interpret the words as, ''One finds sanctity only in the area of eating meals.'' In another passage, the *Shene Luhot Haberit* wrote (comments to *parashat Ekev*) that when someone sanctifies the manner of his eating he becomes akin to the angels. See more about this topic in the *sefer Zekhut Yitzhak* Sofer (#5).

Harav HIDA (*sefer Simhat Haregel* Unit 3, page 21) wrote: ''I heard from reliable sources that during the time when the holy Rav Yosef Kobo served as rabbi of Salonika, there was a rumor that a simple and unlearned man began to display his powers of uncovering secret information. Several of the rabbis of the city went to witness this for themselves and they verified that this was the case. They could not understand how this unlearned person had become so powerful spiritually, and they consulted with Rav Yosef. He told them to go and investigate the manner in which this person eats and drinks. They did so and returned with the report that this person eats far more than the average person at each meal. 'If so,' Rav Yosef ruled, 'there is no reason to investigate him any further. By this very act he has shown that he has become possessed by evil powers.'

The holy *Zohar* (Vol. II, page 168b) states this concept that overeating causes one to be possessed by the satanic powers of evil, as shown in *sefer Kerem Yaakov* (page 87). The verse (*Mishlei* 13:25), ''A tzaddik eats to satisfy his soul, but the belly of the wicked is lacking,'' likewise alludes to this. The Hebrew word for belly – *beten* – has the same numerical value (61) as the word *tum'a* – spiritual impurity. The *tum'a* of the wicked is displayed by their habit of always feeling that they are lacking, as if they have not eaten their fill.

In today's modern world of instant pleasures, it is difficult to conceive of abstaining from eating until completely full and demanding that the food be delectable and aromatic, pleasing to the eye and palate. We are surrounded with advertisements for foods and restaurants, while new cookbooks tantalize the mind with blown-up pictures of delicacies of all types. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to at least be aware of the standards of sanctity dictated by our Sages through the generations.

Behaving Respectfully During Meals

The *Hemdat Yamim* (Unit *Yamim Nora'im* chapter 3) related that the departed soul of a great Torah scholar once appeared to Harav Hayim Vital and told him that in Heaven a decree had been issued to strike the Jewish community of Damascus with a deadly plague. He urged Rav Hayim, who lived at that time in Damascus, to inspire the people to repent for their sins and cancel the evil decree. Rav Hayim then asked the messenger, ''Who should I ask to fast and pray on the community's behalf? Who is great enough to influence the Heavenly Court?''

The messenger replied, ''You should summon Harav Yosef Matalon, since he is a man of sterling character. It would be good to summon Harav Yitzhak Abul'afia, but he is far away in Safed. A third candidate is Harav Yoshiyahu Pinto.''

Rav Hayim said, ''Perhaps I should call upon Harav Yisrael Najara as well?''

''No,'' came the quick reply, ''do not call him, for he possesses a fault. Although he has composed beautiful poems and songs that are pleasing to God and to man, he sits at his table, a veritable Altar, to eat his meals with only a red cap on his head and with bare forearms. It is therefore unfitting to call upon him.''

Who was Harav Yisrael Najara? He is the famous poet who authored the popular Shabbat hymns of *Yom Ze Mekhubad* and *Yah Ribon Alam*, among others. The Arizal testified that Rav Yisrael's soul possessed a spark of the soul of King David, the author of *Tehillim*. It was his custom to sit at his table during the Friday evening meal and to sing songs in praise of God, of the Torah and of Shabbat.

One Friday evening as Rav Yisrael was in the midst of his meal, the Arizal suddenly had a vision. He saw tens of thousands of angels descending from Heaven and entering Rav Yisrael's modest home to listen to him singing God's praises. Suddenly, an angel swooped down and chased all the angels away since Rav Yisrael was sitting at the table with bare forearms and without his hat.

The Arizal woke up and immediately sent two of his students to his neighbor, Rav Yisrael, telling him what he had seen. When Rav Yisrael heard this he began to tremble and broke out in a cold sweat. Gathering his strength, he got up and dressed in his full garb, returned to his table and resumed singing. At that moment, the Arizal saw the angels returning to Rav Yisrael's home.

The responsa *Tzitz Eliezer* (Vol. XIII, #13) dissected these stories thoroughly, deducing many important ideas from them.

The *Hesed La'alafim* (180:6) states: It is forbidden to kill a gnat or louse on the table upon which a person eats, since the table is akin to the Altar in the *Bet Hamikdash*. The Prophet Yehezkel declared (*Yehezkel* 41:22), ''*Ze hashulhan asher lifne Adonay* – This is the table that is in God's Presence.'' For this reason one must sit respectfully at the table and be properly dressed as if he is in the presence of important people. This is particularly important while reciting *Birkat Hamazon*. This behavior is necessary to fulfill the verse (*Shemot* 15:2), ''*Ze Eli ve'anvehu* – This is my God and I will beautify [myself for] Him.'' The words *ze Eli* are an acronym for the words cited above – *Ze hashulhan asher lifne Adonay*.

The Sanctity of Eating

The Tosafot (*Ketubot* 104a) cite a Midrash stating: ''Before someone prays for the words of Torah to enter his mouth, he must pray that delicacies should not enter his body. The Arizal (*Sha'ar Hamitzvot parashat Ekev* page 42b) commented that it happens sometimes that a person with a fine reputation suddenly falls precipitously into sin, it is because he has become accustomed to eat in order to satisfy his animalistic desires. By doing so he inflicts damage on the souls reincarnated in the food that he eats, and they seek their revenge on him. If he is spared spiritually, he might fall victim to a tragic event instead.

Harav HIDA (*More Ba'etzba* 3:105) wrote if someone eats more in his weekday meals than the minimum necessary to maintain his strength, that extra is a gift to the satan. Therefore, anyone who cares for his soul's welfare will make sure to minimize his eating pleasure during the weekdays even if he is wealthy. He should realize that eating delicacies during the weekdays is tantamount to building a temple for the satan. Woe unto him, for his body has become defiled with the satan's impurity. It is as if he has supplied the satan with weapons that will then be used to drag him down to Gehinnom alive.

According to the *sefer Maggid Mesharim* (#18), Maran communicated regularly with an angel, and the angel told him to minimize eating meat to avoid inflicting damage on his soul. Furthermore, he told Maran that he could never imagine the extent of the damage caused by drinking wine. He demanded that Maran break off his relations with people who engage in such activities. Most people, the angel explained, think that this world consists of only what they see with their eyes and therefore they eat and drink to fill the satan's desires. All their activities are recorded in Heaven, and one day they will have to pay for their pleasures through terrible and varied punishments.

Even on a down-to-Earth, practical level, the Rambam taught (*Hilkhot De'ot* 4:15) about the many health hazards of eating more than necessary. The reader can find his words below in halakha 28.

''One should eat only foods that strengthen one's body, and one must not overeat. One must not seek to fill one's belly like those who eat and drink until their stomachs are distended. The Prophet stated, concerning such people, 'I will cast feces on your faces ...' (*Malakhi* 2:30), and our Sages explained that this refers to people who eat and drink, making all their days into holidays. They declare, 'Eat and drink, for tomorrow we will die' (*Yeshayahu* 22:13). Such a practice is the way of the wicked. The Prophet described the tables on which these meals are eaten as, 'all the tables are filled with vomit and feces until there is no room left' (ibid. 28:8). A wise man eats no more than one or two courses in a meal, and he eats only enough to sustain him, as King Shelomo said, 'A tzaddik eats enough to

satisfy his soul' (*Mishlei* 13:25). The wise man agrees to eat the little that he needs only if it is in his own home and at his own table.'' (Rambam, *Hilkhot De'ot* 2:1and 2)

It is difficult to imagine this standard in a society filled with snack foods and beverages, when people have cookies, candies or other snacks available for noshing at all times. There was once a time when all these things were delicacies served on Shabbat or *Yom Tov* only and a person was fortunate if he managed to receive one small portion of such things. The average person today probably eats four to five times as much snack foods every day than people ate on a real holiday in yesteryear.

Harav Meir Papirash wrote (*sefer Or Tzaddikim*): ''One must take care to always eat while seated at a table and not in a haphazard manner. One should eat at a set time every day and one should refrain from eating during the rest of the day.''

The habit prevalent today of opening the refrigerator dozens of times each day to seek another snack creates many halakhic problems. *Am I supposed to recite another berakha? Have I eaten enough for a berakha aharona? What if I walked out into the hallway? Have I waited too long and now I have missed the opportunity to recite a berakha aharona?* Furthermore, when people grab snacks without thinking about it, they are likely to recite the *berakhot* quickly, swallowing the words along with the snack and without any regard for the words' meaning.

In light of this, it would be wonderful if people would assume the practice of always sitting down at a table when they wish to snack, to prepare the food they wish to eat and to recite the proper blessings before and afterward, enunciating each word and concentrating on its meaning.

Day 26

Teachings of the Arizal Regarding Meals

The *Ben Ish Hai* (*parashat Shelah* halakha 1) states: The Arizal is cited (*Sha'ar Ta'ame Hamitzvot parashat Ekev*) as teaching that whenever we eat we must realize that this seemingly mundane act is priceless, since when we eat we free trapped sparks of holiness and separate them from the forces of evil in which they have been entangled. By thinking about this sacred task while we eat, we strengthen the affect we have in accomplishing this.

At least while eating the first *kazayit* of bread after reciting *hamotzi*, one should think about the fact that our thirty-two teeth with which we chew the food correspond to the thirty-two Channels of Wisdom with which the untangling of the sparks of holiness is accomplished. As the teeth chew and pulverize the food, our thoughts harness this wisdom for this purpose. The chewing loosens the grip of the forces of evil on the sparks, much like a mill breaks apart the grain into a mass of tiny particles. After the food is