

For the past little while we have been learning in “the Amud” various laws about *birchas hamazon*, grace after meals. This week’s *amud* quotes *Rav Masna* as elaborating on the meaning of the fourth blessing of *bentching* is known as *hatov v’hameitiv*”, G-d Who is good and does good to all. Although the first three blessings are biblical in nature, the fourth blessing was instituted by the Rabbis in Yavne. *Rav Masna* explains the background that led to the formation of the fourth blessing. After the destruction of the second Temple, Bar-Kochva led an unsuccessful revolt, and in the city of Beitar, hundreds of thousands were killed. However the Romans did not allow the remaining Jews to bury the dead. After several years, the Rabbis of Yavne prayed until permission was granted for the dead to be buried. Miraculously, though years had passed, the dead bodies were as fresh and whole as the day they had died. Based on this incident, the Rabbis instituted the bracha of *hatov v’hametiv*. *Hatov*, praising the goodness of Hashem that the bodies did not rot or decay, and *hametiv*, referring to the fact that they were ultimately buried.

Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk asks in his magnum opus, *Meshech Chochma*, why the Rabbis saw fit to institute a permanent blessing, said billions of times through the centuries, about a specific, albeit tremendous, miracle. There have been many great miracles throughout our history. What is unique about this one?

R’ Meir Simcha explains that a single thread unites the first three berachos – the ones that are biblical. They add up to the slow, stepwise creation of a Jewish nation. Hashem took us out of Egypt and stood us at Sinai. He sustained and nurtured us with manna for forty years. He led us into the Land, and to the city of Yerushalayim, where we achieved our full stature as a people of the Torah. The fourth blessing celebrates the extraordinary survival in exile of that same nation, determined to go its own separate way. In the wake of the destruction of Yerushalayim it seemed that the survival of the people was an impossibility. At best, they were destined to live semi-civilized lives as eternal wanderers. The failure at Beitar of the Bar Kochba rebellion – supported by some of the greatest Torah luminaries – was the depth of a long process of destruction of Yerushalayim and the Jewish state.

Then the unfathomable happens. A ruler allowed the victims of the slaughter to be buried. The Jews correctly saw in this Divine Providence a message about the Jewish future. As bleak as things looked after the loss of the war, Hashem would guarantee their survival, even in the worst of times. He would fill the hearts of individuals with a gracious spirit towards the Jews that would save them when waves of destruction would be poised to inundate them. Jews would survive, even as the single sheep among seventy wolves. This guarantee of Divine assistance through the exile also vindicated the message of all the prophets and leaders who had guided the nation to Yerushalayim.

In conclusion, the Rabbis saw in the miracle of Beitar something much more than simply a miracle. They saw what would be the beacon of light throughout the generations, something worthy of being mentioned in a permanent blessing. They saw that even as we go through the darkness of exile, Hashem will always be there to rescue us, and will ultimately lead to the final redemption with the coming of Moshiach, he should come speedily in our days, Amen.