

An Explanation of the Sefer HaChinuch's Amazing Oral Tradition:

"I Have a Tradition from My Teachers that Anyone Who Conscientiously Recites Birkas HaMozon Is Guaranteed to Find His Meals in a Respectable Fashion throughout His Life"

This week's parsha is parshas Eikev. It is fitting, therefore, that we examine a very important mitzvas aseh which is derived from this parsha — the mitzvah of Birkas HaMozon. The possuk states (Devorim 8, 10): **“ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את ה' — אלקיך על הארץ הטובה אשר נתן לך”** — you will eat and you will be satisfied and you will bless Hashem, your G-d, for the good land that He gave you. Our blessed sages learn out from this possuk that the Torah obliges one to recite Birkas HaMozon after one has eaten and is satisfied.

Concerning this mitzvah, we have learned in the Gemoroh (Berochos 21a): **“מנין לברכת המזון לאחריה מן התורה, שנאמר ואכלת ושבעת וברכת. מנין לברכת התורה לפנייה מן התורה, שנאמר ואכלת ושבעת וברכת — (דברים לב ג) כי שם ה' אקרא הבו גודל לאלקינו”** — from where in the Torah do we derive the obligation to recite Birkas HaMozon after meals? For it is written: **“and you will eat and you will be satisfied and you will bless.”** From where in the Torah do we derive the obligation to recite a berochoh before studying the Torah? For it is written: **“When I call out the name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our G-d.”**

In the Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 430) a logical reason is provided for why regarding Torah study a berochoh is necessitated prior to the activity, whereas regarding eating a meal a berochoh is Biblically mandated after the activity. He explains that eating and drinking are physical, material functions. As such, the pleasure and benefits from these activities are only realized after the fact. Consequently, it is only deemed necessary to recite a blessing over the physical bounty after one has finished eating and drinking. Torah study, on the other hand, is spiritual bounty for the spiritual intellect which is able to comprehend and enjoy the wisdom of the Torah. In this case, the intellect perceives and appreciates the immense pleasure in store for it even prior to engaging in the actual Torah study. As a consequence, one is required to recite a berochoh prior to engaging in Torah study.

Now, the Torah mandates that we recite three Berochos after meals. This is expressed in the Gemoroh as follows (Berochos 48b): **“תנו רבנן סדר ברכת המזון כך היא, ברכה ראשונה ברכת הזן, שניה ברכת הארץ, שלישיית בונה ירושלים, רביעית הטוב והמטיב... מנין לברכת המזון מן התורה... רבי אומר ואכלת ושבעת וברכת, זו ברכת הזן... על הארץ זו ברכת הארץ, הטובה זו בונה — ירושלים, וכן הוא אומר (דברים ג כה) ההר הטוב הזה והלבנון”** — the Rabbis taught in a Beraisa the order of the Berochos of Birkas HaMozon. The first berochoh is “Birkas hazon,” the second is “Birkas haoretz,” the third is “boneh Yerushalayim” and the fourth is “hatov v'hameitiv.”

It behooves us to explain why HKB”H commanded us in the Torah to recite three distinct and separate Berochos after meals rather than combining them into one. Prior to delving into this matter, however, let us explore the Rabbinical institution to add the fourth blessing of Birkas HaMozon — “hatov v'hameitiv” — to commemorate Hashem's kindness to those slain at Beitar.

“Hatov V'hameitiv” Was Instituted in Yavneh on Account of Those Slain at Beitar

Concerning the additional fourth berochoh which was instituted by our blessed sages in Yavneh, we learned in the Gemoroh (ibid.): **“הטוב והמטיב ביבנה תקנוה כנגד הרוגי ביתר, דאמר רב מתנא אותו היום שניתנו הרוגי ביתר לקבורה, תיקנו ביבנה — הטוב והמטיב - הטוב שלא הסריחו, והמטיב שניתנו לקבורה”** — Rav Masna states that the day that permission was finally granted to bury those slain at Beitar, the Rabbis in Yavneh instituted the berochoh of “hatov v'hameitiv”; “hatov” — He Who is good — for miraculously not allowing the bodies to decay and smell; “v'hameitiv” — (He Who confers good) — for insuring that they were ultimately afforded burial.

To better appreciate the tremendous miracle HKB”H conferred upon the slain Jews of Beitar let us refer to the Yerushalmi (Taanis 24a). The populace of Beitar joined Bar

Kochva's rebellion. Bar Kochva rebelled against the Romans approximately sixty years after the destruction of the second Beis HaMikdosh. According to the Yerushalmi, they were punished for not mourning over the destruction of Yerushalayim.

Then the Yerushalmi (ibid.) adds the following:

”כרם גדול היה לאדריינוס הרשע - שמונה עשר מיל על שמונה עשר מיל כמן טיבריא לציפורי, והקיפו גדר מהרוגי ביתר מלוא קומה ופישוט ידים, ולא גזר עליהם שיקברו, עד שעמד מלך אחר [אחרי מות אדריינוס] וגזר עליהם שיקברו. אמר רב חונה, משניתנו הרוגי ביתר לקבורה נקבעה הטוב והמטיב - הטוב שלא נסרחו, והמטיב שניתנו לקבורה.”

The wicked Hadrian had a large vineyard — measuring eighteen “mil” by eighteen “mil.” He created a fence surrounding the vineyard from the corpses of those slain at Beitar. He stood them upright and decreed that they not be buried. After Hadrian's death, the new emperor decreed that they be buried.

The Gemoroh (Gittin 57a) teaches: **”במתניתא תנא שבע — שנים בצרו עובדי כוכבים את כרמיהן מדמן של ישראל בלא זבל”** — with the blood of the Jewish victims, the idolaters were able to harvest the grapes from their vineyards for seven years without fertilizer. We can now begin to comprehend the incredible miracle that HKB”H conferred upon the slain Jews of Beitar. On the one hand, they were punished for not mourning over the destruction of Yerushalayim. Nonetheless, HKB”H preserved their bodies for seven years — not allowing decay and stench to affect them until they were afforded burial.

Upon careful consideration, this was clearly an awesome yet frightening miracle. For seven years, the corpses of those slain at Beitar stood upright with outstretched arms forming a fence around the wicked Hadrian's vineyard. In the winter, they were exposed to the cold and rain; in the summer, they were exposed to the burning heat of the sun. Despite all of this, their corpses did not fall prey to stench or decay. Those lifeless bodies stood strong against the powerful forces of nature as if to provoke the wicked Hadrian who placed them there to disgrace them. It is as if they were mocking him and declaring publicly: “It is not you who put us here, it is Hashem who punished us for our sins and it is he who is watching over us and preserving our bodies”!

Then, after seven years, they were brought to burial which constitutes an important rectification for the dead. As HKB”H decreed upon Adam HaRishon after the sin involving the Tree of Knowledge (Bereishis 3, 19): **”כי עפר אתה ואל עפר תשוב”** — for you are dust, and to dust shall you return. This explains why

it was necessary to institute a special blessing commemorating this miracle: “hatov v’hameitiv”-- He Who is good — for miraculously not allowing the bodies to decay and smell--and He Who confers good — for insuring that they were ultimately afforded burial.

The Connection between the Burial of Those Slain at Beitar and Birkas HaMozon

It now remains for us to explain the connection between the burial of a dead person and the Berochos we recite after meals. Why did our sages in Yavneh specifically institute a special berochoh in Birkas HaMozon to memorialize the burial of those slain at Beitar? An explanation for this association can be found in the commentary of the Rosh (Berochos 7, 22): **”וקבעה בברכת המזון שכולה הודאה, ואמרינן בירושלמי (סוכה כג.) כשנחרבה ביתר נגדעה קרן ישראל, ואין עתידה לחזור עד שיבוא בן דוד, ולכך סמכה אצל בונה ירושלים.”** He writes that Birkas HaMozon is completely an expression of gratitude. The Yerushalmi states that when Beitar was destroyed the dignity and hopes of Yisroel were struck down, and they will not be restored until Mashiach comes. Therefore, this special berochoh was placed in Birkas HaMozon and juxtaposed to the berochoh of “boneh Yerushalayim.”

In other words, in the berochoh of “boneh Yerushalayim,” we beseech Hashem to rebuild Yerushalayim and the Beis HaMikdosh. So, for similar reasons, a special berochoh devoted to those slain at Beitar and were ultimately afforded burial is juxtaposed to the berochoh of “boneh Yerushalayim” — so that they should also merit “tikun” and resurrection of the dead at the time of the future geulah when Yerushalayim and the Beis HaMikdosh will soon be rebuilt.

An additional explanation is provided here by the Baal HaTurim coming from more of a moral vantage point. He addresses the juxtaposition of the pesukim in our parsha (Devorim 8, 10): **”ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את ה' אלקיך על הארץ הטובה אשר נתן לך, השמר לך פן תשכח את ה' אלקיך... פן תאכל ושבעת ובתים טובים -- תבנה וישבת... ורם לבבך ושכחת את ה' אלקיך”** — You will eat and you will be satisfied and you will bless Hashem, your G-d, for the good land that He gave you. Take care lest you forget Hashem, your G-d . . . lest you eat and be satisfied, and you build good houses and settle . . . and your heart will become haughty and you will forget Hashem, your G-d.

The pesukim juxtapose eating and being satiated with a warning not to forget Hashem. This teaches us that it is essential to mention the day of one's death in Birkas HaMozon. Therefore, the berochoh of “hatov v’hameitiv” was instituted

regarding the burial of those slain at Beitar. In other words, this unique berochoh was placed in Birkas HaMozon, because there is a potential danger that when one is occupied with mundane worldly activities, such as eating and drinking, one's thoughts may drift away from Hashem. Recalling the day of one's death and burial helps eliminate this danger.

Reciting Birkas HaMozon Joyfully Portends Receiving Sustenance Joyfully

As we know, it is the beauty and nature of the Torah that it can be expounded from seventy different vantage points. Therefore, let us propose a novel explanation for why our blessed sages saw fit to institute a special berochoh commemorating the burial of those slain at Beitar in Birkas HaMozon. First, however, let us introduce a wonderful "seguloh" mentioned by the Sefer HaChinuch (430): **שכל הזהיר, שכל הזהיר, שכל הזהיר** — **כך מקובל אני מרבתי ישמרם אל, שכל הזהיר** — **בברכת המזון מזונותיו מצויין לו בכבוד כל ימיו** — I have a tradition from my teachers that anyone who is conscientious about reciting Birkas HaMozon will be provided with his sustenance with dignity throughout his life.

Furthermore, concerning this matter, we find in the Arizal's Shaar HaMitzvos (Ekev), in the name of the Zohar hakadosh (Vayakhel 218a), that it is vital for a person to recite Birkas HaMozon with great joy. In this merit, HKB"H will likewise grant him sustenance joyfully.

At this point, it is incumbent upon us to explain: (a) why is it Biblically mandated to recite three Berochos over our meals? (b) An additional explanation why did our Rabbis in Yavneh incorporate a special berochoh commemorating those slain at Beitar in Birkas HaMozon? (c) What is the rationale behind the wonderful tradition the author of the Sefer HaChinuch received from his teachers: **שכל הזהיר בברכת המזון מזונותיו מצויין** — **שכל הזהיר** -- that anyone who is conscientious about reciting Birkas HaMozon will be provided with his sustenance with dignity throughout his life?

The Purpose of Eating — Elevating the Inanimate, Plant and Animal Elements of Creation

Let us begin this enlightening journey by introducing a fantastic lesson provided by the great author of the Ponim Yofos (Bereishis 16b). He addresses the Mishnoh in Kiddushin (82a): **רבי שמעון בן אלעזר אומר, ראית מימך חיה ועוף שיש להם** — **אומנות והן מתפרנסין שלא בצער, והלא לא נבראו אלא לשמשני ואני נבראתי לשמש את קוני, אינו דין שאתפרנס שלא בצער, אלא שהורעתי מעשי וקפחתי את פרנסתי** — Rabbi Shimon ben Elozor says: Have you ever seen a wild animal or a bird that has a

trade? Yet they sustain themselves without travail, though they were created only to serve me, whereas I was created to serve my Master. Does it not follow that I certainly should be able to sustain myself without difficulty? However, I have corrupted my deeds and thereby forfeited my sustenance.

Seeing as this lesson of the Ponim Yofos's is so basic and crucial, it worthwhile elaborating on it. His lesson is founded entirely on the Arizal's revelation in Shaar HaMitzvos (Ekev). He teaches us that the act of eating is itself a form of service of Hashem. For, the purpose of eating is for man to elevate the holy sparks — the "nitzotzei kedushoh" — that are dispersed among the four categories that comprise creation: **דומם, צומח, חי, מדבר**.

The "inanimate" category, **"דומם"**, consists of all objects that are stationary and cannot change locations on their own — such as earth, rocks, water and salt. The next category, "plant life," **"צומח"**, possesses a life-force and includes everything that has the ability to grow and thrive — such as trees, grass, plants and vegetation.

The "animal" category, **"חי"**, possessing an even greater life-force, includes living creatures that possess the ability to move from place to place. The highest category, man, **"מדבר"**, corresponds to human beings — whom HKB"H endowed with the power of speech. As the possuk states (Bereishis 2, 7): **וּפָחַ בְּאַפֵּי נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי אָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה** — and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living being. The Targum comments: **"והוות באדם לרוח ממללא"** — the power of speech comes from the living soul that HKB"H, so to speak, blew into man's body.

Examining this system, we find that HKB"H created the universe so that each category in this hierarchy derives its nourishment from the category below it. How so? The plants and vegetation, **"הצומח"**, receive nourishment from the soil of the earth, **"הדומם"**; in this manner, the sparks and elements of the inanimate matter are incorporated into the **"צומח"** and become inseparable from it. Thus, the holy "nitzotzos" originating from the inanimate category are elevated and become an integral part of the plant category.

The animals, **"החי"**, feed off of the plants and their essence becomes inseparable and indistinguishable from that of the animals. Thus, the holy "nitzotzos" previously found in the **"צומח"** category are elevated to the category of animal-life, **"החי"**, and are integrated into this category.

Alas, man, **"המדבר"**, possessing the faculty of speech, is nourished by the meat and flesh of creatures in the animal category, **"החי"**. When he slaughters the kosher animal according

to Torah guidelines, and consumes its meat after reciting a berachah, he incorporates the life-force and holy “nitzotzos” of the animal--which already contains that of the plant life and inanimate elements — as an inseparable part of his being.

**“Three that ate together at the same table”
Alludes to החי והצומח והדומם that Anticipate Tikun**

So, let us present the somewhat alarming words of the Baal Shem Tov hakadosh, zy”a, elucidating the statement of the divine Tanna Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in the Mishnah (Ovos 3, 3):

“רבי שמעון אומר, שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ולא אמרו עליו דברי תורה, כאלו אכלו מזבחי מתים, שנאמר (ישעיה כח ח) כי כל שלחנות מלאו קיא צואה בלי מקום, אבל שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ואמרו עליו דברי תורה, כאלו אכלו משלחנו של מקום ברוך הוא, שנאמר (יחזקאל מא כב) וידבר אלי זה השלחן אשר לפני ה’.”

“Rabbi Shimon states that three who ate together at the same table without discussing divrei-Torah resemble those who have eaten from offerings of the deceased . . . ; however, three who ate together at the same table and discussed divrei Torah are likened to those who have eaten at the table of the Holy One Blessed is He . . .”

Here are the words of the Baal Shem Tov as they appear in the sefer Beer Mayim on the Pesach Haggodeh:

“אמר הבעש”ט זללה”ה, שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ולא אמרו עליו דברי תורה כאילו אכלו מזבחי מתים, פירוש כי המת מתגלגל במאכל אדם כדי שיאמרו עליו דברי תורה, ועל ידי זה מחיה אותו המת שהיה בגלגול זה, אבל אם לא אמרו דברי תורה, אז הוא זובח אותו המת המגולגל במאכל זה ומשליך אותו לדומם, וזהו שאמר מזבחי מתים.”

According to the Ba’al Shem Tov, a deceased person reincarnates into human food, so that those consuming that food will discuss Torah issues over that meal. By doing so, they resurrect that deceased person. If, however, those participating in the meal fail to discuss Torah-related issues, they drive the deceased that is reincarnated in that food down to the level of inanimate matter. This is the meaning of the Mishnah’s statement that they “resemble those who have eaten from offerings of the deceased.”

In the sefer Yogel Yaakov (Miketz), he adds a valuable point. The three eating together at the same table is an allusion to: **החי והצומח, הדומם** — the inanimate, plant and animal elements that are always present at a Jew’s table. For, when he eats the meat of an animal, he is, in fact, also consuming the holy “nitzotzos” of the inanimate elements and plant elements that were elevated and incorporated into that animal.

Now, the purpose of clarifying and elevating all of the “nitzotzos” to the level of **המדבר** — mankind with the faculty of speech--is so that man will elevate them to Hashem by utilizing their nourishment to engage in Torah study. Consequently, if a person does not speak divrei-Torah at his table while dining, he fails to put these added resources he has consumed to good use and, in effect, is killing them and dragging them down to the spiritual abyss. He has taken them from a spiritual peak down to a spiritual depth; this is akin to eating from offerings of the deceased, “mizivchei meisim.”

It is worth noting one more critical point. Until now, these holy “nitzotzos” that were located in the three lower domains -- **החי, הדומם, הצומח, החי** — were incapable of uttering divrei-Torah or prayers to Hashem. After all, only mankind, **המדבר**, was endowed by HKB”H with the faculty of speech and the ability to learn Torah and praise Hashem with the twenty-two letters of the Torah. So, until now, they could best be described by the possuk (Tehillim 39, 3): **“נאלמתי דומיה החשיתי מטוב וכאבי — נעכר”** — I became mute with stillness, I was silent from the good; and my pain was intensified. As the possuk describes, an existence without the capacity to engage in Torah study is intensely painful.

Once, however, they have been elevated to the level of **המדבר**, and have been fully incorporated into man’s being, they gain the capacity to speak. Therefore, it is essential to take advantage of the very first opportunity after consuming these “nitzotzos” to speak divrei-Torah — allowing these “nitzotzos,” which were limited and mute until now, to fulfill their intended potential. Failing to do so, prevents these holy sparks from achieving spiritual elevation, and it is as if one is partaking of “zivchei meisim” — offerings of the deceased.

**Avoid הרומם הצומח והחי
People Who Do Not Elevate Them**

Now, let us revisit the wonderful insight of the Ponim Yofos. Animals generally find their meals readily available; they consume plants that are spread out in the fields and forests. The reason being that the “nitzotzei kedushoh” present in the “domeim” — inanimate elements — and the “tzomeiach” — the plant life and vegetation — yearn to rise to a higher level in the spiritual hierarchy. They can only accomplish this goal if a member of the animal kingdom comes along and consumes them. Therefore, they are made readily available to the animals, so that they may be consumed and elevated to a higher level.

This is the message inherent in Rabbi Shimon ben Elozor’s statement: **“ראית מימך חיה ועוף שיש להם אומנות והן מתפרנסין -- שלא בצער”**

has a trade? Yet they sustain themselves without travail. Apparently, the reason is because the “tzomeiach” seemingly chases after the living creature desiring that it be consumed in order to rise up the spiritual ladder from level to level. This then raises the question: **“והלא לא נבראו אלא לשמשני ואני נבראתי”** -- though they were created only to serve me, whereas I was created to serve my Master. Does it not follow that I certainly should be able to sustain myself without difficulty?

In other words, other living creatures were only created to serve mankind; so that man will come and consume them and utilize their physical and spiritual nutrients to serve Hashem. In the process, the “nitzotzei kedushoh” contained in the creature will be elevated and rectified. If this is the case, how is it possible that man himself must struggle to procure his sustenance? In the Mishnah, Rabbi Shimon answers: **“אלא שהורעתי מעשי”** -- however, I have corrupted my deeds and thereby forfeited my sustenance. In other words, since I have transgressed and not utilized the potential contained in my food to serve Hashem, I have forfeited my easily accessible sustenance. It avoids me like the plague, so that I will not corrupt the available “nitzotzei kedushoh.” This is the thrust of the Ponim Yofos’s vital lesson.

How nicely this coincides with what we have learned in the Mishnah (Ovos 3, 17): **“אם אין תורה אין קמח”** — without Torah, there is no flour. In other words, if one does not utilize the nutrition and energy contained in one’s food to learn Torah, the “flour” avoids him. The food substances are terrified of someone who does not engage in Torah study — lest he corrupt the “nitzotzei kedushoh” they possess. Conversely, a person who engages in Torah study is assured to obtain his sustenance easily; for the food substances pursue him, so that he will consume them and elevate them — by utilizing his additional nutrition to study more Torah.

Three Berochos Corresponding to הדרומם הצומח והחי

At last, we can rejoice as we are able to provide an explanation for why the Torah prescribed three Berochos to be recited over our meals. We have learned that the purpose of eating is to elevate the “nitzotzei kedushoh” from the realms of the inanimate, the plant life and the animal life to the realm of man, who possesses the faculty of speech. By so doing, he rectifies those lower elements through his words of Torah and prayer. Hence, HKB”H commanded us to recite three Berochos over our food in order to rectify the three categories of “domeim,” “tzomeiach” and “chai.”

We can suggest that the first berochoh, “Birkas hazon,” corresponds to the inanimate realm, the “domeim.” The “domeim” includes the earth from which HKB”H brings forth sustenance for all of creation. Hence, the berochoh concludes: **“הזן את הכל”** — Who nourishes all. The second berochoh “Birkas haoretz,” addressing Eretz Yisroel corresponds to tikun of the “tzomeiach,” plant life. For, it is specifically in Eretz Yisroel that we are commanded to fulfill the mitzvah of “trumos” and “maasros” in order to rectify the “tzomeiach.” The third berochoh, “boneh Yerushalayim,” aims at the tikun of the animal kingdom; for it was in Yerushalayim that animals were sacrificed in the Beis HaMikdash.

As we have explained, so long as the “nitzotzei kedushoh” remain within the “domeim,” “tzomeiach” and “chai,” they lack the faculty of speech and are unable to learn Torah and praise Hashem with the twenty-two letters of the Torah. It was precisely for this reason that we learned in the Mishnah: **“שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד”** — these three categories of creation are eaten together so that they may be elevated to the level of man, the one who is able to speak. Then: **“ואמרו עליו”** -- **“דברי תורה”** — if words of Torah are spoken at the table during that meal, completing the process of rectification--**“כאלו אכלו”** — **“משלחנו של מקום ברוך הוא”** — it is considered as if they dined at the table of the Omnipresent, blessed is He.

This explains why we were mandated by the Torah to recite precisely three Berochos over our meals. We express our gratitude and praise to Hashem for allowing us the opportunity to rectify the “nitzotzei kedushoh” contained within the three realms of the “domeim,” “tzomeiach” and “chai.” We celebrate the fact that they have achieved the level of “hamidaber” — the one who speaks — and they may now praise Hashem through speech. This also explains beautifully why the Torah commanded us to recite the Berochos specifically after the meal and not before the meal. For, before the meal, the elements of “domeim,” “tzomeiach” and “chai” had not yet been incorporated into man’s being. Therefore, it is necessary to wait until after the meal to express our gratitude to Hashem all together--once all three of these lower categories have been incorporated into our being.

Based on this understanding, the tradition passed down to the author of the Sefer HaChinuch from his Rabbis makes perfect sense: **“שכל הזהיר בברכת המזון מזונותיו מצויין לו בכבוד”** -- **“כל ימיו”** — one who is conscientious about reciting Birkas HaMozon is provided for with dignity throughout his life. As explained, HKB”H commanded us to recite three blessings over our meals in order to rectify the “nitzotzei kedushoh” contained in the “domeim,” “tzomeiach” and “chai” — which as a result

of our meal were elevated spiritually and were incorporated into our beings. Therefore, anticipating this ultimate tikun, they pursue one who conscientiously recites Birkas HaMozon and make themselves readily available to him so that they may achieve their tikun.

This also explains the statements of the Zohar hakadosh and the Arizal. They emphasized the importance of reciting Birkas HaMozon joyfully and enthusiastically so that HKB”H would provide us with our sustenance in like fashion. On the one hand, we recite Birkas HaMozon enthusiastically thanking Hashem for the privilege to rectify the “nitzotzei kedushoh” contained in the lower three categories of creation. In response, HKB”H provides us with our sustenance enthusiastically, knowing full well that we will utilize that sustenance to the best of our abilities to rectify all that He has created in His universe.

Burial Is Meant to Cleanse the Serpent’s Contamination

Following this line of reasoning, we can begin to appreciate the incredible act attributed to our blessed sages in Yavneh — the institution of an additional berochoh in Birkas HaMozon commemorating the fact that those slain at Beitar were ultimately afforded burial. In Taamei HaMitzvos (Vayechi), our great teacher, the Arizal, explains the rationale for burying the dead in the ground.

During the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, Adam and Chava heeded the primeval serpent’s advice; this allowed the serpent to introduce contamination into their bodies — corrupting the purity and sanctity of the body. As a consequence, HKB”H decreed that they must die (Bereishis 3, 19): **“כי עפר אתה ואל עפר תשוב”** — for you are dust and to dust shall you return. This heavenly decree was for man’s own benefit — to allow the dust of the earth to absorb the poisonous contamination that the serpent had injected into their bodies. As a result, man will be able to rise up at the time of the resurrection — “techiyas hameisim” — with a clean body free of contamination and impurity.

To embellish this thought, we can suggest a sound reason why HKB”H specifically chose the dust of the earth to accomplish this task — the purification and cleansing of man’s body from the serpent’s contamination. We have established that through the act of eating man is able to rectify the “nitzotzei kedushoh” dispersed throughout creation. The “domeim” elevates into the “tzomeiach”; the “tzomeiach” then elevates into the “chai”; then all of them together elevate from the “chai” into man, the “midaber.” At this final step, man brings them all to tikun by means of his Torah and his Berochos recited over the food. Therefore, it is only fitting that the inanimate dust

of the earth reflect its gratitude in appreciation of this ultimate act of kindness by cleansing man’s body of the contamination introduced by the serpent.

Seen in this light, the depth of our blessed sages’ intent becomes apparent. They added a fourth berochoh — “hatov v’hameitiv” — to Birkas HaMozon to commemorate the fact that: **“הטוב שלא הסריחו, והמטיב שניתנו לקבורה”** — the bodies of those slain at Beitar did not putrefy and were ultimately afforded burial. Thus, we first recite three Berochos in Birkas HaMozon to rectify the “nitzotzei kedushoh” of the “domeim,” “tzomeiach” and “chai” that we just consumed. Having done so, it is then appropriate to express our gratitude to Hashem with this unique fourth berochoh. We thank Hashem for providing us with the opportunity to rectify the other elements of creation, so that in that merit, we too will merit tikun and purification. As a result of our good deed, the dust of the earth responds in kind by purifying man’s body of the serpent’s contamination.

This amazing tikun afforded mankind by the dust of the earth became ever apparent through the tremendous miracle conferred upon those slain at Beitar. Recall that the wicked Hadrian stood their corpses upright at the periphery of his vineyard to serve as a fence for his vineyard; there they stood for seven years. Yet, their bodies did not decay or develop a stench, and they ultimately merited burial — so that they could be purified by the dust of the earth. To commemorate this miraculous event a fourth berochoh was added to Birkas HaMozon. In addition, this berochoh serves to express our thanks to Hashem for providing us with a method of tikun — cleansing our bodies of the serpent’s contamination. As a result of this tikun, our bodies will rise at the time of “techiyas hameisim” cleansed and free of any impurity or defect.

In conclusion, we have learned a valuable lesson that is worthwhile for every Jew to review and remember. People are willing to try all sorts of methods to increase their incomes. They seek all sorts of strange omens to improve their lots in life. Yet, they forget the wonderful “seguloh” of Birkas HaMozon — a mitzvas aseh from the Torah. Rather than reciting the Berochos hurriedly and skipping a significant percentage of the words, it is preferable to recite Birkas HaMozon out of a siddur — slowly, joyfully and enthusiastically. If a person takes advantage of this “seguloh,” he is assured that he will realize the promise of the tradition related by the Sefer HaChinuch:

“כך מקובל אני מרבתי ישמרם אל, שכל הזהיר בברכת המזון – מזונותיו מצויין לו בכבוד כל ימיו.” — a person who is always conscientious to recite Birkas HaMozon and to recite it meaningfully, is assured that he will find sustenance with dignity throughout his life!