



**7 Species and 7 insights into mindful eating
wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates?fig**

Wheat and barley, the two grains among the Seven Kinds, represent the staples of our inner make-up.

Following these come five fruits—appetizers and desserts on our spiritual menu—which add flavor and zest to our basic endeavor of developing our animal and G-dly souls. Originally published in *Week in Review*.

Republished with the permission of MeaningfulLife.com. If you wish to republish this article in a periodical, book, or website, please email permissions@meaningfullife.com.

Wheat:

From Martin Buber, *Hasidism and Modern Man [and Woman]*:

“The whole focus of Kabbalah and Hasidism is to hallow the here and now. That is our purpose. One is to relate to the earthly with the intention to consecrate the situation one is in right now. This brings the Presence to all one does. Presence is the indwelling Divine. There is neither place nor moment that can’t become an opening in which one may encounter God. One is to find joy in the here and now, and fulfillment in the present, in the world as it is, in every hour that is. Every ordinary, ‘mundane’ act is **made sacred by the manner in which it is performed**. Do what you must do, but **do it with holy intent, with *kavanah* (intention, focused concentration and awareness)**. The world in which you live, just as it is, affords you association with God. We are to expand the boundaries of what we

consider to be holy, so that there is no such thing as a ‘religious sphere’ of life. Every aspect must be spiritualized.”

“This is the attitude toward the gratification of all physical appetites. It is not ascetic or puritanical but thankful acceptance of physical appetites as a gift of the Creator. One was required to enjoy eating, and offer numerous blessings for so many of the things we encounter in everyday living, but we take for granted.

Barley

“All the following practices elevate the holy sparks in the food:

The use of things of the world, like utensils, plates, cooking equipment, etc, as a means of serving the Divine,

Saying a blessing before and after eating.

The holy thoughts you have while eating.

Eating in the spirit of holiness, slowly, with great relish and awareness

Discussing Torah or Jewish spiritual teachings at the table.

Thoughts of gratitude.

A prayer you say in any place or for any person, raises the sparks within them.

”Eating like this, in the spirit of holiness, enables the sparks which are trapped in the food, to find their *tikkun*, healing, repair, fixing. So it then becomes a sacred meal, and your table becomes an altar... **All that belongs to you, your household effects, your animals, your food, clothing, home, your business or work, and each situation you find yourself in; they all belong to the sparks of your own soul which you are called to lift up.**

“Each person is given a task which no other person can perform in his or her place. There is a specific sphere in this world which spiritually belongs to you, to raise the sparks that are trapped there in that situation.”

From The Wings of the Sun: Traditional Jewish Healing in Theory and Practice by Rabbi Avraham Greenbaum (Breslov Reseach Institute, Jerusalem and NY, 1995):

Grapes

The first of these is the grape, whose defining characteristic is joy. As the grapevine describes its product in Yotam's Parable ([Judges 9:13](#)), "my wine, which makes joyous G-d and men."

Joy is revelation. A person ignited by joy has the same basic traits he possesses in a non-joyous state—the same knowledge and intelligence, the same loves, hates, wants and desires. But in a state of joy, everything is more pronounced: the mind is keener, the loves deeper, the hates more vivid, the desires more aggressive. Emotions that ordinarily show only a faint intimation of their true extent now come out into the open. In the words of the [Talmud](#), "When wine enters, the concealed emerges."

A joyless life might be complete in every way, yet it is a shallow life: everything is there, but only the barest surface is showing. Both the G-dly and the animal souls contain vast reservoirs of insight and feeling that never see the light of day because there is nothing to stimulate them. The grape represents the element of joy in our lives—the joy that unleashes these potentials and adds depth, color and intensity to everything we do.

From Maimonides (12th cent). From his *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot De'ot*, Chap. 4:

“Eat only when hungry. Don't keep eating until your stomach is full. Eat a quarter less than the amount that would make you fully satisfied. Always sit down to eat. Say a blessing. Give thanks before and after eating.”

Figs

The fig, the fourth of the Seven Kinds, is also the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil—the fruit which Adam and Eve tasted, thereby committing the first sin of history. As Chassidic teaching explains, knowledge (*daat*) implies an intimate involvement with the thing known (as in the verse, "And Adam knew his wife"). Adam's sin derived from his refusal to reconcile himself with the notion that there are certain things from which he must distance himself: he desired to [intimately know](#) every corner of G-d's world, to become involved with every one of G-d's creations. Even evil, even that which G-d had declared out of bounds to him.

Adam's fig was one of the most destructive forces in history. In its equally powerful constructive guise, the fig represents our capacity for a deep and intimate involvement in our every positive endeavor—an involvement which signifies that we are one with what we are doing.

Nahman of Bratslav: “Be careful not to gobble your food hurriedly. Get into the habit of eating at a slow pace, calmly, really tasting and enjoying the food, and with the same table manners as if an important guest were present.”

(Tzaddik #515)

“One of the marks of human dignity is to eat only what one needs. Someone who eats more than he needs is like an animal who eats and chews the whole day. This can bring on disease.”

(Likutey Moharan I, 263)

“Eating properly in this way subdues the tendency toward folly, heightening one’s intellectual and spiritual faculties. But when one over-indulges, folly will get the upper hand and overcome one’s intellectual and spiritual faculties.”

(Likutey Moharan I, 17:3)

“We must make every effort to eat only healthful foods”

(Siach Sarfey Kodesh III: 539)

“Our spiritual consciousness becomes dulled to the extent that we gratify our cravings for things and food in excess of what we need to fulfill our mission in this world. To recover our spiritual sensitivity we have to rectify these cravings.”

Pomegranates

Deed

"Your lips are like a thread of scarlet," extols King Solomon in his celebration of the love between the Divine Groom and His bride Israel, "your mouth is comely; your temple is like a piece of pomegranate within your locks" ([Song of Songs, 4:3](#)). As interpreted by the Talmud, the allegory of the pomegranate expresses the truth that, "Even the empty ones amongst you are full of good deeds as a pomegranate [is full of seeds]."

The pomegranate is not just a model for something that contains many particulars. It also addresses the paradox of how an individual may be empty and, at the same time, be full of good deeds as a pomegranate.

The pomegranate is a highly compartmentalized fruit: each of its hundreds of seeds is wrapped in its own sac of pulp and is separated from its fellows by a tough membrane. In the same way, it is possible for a person to do good deeds—many good deeds—yet they remain isolated acts, with little or no effect on his nature and character. He may possess many virtues, but they do not become him; he may be full of good deeds, yet he remains morally and spiritually hollow.

If the fig represents our capacity for total involvement and identification with what we are doing, the pomegranate is the fig's antithesis, representing our capacity to overreach ourselves and act in a way that surpasses our internal spiritual state. It is our capacity to do and achieve things that are utterly incompatible with who and what we are at the present moment.

The pomegranate is hypocrisy in its noblest form: the refusal to reconcile oneself to one's spiritual and moral station as defined by the present state of one's character; the insistence on acting better and more G-dly than we are.

From *Kedushat ha-Shulhan*, p. 24; quoted in Yizhak Buxbaum, *Jewish Spiritual Practices*:

“When you eat or drink, you should think of the taste in the food and drink as the pale reflection of the spiritual aspect, the Shekhinah, the Divine Presence, in the food. It is the beauty and delight of God; and this should turn your heart to God. God has given us the desire for food and drink as an inducement to elevate the holy sparks in the food. This is the spiritual aspect of eating, concealed in the physical pleasure from the food... Arouse yourself every moment to ask yourself in wonder, ‘What is this enjoyment and pleasure? Where is it coming from?’ And answer yourself, ‘This is nothing but the holy sparks that are within the food and drink.’”

Olives

Struggle

For most of us, life is synonymous with struggle. We struggle to forge an identity under the heavy shadow of parental and peer influence; we struggle to find a partner in life, and then we struggle to preserve our marriage; we struggle to raise our children, and then struggle in our relationship with them as adults; we struggle to earn a living, and then struggle with our guilt over our good fortune; and underlying it all is the perpetual struggle between our animal and G-dly selves, between our self-oriented instincts and our aspiration to transcend the self and touch the Divine.

The olive in us is that part of ourselves that thrives on struggle, that revels in it, that would no more escape it than escape life itself. Just like an olive, say our sages, which yields its oil only when pressed, so, too, do we yield what is best in us only when pressed between the millstones of life and the counterforces of a divided self.

From Rabbi Louis Jacobs, “Eating as an Act of Worship in Hasidic Thought,” in *Studies in Jewish Religion and Intellectual History*:

“The taste one experiences when one swallows the food is the inward part of the holy sparks that reside in that food and drink. The sparks are raised by eating with kavanah: intention, concentration, focused awareness, devotion, wholeheartedness, presence.

“To enjoy it in holiness is to liberate the spark. The human being is summoned as a mediator to awaken a holy reality in things through holy contact with them.”

5. Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, (*Likutey Moharan I:25-*)

Dates or Fig?

Perfection

As the fig is countered by the pomegranate, so, too, is the olive in us contrasted by our seventh fruit, the date, which represents our capacity for peace, tranquility and perfection. While it is true that we're best when we're pressed, it is equally true that there are potentials in our soul that well forth only when we are completely at peace with ourselves—only when we have achieved a balance and harmony among the diverse components of our souls.

Thus the Psalmist sings: "The *tzaddik* (perfectly righteous person) shall bloom as the date palm" ([Psalms 92:13](#)). The Zohar explains that there is a certain species of date palm that bears fruit only after seventy years. The human character is comprised of seven basic attributes, each consisting of ten subcategories; thus, the [tzaddik's](#) blooming after seventy years is the fruit of absolute tranquillity—the product of a soul whose every aspect and nuance of character has been refined and brought into harmony with oneself, one's fellow and one's G-d.

To eat in this manner requires mindfulness, and the Jewish injunction to meditate while eating endorses this. For example, the Darchei Tzedek's

statement that “The main service of God is through eating. Moreover the tzaddikim (righteous ones) meditate as they eat, in love and fear of God, as with prayer.¹”

The Talmud encourages us to cultivate a moment of sincerity as we consume our food:

The miracle of food that God provides is as spectacular as the splitting of the Red Sea².

“The natural desires of the Body are gifts from God,” explains Michaelson. He quotes the Hasidic master Rabbi Zusya of Hanipol, who said:

The will of the Creator, blessed be He then, is to “enliven every thing” for I am doing His will by eating....

It is God who has brought you to this hunger and thirst. For the hunger is from God³.

Finally, medieval Jewish sage Bahya ibn Pakuda, from his masterpiece, *The Duties of the Heart*, writes:

Whoever contemplates the natural processes of the body—how when food enters it, it is distributed to every part of the body—will see such signs of wisdom that he will be inspired to thank the Creator and praise Him, as David said,

All of my bones shall say: “God, who is like You!” (Psalms 35:10)

He will see how food passes into the stomach through a straight tube, called the esophagus, without any bend or twist; how afterwards, the stomach digests the food more thoroughly than chewing had; how then the food is carried into the liver through thin connecting veins that act as a strainer, preventing anything coarse from passing through to the liver; how the liver

converts the food it receives into blood, which is distributed all over the body through tubes that look like water pipes and were formed specifically for this purpose....Meditate, my brother, on the Creator's wisdom in structuring your body.

Footnotes: 1. Darchei Tzedik p. 18 Translated by Yitzhak Buxbaum in Jewish Spiritual Practices, p. 226. Pesachim 118a

2. Quoted in Mazkeret Shem HaGedolim (M. H. Kleinman, ed.), p. 79 Translated by Buxbaum in Jewish Spiritual Practices, p 231.

3. Rabbi Bahya ibn Pakuda, The Duties of the Heart, Gate of Discernment, chapter 5, translated into Hebrew by R. Yehuda ibn Tibbon in Haberman, ed., p. 196