



From the desk of
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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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TORAT

Parashat Teruma

HAMELECH

A Table Like a *Mizbei'ach*

This week's *parashah* discusses the *Mishkan* and its vessels. One of the important vessels was the *Shulchan* – the Table for Showbreads. In *Yechezkel* (41:22), it is called a *mizbei'ach*. Why? Says Rav Yehuda: This teaches that when we no longer have a *Beit Hamikdash*, a person's table atones for him just like a *mizbei'ach*.

How does this work? One way is through feeding the poor. A person prepared for himself a whole meal. Instead of ingesting it all, he controls his desire for food and shares some of his meal with the needy. The part that he shared is like a *korban*. He controlled himself. He ate a little less than he had wanted to. He is not so animalistic. He took his animalistic side of him and "slaughtered" it and offered it upon an altar.

That is what the *Beit Hamikdash* is all about. When we slaughter animals and place their designated parts upon the altar, we are to imagine that it is happening to us. We too must sacrifice our animalistic cravings for a higher purpose.

We can also give of our time, convenience and energy for the betterment of society. These, too, can become "*korbanot*" which bring Hashem much *nachat*.

The Extended Table

Says the Shlah HaKadosh: Nowadays, not everyone is capable of inviting the needy to dine at their table. There could be a number of reasons for this. Sometimes the host is too embarrassed. Sometimes the needy are too embarrassed. Sometimes the mandates of *tzniut* do not allow for typical *hachnasat orchim*. There are some people who are of shady character and while we wish to help them, we do not feel comfortable inviting them into our homes.

But we need not do away with this wonderful mitzvah. In such circumstances, the community should raise funds from its residents and open up a soup kitchen or Hachnasat Orchim Home where guests and needy residents can turn to for a healthy meal and a good night's sleep. All who contribute towards this worthy cause have a portion in a special *mitzvah*, with all of the atonement which a *mizbei'ach* has to offer.

The Two Tables

There is yet another way in which our table is akin to an altar. When we say *Divrei Torah* at our meals, we elevate the food and the souls of the listeners.

In *Pirkei Avot* (3:3), R' Shimon teaches that three who eat at a table and do not say words of Torah, well, it is like they consumed offerings of the



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dead (idols), as the verse says (Yeshaya 28), "For all tables are full of vomit and excrement, without [the Divine] Presence. But a threesome who dine together and share words of Torah, that is like they ate from Hashem's Table, as it says (Yechezkel 41), "This is the table which is before Hashem."

The Zohar HaKadosh expounds upon this point in this week's *parashah*. Here is an excerpt: There's a table and there's a table. One table is arranged before Hashem in the Heavens. What is served upon it? Words of Torah! Delicious delicacies built of letters. Hashem Yitbarach enjoys these dishes immensely! He "tastes" from each one. This is truly the table which is before Hashem.

Then there is this other table. Oy vey! No Torah there. No Kedusha. That's the "key-tzoa" table. Hashem is not there. That's just how it is. A table without *Divrei Torah* is the "key-tzoa" table. It is a table for *Avoda Zara!*

A table which has *Divrei Torah* and also poor people dining – that is a recipe for success!

Two Tables, Part Two

As Purim approaches, we notice a stark contrast between Achashveirosh's "Shabbat" table and ours (as described in Gm. Megillah 12b). On the seventh day of Achashveirosh's second party, Achashveirosh was drunk and the conversation turned to discussing external, physical beauty –

which country has the best-looking queen. Until Achashveirosh boasted that his wife outdid them all and he was challenged to prove it.

Well, Hashem is not pleased with such conversations. On the contrary, He is disgusted by it. What pleases Him? When *Klal Yisrael* conduct their *Seudot Shabbat* with *Zemirot* and *Divrei Torah*. Now that gives Him true *nachat!* *Divrei Torah* at the table infuse *Kedushah* into the very food we eat, as do the *Brachot* when recited properly.

Why are the Rabbis so Thin?

R' Elazar asked R' Shimon: Why is it that *Talmidei Chachamim* are, generally speaking, physically weaker than others?

R' Shimon explained that *Talmidei Chachamim* focus on spirituality, even whilst eating. So their souls get nourished from the spirituality of the food. The physical part of the food does not really talk to them. It does not become part and parcel of their being.

The wicked eat for eating's sake, so they get fatter. The righteous eat for the sake of giving honor to Hashem, so their souls receive nourishment and the physical part of the food goes in one side and out the other, not leaving off too much along the way.

Magen Avraham (siman 6, note 4) also says that the soul benefits from the spirituality of the food



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while the body enjoys the physical side. Thus, food keeps both going.

How to Eat

The Arizal told R' Chaim Vital that the best way to receive Ruach HaKodesh is to recite *Brachot* over food properly! That is what decimates the "peels" and "shells". Besides for physical peels and shells, all food comes with spiritual ones, too. Those who eat without a *brachah*, well it is like eating an egg or a nut with the shell, Uch! Or an orange and banana with the peel!

Those who say a *brachah* the way a *brachah* was meant to be said, well, they are "peeling" the fruit or other food item, ridding it of all impurities and thus, only the best of spirituality enters their system. Thus, it is no wonder that they are fit for Ruach HaKodesh for they are such holy people!

Which Mizbei'ach?

Sefer Od Yosef Chai (of R' Yosef Zarka) relates how R' Shalom Sharabi would tell people to learn *Parashat Ketoret* and *Perek Eizehu Mekoman* at their tables. This way, their tables would be transformed into both *Mizbechot: Ketoret* and *Olah*.

He continues: There are 27 pipelines which allow goodness to flow down to us from the Heavens. These correspond to the 27 letters of the *Alef-Bet* (including *sofiot*). The *Shulchan* in the *Mishkan* represents this number as well. How so? Its

measurements are two *amot* long, one *amo* wide, and one and a half *amot* tall. Now, given that each *amo* is six *tefachim*, that translates to twelve *tefachim* long, six *tefachim* wide, and nine *tefachim* high. What is that all together? That's right – 27! [Interesting to note that the Gemara discusses how a person's table is like a *mizbei'ach* on page 27 of *Masechet Chagiga*.]

Vilna Gaon (*Shir HaShirim* 3:6) points out that *Shulchan* in Hebrew stands for: *Shechelet*, *Chelbana*, *Levona*, *Nataf*; which are four essential parts of the *Ketoret*.

Life of the Party

Yitro came to join *Klal Yisrael* in the desert. He slaughtered offerings and Aharon and the Elders joined him for a banquet. The verse says that they dined "before Elokim." Our Sages extrapolate that anyone who dines at a meal where a *Talmid Chacham* is present, he is enjoying the radiance of the Divine Presence. But, Rav Y. Y. Fisher asks, how does this fit with what we are taught that a *Talmid Chacham* is not to partake of a *seudah* which is not for a *mitzvah* purpose? Didn't we just say that any *seudah* which has a *Talmid Chacham* has the *Shechinah*?

The answer is obvious. Not every time a *Talmid Chacham* walks in to a meal is the *Shechinah* there. Only if he is taking a leading role, saying *Divrei Torah* and *Divrei Hitorerut*, etc. At such a place, the *Shechinah* is there. But if the *seudah* is



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one of *reshut* and the *Talmid Chacham* were just to wander in and sit on the side, he ought not do that.

Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that Yitro's banquet was his *Seudat Brit Milah*, his joy and celebration over becoming part of the Jewish People. At such a *seudah*, the eating is very spiritual and uplifting.

You, Too, Can be a Mishkan

When done right, a person's eating can be very spiritual.

One who brings a gift to a *Talmid Chacham* is akin to bringing *Bikurim* (Ketubot 105a). Giving wine to *Talmidei Chachamim* to drink is like pouring wine libations upon the altar (Yoma 71). A person can achieve a level of sanctity such that all of his physical endeavors become infused with spirituality. For example, when the *kohanim* ate *korbanot*, that was the fulfillment of a *mitzvah*. A person can get to a level where he is a living, walking, talking *mishkan*, *mikdash* and *mizbei'ach*. (Mesilat Yesharim 26)

Lechavod Shabbat Kodesh

Shamai ate daily *Lechavod Shabbat*. How did he do this? When he found something nice, he would save it for Shabbat. When he found something nicer, he would eat the first one, and save the second one for Shabbat.

Hillel did everything for the sake of Heaven. He did not have to focus on Shabbat in order to eat for the sake of Heaven.

Zohar Parashat Yitro teaches that when we sit down to our *Seudot Shabbat*, we are making it clear that we are children of the King. Someone who does not eat appropriately at the Shabbat table or does not participate in the *Seuda*, he is making it known that he is not a child of the King. He will receive due punishment.

So when we sit down to our *Shabbat Seudot*, we should give some thought to the greatness of the moment and make the most of it.

In the *Beit Hamikdash*, *Kohanim* had to eat in order for Klal Yisrael to achieve atonement.

Sefer Ohr Haganuz says that just like a bee transforms pollen into honey, so too a person can raise food from physical delight to spiritual ecstasy.

Eating is something we do daily. It is up to us to do it right. We could eat just like other living creatures, but then we are no better than animals. Or we could eat with the right intentions. We can make our tables into a *mizbei'ach* through *tzedakah* and words of Torah, good *brachot* and concentrating upon the fact that we eat so that we have strength to do *mitzvot* and *Avodat Hashem*.

May we merit to live lives of *kedushah*.

Shabbat Shalom Umevorach,
Mordechai Malka