

The burning of food immediately brings to mind the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, where numerous sacrifices were burnt on the altar every day. The burning elevated the energy trapped in the sacrifice (from the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms) to a higher spiritual plane, dedicating it to holiness and purity.

In the Temple service, the body of the sacrifice was offered up for God. Because of the very high level of consciousness of the Jewish People that prevailed when the Temple existed, we saw ourselves reflected in the sacrifice, burning up for God as it were. We experienced nature returning to and reuniting with its Divine Source.

When we lost this high level of consciousness, the Temple was destroyed, for we were no longer worthy of it and its Divine service. Nevertheless our sages teach us that every table at which we eat symbolizes the altar in the Temple where the sacrifices were burned. Knowing that nowadays our table is symbolic of the altar of the Temple, and that the food we consume releases energy in a way similar to a sacrifice adds a powerful new dimension to our meals. Whenever we eat, we should have in mind that we are raising the energy of the food in an offering to God, and that we intend to use the energy that we obtain from the food to serve God.

For a Jew, only kosher food truly releases its energy in an optimal manner conducive to serving God. Only kosher food can raise our level of consciousness to recognize God's Presence in our lives and devote our lives to His service. Maimonides teaches that eating kosher food is the truly healthy way for a Jew to live (FIGURE 4).

The power of will in our soul is likened to fire and expresses our burning passion to achieve a goal. The sages teach that "nothing stands before (the force of one's) will," and "there is nothing as forceful as will." Aligning our will to God's makes for a healthy soul. God tells us what we may eat and what we may not. By obeying His will and making His will our will, we strengthen our souls. A strong soul strengthens the body in which it resides.

There are mammals that are kosher and those that are not. The same goes for birds, fish, and insects (certain grasshoppers are kosher). In general, those species that are not kosher display negative characteristics in their lifestyle, such as cruelty, either in the form of preying on other animals or parasitism. We do not want to incorporate these negative traits into our systems by consuming those non-kosher species.

In Hebrew, the language of creation, the word for "life," or "life force," *chaim*, is related to the word for "heat," *chom*, The Baal Shem Tov, the great Jewish leader and founder of the Chassidic movement, used to place his hand on the heart of a child and bless him: "Be a warm Jew."

In the Temple, fire would descend from heaven to consume the sacrifices offered on the altar. Likewise, when eating we should have in mind to connect with the essence of this holy fire. Connecting to this fire warms the heart, making it burn with desire to serve God. The Ba'al Shem Tov used to send his disciples to observe how simple Jews eat with the pure, innate intention of "burning up" the energy in the food for God.



▲ FIGURE 4

Kosher Symbols

Some of the many kosher symbols found in food labels, informing the consumer that a rabbinical authority certifies that the labeled food is kosher. The OU symbol from the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations is one of the oldest in the United States and certifies over 300,000 products worldwide.