

Most people go about their daily routine of providing for their bodies what nature requires—eating, drinking, sleeping etc.—without paying much attention to what these activities and functions mean on a spiritual plane. The questions that we need to ask are: *Why did God create me this way? Why do I have to eat in order to obtain energy?*

The Torah teaches us: “Man does not live on bread alone, but rather man lives on the word of the mouth of God.” In the Torah, the word “bread” refers to food in general. What the above verse is teaching us is that the “bread” we eat contains a Divine life force, and moreover, that it is important for us to know that this life force is coming directly from God, the Creator and Sustainer of all life (and indeed, of all reality).

If we eat our food with this realization in mind, we can extract the Divine life force or Divine spark that is the inner essence of the food. As a result, the level of nutrition—both physical, as well as cognitive and spiritual nutrition—that we gain from the food will be much greater than if we eat without this understanding.

In Hebrew, “bread” (food), *lechem*, is cognate to “war,” *milchamah* (both words come from the same root *l-ch-m*). The sages instruct us to eat “with a sword in hand.” What does this mean?

The “sword” is the consciousness necessary to pierce through the outer “shell” of the food and reveal, i.e., redeem, the Divine spark trapped within it. On the physical plane, the “sword” symbolizes the enzymes present along the digestive track that chemically break down the food and allow for the body to absorb its nutrients. The Torah teaches us to be conscious of what takes place within our bodies, to recognize the spiritual implications of the physiological processes that are responsible for our life and health. The Torah wants us to connect in our consciousness that which is taking place on the spiritual plane with that which is simultaneously taking place on the physical plane, thus enriching both—more spiritual nourishment and more physical nourishment.

If I am trying to avoid overeating and I have the choice between eating a bag of potato chips or a cheese sandwich, which one should I choose? One way to quantify the energy content of food is, surprisingly, to burn it! In the body, food is processed very slowly by enzymatic reactions that metabolize the food, step by step. In an automobile, the hydrocarbons in gasoline are burned to power the car’s engine.

If we want to quantify the available energy in potato chips or a cheese sandwich, we burn comparable amounts of the two types of food in an instrument called a calorimeter (FIGURE 3), and measure the amount the heat released in units called calories. One calorie is the amount of heat needed to raise the temperature of 1 gram of water by 1 degree Celsius. It is convenient to express the energy in food as kilocalories (kcal); one kcal equals 1000 calories. In food, one kcal is referred to as a dietary Calorie, with a capital C. If you are an average-sized teenage girl, you will burn about 2200 Calories per day (2,800 Calories per day for males). If you are playing in a tournament and you engage in vigorous physical activity, you will burn more calories.

▼ FIGURE 3

Calorimeter

A calorimeter measures the heat released by a substance, in our case, food, when the substance is burned. From that information it is possible to calculate the calorie content of the food being burned. One ounce of regular potato chips contains 150 calories. One ounce of cheese sandwich made with commercial white bread, cheddar cheese, and margarine contains 115 calories.

