**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

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

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**THE LAWS OF THE BERAKHOT**

**Rav David Brofsky**

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Dedicated in memory of

Matt Eisenfeld *z"l* and Sara Duker *z"l* on their 20th yahrzeit.

Though their lives were tragically cut short in the bombing of Bus 18 in Jerusalem, their memory continues to inspire.

*Am Yisrael* would have benefitted so much from their contributions.

*Yehi zikhram barukh*. –

Yael and Reuven Ziegler

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**Shiur #75: Introduction to the *Shehechiyanu* Blessing**

***Shehechiyanu* Upon Seeing a Friend (1)**

**Introduction: The Uniqueness of *Shehechiyanu* and the *Birkot Ha-Shevach***

This week, we will begin to study the laws of the blessing of *Shehechiyanu*. The rabbis instituted the blessing of *Shehechiyanu*, “Blessed are You… who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion,” to be said on numerous occasions.

The Talmud teaches that the blessing should be said on Festive days and upon fulfilling a *mitzva* that is only performed at fixed times (*shofar*, *lulav*, *matza*, and *ner Chanuka*). The Talmud further teaches that one should say the blessing of *Shehechiyanu* upon building (or purchasing) a new house or new *keilim* (clothing and utensils), upon seeing a friend, seeing a new fruit (*Eiruvin* 40b), and upon hearing good news (*Berakhot* 54a and 59b).

The *gemara* (*Eiruvin* 40b) distinguishes between different types of *Shehechiyanu*:

Rabba further stated: When we were at R. Huna, we raised the question whether the blessing of *Shehechiyanu* is to be recited on Rosh Ha-Shana and Yom Kippur. Must it be recited [we argued] because [these solemn days] occur only periodically, or is it possible that it is not to be said since they are not described in Scripture as festivals? He was unable to give an answer. When I later arrived at R. Yehuda, he stated: I recite the benediction of *Shehechiyanu* even over a new pumpkin. I told him: I do not ask whether it is permitted [to recite this benediction]. What I ask is whether its recitation is obligatory.

This passage teaches that *Shehechiyanu* over new fruits is a *reshut*, optional, as opposed to when the blessing is said on Festivals, which is obligatory.

The Eshkol (*Birkot Hoda’ah*, p. 32b; see also Ritva, *Eiruvin* 40b) explains that the *gemara* does not mean that saying the blessing is optional. Rather, it is up to the person whether or not he will see a new fruit. Others explain that it is not obligatory to say the blessing at all (Teshuvot Ha-Rashba 1:245; see also Magen Avraham 225:6, Mishna Berura 225:9 and Arukh Ha-Shulchan 225:5). Despite the fact that most *Posekim* understand that the blessing is only a *reshut*, they clearly maintain that one should say the blessing (Mishna Berura, ibid.; see also Iggerot Moshe, OC 5;43:5). For example, there is a custom to refrain from eating new fruits between Shiva Asar Be-Tamuz and Tisha Be-Av (Shulchan Arukh 551:17) due to the concern that one will say the *Shehechiyanu* blessing, despite the fact that it is a *reshut* to do so.

Furthermore, while the Rashba (ibid.) rules that all of the applications of *Shehechiyanu* mentioned in the ninth chapter of *Berakhot* (except for recitation on a Festival and over *mitzvot*) are optional, the Darkhei Moshe (OC 223:4) writes the one should act in accordance which the other authorities, who treat the other cases as obligations (with the exception of the blessing for a new fruit).

Assuming that the *Shehechiyanu* blessing is fundamentally a *reshut* (except for on Festivals and over certain *mitzvot*), does that teach us anything else about the blessing? The Rivash (505) asserts that since the *Shehechiyanu* blessing is a *reshut*, the halakhic policy of being strict regarding saying unnecessary blessings (*berakha she-eina tzerikha*) does not apply. Similarly, R. Yoel Sirkis explains in his commentary to the Tur (Bayit Chadash 29):

In my humble opinion, it seems that we should distinguish between *Shehechiyanu* and other blessings, as *Shehechiyanu* [was established] upon the happiness of a person’s heart. [Therefore,] one may say the blessing even if he is not definitively obligated to say the blessing, and he does not violate the prohibitions of taking God’s name in vain.

Some *Acharonim* (Eliya Rabba 22:2, Peri Chadash 432; see also Tzitz Eliezer 13:20:5) concur. Other *Posekim*, however, imply that we are indeed concerned about saying the *Shehechiyanu* blessing in vain (Rashba, ibid.; Mishna Berura 224:12 and Arukh Ha-Shulchan 225:7).

Finally, the *Acharonim* offer another distinction between the different scenarios at which one says *Shehechiyanu*. Saying *Shehechiyanu* on a Festival, upon fulfilling certain *mitzvot*, or even upon seeing a new fruit (as we will discuss next week), is not necessarily related to one’s personal sense of excitement or joy. However, the *Shehechiyanu* said upon seeing a friend or purchasing new *keilim* appears to be an expression of one’s inner feelings. Thus, not only are the blessings a *reshut*, in many cases, as we shall see, they are not said at all.

***Shehechiyanu* Upon Seeing a Friend**

The *gemara* teaches:

R. Yehoshua ben Levi said: One who sees his friend after thirty days have passed since last seeing him recites, “Blessed…Who has given us life, sustained us and brought us to this time.” One who sees his friend after twelve months recites: “Blessed…Who revives the dead.” As Rav said: A dead person is only forgotten from the heart after twelve months have elapsed, as it is stated: “I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind; I am like a lost vessel” (*Tehillim* 31:13).

Upon seeing a friend after thirty days, one says *Shehechiyanu*, and after twelve months, one says *Barukh* … *Mechaye Ha-Metim*.

What is the meaning of this blessing? Is this blessing similar to the blessing over a new fruit? This would imply that simply upon seeing someone that one has not seen in over thirty days, one says a blessing. Or is this blessing only said because and when one is truly happy to see this person? In other words, is the blessing upon the idea of “renewal” or the *simcha* that results?

Interestingly, a number *Rishonim* limit this blessing to a friend who he is genuinely happy to see (see Tosafot 58b, s.v. *ha-ro’eh*; Rabbeinu Yona 43b, s.v. *ha-ro’eh*, etc.). The Rambam, however, never mentions this condition (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 10:2), and simply quotes the *gemara*.

How is a “friend” defined for the purposes of this blessing? The Rashba (Teshuvot 4:76) was asked regarding a case in which one never actually met the other person, but rather corresponded with him. He asserts that the blessing was not instituted for “everyone that one benefits from seeing,” but rather upon seeing a person whom he was accustomed to spend time with (“*chavero ha-ragil etzlo*”). This view is cited by the Shulchan Arukh (225:2).

Despite this explicit ruling, the *Acharonim* discuss other scenarios in which one may say the *Shehechiyanu* blessing even without having met the person. For example, the Mishna Berura (225:5) cites the Peri Megadim, who rules that if one was abroad and his wife gave birth in the interim, he should say *Shehechiyanu* upon seeing his child for the first time. It is not clear whether *Shehechiyanu* is appropriate in this case because he is truly happy to see his new child or because the case of a child who was just born is not comparable to that of a person who existed but who one had simply never met. Interestingly, the Mishna Berura (223:2) also rules that upon the birth of a daughter, it is obvious (*pashut*) that one should say the *Shehechiyanu* blessing, as this case is not worse than one who has not seen a friend for over thirty days. We will address this scenario on a different occasion.

R. Tzvi Pesach Frank (1874-1960) discusses this issue in his Har Tzvi (1:116). He relates that when the Munkatcher Rebbe, R. Haim Elazar Spira (1868 –1937), first met R. Solomon Eliezer Alfandari (1820–1930), a few years before he passed away, he said the *Shehechiyanu* blessing. R. Frank suggests that just as it is clear to us that a father who has never seen his child says the *Shehechiyanu* blessing, R. Spira felt such joy when he met R. Alfandrari that even the Rashba would agree that a blessing is appropriate.

The *Acharonim* also discuss whether it is still fitting nowadays to recite a blessing upon seeing a friend whom he has not seen in thirty days, given that one may be in touch with friends though writing letters, email, and even social media. The Be’er Hetiv (225) cites R. Yirzchak Algiz (Halakhot Ketanot 1:220), who distinguished between the two blessings for this case. If someone heard from his friend, he should not say *Mechaye Ha-Metim*, as the person “was not forgotten from the heart,” but he may say *Shehechiyanu*, which was established upon “seeing his face.” As a result, nowadays it is indeed extremely uncommon to say the *Mechaye Ha-Metim* blessing. However, if a person is happy to see a friend, even one whom he had heard from, he may say the *Shehechiyanu* blessing.

The Mishna Berura (225:2), however, cites a debate among the *Acharonim* regarding whether one should say the *Shehechiyanu* blessing if one has received letters or has been informed about his friend’s welfare. He concludes that due to the principle of “*safek berakhot le-hakel*,” one should refrain from saying the blessing. Some *Acharonim* disagree (see, for example, Yechaveh Da’at 4:17) and note that while being in touch with the person may affect one’s ability to say *Mechaye Ha-Metim* after twelve months, one certainly says *Shehechiyanu* upon seeing a friend.

Some *Acharonim* report that it is no longer common to say the blessing upon seeing a friend. Some base this upon the Mishna Berura cited above, who questions whether one may say the blessing upon seeing a person with whom he has been in contact or about whom he has received news. R. Yosef Hahn (Frankfurt am Main, 1570-1637) writes in his Yosef Ometz (451) that nowadays, since people rarely have friendships that would lead to such an outburst of joy after not seeing someone for thirty days, the blessing is generally not recited. R. Eliezer Papo (1785–1828) writes in his Chesed La-Alafim (*Hilkhot Birkat Ha-Hoda’ot* 16) that while one should say the blessing upon seeing a really good friend that one has not seen in thirty days, one should refrain from saying the blessing when seeing others, as people often inappropriately used the blessing as a form of flattery.

R. Shlomo Auerbach (Halikhot Shlomo, *Birkot Ha-Shevach Ve-HaRe’iyah* 12) records that it is not customary to say this blessing, as there is concern that the blessing is said only out of politeness or insincerity. However, upon seeing a very close friend or relative who has returned from a dangerous illness or situation, one should say the blessing. Others (Yechaveh Da’at, ibid.; see also Peninei Halakha, *Hilkhot Berakhot* 17:10) insist that one should not refrain from saying this blessing; rather, when one feels great joy upon seeing a friend or relative, he should say the blessing.

Finally, R. Ovadia Yosef (Yechaveh Da’at, ibid.) discusses whether one should say the *Shehechiyanu* blessing even when seeing someone on live television or upon speaking with a friend on the telephone after thirty days. He concludes that one should not say the blessing in these cases.

Next week, we will continue our discussion of the *Shehechiyanu* blessing.