**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

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

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**LIFECYCLES – HILKHOT ISHUT**

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**Shiur #24: Laws of the Wedding**

**The *Sheva Berakhot* (1)**

**Introduction**

The *birkat chatanim*, known as the *sheva berakhot*, are recited under the *chuppa* during the wedding ceremony, as we discussed previously, as well as at the festive meal after the wedding. In addition, the Talmud (*Ketubot* 8a) teaches that three components of the *brikat chatanim* recited at the festive meal – the special *birkat ha-zimun* of “*she-hasimcha be-me’ono,*” the *birkat chatanim*, and the last blessing, “*asher bara*,” are recited throughout the seven days after the wedding, the *shivat yemei mishteh*, if not longer.

Regarding the *birkat chatanim*, the Talmud (*Ketubot* 7b) teaches:

The Sages taught: One recites the *birkat chatanim* in a quorum of ten men all seven days of the wedding celebration. R. Yehuda said: That is the case only when new faces (*panim chadashot*), who did not previously participate in the festivities, came to join the celebration.

This passage teaches that these blessings are recited in a quorum of ten (a *minyan*), for seven days, and only in the presence of *panim chadashot*. The Talmud further derives the source for *birkat chatanim* from two different verses:

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) [indicating 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.]

As we shall see, there is likely a difference between these two sources.

 The *Rishonim* discuss a number of questions that are crucial to understanding, as well as the proper performance, of the *sheva berakhot*. For example, what is the nature of the *birkot chatanim*? Where can they be recited? Why does the Talmud require *panim chadashot*? Are the *sheva berakhot* an integral part of the festive meal and its *birkat ha-mazon*, or may they even be recited without a festive meal?

This week, we will begin our study of the laws of the *sheva berakhot*, focusing on the nature of the *sheva berakhot* and the *panim chadashot*, as well as the *asher bara* blessing. Next week, we will continue our study of the *sheva berakhot*, and then focus on the special *birkat ha-zimun*, *she-hasimcha be-me’ono*.

**The Nature of *Sheva Berakhot* and *Panim Chadashot***

Why are the *birkot chatanim* recited for the seven festive days after the wedding, and why is it crucial that they be said in the presence of *panim chadashot*? The *Rishonim* appear to offer two different explanations.

Tosafot (*Ketubot* 7b, *s.v. ve-hahu*) cites the Ri (R. Yitzchak), who explains that “*panim chadashot* refer to people for whom the *simcha* is expanded” (*marbim be-shvilam ha-simcha yoter*). Tosafot adds that on Shabbat, there is no need for *panim chadashot*, as the festivities are naturally increased in honor of the Shabbat. Tosafot views the *sheva berakhot* as an expression or manifestation of *simcha* of the *shivat yemei mishteh*. After the first day, the blessings are only recited when the festivities are qualitatively increased due to the presence of *panim chadashot* (or Shabbat).

Some *Rishonim* appear to offer a different approach, separating the *sheva berakhot* from the joy of the seven festive days. For example, the Rambam (*Hilkhot Ishut* 10:13) rules that when a man who was never married weds a widow, there are only three days of *simcha*. Nevertheless, in *Hilkhot Berakhot* (2:9) he rules that in such a case, the *sheva berakhot* are recited for a full seven days! Apparently, the *sheva berakhot* are not an expression of the *simcha* of the festive days, but rather serve a different function.

Why, then, are the *sheva berakhot* recited? Interestingly, the Ran, in his commentary to the Rif (*Ketubot* 3b, s.v. *mevarekh*), writes: “The following explanation seems [correct] to me: If there are *panim chadashot*, all of the blessings are recited, as for them **it is like the beginning of their marriage**.” The Ran maintains that the *sheva berakhot* are recited during the seven festive days after the wedding whenever it would be appropriate to “reenact” the wedding in honor of a new guest.

 These two understandings may even be rooted in the two sources cited above. The verse, “In assemblies (*mak’helot*) bless God, the Lord, from the source of Israel” indicates that the blessings are an expression of praise and joy. In contrast, “And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, ‘Sit you here,’ and they sat” implies that the blessings play almost a formal role, publicizing the marriage, in our case, for those who have not yet participated in the festivities.

 Interestingly, while the Talmud (*Megilla* 23b) teaches that the *chatan* counts as part of the quorum, R. Pinchas Ha-Levi Horowitz (1731 - 1805) notes in his commentary to *Ketubot*, *Sefer Hafla’ah* (7b), that the halakha that the *chatan* may count as part of the quorum, can be understood only according to the verse, “In assemblies bless God, the Lord,” but not according the verse from *Ruth*, “And he took ten men of the elders of the city.” In other words, while the *chatan* may count as part of a quorum within which God is praised, it makes little sense that he may be counted within a quorum intended to publicize the marriage.

**Definition of *Panim Chadashot***

 The *Rishonim* also disagree as to the definition of *panim chadashot*.

The Rosh (*Ketubot* 1:13) explains that *panim chadashot* are those “who have not eaten yet, even if they were present at the time of the *chuppa*.” The Rosh maintains that the *panim chadashot* relate to the meal. Seemingly, this is because the Rosh understands that the *panim chadashot* are meant to increase the festivities. If they already celebrated by attending a meal with the couple, then they are not considered to be *panim chadashot*.

 The Rambam, however, writes that even if the person attended the ceremony but did not participate in the meal, he is not considered to be *panim chadashot*. Apparently, the *sheva* *berakhot* function like a *chuppa*, as described above. Thus, if person attended the ceremony, he cannot be considered *panim chadashot*.

 Finally, do the *panim chadashot* need to actively participate in the meal by eating? The Rosh cited above implies that they eat at the meal, but other *Rishonim* disagree. For example, the Ramban (*Ketubot* 7b, s.v. *u-peirush panim chadashot*) explains that “if a person who was not present during the festive days comes during the blessings, even if he did not eat there, the seven blessings may be recited.” The Ritva (ibid. *s.v. amar*) similarly writes that “even on the other days … as long as everyone has gathered to rejoice with the *chatan* and *kalla* during the meal, and even not during the meal,” the *sheva berakhot* may be recited. It is not clear whether these *Rishonim* assign a completely different function to the *sheva berakhot*, or if they assume that the *panim chadashot* increase the *simcha* even if they do not actually partake of the meal.

 The *Shulchan Arukh* (EH 62:7) cites both opinions, but he rules that as long as the person did not participate in a celebratory meal, he may be considered to be *panim chadashot*. Furthermore, the *Shulchan Arukh* rules that Shabbat and Yom Tov are considered to be *panim chadashot*, except for *seuda shelishit*. The Rema writes that it is customary to say the *sheva berakhot* even at *seuda shelishit*, either because the third meal is also considered to be *panim chadashot* (see Pitchei Teshuva 16), or because one can assume that someone new will attend the meal (Rema), or because the *divrei* *Torah* recited at the meal are considered to be *panim chadashot* (Rema).

**The *Asher Bara* Blessing**

The Talmud (*Ketubot* 8a) distinguishes between the last of the *birkot chatanim*, *asher bara*, and the other blessings:

R. Ashi happened to come to the house of R. Kahana to attend a wedding. The first day, he recited all seven blessings. From that point forward, if there were new faces (*panim chadashot*) present, he recited all the blessings, and if not, he would say: It is merely an extension of the original celebration. And he would recite the blessing “*she-hasimcha be-me’ono*” (In Whose dwelling is joy) in the *zimmun* prior to *birkat ha-mazon*, and the sixth blessing after *birkat ha-mazon*, “*asher bara*” (Who has created).

The blessing of *asher* *bara* may be recited, according to the Talmud, even when there are no *panim chadashot*.

 The *Rishonim* appear to debate whether *asher bara* is similar to the other *birkot chatanim*, except that if may be recited all seven days even when there are no *panim chadashot*, or whether it is a completely different type of blessing.

The Ran (*Ketubot* 2b, s.v. *mekhi*) raises this question. He cites the Ramban, who maintains that is considered to be one of the *birkot chatanim* and therefore may only be recited in the presence of a *minyan*. Apparently, there is no fundamental difference between the *asher* *bara* blessing and the other *birkot* *chatanim*. Rather, the different blessings reflect different levels and intensities of *simcha*.

The Ran disagrees and rules that the *asher bara* blessing may be recited even without a *minyan*: “The *asher* *bara* blessing is not a *birkat chatanim* and does not require ten, as it is merely an extension of the original celebration (*afushei simcha be-alma*). Therefore, it is recited after a meal when three have eaten (*zimun*).” In other words, while the *birkot chatanim* have a unique and defined role, possibly serving to recreate and publicize the wedding, as described above, the *asher* *bara* blessing is simply a reflection of the festivities.

 The Tosafot Rid (ibid.) suggests a unique position:

Therefore, it appears to the Ri … that since *asher* *bara* is the primary *birkat chatanim* (*ikkar birkat chatanim*), which must be recited each day, even if the *chatan* ate alone, he is obligated to say it.

Tosafot Rid apparently maintains that *asher* *bara* is the basic wedding blessing, which best captures the joy of the *chatan* and *kalla* and must therefore be recited each day during the seven festive days. The other blessings also relate to the wedding, but they are only recited in a quorum, at the height of the celebration.

The *Shulchan Arukh* (EH 62:4) rules in accordance with the Ran (and Rambam), that the *asher bara* blessing can be said without a quorum when there is a *zimun*.

Next week, we will continue our discussion of the *birkot chatanim*.