**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**LIFECYCLES – HILKHOT ISHUT**

**Rav David Brofsky**

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This shiur is dedicated in memory of

Miriam Heller z"l

whose yahrzeit falls on the seventh of Shvat,

by her niece, Vivian Singer.

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**Shiur #21: Laws of the Wedding (11)**

**Customs and Laws of the Wedding**

**Introduction**

 **After the *ketuba* is read, as we discussed** [last week](http://etzion.org.il/en/shiur-20-laws-wedding-10-customs-and-laws-wedding)**, the *sheva berakhot* are recited. When using the same cup which was used for the *birkat ha-eirusin*, one should add wine in order to fill the cup, and in order to “fix” the wine which was rendered “*pagum*” after the *chatan* and *kalla* drank from it. It is in order that the wine should not be considered to be “*pagum*” (unfit for ritual use). It is customary to use an additional cup of wine for the *sheva berakhot*. After the *sheva berakhot* are concluded, the *chatan* and *kalla* taste the wine.**

**The Nature of the *Sheva Berakhot***

The Talmud ([*Ketubot* 7b](https://www.sefaria.org/Ketubot.7b?lang=he-en)) teaches that the *sheva berakhot* are recited at the wedding and for the seven days following the wedding:

The Sages taught: One recites the benediction of the grooms in a quorum of ten men all seven days of the wedding celebration.

These blessings are recited over a cup of wine and only in the presence of ten men (a *minyan*). What is the nature of these *berakhot*?

The Beit Yosef ([EH 62](https://www.sefaria.org/Shulchan_Arukh%2C_Even_HaEzer.62?lang=he-en)) suggests that according to the Rambam (*Hilkhot Ishut* 10:6), the *Birkot Chatanim* function as a *birkat ha-mitzva*, like any blessing recited before performing a mitzva. For this reason, the Rambam requires that the blessings be recited before the *nisu’in*. This view raises many difficulties, such as whether the *nisu’in* is a mitzva and how seven blessings of praise can be viewed as a *birkat ha-mitzva*.

 Alternatively, the Ran ([*Pesachim* 4a](https://www.sefaria.org/Pesachim.4a?lang=he-en), *s.v. u-le’inyan*) explains that “the *berakhot* are blessings of song and praise.” He explains why, although *birkot* *ha-shevach* (blessings recited to praise a natural or religious phenomenon) are generally said upon experiencing the given phenomenon, the *birkat chatanim* are said before the *nisu’in*:

These blessings are said before the *nisu’in*… because the *chuppa* is a form of *yichud* (i.e. seclusion of the husband and wife), and the *chuppa* can only be performed if it possible for the couple to engage in sexual relations (*reuyah le-bi’ah*). Since a *kalla* is not permitted to her husband, like a menstruating woman, before the blessings are recited, the blessings must be recited before the *nisu’in*.

In other words, according to the Ran, the blessings offer praise for the union between this *chatan* and *kalla*, and their recitation permits the *chatan* and *kalla* to be secluded. In fact, he cites the Rambam cited above, who rules that if one did not say the blessings, the *birkat chatanim* can be recited several days after the wedding, as a proof that the blessings must be *birkot ha-shevach*.

Although the *gemara* does not provide a source for these blessings, the minor tractate *Kalla* (1:2) teaches:

And from do we derive the *birkat ha-kalla* from the Torah? As it says, “And they blessed Rivka” (*Bereishit* 24:60). And did they say the blessing over a cup of wine? Rather the verse is merely a hint (*asmakhta*). R. Yochanan says: The blessings are derived from here, “And God blessed them, and God said unto them: Be fruitful, and multiply” (ibid. 1:28).

This source implies that the blessings are given to the couple by the community, or in the case of Adam and Chava, by God. A similar idea emerges from the *gemara*, which teaches that the blessings must be said in the presence of a *minyan*:

R. Nachman said: Huna bar Natan said to me that it was taught: From where is it derived that the benediction of the grooms is recited in a quorum of ten men? It is as it is stated: “And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said: Sit you here, and they sat” (*Ruth* 4:2). And R. Abbahu said that the source is from here: “In assemblies [*mak’helot*], bless God, the Lord, from the source of Israel” (*Tehillim* 68:27). This verse indicates that a congregation [*kahal*], which contains at least ten men, blesses God when reciting a benediction related to the source of Israel [i.e., conjugal relations], which will lead to the birth of Jewish children.

This passage also appears to view the *birkat chatanim* as blessings recited for the couple by the congregation.

**The Relationship Between the Seven Blessings**

The *Sheva Berakhot* are an interesting halakhic phenomenon, as they are presented by the Talmud as a string of *berakhot* recited one after the other. What is the relationship between these *berakhot*? Must they be said in order? What if one is omitted? May one interrupt in between the *berakhot*?

 On the one hand, *Kalla Rabbati* (1:1) teaches:

It was asked: If all of the blessings are recited out of order or if one is omitted, what is the law? Come and hear: The blessings do not depend one upon the other (*ein me’akvot zo et zo*).

Similarly, the Rambam rules (*Teshuvot Ha-Rambam* 288; see also *Be’er Heitev* EH 62:1):

Each and every one of the marriage blessings is a different matter, and one who omits one of them should recite it when he remembers, and they do not have a specific order, implying that the order of the blessings does not prevent one [from fulfilling the obligation].

These sources strongly imply that there is no fundamental connection between the blessings.

 Some *Rishonim* disagree and distinguish between the different blessings. Rashi (*Ketubot* 8a), for example, implies that while the first three and the seventh blessing stand alone, the fourth, fifth and sixth blessings are meant to be said one after the other. The Shita Mekubetzet (*Ketubot* 8a) implies that the first blessings are also meant to be said one after the other.

 This issue raises another important question: Maythe *sheva berakhot* be recited by more than one person?

R. Efraim Margulies (*Sha’arei Efraim* 9:30) discusses whether the blessings recited after the *haftara* may be divided among different people. He invokes a halakhic principle that appears in the Talmud. The *gemara* teaches that all blessings must begin and end with the “*barukh*” formula, with notable exceptions, including the “blessings of fruits,” the blessings of *mitzvot*, the last of the *birkot keri’at Shema* (*Emet Va-Yatziv*), the final blessing of *Birkat Ha-Mazon* (“*Ha-Tov Ve-Hametiv*”), and when one blessing is recited after another (*berakha ha-semukha le-chaverta*). The *gemara* teaches that when one blessing follows another, it need not open with the “*barukh*” formula. Based upon this requirement, The *Sha’arei Efraim* rules that the *sheva* *berakhot* should not be divided, aside from the last one, which begins with “*barukh*.”

The Kesef Mishna (*Hilkhot Keriat Shema* 1:8) disagrees with the above assumption and rules that even if blessings are recited separately, they may still considered to be *semukha le-chaverta*. Based upon this opinion, some rule that the *sheva berakhot* may be recited by numerous people.

Although some *Acharonim* object to the practice of dividing the blessings among different people (see *Har Tzvi*, OH 44), most *Acharonim*, including R. Moshe Feinstein (*Iggerot Moshe*, EH 1:94), R. Ovadia Yosef (*Yabi’a Omer*, EH 5:12) and R. Eliezer Waldenberg (*Tzitz Eliezer* 6:2:5) defend the common custom of dividing the *sheva berakhot* among different people.

 Some claim that it is customary not to divide the first two blessings. In other words, the first person honored to say the *sheva berakhot* should recite the first and second blessing. In extenuating circumstances, one may divide the first two blessings as well (see R. Yehuda Herzl Henkin, “*Chalukat Berakha Rishona Ve-Sheniya Be-Sheva Berakhot*,” *Tzohar* 12).

**May a Woman Recite the *Sheva Berakhot***

 In recent years, numerous articles and halakhic responsa have questioned whether the *sheva berakhot* may be recited by women. On the one hand, R. Yehuda Gershoni (*Chokhmat Garshoni* 165-167) suggested that a woman may be permitted to recite the *sheva berakhot*. He, and others (see Bnei Banim 3:27) note that the Rambam (Hilkhot Berakhot 2:9-10) writes that slaves and children may not recite the Asher Bara blessing. Rambam does not exclude women, implying that women may indeed recite the *sheva berakhot*. Most Acharonim, including R. Shaul Yisraeli (*Chavot Binyamin* 2:80) and R. Zalman Nechemia Goldberg (*Be-Mareh Ha-Bazak* v. 5 pg. 225-228) disagree, ruling that as the *sheva berakhot* are considered to be a *devarim shebikedusha* (see *Megilla* 23b and *Ketubot* 7b), just as a woman is not counted towards a *minyan*, so too she cannot say the prayers which can only be said in a quorum of ten men. Some distinguish between the *sheva berakhot* said under the *chuppa*, and those said at a meal during the seven festive days. This topic will certainly be explored further in years to come.

**Breaking the Glass at the Wedding**

 The Talmud teaches:

Mar son of Ravina made a wedding feast for his son, and he saw the Sages, who were excessively joyous. He brought a valuable cup worth four hundred *zuz* and broke it before them, and they became sad. R. Ashi made a wedding feast for his son and he saw the Sages, who were excessively joyous. He brought a cup of extremely valuable white glass and broke it before them, and they became sad … In a similar vein, R. Yochanan said in the name of R. Shimon ben Yochai: One is forbidden to fill his mouth with mirth in this world, as long as we are in exile (*ge’onim*), as it is stated: “When the Lord returns the captivity of Zion we will be as dreamers” (*Tehillim* 126:1). Only “then will our mouths fill with laughter and our lips with song” (ibid. 126:2). When will that joyous era arrive? When “they will say among nations, the Lord has done great things with these” (ibid.). They said about Reish Lakish that throughout his life he did not fill his mouth with laughter in this world once he heard this statement from his teacher, R. Yochanan. (*Berakhot* 30b–31a)

The Talmud relates how some Rabbis, concerned about the excessive levity at festive occasions, would try to dampen the joy, in keeping with the statement, “One is forbidden to fill his mouth with mirth in this world.”

 Tosafot (ad loc., s.v. *eitei*) writes that this is the source of the custom to “break glass” at weddings. The Sefer Kol Bo (62) relates this practice to remembering the destruction of Jerusalem. Similarly, the Rema (OC 560:2) cites this practice in the context of the practices observes as a “*zekher le-churban*.”

Some write that it is customary to break the glass after the *sheva berakhot* (Rema, EH 65:3). Others write that the glass should be broken after the *eirusin*, before the reading of the *ketuba*.

It is customary for the *chatan* to break the glass with his right foot, he should be careful not to hurt himself or others, and therefore some wrap the cup so that the glass pieces.

In some communities, it is customary for the *chatan* to say the verses, “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget [its skill]. May my tongue cling to my palate, if I do not remember you, if I do not bring up Jerusalem at the beginning of my joy” (*Tehillim* 137:5-6). In recent years, it has become customary for the congregation to sing this verse.