

# A Taste of Torah – Nourishment in the Parasha

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

## Parashat Devarim: “The Bread of Heaven” What is Moshe’s Last Lesson to Israel About Mindful Eating?

### What Has Helped Me Reduce My Food Cravings

Although my struggle to eat mindfully seems never-ending, when I look back at how I used to devour delicacies without awareness of their Divine Source, I do recognize progress B”H.

What has helped me over the years is being careful about eating routines, portion control, and pronouncing my blessings loudly. The first step is to work on lustful eating, as I learned from Rabbi Lazer Brody: “Lustful eating creates an iron curtain between a person and Hashem” (*Foreword, A Taste from the Wellsprings – With Torah Teachings on Nutrition & Health*, soon to be published, b’ezrat Hashem).

I just completed my annual juice fast, which I believe helps reduce cravings and emotional eating. As my food cravings subside, it is easier to recognize Hashem as the Source of my sustenance. Yet after going more than ten days without eating, it takes tremendous self-discipline to avoid overindulging in the delicious quinoa and pesto finally available to me. Feeling grateful for my meals and thanking Hashem for them through appropriate blessings helps me enjoy my food, eat more mindfully, and be satisfied with less. I also try to recite a short personal prayer before eating, asking Hashem to help me tap into the Divine sparks embedded within the food, as the Biala Rebbe taught. It is sufficient to intend and enunciate that we are eating to keep our bodies healthy and strong for the sake of serving Hashem at the beginning of our meal. Before beginning to eat, it is much easier to have this intention than in the middle of the meal when we may get overpowered by food cravings. Even if we lose sight of our original intention during the meal and the appetite takes over, our eating is still considered eating for the sake of Heaven according to the original intention.

### What Nourishes More Than Bread?

When Moshe recounts Israel’s forty years of wilderness wandering, he reminds the people that Hashem deliberately allowed them to experience hunger before providing them with the miraculous manna. Had the manna appeared before they felt their need, they might have regarded it merely as a regular form of food. Instead, Hashem first awakened their dependence and only then revealed the true Source of their sustenance. Through this experience, Moshe teaches one of the Torah’s most profound truths about nourishment:

**סֵפֶר דְּבָרִים פֶּרֶק ח פסוק ג וַיַּעֲבֹר וַיִּרְעֲבֶךָ וַיֹּאכְלֶךָ אֶת הַמָּן אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַעְתָּ וְלֹא יָדְעוּן אֲבֹתֶיךָ לְמַעַן הוֹדִיעֶךָ כִּי לֹא עַל הַלֶּחֶם לִבְדּוֹ יַחְיֶה הָאָדָם כִּי עַל כָּל מוֹצֵא פִּי הַשֵּׁם יַחְיֶה הָאָדָם:**

“He afflicted you and let you hunger, and then fed you with the manna... to teach you that the human being does not live by bread alone, but by everything that comes from the mouth of Hashem” (*Devarim* 8:3).

At first glance, Moshe’s statement seems difficult to understand. Is the Torah asking us to ignore the physical realities of nutrition? Is there somehow vitamin B12 or omega-3 hidden within Hashem’s words? If not, what exactly is “every word that proceeds from the mouth of Hashem,” and how does it sustain our lives? Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin reveals that nourishment possesses both a physical and a spiritual dimension:

“A person’s body is nourished from the physical bread, while the Divine spirit is nourished from the spiritual power that enlivens it. Therefore, they said, ‘Not by bread alone,’ meaning not merely by its physical aspect, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of Hashem.’ Through eating, the body and

soul become joined together. This is unlike Torah study and prayer, which contain no physical component through which the body can unite with them" (*Ruach HaChaim* on *Pirkei Avot* 3:3).

Physical nourishment alone cannot sustain life because it exists only through the continuous creative word of Hashem. This idea echoes the famous Midrash that "there is not a single blade of grass below that does not have a heavenly angel above it striking it and saying, 'Grow!'" (*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 10:6). Every stalk of wheat, every kernel of grain, and every fruit and vegetable grows only because Hashem continually breathes life into His Creation. The bread resting upon our table is therefore much more than flour, water, yeast, and salt. Hidden within every loaf is the Divine utterance that continually calls it into existence. When Moshe declares that we do not live by bread alone, he invites us to look beyond what our eyes can see. Every meal offers us far more than physical sustenance; it invites us to encounter the Divine Presence that permeates all of Creation.

### **Why Did Hashem Choose Manna to Teach Us About the Inner Dimension of Food?**

The Shlah HaKadosh explains that the manna was not naturally suited to nourish the human body for forty years. Rather, its purpose was to teach them that even bread, although suited to human nature, is not the true source of life. The manna was uniquely suited to teach this lesson because it descended every morning, directly from Heaven, visibly demonstrating that nourishment comes from Hashem. Moreover, its physical dimension was so subtle that its spiritual source shone through far more clearly than in ordinary food, whose Divine origin is concealed. Once Israel experienced this truth through the manna, they were prepared to recognize that the ordinary bread they would later bake in Eretz Yisrael was sustained by the very same Divine Source, although now concealed within the natural order (*Shlah HaKadosh*, Toldot Adam, Beit David). Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Chaver adds another dimension: "The manna given to them in the wilderness purified their bodies and souls, making them fitting vessels to receive the Torah and bind themselves to the holiness of His Torah... Just as this sanctified physical nourishment refined their bodies, so too were they sustained by the spiritual sustenance, namely the supernal light of Torah..." (*Siach Yitzchak*, Part I, *Drush l'Siyum HaShas*). The manna, therefore, did far more than satisfy Israel's physical hunger. It refined the generation that received it, preparing them to become worthy vessels for the Torah that would nourish them spiritually. Although we no longer eat manna, its lesson accompanies every meal. The miracle hidden within our daily bread is no less real than the miracle that descended from Heaven. Every loaf invites us to recognize the very same Divine Source that sustained the manna.

### **How Do We Elevate the Hidden Holiness Within Our Food?**

The Chassidic masters explain that humanity's relationship with eating changed dramatically after Adam and Chavah ate from the Tree of Knowledge. Before the first sin, good and evil existed separately. Afterwards, they became intermingled throughout Creation. Sparks of holiness became concealed within the physical world, awaiting their restoration. Since humanity's first spiritual failure occurred through eating, it is through eating in holiness that we are given the opportunity to begin repairing that breach (*Yesod V'Shoresh HaAvodah*, *Sha'ar* 7, Chapter 1).

Rabbi Shlomo Hakohen of Radomsk explains Rabbi Shimon's teaching that three who eat without words of Torah are considered as though they have eaten from offerings to the dead:

"The food contains both holy sparks and *kelipot* (husks). Through words of Torah we bind ourselves to the holy sparks and elevate them. Otherwise, only the *kelipot* remain" (*Shulchan HaTahor*, *Pirkei Avot* 3:3).

The purpose of speaking Torah at the table is therefore not merely to create an inspiring atmosphere. It awakens the hidden holiness within food and transforms the physical act of eating into an act of revealing and elevating the sparks embedded within our food.

Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin develops this idea further. He explains that every table stands at a crossroads. Whether it becomes “the table of Hashem” or Heaven forbid, its opposite depends upon where the pleasure of eating is directed. There is nothing wrong with enjoying delicious food. On the contrary, Hashem created taste as one of His gifts. The question is whether that pleasure remains trapped within our physical appetites or is elevated through recognizing Hashem as the Source of our nourishment. When our enjoyment flows through our Divine soul rather than merely our physical desires, even the pleasure itself becomes an act of holiness (*Pri Tzadik, Et HaOchel*, §6).

Rabbi Alexander Ziskind likewise teaches that the principal vitality we receive from food comes from the sparks of holiness hidden within it. When we eat with the proper intention, these sparks become attached to our souls, and when we use the strength gained from our meal to learn Torah, pray, perform mitzvot, and serve others, those sparks are elevated back toward their Source (*Yesod V'Shoresh HaAvodah, Sha'ar* 7).

Every meal thus becomes an opportunity to continue the lesson of the manna that revealed the spiritual dimension of food openly. Each blessing, every word of Torah spoken at the table, and every mitzvah performed with the strength our meals provide helps uncover the hidden holiness that Hashem lovingly concealed within His Creation.

### How Do Blessings Help Us Recognize and Elevate Divine Sparks?

**ספר דברים פרק ח פסוק י' ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את השם אלהיך על הארץ הטובה אשר נתן לך:**

“When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless Hashem your G-d for the good land that He has given you” (*Devarim* 8:10).

Rabbi Alexander Ziskind teaches that when we recite our blessings with heartfelt intention and eat for the sake of Heaven, we elevate the holy sparks concealed within our food (*Yesod V'Shoresh HaAvodah, Sha'ar* 7).

Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin adds that when we use the strength gained from what we eat to learn Torah, perform mitzvot, and serve Hashem, we complete their journey back to their Divine Source (*Pri Tzadik, Et HaOchel*, §6). Every meal offers us a choice: we can eat simply to satisfy physical hunger, or we can transform eating into an opportunity to draw closer to Hashem. Through blessings, words of Torah, and performing mitzvot, ordinary bread becomes nourishment not only for the body, but also for the soul.

Perhaps this is the deepest lesson Moshe wished to impart before Israel entered the Land. The manna would cease, and ordinary bread would replace the miraculous bread that fell from Heaven. Yet the miracle itself would never end.

When we recognize that Hashem continually sustains all creation through His word, every bite becomes an opportunity to draw closer to Hashem, nourish the deepest dimension of our souls, and transform the simple act of eating into an act of Divine service.

*Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin: Holistic Torah for Women on the Land is for women who seek to delve deeply into their souls through intensive textual study and creative expression. We engage women of all ages and nationalities in intense Torah study and sustainable living. Drawing on creativity and life experience, students participate in art & drama workshops, authentic movement, and organic gardening, and take turns cooking wholesome meals for each other. Our Holistic Torah involves connecting to Torah of the land, to our Creator, and to personal growth. Dormitory facilities are available in the peaceful, rural setting of Bat Ayin, nestled in the Judean Hills and located just 20 minutes south of Jerusalem.*