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

swallowed, the nutrients are separated from the waste materials, and simultaneously the holy sparks are separated from the bits of evil with which they had been mixed. Without the initial chewing, it would be impossible to free the holy sparks from their captors.

There are two different tasks of separating that one must think about when eating. One is to separate the goodness from the impurities mixed with it. The mixture is partly a result of Adam's original sin, but even before that occurred goodness was mixed with impurities since the time of Creation. The second task is to rectify the souls that have been reincarnated in the foods we eat.

When swallowing the food, a person should think that he is now beginning the second stage of the separation. As the food is digested, the nutrients are passed on to the liver where they are catalogued and sent on through the bloodstream to each part of the body as needed. The indigestible material is passed through the intestines where it is converted into human waste and then expelled.

The *Ben Ish Hai* concluded by stating that one does not have to be fluent in Kabbalah to think of these ideas while eating, and therefore everyone can and should develop the habit of thinking of them while he eats.

He added that even if someone does not have thirty-two teeth, it does not lessen his capability to separate the holy sparks when he chews his food. Since man was made to have thirty-two teeth, whatever number he has accomplishes the same rectification. [Nowadays it is uncommon for someone to have all thirty-two teeth since that number includes the four wisdom teeth.]



סימן קע

הנהגות האדם בסעודה

א. אין משיחין בסעודה שמא יקדים קנה לוושט, אפילו בדברי תורה. ואפילו מי שנתעטש בסעודה אסור לומר לו "אסותא" או "לבריאות" או "חיים טובים". [ש"ע סי' קע ס"א ואחרו"]. ובזמן הזה שאין אנו נוהגים לישב בהיסבה, נהגו להקל בזה להפסיק בדיבור באמצע הסעודה. [ראה בפרישה, ובשיו"ב ובכה"ח ס"ק א, ובחזו"ע ח"ב עמ' קח] **ואם** שמע ברכה מחבירו והוא קרוב לבית הבליעה, די שיהרהר "אמן" בלבו, וכמו שנתבאר לעיל בסימן קס"ז הלכה כ"ד.

Siman 170

Proper Conduct During Meals

Speaking during meals

1) Our Sages taught that it is forbidden to speak during a meal, explaining that if someone talks while chewing and swallowing, his food might accidentally lodge itself in his trachea instead of descending through his esophagus. They were quite stringent about this, insisting that even Torah thoughts may not be discussed. In fact, even if someone sneezes it is forbidden for a person who is eating to bless him by saying, "*libriyut*" or, "may you have good life and health."

Nowadays we permit people to speak during meals. This is because we no longer eat while reclining on a couch as the custom was in the Talmudic era. Since we eat while sitting upright, speaking does not increase the danger of asphyxiation.[267]

If someone is in the middle of swallowing and he hears another person recite a blessing, he should not respond Amen verbally. Instead, he should think the word Amen, as explained above in *Siman* 167:24.

267. The *Perisha* (*Siman* 170) wrote that it seems logical to say that the rule forbidding speech during meals applies only to societies where the custom is to eat while reclining on a couch on one's left side. In that position, the opening of the trachea is just below the opening of the esophagus. If someone speaks while attempting to swallow, the food may fall into the trachea and cause choking. Nowadays, when we sit upright to eat, there is much less chance of such an occurrence.

Harav HIDA (*Birke Yosef* 170:1) praised this comment, agreeing with its logic. In his *Shiyure Berakha*, however, he apparently changed his mind since many later *Poskim* cite the halakha forbidding speech during meals without comment, even though in their times the custom was already to eat while sitting upright. Nevertheless, he testified that people do not observe this halakha any longer.

In contrast, the *Peri Megadim* and the *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* (cited in the *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer 170:1) ruled that even in our times it is forbidden to speak during meals. This seems to be the opinion of the *Mishna Berura* as well.

The *Ben Ish Hai* (*parashat Behar* halakha 5) cited the opinion of the *Perisha* and Harav HIDA and then commented that we have no other proof that we can ignore our Sages' instructions besides this argument. Therefore, on the Seder night when we eat while reclining, we are definitely obligated to observe this halakha. The same applies to any other occasion when someone happens to eat in a reclining position. See the *Hazon Ovadya Pesah* (Vol. II, page 105).

The *Mishna Berura* (170:1) added that even those who ruled stringently about this matter agreed that it is permissible to speak between courses. Likewise, the *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer (170:1) added that if someone is eating and he notices another person performing a forbidden act, he may speak up to warn that person to cease.