reverse chain of command—with the liver below controlling the heart and the heart controlling the brain—I also supplied you with the antidote to the yetzer, the Torah. Engaging in Torah study, enlightens a person starting from the top, his brain, down to the rest of the body. First, one must appreciate and recognize the brilliance of the Torah with one's brain and mental faculties, and only then can it be disseminated to his heart and, finally, to his liver. Truly, the Torah is an amazing antidote and weapon with which to confront the yetzer horah.

### Mealtime Is a Time of Battle

With greater insight and joy in our hearts, we can now return to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's statement in the Mishnah:

"שלושה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ולא אמרו עליו דברי תורה, כאלו אכלו מזבחי מתים... אבל שלושה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ואמרו עליו דברי תורה, כאלו אכלו משלחנו של מקום ברוך הוא."

"Rabbi Shimon states that three who ate together at the same table without discussing divrei Torah resemble those who have eaten from offerings to idols . . . ; however, three who ate together at the same table and discussed divrei Torah are likened to those who have eaten at the table of the Holy One Blessed is He . . ."

This can now be understood as referring to any individual sitting down to eat a meal. Even if one is eating alone, he can still be considered as: "שלושה שאכלו על שלחן אחד"—for, the three that are dining together are the Nefesh in the liver, the Ruach in the heart and the Neshome in the brain.

In fact, the Zohar hakadosh teaches us (Ekev 272.): "שעת אכילה שעת מלחמה"—mealtime is a time of battle. This statement can be understood in light of our previous discussion. Any food we ingest, "לחם מן הארץ", earthly fare, is processed from the bottom up. It begins nourishing the liver, where the nutrients are sorted out; it then passes on to the heart and, ultimately, to the brain. We see that physical, earthly food, assists the yetzer horah in its quest to institute a chain of command starting from the bottom up—a system wherein a person is governed by his

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animalistic tendencies. Both follow the order of the letters **כל"ם**—liver, heart, brain. For this reason, mealtime is a time to wage battle against the yetzer horah. Therefore, it is recommended to engage in divrei Torah during meals. By engaging in Torah-related discussions, we enact a system that starts with the brain and works downward—a system symbolized by the word **מל"ך**—reflecting the following order: brain, heart, liver.

We can interpret Rashbi's statement as follows: "Three that ate together at the same table"—is a reference to the Nefesh in the liver, the Ruach in the heart and the Neshome in the brain; "and did not discuss words of Torah, resemble those who have eaten from offerings to idols"—since the food is starting off down in the liver and, only then, travels upward, it is following a negative, potentially evil path consistent with dictum (Berachos 18:): **רשעים** "בחיההן קרויין מתים"—"the wicked even while alive are considered as dead", therefore, it is considered as if they have eaten from offerings to idols (who are dead). On the other hand, "three who ate together at the same table and discussed divrei Torah"—their words of Torah impose an order of influence beginning in the brain and spreading downward, counteracting the food's natural direction of influence. Now, they are viewed "as if they have eaten at the table of the Holy One Blessed is He."

### Three Blessings Designed to Enlighten the Liver the Heart and the Brain

Alas, we can understand the biblical command from the Almighty to recite three blessings in Birkas Hamazon. They are aimed at remedying the three major organs—the liver, the heart and the brain—that process food from below and then move it upwards. The first blessing, **הזן**, is directed at the **Nefesh**, in the liver, that receives the majority and bulk of the food. Insofar as this part of the process is common to all living creatures, the formula recited for this blessing is **"הזן את הכל"**—He that nourishes all creatures.

The second blessing, **הארץ**, is aimed at the **Ruach** which dwells in the heart. This is in recognition of the fact that Eretz Yisroel is the center and heart of the world. The Chesed L'Avraham writes:

**"כי ארץ ישראל הוא לב העולם כי היא שער השמים כנוכר לעיל, וכמו שהלב הוא מקור החיים יתחלק ויתפשט החיות לכל אברי הגוף, כן בהיות ארץ ישראל בריאה בצדיקים היושבים בה, יתפשט הבריאות לכל יושבי העולם בכללות."**

Eretz Yisroel is the heart of the world and the gateway to heaven. Just as the heart provides sustenance to the rest of the body, so, too, the righteous tzaddikim living in Eretz Yisroel, sustain the health of the rest of the world.

The third blessing, **ירושלים ובית המקדש**, corresponds to the **Neshome** in the brain. The Beis HaMikdash represents the brain of the world; the Shem MiShmuel (Sukkos 5673) writes that the wisdom of the Torah was disseminated to all of Yisroel via the Beis HaMikdash.