



The Focus and Purpose of Eating according to the Arizal

Sixteen Upper Teeth and Sixteen Lower Teeth Grind the Food to Free the Sparks of Kedushah from the Garbage of the Klipos

This week's parsha, parshas Eikev, contains the mitzvas aseï of Birkas HaMazon (Devarim 8, 10): **“ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את ה' אלקיך על הארץ הטובה אשר נתן לך”**—**you will eat, and you will be satisfied, and you will bless Hashem, your G-d, for the good land that He gave you.** Our blessed sages deduce from this passuk that a person is required by the Torah to recite Birkas HaMazon after he has eaten and is satiated. As we have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 21a): **“מנין לברכת המזון לאחריה מן התורה, שנאמר ואכלת ושבעת וברכת.”**—from where in the Torah do we derive the obligation to recite Birkas HaMazon after meals? For it is written: **“And you will eat, and you will be satisfied, and you will bless.”**

It behooves us to focus on the beginning of this passuk: **“You will eat, and you will be satisfied.”** Clearly, we are not being commanded to eat and be satisfied. Nevertheless, Chazal emphasize the importance of eating with kedushah and taharah l'shem Shamayim; it is considered a vital avodah. This is stated explicitly in the following Gemara (ibid. 55a): **“כל זמן שבית המקדש קיים מזבח מכפר על ישראל, ועכשיו שלחנו”**—**so long as the Beis HaMikdash stood, the mizbeiach atoned for Yisrael; now, a person's table atones for him.**

For this reason, it is necessary to say words of Torah at the dining table. As the Mishnah teaches us (Avos 3, 3): **“שלושה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ואמרו עליו דברי תורה, כאילו”**

אכלו משלחנו של מקום ברוך הוא, שנאמר וידבר אלי זה השלחן אשר לפני.” But three people who ate at the same table and did speak divrei-Torah at the table, it is as if they had eaten at the table of the Omnipresent, Blessed is He, as it is said (Yechezkel 41, 22): **“And he said to me, ‘This is the table that is before Hashem.’”** Similarly, this is the reason for the halachic ruling in the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 231): **All pleasure and benefit a person enjoys in this world should not be intended for one's own personal pleasure but rather should be for the purpose of serving the Almighty.** As it is written (Mishlei 3, 6): **“בכל דרכיך דעהו”**—in all your endeavors know (emulate) Him. . . This applies to all mundane and optional activities such as eating, drinking, walking, sitting, rising and satisfying all of a person's bodily needs. A person who adheres to this directive is always serving his Creator.

The Purpose of Eating Is to Separate the Food from the Waste

In this essay, we wish to present to our royal audience an important, practical insight from our master, the Arizal, that applies to each and every one of us. His remarks are found in Sha'ar HaKavanos in relation to the passuk from our parsha cited above. Here is a translation of one excerpt: **The goal of eating is to sift out the good from the food and extricate it and elevate it from the klipos and**

dross mixed in with it . . . Hence, when a person eats, he should do so with great care and not like animals who cannot distinguish between good and bad. Therefore, our blessed Rabbis elaborate on this subject and compare one's table to the mizbeiach.

Further on, the Arizal teaches us something remarkable. He explains why HKB"H created man with sixteen upper teeth and sixteen lower teeth with which to chew food. He says that the 32 teeth correspond to the 32 "paths of chochmah" that make sense of everything. Similarly: **The food is processed by the 32 teeth. The 32 teeth grind up the food and separate the essence of the food from the refuse just like a millstone grinds up grain. Afterwards, the chaff and bran, which are the klipos (literally: shells), separate from the flour that is the essence of the food. This was not so before they were ground up; then they were stuck together as a single entity.**

The Arizal also asserts that the teeth are divided into sixteen upper teeth and sixteen lower teeth akin to the letter "aleph." How so? The Tikunei Zohar (Introduction 15b) explains that the letter 'א' is formed by the letters יו"י. There is a "yud" on its upper right side, another "yud" on its lower left side, and a diagonal "vav" in between them.

Additionally, the Arizal asserts that the diagonal "vav" is actually made up of two "vav"s. Thus, the letter "aleph" is formed by the letters יו"י, which are divided up into a י"י (16) on its upper right side and a י"י (16) on its lower left side. This is precisely the division of the 32 teeth in a human being's mouth—16 above and 16 below. This is the deeper significance of man's 32 teeth, and how they correspond to the letter "aleph."

Accordingly, the Arizal says that when eating and chewing our food, we should focus on separating the true food from the refuse with our 32 teeth that correspond to the letter "aleph"; because the letter "aleph" alludes to the supreme chochmah that

sifts out the food from the waste, and the sparks of kedushah from the klipos.

It is my aim to explain in this essay the intriguing insight of the Arizal in a way that is practical and pertinent to everyone, according to the revealed Torah. We will endeavor to explain why our 32 teeth are divided up into two groups of 16, akin to the letter "aleph," enabling us to separate the food from the waste in our food. We beseech Hashem to guide us on the path of "emet"!

An Enigma from the Teachings of the Gra of Vilna

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by introducing a baffling teaching from the great luminary, the Gaon of Vilna, zy"a. He addresses a passuk from the Haftarah of "Nachamu" (Yeshayah 40, 4): **כָּל גֵּיא יִנָּשָׂא וְכָל הָר וְגִבְעָה יִשְׁפָּלוּ וְהָיָה הָעֵקֶב לְמִישׁוֹר וְהָרְכָסִים לְבִקְעָה, וְנִגְלָה יְנֻשָּׂא וְכָל הָר וְגִבְעָה יִשְׁפָּלוּ וְהָיָה הָעֵקֶב לְמִישׁוֹר וְהָרְכָסִים לְבִקְעָה, כְּבוֹד ה'."** Every valley will be raised, and every mountain and hill will be lowered; the crooked will become straight, and the mountain ridges will become a valley. The glory of Hashem will be revealed.

According to the Gra, the navi was referring to the letter 'א', which is formed by a "yud," a "vav" (that is actually two "vav"s), and a "yud." These four letters are not aligned properly; they are supposed to stand upright in a single line like all of the other letters. Hence, the navi prophesied that in the future, they will be aligned properly:

"כָּל גֵּיא יִנָּשָׂא"—every valley will be raised—refers to the "yud" on the lower left side of the "aleph"; it will be raised to stand level with the other letters. **"וְכָל הָר וְגִבְעָה יִשְׁפָּלוּ"—and every mountain and hill will be lowered**—refers to the "yud" on the upper right side of the "aleph"; in the future, it will be lowered to stand in line, level with the other letters. **"וְהָיָה הָעֵקֶב לְמִישׁוֹר"—the crooked will become straight**—refers to the diagonal "vav" in the middle of the "aleph"; it will stand up straight. **"וְהָרְכָסִים לְבִקְעָה"**—indicates that the "vav" will be split in two, i.e., the word **"לְבִקְעָה"**

alludes to splitting. **“וְנִגְלָה כְבוֹד ה’”—and the “kavod” of Hashem will be revealed.** The gematria of כבוד equals 32, the numerical value of the four letters that form the “aleph,” יו”י (10+6+6+10).

Undoubtedly, the words of the Gra are enigmatic. What does it mean that currently, in Olam HaZeh, all the letters that comprise an **“aleph”** are crooked and not aligned properly? Furthermore, this prompts the navi Yeshayah to announce in his prophecy of consolation— **“נַחֲמוּ נַחֲמוּ עַמִּי”** – that they will be straightened out and aligned properly in the future. We will endeavor to explain these enigmas.

The 16 Upper Teeth Allude to the 16 Aliyot to the Torah the Sixteen Lower Teeth Allude to the 16 Tamid Offerings

Now, I would like to propose my own explanation of the Gra’s enigmatic words. The Shela hakadosh (Beha’aloscha 9) brings down a fascinating interpretation from one of the Rishonim, the author of the Rokeiach, of two pesukim in Shir HaShirim where HKB”H extols the virtues of the congregation of Yisrael by referring to their teeth. The first passuk is (Shir HaShirim 4, 2): **“שִׁינֶיךָ כַּעֲדַר הַקְּצוּבוֹת שְׁעָלוּ מִן הַרְחֵצָה שְׂכוֹלִים**” **—your teeth are like a well-numbered flock of ewes that came up from the washing pool, all of which are perfect, and none among them are blemished.** The second passuk is (ibid. 6, 6): **“שִׁינֶיךָ כַּעֲדַר הַרְחֵלִים שְׁעָלוּ מִן הַרְחֵצָה שְׂכוֹלִים מֵתַאֲיֻמוֹת**” **—your teeth are like a flock of ewes that came up from the washing pool, all of which are perfect and none of them is missing.**

According to the Rokeiach, these two pesukim allude to the Torah and the avodah of the korbanos that sustain the world. That the Torah sustains the world is stated explicitly in the Gemara (Shabbas 88a): **“מֵאִי דְכַתִּיב וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם ה’שִׁשִּׁי, ה”א יִתִּירָה לְמָה לִּי, מִלֵּמַד שֶׁהַתְנָה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עִם מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרָאשִׁית וְאָמַר לָהֶם, אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל מִקְבָּלִים הַתּוֹרָה. What is the meaning of that which is written (Bereishis 1, 31): “And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day (יוֹם ה’שִׁשִּׁי)?” Why do I need the extra letter “hei”? It teaches us that HKB”H stipulated**

with the works of creation, saying to them: “If Yisrael accept the Torah, you will endure; but if they do not, I will return you to a state of total void and chaos.”

The fact that the continued existence of the world hinges on the avodah of the korbanos, even when the Beis HaMikdash is not extant, is taught in the following Gemara (Megillah 31b):

אָמַר אַבְרָהָם לִפְנֵי הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: רְבוּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, שְׁמָא חֵס וְשָׁלוֹם יִשְׂרָאֵל חוֹטְאִים לִפְנֵיךָ וְאַתָּה עוֹשֶׂה לָהֶם כְּדוֹר הַמַּבּוּל וְכְדוֹר הַפְּלָגָה? אָמַר לוֹ: לֹא. אָמַר לִפְנֵי: רְבוּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, “בְּמָה אֲדַע?” אָמַר לוֹ: “קָהָה לִי עֵגְלָה מְשׁוּלָּשֶׁת וְגו’.” אָמַר לִפְנֵי: רְבוּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, תֵּינַח בְּזִמְנָן שְׁבִית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ קָיָים. בְּזִמְנָן שְׂאִין בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ קָיָים מָה תֵּהָא עֲלֵיהֶם? אָמַר לוֹ: כִּבְר תִּקְנִיתִי לָהֶם סֵדֶר קְרִבּוּת, כָּל זִמְנָן שְׁקוּרְאִין בְּהוֹן מַעֲלָה אֲנִי עֲלֵיהֶן כְּאִילוּ מִקְרִיבִין לִפְנֵי קְרִבּוֹ, וּמוֹחֵל אֲנִי עַל כָּל עֲוֹנוֹתֵיהֶם.

Avraham said to HKB”H, “Master of the Universe, Perhaps, chas v’shalom, Yisrael will sin before You, and You will do to them as to the generation of the mabul and the generation of the dispersion.” He said, “No!” He (Avraham Avinu) said to Him, “Master of the Universe, “How will I know?” He (Hashem) said to him (Bereishis 15, 9): “Bring to Me a three-year-old calf . . .” (hinting that He would forgive Yisrael for their transgressions in the merit of the korbanos). He (Avraham) said to Him, “Master of the Universe, that is fine for the times that the Beis HaMikdash is in existence, but in the times that the Beis HaMikdash will not be in existence, what will be with them?” He (Hashem) said to him, “I have already established for them the order of korbanos (in Scriptures). Whenever they read from them, I will consider it as if they were bringing Me a korban, and I will forgive them for all their sins.”

Based on this, the Rokeiach says that one set of 16 teeth represents the 16 lambs that Yisrael offered weekly for the korban Tamid. How so? Every day of the week, Yisrael offered two korban Tamids, one in the morning and one in the evening. This accounts for fourteen korbanos. On Shabbas Kodesh, they offered two more lambs, as it is written (Bamidbar

28, 9): **“וביום השבת שני כבשים בני שנה תמימים”**—**and on the Shabbas day, two male lambs in their first year, unblemished.** Altogether, we now have a total of **16** lambs alluded to by the **16** teeth. This prompted HKB”H to praise Yisrael as follows: **“Your teeth are like a flock of ewes”**—alluding to the flock of sheep offered by Yisrael every week.

The other set of **16** teeth represents the number of men called up to the Torah each week. How so? Three men are called up on Monday, three on Thursday, seven on Shabbas morning, and three more at Minchah on Shabbas. Altogether, they total **16**; they are alluded to by the other **16** teeth. This prompted the following praise from HKB”H: **“Your teeth are like a well-numbered flock”**—they allude to the established number of men called up to the Torah on any normal week.

As to which group of teeth corresponds to which of the above, we can suggest the following. We are taught in the Gemara (Eiruvim 63b): **“גדול תלמוד תורה יותר מהקרבן”**—**the study of Torah is greater than the offering of the Tamids.** Accordingly, we can suggest that the **16** upper teeth represent the **16** men called up to the Torah in a given week, whereas the **16** lower teeth represent the **16** weekly korban Tamids.

Eating with the Intent to Study and Pray Refines the Food

With this understanding, we can explain the deeper significance of eating with our **32** teeth in a way that we can all comprehend. Eating is designed to separate the waste from the essential, nourishing food, and to clarify the sparks of kedushah from the klipos. Thus, we fulfill the ruling in the Shulchan Aruch cited above: **All pleasure and benefit a person enjoys in this world should not be intended for one’s own personal pleasure but rather should be for the purpose of serving the Almighty. As it is written: “In all your endeavors know (emulate) Him.”**

Thus, when a person eats and chews the food with his **32** teeth, he should have the following in mind: Chewing with the upper **16** teeth should provide the

fortitude to study Torah. This alludes to the established practice to call **16** men up to the Torah each week to connect Yisrael with the Torah. It also expresses one’s intense desire to be connected through the Torah. Similarly, chewing with the **16** lower teeth should prepare us to serve Hashem through tefilah, which our sages instituted to correspond to the **16** weekly korban Tamids.

With this exalted focus and intent, the two sets of **16** teeth combine to represent the **32** “paths of chochmah,” with which the world was created. In the words of David HaMelech (Tehillim 104, 24): **“מה רבו מעשיך ה’ כולם בחכמה עשית”**—**how abundant are Your works, Hashem! You made them all with chochmah.** In other words, You created and established all of creation with Your supreme wisdom, so that mankind would possess the capacity to refine everything that he eats—to separate out the refuse and extract the sparks of kedushah from the klipos. Thus, they ascend to Hashem like an aromatic, pleasing korban.

The Arrangement of Teeth Align with the Letter Aleph to Connect Us with the Supreme Aleph

Continuing on this sacred journey, we will explain based on what we have learned why HKB”H created man’s teeth in relation to the letter **“aleph,”** which also has two sets of **י”ו** (16). It is well-known, that the letter **“aleph,”** the first letter of the aleph-Beis, alludes to HKB”H, who is referred to as **“Alupho shel Olam”**—**the primary (supreme) being in the world** or the **“Aleph”** of the world. For this reason, at Matan Torah, HKB”H began transmitting the Torah with the letter **“aleph”** (Shemos 20, 2): **“אנכי ה’ אלקיך”**—**אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים**. Thus, when a Jew studies Torah and serves Hashem, he must do so l’shem Shamayim, solely for the sake of HKB”H, **“Alupho shel Olam.”**

As we have learned, the letter **“aleph”** is comprised of an upper set of **י”ו** and a lower set of **י”ו**, just like the teeth with which we chew our food. Thus, if a person eats with the intention of connecting with HKB”H, the

“Aleph” of the world, he possesses the capacity to separate the food from the waste and the sparks of kedushah from the klipos. As a result, they ascend to HKB”H refined and pure. Hence, they taught in the Gemara: **“So long as the Beis HaMikdash stood, the mizbeiach atoned for Yisrael; now, a person’s table atones for him.”** For, eating with this exalted kavanah at one’s table while speaking words of Torah, it is as if one offered a korban Tamid on the mizbeiach; the food is refined as well as the person eating the food.

Why Do the Number of Teeth Allude Only to Torah and Avodah but Not to Gemilus Chasadim

With great pleasure, I would now like to share with my esteemed readership a question which I have contemplated at length. We have an explicit teaching in the Mishnah (Avos 1, 2): **“שמעון הצדיק היה: על שלשה דברים העולם עומד, על משירי כנסת הגדולה. הוא היה אומר, על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים”**—**Shimon HaTzaddik was among the survivors of the Great Assembly. He used to say: The world depends on three things—on Torah study, on the avodah (religious service), and on gemilus chasadim (acts of kindness).** Therefore, I find it extremely surprising that when a person eats with his upper and lower teeth, it only alludes to the first two items mentioned in the Mishnah—Torah and avodah—but neglects the third item—gemilus chasadim. As we have learned, the upper **16** teeth allude to the **16** men called up to the Torah in a week, and the **16** lower teeth allude to the **16** korban Tamids. Why did HKB”H choose not to include an allusion to gemilus chasadim in the teeth, as well?

I would like to propose a satisfactory explanation based on the incident described in parshas Vayeira. When the three malachim approached Avraham Avinu as guests, he said to them (Bereishis 18, 5): **“ואקחה פת—I will fetch a morsel of bread that you may nourish your heart.”** Rashi comments in the name of the Midrash (B.R. 48, 11): **“Nourish your heart”—In the Torah, in the Neviim, and in the Ketuvim, we find that bread is the nourishment**

of the heart. Why does Scripture emphasize that eating bread nourishes the heart?

To explain the matter, we will refer to the Mishnah (ibid. 2, 9). Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai addresses his disciples: **“אמר להם, צאו וראו איזו היא דרך טובה שידבק בה האדם. רבי אליעזר אומר עין טובה, רבי יהושע אומר חבר טוב, רבי יוסי אומר שכן טוב, רבי שמעון אומר הרואה את הנולד, רבי אלעזר אומר לב טוב. אמר להם רואה אני את דברי אלעזר בן ערך מדבריכם שבכלל דבריו דבריכם.”** **He said to them: Go out and find the best path a person should follow. Rabbi Eliezer says: A good eye. Rabbi Yehoshua says: A good friend. Rabbi Yossi says: A good neighbor. Rabbi Shimon says: One who foresees the outcome of his actions. Rabbi Elazar says: A good heart. He (Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai) said to them: I prefer the words of Elazar ben Arach over your words, for his words incorporate your words.”** Rabeinu Ovadiah of Bartenura provides the following clarification: **The heart activates all of the other faculties. All actions arise from the heart.** As such, **“a good heart”** incorporates all of the other good qualities; it is the ultimate “tov.”

This enlightens us as to how the 32 teeth allude to the tikun of all three pillars upon which the world stands. We have already explained that the **16** upper teeth correspond to the Torah, and the **16** lower teeth to the avodah. Thus, those two pillars have their tikun. In truth, the tikun of the third pillar—**“gemilus chasadim”**—is included with them. This is apparent from Avraham Avinu, the pillar of **“gemilus chasadim.”** For, he said to the malachim: **“I will fetch a morsel of bread that you may nourish your heart”**—teaching us that bread nourishes the heart. Therefore, when a person chews bread with both sets of teeth (**32=ל"ב**) to rectify the pillar of Torah and the pillar of avodah, he is also rectifying the heart (**ל"ב**), ensuring that it will qualify as a **“lev tov.”** As we learned from the Mishnah in Avos, a **“good heart”** encompasses all of the positive midos inspiring a person to perform **“gemilus chasadim”**—acts of chesed.

Thus, the combined efforts of the two sets of **16** teeth provide tikun for all three vital pillars—Torah,

avodah, and “gemilus chasadim.” Additionally, a person acquires a **ל"ב טוב**. So, it turns out that the **ל"ב (32)** teeth are associated magnificently with all three pillars upon which the world depends. As we know, a three-ply cord is not easily severed.

Making Sense of the Enigmatic Words of the Gra of Vilna

We now have cause to rejoice. We have shed some lights on the enigmatic interpretation of the words of the navi by the Gra: **כָּל גֵּיא יִנְשָׂא וְכָל הָר וְגִבְעָה יִשְׁפְּלוּ וְהָיָה הָעֵקֶב לְמִישׁוֹר וְהָרָקְסִים לְבִקְעָה, וְנִגְלָה כְבוֹד ה'** In truth, even in galus, we are able to perform the mitzvos of studying Torah and offering the korban Tamid—albeit through reading and studying the related passages in the Torah. Ideally, however, Yisrael should actually be offering those korbanos in the third Beis HaMikdash.

Even with regards to Torah-study, the current situation is less than ideal. Hence, the Gemara often

leaves questions unanswered and simply says **תִּיקוּ**, which is an acronym for **ת'שבי י'תרץ ק'ושיות ו'איבעיות**—these questions and rulings will not be resolved until the coming of Eliyahu HaNavi.

Therefore, the prophet Yeshayah consoles Yisrael. He informs us that **le'asid la'vo** when the third Beis HaMikdash will be built, and all the korbanos will actually be offered, and all the portions of the Torah will be revealed, the four letters that form the letter **“aleph”** will be aligned properly. As explained above: **כָּל גֵּיא יִנְשָׂא**—refers to the **“yud”** on its left—**וְכָל הָר וְגִבְעָה יִשְׁפְּלוּ**—refers to the **“yud”** on its right—**וְהָיָה הָעֵקֶב לְמִישׁוֹר**—refers to the **“vav”** in the middle of the **“aleph,”** and—**וְהָרָקְסִים לְבִקְעָה**—teaches that the **“vav”** will be split in two. As a result: **נִגְלָה כְבוֹד ה'**—since the sum of the four component letters of the **“aleph”**—**יוו”י**—equals the gematria of **כבו"ד**. Thus, the glory of Hashem will be revealed. It should be swiftly, in our times! Amen.



Our thanks and blessings are given to those who donated for the publication of our weekly dvar Torah for the merit of **אחינו בני ישראל**

לעילוי נשמת -
their dear mother
Lea bat Virgini ע"ה

Arthur & Randi Luxenberg לזכות
of their wonderfull parents, children and grandchildren
לעילוי נשמת His Father ר' יצחק יהודה בן ר' אברהם ע"ה

To receive the mamarim by email: mamarim@shvileipinchas.com