



An Amazing Revelation from the Arizal

A Berachah Uttered with Proper Kavanah Releases the Inner Spiritual Fuel that Refines the Material Nature of the Food and Produces Ruach HaKodesh

In this week's parsha, parshas Eikev, it is fitting that we explore the incredible connection between Yisrael's entering Eretz Yisrael and the fact that HKB"H fed them "mahn" in the midbar for forty years. Here are the pertinent pesukim (Devarim 8, 1):

"כל המצוה אשר אנכי מצוך היום תשמרון לעשות, למען תחיון ורבייתם ובאתם וירשתם את הארץ אשר נשבע ה' לאבותיכם. וזכרת את כל הדרך אשר הוליכך ה' אלקיך זה ארבעים שנה במדבר, למען ענותך לנסותך לדעת את אשר בלבבך התשמור מצוותיו אם לא. ויענך וירעיבך ויאכילך את המן אשר לא ידעת ולא ידעון אבותיך, למען הודיעך כי לא על הלחם לבדו יחיה האדם, כי על כל מוצא פי ה' יחיה האדם."

All the commandments that I command you today you shall observe to perform, so that you may live and increase, and come and take possession of the land that Hashem swore to your forefathers. You shall remember the entire road on which Hashem, your G-d, led you these forty years in the midbar, so as to afflict you, to test you, to know what is in your heart—whether you would observe His mitzvos or not. He afflicted you and let you starve, then He fed you the "mahn" that you did not know, nor did your forefathers know, to inform you that not by bread alone does man live; rather by everything that emanates from the mouth of G-d does man live.

We will endeavor to explain the connection between inheriting the land and the consumption of the "mahn" in the midbar. Additionally, we must explain why the "mahn"

ceased to fall when Yisrael entered the promised land. It also behooves us to examine the reason HKB"H provides for having fed us the "mahn" in the midbar: **"He afflicted you and let you starve, then He fed you the "mahn" . . . in order to make you know that not by bread alone does man live; rather by everything that emanates from the mouth of G-d does man live."** Seeing as HKB"H intended to teach us by means of the heavenly bread **"that not by bread alone does man live,"** it is imperative that we strive to comprehend this vital lesson.

Lastly, it is fitting that we examine the juxtaposition of the rationale for feeding Yisrael the "mahn" in the midbar for forty years-- **"כי לא על הלחם לבדו יחיה האדם"**—and the mitzvah of Birkas HaMazon (ibid. 7): **"כי ה' אלקיך מביאך אל ארץ טובה... ארץ"** אשר לא במסכנות תאכל בה לחם לא תחסר כל בה... ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את ה'—**for Hashem, your G-d, is bringing you to a good land . . . a land where you will eat bread without poverty, you will lack for nothing there . . . you will eat and you will be satisfied and you will bless Hashem, your G-d, for the god land that He gave you.**

The Chasam Sofer's Revelation regarding the "Mahn"

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by introducing a magnificent insight from the Chasam Sofer, zy"a, in his responsa (O.C. 197). In a letter he wrote to the holy author of

the Yismach Moshe, zy”a, regarding the “mahn,” he explains that HKB”H took the spiritual influence of the fruit of Eretz Yisrael, while it was still in the heavens, before it entered the fruit down on earth, and inserted it in the “mahn” that descended from the heavens to nourish Yisrael in the midbar.

As a result, the Emorim, the inhabitants of Eretz Canaan at that time, were left with only the chaff and the husks of the fruit and grains; their produce lacked its internal vitality and life-force. This is implied in Yehoshua and Calev’s comment to Yisrael (Bamidbar 14, 9): **‘כי לחמנו הם סר צלם מעליהם וה’—for they are our bread; their protection has left them; Hashem is with us.** In other words, the Emorim were consuming only the external part of our bread; because HKB”H placed the internal, spiritual essence of the produce in the “mahn,” which He provided for Yisrael in the midbar.

This insight provides us with a novel interpretation of the meraglim’s tragic error. Those elite leaders of Yisrael had the audacity to speak ill of the fruit of Eretz Yisrael. For, they misinterpreted HKB”H’s promise to bring Yisrael to **‘ארץ זבת חלב ודבש—a land flowing with milk and honey.** They understood this to mean that the fruit of Eretz Yisrael was imbued with the kedushah of Eretz Yisrael—that it would possess a unique taste due to the godly, spiritual influence it contained. In the words of the Bach in his commentary on the Tur (O.C. 208), the formula we recite in the “three-faceted berachah”: **‘זונאכל מפריה ונשבע מטובה’—let us eat from its fruit and let us be satiated from its goodness** – expresses the fact that HKB”H endows the fruit of Eretz Yisrael with the kedushah of the Shechinah that resides within the land. Thus, by consuming the fruit of the land, we are nourished by the kedushah and taharah of the Shechinah and are satiated by its goodness.

Therefore, when the meraglim partook of the fruit of the land and did not experience any sense of kedushah or unique flavor, they felt that they had been deceived by Hashem. After all, he had promised to bring Yisrael to **‘ארץ זבת חלב ודבש’.** Their blasphemy hinged on the fact that indeed the fruit of the land lacked any spiritual flavor. As explained, this was not due to any lack of kedushah in the land, but rather because the internal, spiritual flavor hadn’t yet reached the fruit of Eretz Canaan; it had been redirected from above into the “mahn.”

This then was the message conveyed by Yehoshua bin Nun and Calev ben Yefuneh to the entirety of Yisrael (Bamidbar 14, 7): **‘הארץ אשר עברנו בה לתור אותה טובה הארץ מאד מאד, אם הפץ בנו ה’ והביא אותנו אל הארץ הזאת ונתנה לנו ארץ אשר היא זבת חלב ודבש, אך בה’ אל תמרודו ואתם אל תיראו את עם הארץ, כי לחמנו הם סר צלם מעליהם וה’—the land that we passed through, to spy on, the land is very, very good! If Hashem desires us, He will bring us to this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. But do not rebel against Hashem and you will not fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has left them. Hashem is with us!**

They informed Yisrael that the land is truly very good, just as HKB”H promised; however, the reason the meraglim did not sense spirituality and goodness in the fruit of the land was because: **‘לחמנו הם’—the people there are only eating the external, material bread; ‘סר צלם מעליהם’—the spiritual essence of their fruit has been removed; ‘וה’ אתנו’—because HKB”H is with us and has transferred the taste of the fruit to us in the form of the “mahn.”** Therefore, it is impossible to sense spirituality in the fruit of the land. Yet, after Yisrael enter the land, the godly, spiritual influence will once again flow down into the fruit of the land. Precisely for this reason, the “mahn” ceased to fall when Yisrael entered the land.

The Arizal Explains How Food Sustains Mankind

It appears that we can elaborate further on the Chasam Sofer’s incredible insight regarding the “mahn.” His entire explanation is founded on the sacred words of the Arizal in Likutei Torah on this week’s parsha. There, he addresses the following passuk: **‘ויענך וירעיבך ויאכילך את המון אשר לא ידעת ולא ידעון אבותיך, למען הודיעך כי לא על הלחם לבדו יחיה האדם, כי על כל מוצא פי ה’ יחיה האדם.’** He explains that the holy Torah intended to reconcile a fundamental, philosophical question posed by those who deny the eternal existence of the soul. Assuming that man is an amalgamation of a physical body and a spiritual soul—that persists even after death—how is it possible that the material food and nutrition a person consumes sustains and unites the two? After all, the spiritual soul cannot be nourished by the material food. So, when a person doesn’t eat, he dies; what about the soul?

Due to this apparent difficulty, the heretics concluded that man's soul is not a spiritual entity that persists after death; on the contrary, it is an inseparable part of the physical, material body. As such, it is also nourished when man consumes material nutrition. Furthermore, when the physical body dies, the soul dies along with it; nothing remains of that person. The Arizal, however, attacks their faulty logic and conclusion. They failed to comprehend that the material food we ingest is merely an external covering for the spiritual nourishment housed within. The spiritual nutrition is the divine utterance that emanated from Hashem's mouth at the time of creation; he instructed the earth to produce all sorts of food, fruits and grain for consumption.

Accordingly, when a person consumes material food, he is also consuming the spiritual nutrition it houses within it. Therefore, just as food combines physical and spiritual components; so, too, does the human being that consumes the food. When man eats, he sustains and unites the physical body with the spiritual neshamah it houses within. The body is nourished by the material component of the food, while the neshamah is nourished by the spiritual component.

With this understanding, the Arizal interprets quite elegantly the passuk: "ויענך וירעיבך ויאכילך את המן" -- **He afflicted you and let you starve, then He fed you the "mahn."** This passuk is referring to the spiritual aspect of the "mahn," as indicated by the passuk (Shemos 16, 4): "הגני ממוטיר לכם לחם מן השמים—I am providing you with bread from the heavens that lacks the physical form of earthly bread. Proof of this can be found in the Gemara (Yoma 75a), where it explains that the "mahn" was absorbed completely by the 248 human limbs and organs; there was no refuse left over.

The Torah explains the benefit of this phenomenon: **"To inform you that not by bread alone does man live."** In other words, man is not sustained merely from the material component of the bread and food that nourishes the body, as the heretical philosophers mistakenly believed, causing them to deny the eternal existence of the soul. **"Rather by everything that emanates from the mouth of G-d does man live"**—man is sustained primarily by the spiritual component of the bread and food he ingests—Hashem's utterance instructing the earth to produce and yield all sorts of foodstuffs for mankind.

A Berachah Auspiciously Triggers the Spiritual Component of the Food to Refine the Material Component

Continuing onward along this enlightening path, let us explore the wealth of information the Arizal reveals at the conclusion of his sacred remarks regarding the importance of reciting a berachah over the food we ingest: "לכן צריך לברך על המזון כי על ידי הברכה מעורר החיות" Let us explain. Since food is made up of a material component that houses the spiritual component within, we can conclude that the more a person increases and intensifies the spiritual, internal component of the food, he is able to refine the material component more thoroughly. As a result, the material influence of the food will be less pronounced; the person will be more spiritual and less material.

According to the Arizal, we accomplish this feat by reciting a berachah with proper "kavanah" (intent) over the food. For instance, over bread we recite: "המוציא לחם מן הארץ"; over vegetables and produce from the earth, we recite: "בורא פרי"; over fruit that grows on trees, we recite: "בורא פרי העץ"; over everything else, we recite: "שהכל נהיה בדברו". By reciting a berachah, we trigger and enhance the spiritual essence of the food.

As we have learned, the spiritual essence of the food emanates from: "מוציא פי ה'"—HKB"H's instructions to the earth at the time of creation. Thus, when we recite the berachah over bread: "המוציא לחם מן הארץ"—we trigger and enhance the spiritual nutrition within the bread, which stems from HKB"H's utterance demanding the earth to yield bread. The same holds true for every type of food we ingest. Furthermore, in this manner, we refine the material aspect of the food, so that the material aspects of our beings will be less pronounced.

With this understanding, we can begin to comprehend what the Arizal explains in Sha'ar HaMitzvos (Eikev): "ודע כי צריך האדם להיזהר בתכלית בברכות הנהנין, כי גוף האדם נהנה מהן ומתקדש בברכות אלו, וכמו שכתוב (תהלים מ-ט) ותורתך בתוך מעי, וגורם שפע עליון." He emphasizes the importance of having proper intent when uttering Berachos over things that provide pleasure or benefit—"birchos hanehenin." Regarding this topic, we find the following written by Rabeinu Chaim Vital in the name of his mentor the Arizal, in Sha'ar Ruach HaKodesh (page 11):

”גם אמר לי מורי ז”ל, כי עיקר השגת האדם אל רוח הקודש, תלויה על ידי כוונת האדם וזהירות בכל ברכות הנהנין, לפי שעל ידם מתבטל כח אותם, הקליפות הנאחזות במאכלים החומריים, ומתדבקים בהם באדם האוכל אותם, ועל ידי הברכות שעליהם הנאמרות בכוונה, הוא מסיר מהם הקליפות ההם ומזכך החומר שלו, ונעשה זך ומוכן לקבל קדושה, והזהירני מאד בזה.”

My teacher, z”l, also told me that a person’s attaining “ruach hakodesh” depends mainly on his “kavanah” and care regarding all “birchos hanehenin.” For, they annul the effect of those klipos attached to the material foods that latch onto the person who ingests them. By means of the Berachos recited over them with “kavanah,” he removes those klipos from them and refines his physical being. Thus, he becomes pure and suitable to receive kedushah. He warned me emphatically about this matter.

Let us explain the matter as it pertains to our current discussion. The klipos are able to latch onto the external aspects of the food, the material component, because they are being consumed by a human being wishing to satisfy his heart’s desires. However, when he recites a berachah with proper “kavanah” to HKB”H, demonstrating his appreciation for the food HKB”H created, he enhances the spiritual component of the food, thereby driving away the klipos from the material component of the food. As a result, he refines his physical body and attains “ruach hakodesh.”

It is with great pleasure that we can now interject the sacred remarks of the Ohev Yisrael (Likutim). He expresses by dint of allusion—“remez”—why the halachically accepted, minimum measure for eating throughout Sha”s is a “k’zayis”—a portion the size of an olive. He cites the following Gemara (Horayos 13a): “אמר רבי יוחנן כשם שהזית משכח לימוד של שבעים שנה, כך שמן: Rabbi Yochanan said: Just as the olive causes the forgetting of seventy years of Torah-study; similarly, olive-oil restores seventy years of Torah-study. Thus, we learn that consuming the external olive causes forgetfulness; whereas, the oil, the internal aspect of the olive, is able to restore one’s memory.

This then is the significance of eating a measure of a “k’zayis.” When a person consumes material foods, he must consume an amount measuring at least the size of an “olive.” He should consume them intending to connect with the internal, spiritual food, which permeated the food when

HKB”H created them with His divine utterance. Thus, the food becomes a propitious vehicle for remembering Hashem, akin to the olive-oil, the internal essence of the olive. A person should avoid focusing only on the external, material aspect of the food, which causes him to forget Hashem.

The Torah Was Only Given to Those Who Ate the “Mahn” to Elucidate

This illuminates for us to a greater degree the amazing chiddush of the Chasam Sofer—Rabeinu Moshe Sofer, zy”a—in his letter to the Yismach Moshe—Rabeinu Moshe Teitelbaum, zy”a—regarding the “mahn” that descended from the heavens for Yisrael during their forty-year sojourn in the midbar, in the merit of Moshe Rabeinu. His chiddush is founded on the fundamental concept learned from the Arizal—that the “mahn” was a purely spiritual food, devoid of any material, external form. With this understanding, the Chasam Sofer posited that the spiritual nature of the “mahn” came from the spiritual influence that was meant for the fruit of Eretz Yisrael. However, since Yisrael had not yet reached Eretz Yisrael, HKB”H delivered it to them in the midbar in the form of the “mahn.”

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I would like to grab onto the coattails of the Chasam Sofer and add a juicy thought to his marvelous chiddush. He taught us that the unique flavor of the “mahn” derived from the spiritual flavor that was meant to imbue the fruit of Eretz Yisrael. So, what, indeed, prompted HKB”H to give Yisrael the “mahn”—the heavenly bread—in the midbar, beginning forty years before they entered the promised land?

It appears that we can suggest an explanation based on what we have learned in the Gemara (B.B. 158b): “אורא: the air of Eretz Yisrael makes one wise. Similarly, we learn in the Midrash (B.R. 16, 4) related to the passuk (Bereishis 2, 12): “וזהב הארץ ההיא טוב, מלמד שאין: The gold of that land is good”: This teaches us that there is no Torah like the Torah of Eretz Yisrael, and no chochmah like the chochmah of Eretz Yisrael. Furthermore, as we learned from the Bach regarding the berachah: “ונשבע מטובה: ונאכל מפריה—the fruit of Eretz Yisrael are also endowed with a special kedushah.

Now, Yisrael received the Torah in the midbar, and the children of the generation of the midbar represent the root of kedushah for all Yisrael throughout the generations—that they should study the Torah that they were privileged to receive at Har Sinai. That being so, how were they able to comprehend the Torah properly, as long as they were not in Eretz Yisrael? Therefore, HKB”H provided the remedy prior to the ailment. He gave them the “mahn” imbued with the spiritual flavor of the fruit of Eretz Yisrael, so that it would enable them to attain and comprehend the intricacies of the Torah. Thus, they would attain the levels of Torah scholarship they were destined to attain in Eretz Yisrael due to the influence of its fruit.

This provides us with a nice understanding of Rashby’s elucidation in the Mechilta (Beshalach) regarding the passuk: “הגני ממטיר לכם לחם מן השמים למען אנסנו הילך בתורתך אם לא - מכאן היה רבי שמעון בן יוחאי אומר, לא ניתנה תורה לדרוש אלא לאוכלי המן.” It states: “Behold, I shall rain down bread from the heavens for you . . . so that I may test him, whether he will follow My Torah or not” –from here Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai would say, “The Torah was not given for elucidation except to those who consumed the ‘mahn.’” For, by consuming the “mahn,” that contained the spiritual nourishment of the fruit of Eretz Yisrael, they were able to attain Torah-knowledge, in the same way that the air of Eretz Yisrael imparts wisdom and knowledge.

It is worthwhile introducing what the Agra D’Kalla (Beshalach) brings down in the name of his Rav, the esteemed Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Rimanov, zy”a. By eating the “mahn,” Yisrael rose spiritually from day to day, to the point that they were not recognizable from one day to the next. This is implicit in the passuk (Shemos 16, 15): “ויראו בני ישראל: ויאמרו איש אל אחיו מן הוא” “מין הוא” mean “who is he?” In other words, they would see each other on a daily basis, but due to the effects of the “mahn,” they no longer recognized each other; for, each of them had risen to a higher spiritual level.

Based on the insight from the Chasam Sofer, this spiritual elevation was due to the spiritual nourishment of the fruit of Eretz Yisrael that was in the “mahn.” As the Bach explained, the fruit of Eretz Yisrael is endowed with the kedushah of the Shechinah, and the kedushah of those who consume them

soars from day to day. To summarize, when Yisrael ate the “mahn” during their forty-year sojourn in the midbar, they were actually consuming the spiritual essence of the fruit of Eretz Yisrael. This served as a preparation for their entry into Eretz Yisrael; there, they continued to eat the “mahn,” disguised as the fruit of Eretz Yisrael.

The Amazing Connection between Entering the Land and Eating the “Mahn”

It is with great pleasure and satisfaction that we can now explain why HKB”H associates Yisrael’s entering Eretz Yisrael, in the merit of observing the mitzvos: “All the commandments that I command you today you shall observe to perform, so that you may live and increase, and come and take possession of the land”—with the memory of eating the “mahn” in the midbar for forty years: “You shall remember the entire road on which Hashem, your G-d, led you these forty years in the midbar . . . He afflicted you and let you starve, then He fed you the “mahn.”

First, let us present the explanation found in our early sources regarding the error of the meraglim. Those, esteemed, leaders of Yisrael did not want to enter the land, because they believed erroneously that it would be impossible for Yisrael to serve HKB”H adequately, through Torah-study and the performance of mitzvos, unless they were in a location like the midbar, divorced from all matters of Olam HaZeh. In the midbar, they received sustenance from the heavens without exertion; and they did not need to tend to fields or vineyards or work the land. Upon entering the land, however, the “mahn” would cease to fall from the heavens. By necessity, Yisrael would have to work the fields and vineyards and eat material foods. As a consequence, they would not be able to study Torah and serve Hashem properly. They were mistaken, of course, because: “אוריא דארץ ישראל מחכים”—the atmosphere of Eretz Yisrael possesses unique properties. In addition, the fruit of Eretz Yisrael is endowed with a unique kedushah that assists in the attainment and comprehension of the Torah.

This enlightens us as to why the Torah associates the entry into Eretz Yisrael with recalling that HKB”H provided Yisrael with “mahn” from above during their forty-year sojourn in the midbar. It wanted to emphasize the amazing power of the fruit of Eretz Yisrael. If its internal essence and

flavor propitiously enabled Yisrael to attain and comprehend the Torah even outside the land; how much more could be accomplished when that essence and flavor would be housed within the actual fruit of Eretz Yisrael—where HKB”H rested His Shechinah in the Beit HaMikdash! Without a doubt, not only would the food not diminish or interfere with their study of Torah, but, additionally, they would be assisted immensely by the kedushah of the land.

Notwithstanding, a curious mind might contend that this is not entirely true. After all, the “mahn” was completely spiritual; it was totally devoid of “gashmiut”—material qualities. As such, it was ideally suited for assisting Yisrael in their quest to attain Torah insights and knowledge. In Eretz Yisrael, however, the spiritual essence would be housed in the material guise of the fruit. As such, the risk would exist for the external, material nature of the fruit to overwhelm its internal, spiritual nature, thereby preventing a person from engaging in Torah-study.

Therefore, the mitzvah of Birkas HaMazon was juxtaposed by HKB”H immediately afterwards: **‘ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את ה’** **אלקיך על הארץ הטובה אשר נתן לך**. From this passuk, the Gemara (Berachos 48b) deduces that it is necessary to also recite a berachah over food before it is consumed: **‘מנין לברכת המזון מן התורה, שנאמר ואכלת ושבעת וברכת... אין לי אלא לאחריו לפניו מנין, אמרת—קל וחומר כשהוא שבע מברך, כשהוא רעב לא כל שכן’** **from where in the Torah do we derive the obligation to recite Birkas HaMazon? For it says: “And you shall eat, and you shall be satisfied, and you shall bless” . . . from this passuk, I**

only have a source for reciting a berachah afterwards, from where do we derive the requirement to recite a berachah beforehand? You can employ a “kal vachomer”: **If a person recites a berachah when he is satisfied; when he is hungry, most certainly he should do so!**

We have already learned from the Arizal that reciting a berachah with proper “kavanah” is a segulah to enhance the spiritual nutrition within the food, in order to refine the material component of the food--so that the klipos will not dominate there. Thus, when Yisrael are diligent in reciting Berachos with “kavanah” over their food, the food’s internal kedushah will prevail. This will enable them to serve Hashem without any interference. In this manner (the juxtaposition of the topics), HKB”H intended to demonstrate that the meraglim’s claim was totally invalid.

From all that has been said, we learn a vital lesson. It is crucial to take great care when reciting the “birchos hanehenin.” We must accustom ourselves and teach our children to recite a berachah out loud, focusing on the meaning of the words, before we eat: **“בּוֹרָא פְּרִי הָעֵץ, שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָ בְּדַבְּרוֹ, בּוֹרָא פְּרִי הָאָרֶץ”**. By doing so, we express our gratitude to Hashem, who created all of the food that we eat. In the process, we magnify and release the spiritual food contained within that sustains and refines both the body and the soul. In this merit, we will be able to serve Hashem in good health—both physically and spiritually—throughout a long and prosperous life.



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