YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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SPECIAL SHAVUOT 5777 SHIUR

***Birkat ha-Torah*: The highest of blessings**

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### "Where do we find that a blessing before studying the Torah is ordained in the ToraH?"

 *Chazal* instituted many different blessings, which encompass our spiritual world, but it is generally accepted that only two blessings are ordained by Torah law – the Grace after Meals (*Birkat Ha-Mazon*) and the blessing before studying the Torah (*Birkat Ha-Torah*).[[1]](#footnote-1) The *gemara* in *Berakhot* (21a) states:

R. Yehuda said: Where do we find that the Grace after Meals is ordained in the Torah? Because it is stated: "And you shall eat and be satisfied and bless" (*Devarim* 8:10). Where do we find that a blessing before studying Torah is ordained in the Torah? Because it is stated: "When I proclaim the name of the Lord, ascribe You greatness to our God" (*Devarim* 32:3).[[2]](#footnote-2)

 The distinction between Torah-ordained blessings and blessings instituted by the Rabbis has halakhic significance, as noted by the *Peri Chadash* (*Orach Chaim* 47:1): "There is a practical ramification regarding one who is in doubt whether or not he recited *Birkat Ha-Torah*, that he is obligated to recite the blessing a second time."

Nevertheless, the Rambam does not count *Birkat Ha-Torah* as one of the 613 commandments. The Ramban objects to this omission, and he includes the *mitzva* of *Birkat Ha-Torah* in his list of positive commandments that the Rambam omitted (commandment 15).

Our revered Rosh Yeshiva, HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein *z”l*, explained that according to the Rambam, *Birkat Ha-Torah* was indeed instituted only by the Rabbis, and the verse cited in the *gemara* is merely an *asmakhta* (a Scriptural hint).[[3]](#footnote-3) This assertion is supported by the fact that the Rambam includes *Birkat Ha-Torah* in a list of other blessingsthat were introduced by the Rabbis (*Hilkhot Tefilla* 7:1-10):

When the Sages instituted [a text for] these prayers, they [also] established other blessings to be recited every day. These are: …

One who rises to study Torah, whether the Written or Oral Law, before he recites the *Shema*, should wash his hands beforehand, recite [the following] three blessings, and then study. [These blessings] are: “[Blessed... universe,] who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us concerning the words of Torah. And please, God, our Lord, make pleasant… Blessed are You, God, who teaches Torah to His people, Israel… Blessed are You, God, our Lord… who has chosen us from among all the nations and given us His Torah. Blessed are You, God, who gives the Torah.”

One is obligated to recite these three blessings every day. Afterwards, one should read a few words of Torah.[[4]](#footnote-4)

However, the plain sense of the *gemara* certainly implies that *Birkat Ha-Torah* is ordained by the Torah, as the *gemara* equates *Birkat Ha-Torah* with the Grace after Meals, which the Rambam counts as a Torah law (*Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, positive commandment 19; *Hilkhot Berakhot* 1:1).[[5]](#footnote-5) Why, then, did the Rambam stray from the plain meaning of the *gemara*, according to which *Birkat Ha-Torah* is a Torah obligation?[[6]](#footnote-6)

### "For the reading of Scripture it is necessary to recite a blessing"

 The *Amora’im* disagree regarding which study requires the recitation of *Birkat Ha-Torah* (*Berakhot* 11b):

R. Huna said: For the reading of Scripture it is necessary to recite a blessing, but for the study of the Midrash no blessing is required.

R. Eliezer, however, says that for both Scripture and Midrash a blessing is required, but not for the Mishna.

R. Yochanan says that for the Mishna also a blessing is required, [but not for the Talmud].

Rava said: For the Talmud also it is necessary to recite a blessing.

 Concerning Rava's position that even for the Talmud it is necessary to recite a blessing, Rashi comments: "As it is the most important part of the Torah, from which instruction issues forth." Why do the other *Amora’im* maintain that it is not necessary to recite a blessing for the study of the Talmud? After all, a *baraita* explicitly states, "One who occupies himself in the Talmud – there is no greater quality than this" (*Soferim* 15:6)!

 This question becomes even stronger in light of the explanation offered by *Talmidei Rabbeinu Yona* regarding the position of Rava: "'Even for the Talmud, it is necessary to recite a blessing' – for in the Talmud as well they explain the essential points in the verses." This indicates that the primary obligation is to recite a blessing over the Written Law. The reason that a blessing is recited also over the study of Midrash, Mishna, and Gemara (according to some of the *Amora’im*) is that they too, to some degree or another, deal with the meanings of the verses in the Written Law.[[7]](#footnote-7) If so, we return to our question: Why was *Birkat Ha-Torah* instituted only for study of the Written Law, and not for all types of Torah study?

### A blessing over a *mitzva* or a blessing of thanksgiving

 It would appear from this that *Birkat Ha-Torah* is not a blessing recited over a *mitzva* that is recited before fulfilling the *mitzva* of Torah study, similar to the blessings recited before fulfilling the *mitzva* of blowing the *shofar* or taking the *lulav*. Rather, *Birkat Ha-Torah* is a blessing of praise and thanksgiving for the giving of the Torah. The Ramban formulates the essence of this blessing in his strictures to the Rambam's *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*:

We were commanded to thank His holy name whenever we read from the Torah for the great good that He did for us when He gave us the Torah.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Similarly, we find in the *Tur* (*Oracḥ Chaim* 47):

There is also another blessing over the Torah… “Who has chosen us from among all the nations and given us His Torah. Blessed are You, O Lord, who gives the Torah.” And he should have in mind in his blessing the assembly at Mount Sinai, when He chose us from among all the nations, and brought us close before Mount Sinai, and sounded His words to us from out of the fire, and gave us His holy Torah, which is the house of our lives, His precious vessel in which He delights every day.

 That the nature of *Birkat Ha-Torah* is like that of a blessing of praise and thanksgiving, and not like that of a blessing recited before fulfilling a *mitzva*, is evident also from the *gemara* in *Berakhot* 11b, which determines that one who did not recite *Birkat Ha-Torah* before his prayers, but recited the blessing of *Ahava Rabba* as part of the blessings of *keriat* *Shema*, has fulfilled his obligation to recite *Birkat Ha-Torah* (see also Yerushalmi, *Berakhot* 1:5). Were *Birkat Ha-Torah* included among the blessings that are recited before fulfilling a *mitzva*, this ruling would require explanation. How is it possible to fulfill the obligation to recite a blessing before fulfilling the *mitzva* of Torah study with the text of *Ahava Rabba,* whichlacks the standard formulation of blessings recited over *mitzvot*: "*asher kiddeshanu be-mitzvotav ve-tzivanu.*"[[9]](#footnote-9)However, according to our suggestion that *Birkat Ha-Torah* is a blessing of praise and thanksgiving for the giving of the Torah, it is clear why one can fulfill his obligation with the *Ahava Rabba* blessing. This blessing as well – like *Birkat Ha-Torah* – is entirely praise and thanksgiving to God for His choosing the people of Israel, which was expressed in His giving them the Torah and its *mitzvot*, and it ends with the words: "Who chooses His nation Israel with love." It is therefore not surprising that one who recites this blessing fulfills his obligation to recite *Birkat Ha-Torah*, as he has thanked God for His choosing of Israel, as reflected in His giving them the Torah.[[10]](#footnote-10)

 In light of what we have said, it is clear why *Birkat Ha-Torah* relates primarily to the study of the Written Law. The *mitzva* of Torah study is fulfilled both with the Written Law and the Oral Law, but it is the verses of the Written Law that recall the revelation at Mount Sinai and Israel's receiving of the Torah. It is primarily before learning those verses that one should praise God and thank Him for having chosen Israel by giving them the Torah.

 Regarding the dispute among the *Amora’im* that we saw above, the *halakha* was established in accordance with the opinion of Rava, who requires *Birkat Ha-Torah* even for the study of Talmud (Rambam, *Hilkhot Tefilla* 7:10; *Shulchan Arukh*, *Orach Chaim* 47:2). However, it still could be argued that only the blessing over the study of the Written Law is ordained by Torah law, while the blessing over the study of the Oral Law is a rabbinic obligation. This follows from the words of the Ramban: "That we were commanded to thank His blessed name whenever **we read from the Torah."** This also follows from the words of the *Sefer Ha-Chinukh* (commandment 430): "That God obligated us [to recite] a blessing **when we read the Torah."** A close reading of their words teaches us that we are dealing with reading from th*e* Written Law, and not studying the Oral Law. If so, the Torah obligation to recite *Birkat ha-Torah* relates to study of the Written Law, while one who studies the Oral Law is obligated to recite a blessing only by rabbinic law.

### "Ascribe you greatness to our God"

 In light of what we have said, we can understand what is implied by the words of the Rambam in *Hilkhot Tefilla* – that *Chazal* instituted that the individual should recite *Birkat Ha-Torah* – in another way, so that his position does not contradict the plain understanding of the passage in *Berakhot* that *Birkat Ha-Torah* is ordained by Torah law.

 The *gemara* in *Berakhot* (21a) learns from explicit verses the obligation to recite the Grace after Meals and the obligation to recite *Birkat Ha-Torah* before studying Torah. Afterwards, the *gemara* brings the opinion of R. Yochanan, who maintains that two more blessings are ordained by Torah law, and their obligation is learned by means of a *kal va-chomer*: One blessing is *Birkat Ha-Torah* after Torah study, and the second blessing is the blessing over food before eating it.[[11]](#footnote-11)The blessing over food before eating certainly refers to a *birkat ha-nehenin*, a blessing recited over pleasure, which is recited before eating. But what is *Birkat Ha-Torah* after Torah study? Is any blessing recited **after** studying Torah?[[12]](#footnote-12) It seems that R. Yochanan is referring not to the Torah study of an individual, but rather to the public reading of the Torah, over which blessings are recited both before and after. It turns out, then, that the *gemara*'s entire discussion deals with the blessings recited before or after **public** Torah reading; the *gemara* is not dealing at all with the *Birkat Ha-Torah* recited by an individual! Indeed, there are authorities who write that the Torah obligation of *Birkat Ha-Torah* that is learned from the *gemara* in *Berakhot* relates exclusively to public Torah reading.[[13]](#footnote-13)

 The *gemara* in *Berakhot* derived the obligation to recite *Birkat Ha-Torah* from the verse: "When I proclaim the name of the Lord, ascribe You greatness to our God" (*Devarim* 32:3).[[14]](#footnote-14) This verse is explained in the *Mekhilta* (*Parashat Bo*) as relating to the blessing recited before a public Torah reading:

R. Chanina the son of the brother of R. Yehoshua said: The verse states: "When I proclaim the name of the Lord, ascribe You greatness to our God." "When I proclaim the name of the Lord" – this is the person reciting the blessing; "Ascribe You greatness to our God" – these are those who answer him. And what do they answer him? "Blessed is the Lord who is blessed forever more.”

 If what we have said is correct, the Rambam's view is perfectly clear. The *Birkat Ha-Torah* recited by each and every individual every morning is indeed of rabbinic origin, as the Rambam rules in *Hilkhot Tefilla*. But this does not contradict in any way the plain meaning of the *Mekhilta*, the *Bavli*, and the *Yerushalmi*, which state that *Birkat Ha-Torah* is ordained by the Torah. The exposition of the verse relates to the *Birkat Ha-Torah* recited before a public Torah reading, and indeed that blessing is by Torah law. However, the *Birkat Ha-Torah* recited by the individual is merely a rabbinic ordinance.[[15]](#footnote-15)

 This understanding of *Birkat Ha-Torah* fits in well with what we concluded above that *Birkat Ha-Torah* is a blessing of praise and thanksgiving for the giving of the Torah, and not a blessing recited over a *mitzva*, which every individual must recite before he occupies himself in the *mitzva* of Torah study.

 The Talmud Yerushalmi (*Megilla* 4:1) draws a comparison between public Torah reading and the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai:

R. Shemuel bar R. Yitzchak entered a synagogue. A certain person rose up and translated the reading near a pillar [leaning against the pillar]. He said to him: This is forbidden. Just as the Torah was given in dread and fear, so must we must handle it with dread and fear.

R. Chaggai said: R. Shemuel bar R. Yitzchak entered a synagogue. He saw that the reader rose and translated the reading, and did not appoint someone else to translate it for him. He said to him: This is forbidden. Just as it [the Torah] was given by way of an intermediary, so too we must handle it by way of an intermediary.

 R. Soloveitchik inferred from this passage that a public Torah reading is like a giving of the Torah:

Public Torah reading is identical to the experience of standing before the *Shekhina* as at the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. This phenomenon is a reenactment of the encounter between the Holy One, blessed is He, and the people of Israel… When the people hear the reading, they must imagine as if the Torah was just given at Sinai. (*Shiurim Le-Zekher Abba Mari*, vol. 2, p. 210)

Public Torah reading is not intended just for the sake of learning [Torah], but also for the sake of arranging a meeting with God, as what happened with our forefathers at Sinai. Each and every reading is tantamount to a new giving of the Torah, a resurrection of that miraculous event at the foot of the fiery mountain. This reading of the Torah contains the element of "today" in the giving of the Torah and a renewal of that awesome and elevated experience. The experience of revelation is continually repeated every time that a Torah scroll is removed [from the ark]. (*U-Vikashtem Mi-Sham*, ch. 19)

 With this we can understand why it is precisely at the time of public Torah reading, which is a reenactment of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, that there is a Torah obligation to recite *Birkat Ha-Torah* and to thank God and praise him for having chosen us from among all the nations and giving us His Torah.

### "Bless the Lord who is blessed"

 The very same verse from which the *gemara* derives the obligation to recite *Birkat Ha-Torah* - "When I proclaim the name of the Lord, ascribe You greatness to our God" – is understood in the *Mekhilta* as relating to public Torah reading:

"When I proclaim the name of the Lord" – this is the one who recites the blessing; "Ascribe You greatness to our God" – these are those who answer after him. And what do they answer after him: Blessed be the Lord who is blessed forever and ever.

 However, if indeed the *Mekhilta* relates to *Birkat Ha-Torah*, why does it mention the formula, "Blessed be the Lord who is blessed forever and ever"? One who is called up to the Torah recites, "Bless the Lord who is blessed" (*Barkhu*), and that the entire congregation responds, "Blessed be the Lord who is blessed forever and ever," and only afterwards does the person who is called up to the Torah recite *Birkat Ha-Torah*. But it would seem that this formula is not part of *Birkat ha-Torah* itself. Why, then, is it mentioned by the *Mekhilta*?

 It stands to reason that the introductory lines, "Bless the Lord who is blessed," and "Blessed is the Lord who is blessed forever and ever," are not subordinate to *Birkat Ha-Torah* which follows those lines. Rather, they are part of the blessing itself.[[16]](#footnote-16) This combination of *Barkhu* and the blessing gives expression to the fact that the *Birkat Ha-Torah* that is recited before a public Torah reading is the blessing of the entire congregation, and not just of the individual who actually recites it. This is what R. Soloveitchik inferred from a precise reading of the Rambam (*Hilkhot Tefilla* 12:5), who, after describing how the person who is called up to the Torah recites *Barkhu* and *Birkat Ha-Torah*, mentions specifically, "And all the people recite Amen." Were this the ordinary Amen, like the one pronounced by anyone who hears another person's blessing, there would be no need to state this explicitly, as the Rambam already ruled that one who hears a blessing is obligated to respond with Amen (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 1:13). Why does the Rambam emphasize that the congregation is required to respond Amen to the blessing recited by the person who is called up to the Torah?

 In order to resolve this difficulty, R. Soloveitchik mentions the *gemara* in tractate *Shevuot* (36a), which speaks of two senses of the Amen response: Amen in the sense of "acceptance of words," which is recited by a person who wishes to fulfill his obligation with a blessing recited by another person,[[17]](#footnote-17) and an Amen in the sense of "confirmation of words," when the person saying it does not mean to fulfill any obligation himself.[[18]](#footnote-18) When the Rambam emphasizes, "And all the people respond Amen" to the blessing recited before a public Torah reading, this is not merely the Amen of "confirmation," but an Amen of "acceptance," an Amen by which the entire congregation fulfills its obligation to recite a blessing.[[19]](#footnote-19)

 Further proof that *Birkat Ha-Torah* is a communal blessing can be brought from the words of the *Shulchan Arukh* (*Orach Chaim* 139:6) that one who is called up to the Torah must recite *Barkhu* and *Birkat Ha-Torah* out loud, and according to the Ravya (2:552), if one recited it quietly, he must repeat the blessing out loud. It is clear that this view is based on the understanding that the reciter's blessing is a communal blessing, as argued above.

 The connection between *Birkat Ha-Torah* and public Torah reading does not stem only from the fact that this reading is like the giving of the Torah. We learn from the verse, "When I proclaim the name of the Lord, ascribe You greatness to our God," that the entire congregation must bless God and thank Him for choosing Israel, which finds expression in His giving them the Torah. This communal thanksgiving is fulfilled in a ceremony that precedes the public Torah reading, opening with the reciter's inviting the congregation to bless, "Bless the Lord who is blessed," and ending with the blessing, "Who has chosen us," and with the response of Amen on the part of the entire congregation.

A very similar ceremony was conducted by Ezra the scribe when he read from the Torah to the entire people (*Nechemya* 8:6-8):

And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. **And all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,”**[[20]](#footnote-20) with the lifting up of their hands; and they bowed their heads, and fell down before the Lord with their faces to the ground… And they read in the book, in the Law of God, distinctly; and they gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

 Since *Birkat Ha-Torah* has an important communal dimension, we see that it is a blessing of praise to God, who has chosen us from among all the nations and given us His Torah.

1. Some *Rishonim* maintain that the "*Al Ha-Michya*" blessing is also ordained by Torah law; see Rashba, *Berakhot* 35a, s.v. *hakhi*. The *Penei Yehoshua* (ad loc.) argues that even *birkot ha-nehenin* have the status of Torah law. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See also Yerushalmi *Berakhot* 7:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Shiurei HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein -* *Pesachim*, p. 234. See also *Mar'eh Ha-Penim* on Yerushalmi *Berakhot* 7:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. It should be noted that this reading of the Rambam is not the only possible reading, as the Rambam's words might refer to the eighteen blessings mentioned earlier, meaning that they alone were instituted by rabbinic enactment. In *Hilkhot Berakhot* (2:14), the Rambam mentions the obligation to recite a blessing in a doubtful situation only with respect to the Grace after Meals, but the context there is that of blessings over the various types of pleasures (see *Hilkhot Berakhot* 4:2; 8:12), and it therefore may not prove anything regarding the status of *Birkot Ha-Torah*. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This also follows from the attempt in the *gemara* to derive the obligation to recite a blessing before eating by way of a *kal va-chomer* argument from *Birkat Ha-Torah.* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See *Responsa Sha'agat Aryeh* 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This follows from Rashi's explanation of the opinions of those who hold that study of the Talmud does not require a blessing; see Rashi, s.v. *midrash.* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. One might perhaps distinguish between the various blessings that comprise *Birkat Ha-Torah*: The blessing of "*la’asok be-divrei Torah*" (according to those who maintain that it is a short blessing) is formulated like a blessing recited over a *mitzva*,whereas the blessing of "*asher bachar banu*" expresses praise and thanksgiving for the choosing of Israel, which is reflected in the giving of the Torah. The Ramban relates to this blessing, and it is possible that according to him, only it is a Torah obligation. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The Meiri (*Berakhot* 11b, s.v. *ve-harei lamadeta*), however, explains that one who recites the *Ahava Rabba* blessing is exempt from reciting a blessing over the *mitzva* of reciting the *Shema*. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The understanding that *Birkat Ha-Torah* is a blessing of praise has several practical ramifications – for example, concerning an interruption between the blessing and the study, concerning reciting the blessing "prior to the fulfillment of the *mitzva*," and concerning *Birkat Ha-Torah* for women. SeeTosafot, *Berakhot* 11b, s.v. *she-kevar*; Rosh, *Berakhot* 1:13; *Chiddushei Ha-Griz* on the Rambam, *Hilkhot Berakhot* 11:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. R. Yochanan's position is rejected in the Bavli, but it is accepted in the Yerushalmi. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See Ritva, *Megilla* 17b, s.v. *ha de-amrinan*; *Responsa Ha-Rashba*, vol. 7, p. 540; *Orchot Chaim*, *Hilkhot Talmud Torah* 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See *Be'er Sheva*, *Sota* 33a, 41a; *Mishkenot Yaakov* 60; *Tashbetz* 2:163. The Rosh (*Berakhot* 1:13) explains that the basic obligation concerning *Birkat Ha-Torah* from the Torah relates to Torah study, and it was the Rabbis who instituted that a blessing should be recited also for a public Torah reading. In this way he explains why a person who recited *Birkat Ha-Torah* in the morning recites another blessing when he is called up to the Torah. According to what we have proposed, it is precisely the *Birkat Ha-Torah* recited over a public Torah reading that is required by Torah law, whereas the blessing recited by each individual for himself is a rabbinic enactment. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Rashi, however, explains the *gemara* in *Berakhot* as follows: "When Moshe came to open with words of song, he said to Israel: I will first recite a blessing, and you will then answer Amen. "When I proclaim the name of the Lord" – with a blessing; "ascribe You greatness to our God" – with Amen." [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. It remains to be explained why the Rambam (like most of those who enumerated the *mitzvot*) did not count in his *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot* the *mitzva* of reciting a blessing before a communal Torah reading. R. Y.F. Perlow, in his commentary to R. Saadya Gaon's *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot* (positive commandment 63), argues that *Birkat Ha-Torah* is indeed by Torah law, but it is not counted as a separate *mitzva*, as it is part of the *mitzva* of Torah study. It is difficult to accept this explanation according to the Rambam, as he does not bring the law of *Birkat Ha-Torah* in *Hilkhot Talmud Torah*, but rather in *Hilkhot Tefilla* and in *Hilkhot Berakhot*. It would seem more reasonable to say that the Rambam understands that the verse, "Ascribe you greatness to our God," was addressed to the people of that generation, and that it is not a *mitzva* for all generations. Therefore, this blessing is not counted as one of the 613 commandments. What the *gemara* means when it establishes that *Birkat Ha-Torah* is ordained by the Torah is that the root of the idea of *Birkat Ha-Torah* is found in the Torah. This is like the *gemara*'s statement that cruelty to animals is forbidden by Torah law (*Bava Metzia* 32b). It is possible to demonstrate that the Torah is sensitive to the suffering of animals, but this *mitzva* is not counted as a separate *mitzva*. Similarly, we learn from Moshe's words to the people of Israel that it is proper to recite a blessing and thank God before reading from the Torah. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. R. Soloveitchik explained the meaning of *Barkhu* in a different manner. See *Shiurim Le-Zekher Abba Mari*, vol. 2, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The Rambam rules that one can fulfill his obligation by answering Amen to someone else's blessing in *Hilkhot Berakhot* 1:11: "Whoever answers Amen to a blessing recited by another person is considered as if he recited the blessing himself." [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. A young woman once asked R. Soloveitchik whether she should respond Amen to the blessing of "*shelo asani isha*," "Who has not made me a woman." The Rav answered that while she should not answer the Amen of "acceptance," as she does not recite this blessing, she should answer the Amen of "confirmation." [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. R. Soloveitchik draws a similar inference concerning the blessings of *keriat Shema*, communal prayer, *zimmun*, and shofar blowing. See *Shiurim Le-Zekher Abba Mari*, vol. 2, pp. 54, 95; *Harerei Kedem* on *Rosh Hashana*, concerning the shofar blasts sounded "while sitting" and "while standing." [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Regarding the doubling of Amen, see the Griz's letter of the 28th of Av, 5694, concerning a similar doubling found in the Torah section dealing with a *sota*. It may be suggested that the doubling in the book of *Nechemya* expresses the two senses of the word Amen – acceptance and confirmation. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)