

❧ סימן ריט ❧

הלכות ברכת הגומל

א. ארבעה צריכים להודות בברכת הגומל, חולה שנתרפא ועמד מחוליו, יורדי הים באניות כשעלו ממנו, הולכי מדברות כשהגיעו ליישוב, ומי שהיה חבוש בבית האסורים ויצא. וסימנך וכל החיי"ם יודוך סלה. ח'בוש, י"ם, י'סורין (חולה), מ'דבר. [חזו"ע עמי שמ]

ב. צריך להודות בברכת הגומל בפני עשרה ושנים מהם תלמידי חכמים, שנאמר וירוממוהו בקהל עם ובמושב זקנים יהללוהו, ואין קהל בפחות מעשרה (פסחים סד. וע"ע בתוס' כתובות ז ע"ב ד"ה במקהלות). [חזו"ע עמי שמ]. והמברך הגומל הוא מכלל העשרה. [חזו"ע עמי שמג]

❧ Siman 219 ❧

Birkat Hagomel

Four categories of danger 1) One becomes obligated to recite the blessing of *hagomel* on four occasions: someone who has traveled overseas and has arrived safely at port, someone who has traveled across a wilderness and has reached a settled area safely, someone who was ill and has recovered; and someone who was imprisoned and has now been released. We can remember this list using the words of our daily prayers – *vekhoh hahayim yodukha sela*, “all living beings will give thanks to You forever.” The word *hayim*, spelled *het, yod, yod, mem*, is an acronym for the words *havush* (prisoner), *yisurim* (suffering from illness), *yam* (sea) and *midbar* (wilderness).¹

Ten men and two Torah scholars 2) The blessing of *hagomel* must be recited in the presence of ten men, two of whom are Torah scholars.² Our Sages derived this rule from the verse (*Tehillim* 107:32), “They shall exalt Him among an assembly of people and praise Him where scholars reside.” The Hebrew word for assembly – *kahal* – refers to a group of at least ten people. The person reciting the blessing counts as one of the ten.³

1. See the preface to this *Siman* for the source for this obligation.

2. Definition of a Torah scholar

The *Magen Avraham* defined the term Torah scholar [in the context of this halakha] as someone who is able to teach practical halakha. The *Mahatzit Hashekel* explained that this is derived from the term used in the verse, which our Sages (*Kiddushin* 32b) defined as *ze shekana hokhma*, someone who has acquired wisdom and is fit to render halakhic decisions. See below in the footnote to *Siman* 224:1

regarding the halakha of reciting the blessing of *shehalak mehokhmato lire'av*, where it is explained that this blessing is to be recited for a scholar who is capable of rendering halakhic decisions as well. (Y.B.)

3. The responsa *Halakhot Ketanot* (#271) ruled that the person reciting the blessing counts as one of the ten people present. This is similar to our Sages' ruling (*Ketuvot* 8a) that the seven blessings of a wedding can be recited only if there are at least ten men present, but the groom himself counts as one of the ten. The Ra'an"ah (*Derashot Imre She-*

לו. מנהרה שנעשתה ממדינה למדינה תחת הים, כעין המנהרה שבין צרפת לאנגליה, ונוסעים שם במכונית, פשוט שהנוסע בה אינו בכלל יורדי הים, ואינו מברך הגומל. (שבט הלוי ח"י ס"ס עב, להורות נתן ח"י ס"י י, ח"י ס"י כו אות ב, קנין תורה ח"י ס"י ט). ומיהו אם יש במנהרה שיעור פרסה, למנהג יוצאי ספרד יש לברך הגומל, כדין הולכי מדברות דסגי להו מעיר לעיר, כדי לברך. [חזו"ע עמ' שסד בהערה]

לו. יש מי שכתב שיורדי הים באניות, וכן הולכי מדבריות, שמברכים הגומל, הוא דוקא אם קרה להם מקרה רע אז צריכים לברך כשנחלצו מצרה, אבל אם נסעו ועלו בשלום אין צריכים לברך, אבל לדינא לא נראה כן, אלא אפילו לא תעו במדבר או לא עמד עליהם רוח סערה, מברכים הגומל. (ביאור הלכה ר"ס ריט). [חזו"ע עמ' שסא-שסג בהערה]

The Chunnel 36) Those who travel by automobile or train through the Chunnel under the English Channel between England and France are not considered among those who have traveled by sea. It is not necessary to recite the blessing of *hagomel* after such a trip. Sefardic Jews would have to recite the blessing if their trip lasted longer than seventy-two minutes.²³ This is no different than any other trip between two cities, after which we are required to recite this blessing.

Uneventful trips 37) According to some *Poskim*, those who sail the seas or travel across the desert must recite the blessing of *hagomel* only if something happened along the way that actually placed them in danger. If the trip was uneventful they are not to recite the blessing. The halakha does not follow this opinion, however. Even if nothing out of the ordinary occurs during the trip, the travelers must nevertheless recite the blessing of *hagomel*.²⁴

approach to this halakha is that one must recite the blessing of *hagomel* after any short trip on a ship. The *Halakha Berura* (page 208), however, ruled that one may recite the blessing only if the trip took at least seventy-two minutes, thus equating the case of seafarers with that of travelers in the wilderness. (Y.B.)

23. The length of the Chunnel is about fifty kilometers of which thirty-four kilometers are under the English Channel.

24. The *Yad Hamelekh* (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 10:8) ruled that this blessing is to be recited only if the person actually encountered some danger during his trip, based on the simple meaning of the verses in *Tehillim* 107. In fact, Maran the Rishon Letziyon (*Hazon Ovadya*, page 361) found that this opinion is mentioned by Rabbenu Menahem Hame'iri (*Berakhot* 54b), but he refuted it, stating emphatically that any traveler across a desert or on the high seas must recite this blessing even if he suffered no mishap. The very fact that

he was in a situation where he was vulnerable to danger is reason to be obligated to recite the blessing.

Harav Moshe Alshikh (*Torat Moshe* on *parashat Tzav*; *Romemot El* on *Tehillim* 107) wrote likewise that these four categories include people who never experienced the harrowing dangers described in the verses. Rabbenu Mano'ah (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 10:8) wrote that this is the opinion of Rambam as well. In the preface to *sefer Shete Halehem*, the author stated that the four categories of people who must recite the blessing of *hagomel* do not have to experience the travails described in the verses. It means only that these people are susceptible to these dangers, not that they have necessarily taken place. On the contrary, if a person makes his trip or is released from prison without having been subjected to the fear and suffering described in the verses, he is all the more obligated to express his gratitude to God for having enabled him to complete the experience without mishap. This is likewise the ruling of the *Mishna Berura* (*Bi'ur Halakha* 219:1). See the *Hazon Ovadya* (page 362).

הולכי דרכים

לח. מנהג הספרדים ועדות המזרח לברך ברכת "הגומל" גם על נסיעה מעיר לעיר, מפני שכל הדרכים בחזקת סכנה. וכל שנוסע במכונית מחוץ לעיר כשיעור מהלך פרסה, דהיינו שנמשך זמן הנסיעה שבעים ושתיים דקות, חייב בברכת "הגומל". [חזו"ע עמ' שסד]

Travelers

Intercity
travel

38) The practice of Sefardic Jews is to recite the blessing of *hagomel* after traveling from one city to another even within one country. Our Sages declared that traveling [through uninhabited areas] always has an element of danger. Therefore, anyone who travels by automobile from one city to another must recite the blessing of *hagomel* afterward if the trip takes over seventy-two minutes.²⁵

25. The *Shulhan Arukh* (219:7) states: "In Germany and France the custom is to refrain from reciting the blessing of *hagomel* upon traveling from one city to another. They claim that our Sages obligated travelers to recite this blessing only if they traverse uninhabited wildernesses where wild beasts and highway robbers abound. In Spain, however, the custom is to recite the blessing upon traveling from city to city since our Sages declared that 'traveling always has an element of danger.' Nevertheless, if the trip is shorter than a *parsa* the traveler does not recite the blessing unless the area traveled is reputed to be particularly dangerous. In such a case, even if the trip is shorter than a *parsa*, the traveler recites the blessing."

The definition of *parsa*

The Talmud defines *parsa* as four *mil*, which is just under four kilometers (2.4 miles). The *halakhah* states that a person walks, on the average, one *mil* in eighteen minutes or one *parsa* in seventy-two minutes. Maran in the *Shulhan Arukh* did not explain whether a "trip as long as a *parsa*" means a trip covering the distance of four kilometers no matter how much time that might take or if it means a trip taking seventy-two minutes no matter how much distance is covered. If someone travels by car, for example, it is likely that he would travel more than fifty miles in seventy-two minutes.

The *Shulhan Arukh* (Y.D. 375:8) ruled that "if someone's immediate relative passed away and he does not discover it until he arrives home [several days later], as long as he was within a distance of ten *parsa'ot* – a day's walk – from home, he completes his *shiv'a* together with the relatives who began sitting immediately after the funeral." The *Aharonim* debated how this *halakhah* applies in modern times when someone can travel across the entire world in one day. Some *Poskim* ruled that even today this rule applies only if the

person was within 24 miles of his relatives, but others ruled that it applies regardless of where he is since he can arrive home within a day by car or plane. In responsa *Yabia Omer* (Vol. VII, Y.D. #43:3), Maran the Rishon Letziyon ruled leniently, that if someone travels by bus or plane a great distance only to arrive home and find that he is a mourner, he completes the *shiv'a* together with the rest of his family. He based this ruling on the general principle that we always follow the lenient opinion regarding the *halakhot* of mourning. This does not necessarily mean that we are to define all halakhic "distances" as the "amount of time traveled" regarding the blessing of *hagomel*, however.

The *Petah Hadevir* (Vol. III, page 314d) dealt with this issue and concluded that since our Sages gave us measurements in terms of the distance and not in terms of the time spent traveling, we are to measure the *parsa* in distance. Therefore, if someone sprints the distance of *parsa* in only a few minutes [or if he travels by automobile] he has automatically become obligated to recite the blessing of *hagomel*. The responsa *Lev Avraham* Palachi (Y.D. #38), however, hesitated to concur with this ruling, suggesting that regardless of the real distance, if the traveler reaches his destination in less than seventy-two minutes he is not obligated to recite the blessing. Failing to find a definite proof, he concluded that the matter needs more research than he was able to invest.

Maran the Rishon Letziyon (responsa *Yabia Omer* Vol. I, O.H. #13:5) cited proof that one does not recite the blessing of *hagomel* unless one has traveled for seventy-two minutes, no matter how great a distance one has traveled. He cited the *Orhot Hayim* (page 24d) stating: "Our Sages taught (*Berakhot* 55a) that if someone walks by an unstable wall it spurs the Heavenly Court to take stock of his sins. Does this mean that he must recite the blessing of *hagomel* since the wall did not fall over and crush him?" After some

❧ סימן רכ ❧

הטבת חלום ותעניתו

א. הרואה חלום ונפשו עגומה עליו, ייטיבנו באפי שלשה מאוהביו, ויאמר בפניהם: "חלמא טבא חזאי". ולימרו אינהו: "טבא הוא וטבא ליהוי, רחמנא לישוייה לטב שבע זימנין יגזרון עליה מן שמיא דליהוי טבא, טבא הוא וטבא ליהוי". (ברכות נה ע"ב, טור ס"י ר"כ). ונהגו העולם לאומרו ז' פעמים (בית יוסף ס"י רכ, כה"ח שם ס"ק י"ב).

ואחר כך יאמרו ג' הפוכות, וג' פדויות, וג' שלומות. (ראה בברכות ובטור שם). וכפי שנדפס בסידורים. ויזכור החלום בשעת ההטבה. (מג"א סק"א ואחריו).

ואחר כך אומרים לו: "לך אכול בשמחה לחמך". (כל בו ס"י ל). ויש אומרים שאין לאמרו לפי שיש תיבות 'אבל', אלא אומר: "לך אכל לחמך בשמחה". (הר"ם בשם ר' יהודה חסיד). והמנהג לאומרו ביושר. (כה"ח ס"ק יא)

❧ Siman 220 ❧

Mitigating Nightmares

Remedy for nightmares

1) If someone has a nightmare and he fears that it is an omen of some impending tragedy, he can remedy it by calling over three of his friends and declaring to them, "I had a good dream." They then reply, "It is good and it will remain good. May God make it good. May Heaven decree seven times that it is a good dream. It is good and it will remain good."

The common custom is that the three friends repeat this response seven times. Afterward, they recite a number of verses, which can be found in most prayer books. During all this time, the person who experienced the dream should think about its content.

After reciting all the verses, the three friends tell him the verse (*Kohelet* 9:7), "Go, eat in joy your bread." Some *Rishonim* clarified this, stating that they should not recite the words in order since their initial letters spell the Hebrew word for *mourner*. Instead, they should say, "Go, eat your bread in joy." Nevertheless, the custom is to recite the verse as it is written.⁴⁰

40. This is the decision of the *Kaf HaChayim* Sofer (220:11). He cited Harav HIDA (*Birke Yosef*) quoting Mahar"i

Tzemaḥ who explained that even in the order that appears in the verse, it is a good omen.

ב. יפה תענית לבטל חלום רע, כאש לנעורת. ודוקא בו ביום, ואפילו בשבת. (מרוך ורמ"א סי' רכ ס"ב). ומה שתענית יפה לבטל חלום רע, הוא דוקא כשתשובה עמו. (מג"א סי' רכ סק"ג ואחריו)

ג. הרואה חלום רע שצריך להתענות, זהו דוקא כשנפשו עגומה עליו ביותר, ויודע שאם יתענה ויפשפש במעשיו ימצא מנוח ומרגוע לנפשו, אבל מאן דלא קפיד לא קפדינן בהדיה, שדברי חלומות לא מעלין ולא מורידין ובפרט תלמידי חכמים שתורתם אומנותם שראוי להם להמנע מלהרבות בתעניות וסיגופים, כדי שהתענית לא תפריע להם בלימודם. [ילקו"י עמ' תקצא]. וראה עוד בילקוט יוסף תעניות (עמ' שמ"ב-שמ"ד ובהערה שם).

ד. הרואה חלום רע בליל שבת, אין לו להתענות בשבת, אפילו אם החלום הוא אחד משלשה חלומות רעים שהוזכרו בשלחן ערוך (א"ח סי' רפח), אלא יקדיש את יום השבת ההוא לקריאת ספר תהלים ובעסק התורה כפי כחו, וימנע משיחת חולין, ונרצה לו לכפר עליו. ורק אם לבו דוח עליו ונפשו עגומה מאוד ומצטער צער גדול, מותר לו להתענות בשבת, וכל היום ישב בבית הכנסת ויעסוק בתורה כפי

Fasting to counter the nightmare

2) The most effective way to mitigate any ill omen that a nightmare might represent is for the person who experienced it to fast. Our Sages taught that a fast wipes out the nightmare's effects like a fire consumes flax fibers. This is only if he fasts on the same day that the nightmare occurred. Even if that day is Shabbat, one is technically permitted to fast in order to remedy a nightmare. (See below in halakha 4.) It is imperative to understand, however, that the fasting is effective only if it is accompanied by genuine repentance.

Avoiding such fasts

3) It is recommended to fast only if the nightmare bears down heavily on the person who saw it. It is for someone who has been thrown into a depressed state because of the dream and he is confident that if he spends the day fasting and examining his deeds he will find emotional relief. If someone disregards the nightmare, dismissing it as a meaningless, fleeting thought, it loses any significance as an omen as well. In general, dreams have no real significance regarding future events. It is a good idea for Torah scholars who devote themselves to constant Torah study to adopt this attitude and avoid unnecessary fasting or other forms of self-inflicted deprivation. It is more important that they maintain their strength to be able to concentrate on their studies. See *Yalkut Yosef Ta'aniyot English Edition* (page 344).

Fasting for nightmares on Shabbat

4) If someone experiences a nightmare during Friday night, he must not fast on Shabbat day. This is the correct rule even if the dream matched one of the three listed in the *Shulhan Arukh* (Siman 288:5) that are considered critical enough to warrant fasting on Shabbat. Instead, he should devote the entire day to reciting *Tehillim* and studying Torah to the best of his ability. He should refrain from engaging in any other conversation through the day. In this manner, he will achieve the atonement that he needs in case the nightmare calls for mitigation.

וביום לא נהגו לברך עליהם. ויברך בלי שם ומלכות. [חזו"ע עמ' תב]. אמנם על בגדים חדשים המנהג אף האידנא לברך, כמבואר לקמן הלכה ט"ו.

ברכה על ספרים

יב. הקונה ספרים חדשים ושמח בהם, יש אומרים שצריך לברך עליהם שהחיינו, ולא נהגו כן. ומכל מקום המברך יש לו על מה לסמוך. [חזו"ע עמ' שצח]

Today, the custom is to refrain from reciting these blessings over such purchases. Therefore, it should be recited without pronouncing God's Name. When purchasing a new garment, however, the custom is to recite the blessing of *sheheyanu* even in these times, as explained below in halakha 15.

Sheheyanu on Purchasing Torah Books

Purchase of Torah books 12) Some *Poskim* ruled that if someone purchases Torah books and feels great joy, he must recite the blessing of *sheheyanu*. The custom is to refrain from reciting the blessing for such a purchase, but if someone does recite the blessing he has a sound halakhic basis upon which to rely.⁶²

different excuse to recite this blessing besides the gift, it would seem that upon finding a valuable item one may recite it without reservation. Furthermore, although one does not recite a blessing thanking God for receiving a gift of money, if someone finds a considerable sum he should recite the blessing. In this case, he feels no embarrassment upon gaining the money. Above in *Siman 222:5*, the *Shulhan Arukh* is cited ruling that one must recite the blessing of *sheheyanu* upon finding something of value. That halakha is based on a Mishna in chapter 9 of *Berakhot*.

The same applies if someone makes a windfall profit in his business – he must recite the blessing of *sheheyanu* or that of *hatov vehamativ* if he has earned an amount that gives him special pleasure. This amount varies with every person according to his financial standing. The *Peri To'ar* (*Y.D.* 28:4), however, ruled that one may not recite these blessings over a windfall profit since it sometimes happens that God has placed this wealth in his possession in order to cause him great misery and misfortune, as stated in *Kohelet* 5:12. Many times, it happens that a person regrets having received his wealth and often it turns out that he has been simply caring for this money and it ends up in someone else's possession. Since something like this might happen, it would be incorrect to recite a blessing thanking God for the wealth.

The plain reading of the Talmud seems to contradict this ruling. If someone wishes to take it into account, he can arrange to recite the blessing of *sheheyanu* over a new fruit or garment, or to recite the blessing of *hatov vehamativ* over a variety of wines or with the fourth blessing of *Birkat Hamazon*.

Upon incurring a loss

The *Halakhot Ketanot* ruled also that when someone incurs a considerable loss of money he must recite the blessing of *Dayan ha'emet*. Practically speaking, one should not recite this blessing if one's loss is covered by insurance. If he feels that he must, he should recite it without pronouncing God's Name. (Y.B.)

62. Harav David ben Zimra (responsa Vol. III, #412) ruled that one must recite the blessing of *sheheyanu* upon purchasing Torah books. The *Magen Avraham* disagreed with this ruling, explaining that the pleasure of fulfilling mitzvot does not count as a physical pleasure and therefore does not warrant this blessing. The *Mor Uktzi'a* countered that although it is not a physical pleasure there is no greater joy than this. Harav HIDA (*Mahazik Berakha* 223:3) cited both opinions and testified that the common custom is not to recite the blessing. Maran the Rishon Letziyon (*Haazon Ovadya*, page 398) listed many *Aharonim* (*Peri To'ar*,

ז. נשיא מדינה כשהוא מופיע בבגדי השרד, יש לברך עליו ברכת המלך, ובלבד שיש בידו לתת חנינה על מי שנגזר עליו משפט מות.

Presidents of
countries

7) One must recite this blessing upon seeing the president of a country as well, but only if he dresses in regal costume and he has the authority to pardon someone who has been sentenced to death by the courts.⁸¹ This certainly

is permissible for a *kohen* to expose himself to *tum'a* that was instituted by our Sages if necessary in order to see the king. The *Mekor Hayim* (224:9) ruled that even if it will cost money to go to see the king, one is obligated to go anyway.

Kings adorned with idols or if there is immodesty present

The *Mekor Hayim* and the *Hesed La'alafim* (*halakha* 11) stipulated that if the king or his entourage wear idolatrous symbols it is forbidden to go to see him. The *She'arim Hametzuyananim Bahalakha* added that this is certainly true if there are women who are clad immodestly among those coming to see the king.

80. Harav Yoshiyahu Pinto (responsa *Nivhar Mikesev* #3) ruled that it is possible to recite the blessing over a king only if we see him in his full honor, but not if he is dressed in ordinary civilian clothes. After all, he pointed out, the text of the blessing is, "He has given some of His honor to mortal men." If he appears the same as everyone else, where is his divine honor? Furthermore, our Sages taught: One should run for the opportunity to see kings, so that in the future he will be able distinguish between the honor of these kings and that of the *Mashi'ah*. (This is the basis of *halakha* 5.) If the king's honor is indistinguishable, what is there to gain by seeing him? Certainly, the main facet of royalty is the royal vestments of the king, including his robe and crown, which display to everyone his exalted position. As Ribbi Yohanan taught (*Shabbat* 113), each person's clothes are what measures his honor. Also, the royal carriage and the entourage that accompany the king wherever he goes are a display of royal honor. Without any of these trappings, the king does not warrant this blessing.

The *Zekhor le'Avraham* (page 22b) stated likewise that if a king wears ordinary clothes and he is indistinguishable from his subjects, his appearance does not warrant this blessing. We cannot bless God for giving this person honor when he has shed himself of any royal trappings.

Maran the Rishon Letziyon (*Hazon Ovadya*, page 411) listed several more *Aharonim* who concurred with this ruling. He pointed out, however, that it appears from Rabbenu Avraham Av Bet Din and Rabbenu David ben Zimra that any king who has the authority to sentence people to death automatically warrants this blessing. The fact that he has these executive powers is the greatest display of his honor. It demonstrates that he is likened to the King of kings, who has the power to decide when each person will live and when he will die. The king's costume or uniform does not matter at all. Harav HIDA (*Birke Yosef* 224:3) cited Harav Avraham Yitzhaki who ruled likewise regarding someone who sees a boat and he knows that the king is a passenger aboard the boat. Even though he does not see the king himself, he may recite the blessing. Obviously, it is not necessary according to this ruling to see the king's royal vestments. Harav HIDA concluded that we cannot bring any proof from that ruling, but he did not explain why not. He might have meant that this case was about a king who did wear royal vestments, but he could not be seen from shore. Such a king warrants the blessing, whether or not people actually set eyes on him. A king who does not wear royal garb, however, might not warrant this blessing altogether.

The *Tzaphit Bidvash* (#66) disagreed with the ruling of Harav HIDA, in any case. He concluded that in such a case, where one cannot see the king himself although one knows that he is there, one should recite the blessing without pronouncing God's Name.

81. Rabbenu Avraham bar Yitzhak ruled in his responsa (#32, cited in those of Rabbenu David ben Zimra Vol. I, #296) that any high-ranking official who has received the royal authority to execute people as he sees fit is like a king, assuming that no other authority has the power to defy his orders. This blessing must be recited upon seeing him, whether he is a Jew or a non-Jew. Rabbenu David

וכל שכן נשיא של ארצות הברית שבידו להכריז מלחמה על מדינה אויבת פשוט שמברכים עליו. [חזו"ע עמ' תיב]

applies to the president of the United States since he has the authority to declare war on an enemy state.⁸²

ben Zimra deduced from this that one must recite this blessing upon seeing the pasha of Egypt since he has such authority. Although the justice minister of the empire is the person who has the last word regarding executing any criminal, in a time of emergency the pasha has the ability to execute people without resorting to any court and without notifying the minister of his intentions. Rabbenu David concluded that although it appears that this is the correct halakha, he would not give anyone instructions to recite the blessing in full with God's Name since the sultan occasionally sends messages and orders overriding the decisions of the pasha. Rabbenu Avraham Av Bet Din was referring to an official who had absolute authority over his province.

Maran the Rishon Letziyon (*Hazon Ovadya*, page 412) wrote that based on this ruling it would seem that this blessing may never be recited upon seeing an elected head of state in a democracy, since that official does not have the authority to execute people as he sees fit. Both Rabbenu Avraham Av Bet Din and Rabbenu David ben Zimra stated that this is the criterion necessary to warrant this blessing. On the other hand, since the president has the authority to pardon a convicted criminal or to refuse to pardon him and have him executed as previously sentenced, he does have the powers that warrant this blessing. The fact that he is elected for a limited term unlike kings who remain on the throne all their lives does not detract from the status of the president during his term. Several *Aharonim* concurred with this ruling.

The presidential pardon

The *Sha'ar Ha'ayin* (page 360) cited several *Aharonim* who ruled that if a head of state has the authority to pardon a criminal who has been sentenced to death in court, then he is considered powerful enough to warrant reciting the blessing for kings upon seeing him. He then cited the responsa of Rabbenu David ben Zimra explaining that this blessing is warranted only if the head of state has the power to condemn a criminal to death without the approval of a judge if he deems that the situation calls for it. If the criminal can be sentenced to death only by a judge, and the power of the head of state is only that the decision of the judge must meet his approval, his appearance does not warrant this blessing. According to this ruling, it would seem that it is not possible to recite the blessing over any contemporary president. Harav Serayahu Dublitzki issued a like ruling.

Opinion of the *Shevet Halevi*

The responsa *Shevet Halevi* (Vol. I, #35, cited in *Hazon Ovadya*) took a very different approach to this matter. He wrote that one must recite this blessing upon seeing a king or queen even if he or she has no authority to kill anyone

without first having him tried in court. The very fact that the king is held above all other citizens of the country and he is accorded royal honor makes him fit for this blessing. Although Rabbenu David ben Zimra ruled that one must not recite this blessing with God's Name upon seeing the pasha of Egypt unless he has the authority to have people executed, that is because the pasha is not a king. The sultan himself, however, would warrant the blessing even if the law would prevent him from executing people without a trial. The sultan is the king, with or without that power. The *sefer Bene Tziyon* Lichtman (224:10) concurred with this ruling. According to this, an elected president of a country would warrant this blessing in virtue of being the person accorded the greatest honor by the citizens, whether or not he is empowered to pardon convicted criminals. This halakhic opinion adds weight to those who ruled that the power to issue a presidential pardon is sufficient to warrant reciting the blessing.

The Queen of England

According to the ruling of the *Shevet Halevi*, it appears that one must recite this blessing upon seeing the Queen of England despite the fact that she has no such executive powers. Her position is the highest in Great Britain and she is accorded genuine royal honors. Therefore, whenever she wears her crown or is in the royal chambers of Buckingham Palace or when she travels with her royal entourage so that her royal status is visible, those who see her must recite this blessing. The responsa *Teshuvot Vehanhagot* (Vol. II, #139) likewise concluded that this blessing may be recited upon seeing the Queen of England.

The *sefer Sha'ar Ha'ayin* (footnote on page 143), however, argued that the fact that the queen is accorded royal honors is not sufficient to warrant this blessing since she possesses no powers in the government. Maran the Rishon Letziyon (*Hazon Ovadya*, footnote on page 414) cited the *sefer Yaakov* instructing people to recite this blessing upon seeing the Queen of England when she visited New York in 5718/1958, but he did not make it clear whether or not he concurred with this ruling. His discussion was about the issue of reciting this blessing over a queen altogether. He cited this ruling to demonstrate that there is no difference between seeing a king or queen, but he did not use it as proof that one may recite the blessing upon seeing one who has no executive powers. (Y.B.)

82. Presidential power to declare war

Maran the Rishon Letziyon (*Hazon Ovadya*, page 412) wrote that the President of the United States warrants reciting this blessing since he is the commander in chief of

ג. מי שלא ראה פני חבירו שלשים יום, והיה עימו בקשר טלפוני או בקשר של מכתבים בתוך השלשים יום, אף על פי כן יש לו לברך עליו ברכת שהחיינו בשם ומלכות.

3) Even if the person who was absent remained in telephone contact throughout the time he was away, since they have not met face-to-face for thirty days the friend must recite the blessing of *shehehyanu* in full, with God's Name, when they meet again.¹⁰⁵

responsa *Yehave Da'at* (Vol. IV, #17) and in *Hazon Ovadya* (page 425), stating that in case the friends had no communication at all over the span of twelve months they must recite this blessing when they meet. Although according to the reason offered by the *Ben Ish Hai* the blessing should not be recited even in such a case, the *Yalkut Yosef* (page 605) suggested that one can recite the blessing silently if one feels that the friend would be offended if he heard it.

It is also possible to suggest that since our world is one of instant world-wide communication, so long as people have not heard anything at all about a friend it is as if they have been informed that everything is alright with him. The *sefer Orhot Rabbeinu* (Vol. I, #93) offered such a reasoning to explain why we do not recite this blessing in our times. The *sefer Sha'ar Ha'ayin* (page 148) claimed that this is the opinion of Harav Shelomo Zalman Auerbach as well. Nevertheless, it appears that Maran the Rishon Letziyon did not concur with this. His ruling remains steadfast that if someone has not seen or heard from a dear friend for a period of twelve months, he must recite the blessing of *mehaye hametim* upon meeting him again. (Y.B.)

105. The responsa *Ta'alumot Lev* (Vol. III, #24) wrote that the custom nowadays is not to recite the blessing of *shehehyanu* upon meeting friends since people can stay in constant communication via modern technology such as the telegraph. Each person is aware of his friends' welfare, no matter where they are in the world. This negates the need for reciting this blessing, he concluded.

Maran the Rishon Letziyon (*Hazon Ovadya*, page 426; *Halikhot Olam* Vol. II, page 184; responsa *Yehave Da'at* Vol. IV, #17) cited several *Aharonim* who concurred with this ruling, but he countered that it is incorrect. The responsa *Halakhot Ketanot* (Vol. I, #220) ruled that there is a basic difference between the rules for the blessing of *shehehyanu* and those for the blessing of *mehaye hametim*. Regarding the blessing of *shehehyanu* recited after an absence of thirty days, it is to be recited even if the friends corresponded by mail during his absence. The joy of meeting him in person after his absence warrants this blessing despite the fact that they had corresponded in the interim. This is clear from the rulings of Harav HIDA and other *Aharonim*. Although the *Mishna Berura* (225:2) wrote

that some *Aharonim* ruled that one may not recite the blessing of *shehehyanu* if one received a letter from the friend during his thirty-day absence and that we must refrain from pronouncing God's Name, based on the principle of *safek berakhot lehakel*, Maran the Rishon Letziyon insisted that this is an error.

Likewise, although the *Shevet Halevi* and the *Az Nidberu* concurred with the ruling of the *Mishna Berura*, the correct ruling is otherwise. Harav Seraya Dublitzki (*sefer Ze Hashulchan Siman 225*) likewise pointed out that there are no *Poskim* who ruled that one may not recite the blessing of *shehehyanu* because one received a letter from one's friend. He insisted that there is a textual error in the *Mishna Berura* and that a correction must be made in future printings of the *Mishna Berura* based on this.

In the *Sha'ar Hatziyun*, the *Mishna Berura* added that receiving a letter negates the need to recite the blessing of *shehehyanu* only if the letter contains assurances that the friend is doing well where he is. If it relates that the friend is ill and when the friend returns one finds that he has recovered, one certainly should recite the blessing of *shehehyanu* upon meeting him. In this case, one is more overjoyed at meeting one's friend than if one had never received the letter and had never known that he had been ill.

Question on the *Hazon Ovadya*

Despite the fact that Maran the Rishon Letziyon rejected the ruling of the *Mishna Berura*, the *sefer Sha'ar Ha'ayin* (pages 335-339) discussed it at length, bringing a strong proof to this ruling from a responsum of the Rashba (Vol. IV, #76). After discussing this with Rav Dublitzki, the latter agreed that there is indeed a basis for the ruling of the *Mishna Berura* to refrain from pronouncing God's Name in this blessing. It is not known at this writing what Maran the Rishon Letziyon would say about this discovery.

Telephone contact and video communication services

Although the *Halakhot Ketanot* ruled that one must recite the blessing of *shehehyanu* despite having received a letter from one's friend, it is not clear what he would rule if the friends spoke on the telephone during the absence. When one receives a letter, one is apprised of one's friend's welfare at the time that the letter was written, but not of his

ברכת היות משונות

מ.ב. הרואה את הפיל ואת הקוף, מברך "ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם משנה הבריות". [שי"ע ס"י רכה ס"ח].
וכן הרואה את הקיפוף מברך עליו ברכה הנ"ל. והקיפוף, יש אומרים שהוא הינשוף, ויש חולקים. ומכיון
שיש ספק בדבר לא יברך על הינשוף, אלא יפטור ברכתו בפיל והקוף שיראה בתחילה.

מ.ג. הרואה שאר בעלי חיים משונים (כמו הקנגרו והג'ירפה), יש אומרים שגם כן מברך עליהם ברכת "משנה
הבריות" ופיל וקוף שאמרו חז"ל אינם אלא דוגמא. [הגרש"א בהליכות שלמה עמ' רצ, חזו"ע עמ' תנו בהערה]. ויש
אומרים שדוקא על פיל וקוף תיקנו לברך ולא על שאר בעלי חיים [הגר"ש אלישיב והגר"ש ואזנר הו"ד בשער העין עמ' קכב].
ולהלכה נראה דספק ברכות להקל, ולא יברך "משנה הבריות" אלא על פיל וקוף.

Strange-Looking Animals

Elephants and monkeys 42) When someone sees an elephant or a monkey, he is to recite the blessing of *ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם משנה הבריות*, May You, God our Master, King of the universe Who changes the appearance of the creatures, be blessed. The same applies when seeing the animal called *kifof*. Some authorities translated this word as "owl." Since we are unsure what the correct translation is, one must not recite this blessing over an owl unless he sees an elephant or monkey at the same time and he can recite one blessing for both animals.¹⁴⁰

Other odd animals 43) Some *Poskim* ruled that one must also recite this blessing when seeing other odd-shaped animals such as a kangaroo, a giraffe or a rhinoceros. They explained that the examples of "elephant and monkey" are simply that – examples of odd animals to which this blessing applies. Other *Poskim* ruled that our Sages instituted this blessing in particular for seeing elephants and monkeys [the Hebrew word *kof* means any species of monkey or ape], but not for seeing any other animals. In practice, one should follow the second opinion based on the principle of *safek berakhot lehakel*.¹⁴¹

140. The *sefer Sha'ar Ha'ayin* (page 122) cites several opinions regarding the meaning of the word *kifof*. His conclusion is that when someone visits the zoo and recites this blessing over an elephant or monkey, he should have in mind for the blessing to count for seeing an owl as well. The *sefer Halakha Berura* (page 407) likewise concluded that one must not recite this blessing upon seeing an owl. Maran the Rishon Letziyon (*Hazon Ovadya*, page 453), however, translated *kifof* as owl. It appears from this that he ruled that one does recite the blessing of *meshane haberiyot* upon seeing an owl, but it is more likely that he would agree that the rule of *safek berakhot lehakel* applies here. (Y.B.)

141. The Talmud (*Berakhot* 58b) and the *Shulhan Arukh* (225:8) lists elephants and monkeys only. Of course there are thousands of other strange-looking animals. The *Peri Hadash* (Y.D. *Siman* 80) reported that in India there

are unicorn oxen. He also described ferocious animals with bodies similar to horses, heads similar to rams but with only one black horn extending two yards from their foreheads. Their legs are similar to those of an elephant and their tails to those of boars. [Of course, these reports were told to the *Peri Hadash*, who had no way of verifying whether or not they are true.]

Opinion #1: this blessing is recited upon seeing any odd animal

At any rate, Maran the Rishon Letziyon (*Hazon Ovadya*, footnote on page 456) wrote that one must recite the blessing of *meshane haberiyot* upon seeing any odd animal. He cited Harav Shelomo Zalman Auerbach (*Halkhot Shelomo*, page 290) who ruled as well that this blessing is recited on seeing any odd animal and not only elephants and monkeys. According to this, the Talmud listed elephants and monkeys since the existence of these animals

ברכת הברקים והרעמים

ח. על הברקים ועל הרעמים צריך לברך בשם ומלכות, "ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם עושה מעשה בראשית". ואם ירצה יברך: "ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם שכחו וגבורתו מלא עולם". [ש"ע סי' רכז ס"א, וראה חזו"ע עמ' תס]. ומנהג העולם לברך על הברקים "עושה מעשה בראשית", ועל הרעמים "שכחו וגבורתו מלא עולם", וכמ"ש בהלכה הבאה.

Lightning and Thunder

Lightning or thunder 8) When someone sees a lightning bolt or hears a thunderclap, he must recite the blessing of ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם עושה מעשה בראשית – "May You, God our Master, King of the universe Who performs the act of creation, be blessed." Alternatively, he may recite the blessing of ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם שכחו וגבורתו מלא עולם – "May You, God our Master, King of the universe Whose strength and power fill the universe, be blessed."¹⁵⁴ The common custom is to recite the blessing of *ose ma'ase bereshit* upon seeing a lightning bolt and to recite the blessing of *shekoho ugvurato male olam* when hearing a thunderclap, as explained in the following halakha.¹⁵⁵

154. The text of the *Hazon Ovadya*

This halakha is as it appears in the *Shulhan Arukh* (227:1), but in the *Hazon Ovadya* (page 461) it is switched around, saying that one should recite the blessing of *shekoho ugvurato male olam*, but alternatively one may recite that of *ose ma'ase bereshit*. It is unclear why he chose to write it in the opposite order. The truth is that Rambam (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 10:14) also listed the blessing of *shekoho ugvurato male olam* first. The *Nehar Shalom* explained that this is because the blessing of *shekoho ugvurato male olam* is mentioned in the Mishna, whereas the blessing of *ose ma'ase bereshit* is mentioned only in the Talmud. Apparently, he concluded, the opinion of Rambam is that it is preferable to recite the blessing of *shekoho ugvurato male olam*.

The opinion of the *Shulhan Arukh*, however, appears to be that it is preferable to recite the blessing of *ose ma'ase bereshit*, but that one may recite the blessing of *shekoho ugvurato male olam* if one so chooses. Regarding the blessing recited upon experiencing an earthquake, the text in *Hazon Ovadya* is identical to that of the *Shulhan Arukh*, listing the blessing of *ose ma'ase bereshit* first and then that of *shekoho ugvurato male olam*. No reason is given for

switching the order regarding the blessings for lightning and thunder. The *Halakha Berura* (page 459) uses the same text as appears in the *Shulhan Arukh*, and this appears to be the halakha. (Y.B.)

155. This halakha seems to contradict the one following it, and yet both halakhot appear in the *Hazon Ovadya*. Apparently, the first halakha explains what the halakha is technically – either blessing is acceptable for thunder or lightning. The second halakha explains what has become the common custom (as the *Ture Zahav* testified) to recite the blessing of *ose ma'ase bereshit* upon seeing lightning and to recite the blessing of *shekoho ugvurato male olam* upon hearing a thunderclap. The *Mishna Berura* and other *Aharonim* suggested that this custom is based upon the fact that thunder displays God's power more than lightning does.

According to this explanation, if someone wishes to ignore the common custom and recite the blessing of *ose ma'ase bereshit* upon hearing a thunderclap or to recite the blessing of *shekoho ugvurato male olam* upon seeing lightning, it is permissible. (Y.B.)

ט. אם היה שהות בין הברק לבין הרעם, מברך שתי ברכות, "עושה מעשה בראשית" על הברק, ואחר כך "שכחו וגבורתו מלא עולם", על הרעם. ואם היו תכופים הברק והרעם, יברך רק ברכה אחת, שהיא "עושה מעשה בראשית". ואם בירך "שכחו וגבורתו מלא עולם", יצא. [חזו"ע עמי תסד]

י. אם בירך על הברק וכיוון לפטור בברכתו את הרעם הבא אחריו, יצא. [חזו"ע עמי תסה בהערה]

יא. אם ראה ברק והתחיל לברך ברכת עושה מעשה בראשית, ובאמצע הברכה שמע קול רעם גם כן, לא יברך אחר הרעם שכחו וגבורתו מלא עולם, שכבר יצא בברכתו על הברק. [חזו"ע עמי תסה בהערה]

יב. יש לברך ברכת "שכחו וגבורתו מלא עולם" בשם ומלכות, עם השמע קול הרעם הראשון, עד תוך כדי דבור של סיום הרעם. ואם לא בירך אז יברך על הרעם השני או השלישי וכן הלאה. [יחו"ד ח"ב סי'

כו. חזו"ע עמי תסד בהערה. וע"ע שם עמי תסו בהערה שאם לא בירך בשמיעה ראשונה יברך בשניה]

When one blessing suffices 9) If some time passes after seeing the lightning bolt until one hears the thunder, he must recite two blessings – that of *ose ma'ase bereshit* over the lightning and then that of *shekoho ugvurato male olam* over the thunder. If the thunder follows the lightning immediately, he should recite only the blessing of *ose ma'ase bereshit*.¹⁵⁶ If he recited the blessing of *shekoho ugvurato male olam* instead, he has fulfilled his obligation.

Blessing on thunder in advance 10) If someone sees a lightning bolt and recited the blessing over it, intending for that blessing to count for the thunderclap that is about to follow, he has fulfilled his obligation for both.¹⁵⁷

Heard thunder while blessing over lightning 11) If someone sees a lightning bolt and begins to recite the blessing of *ose ma'ase bereshit* over it, but then he hears the thunderclap while he is still reciting that blessing, he must not recite the blessing of *shekoho ugvurato male olam* afterward for that thunderclap. The first blessing automatically counts for the thunder as well.

Time for reciting the blessing 12) The blessing of *shekoho ugvurato male olam* may be recited from the moment that the thunderclap begins until one second after the rumble of the thunder ends. If someone fails to begin the blessing by that time, he must wait until he hears another thunderclap.¹⁵⁸

156. The *Mor Uktzi'a*, cited in the *Hazon Ovadya* (page 465), ruled that even in such a case one must recite both blessings. In practice, however, we are to follow the opinion of the *Magen Avraham* and other *Aharonim* and recite only one blessing in such a case.

157. Maran the Rishon Letziyon (*Hazon Ovadya*, footnote on page 465) cited this halakha in the name of several *Poskim*. The *Petaḥ Hadevir* cited the *Bet Oved* challenging this halakha, insisting that it is impossible to recite the blessing for something that has not yet occurred. The *Petaḥ Hadevir* reconciled the halakha, saying that since he has the

upcoming thunder in mind he can recite the blessing on the lightning and it will cover the thunder as well. It is comparable to reciting a blessing in order to drink water from a flowing stream. Although the water that he will drink is still upstream while he recites the blessing, the blessing is nevertheless valid since he has in mind to drink whatever water comes to his mouth after he recites the blessing. He explained this at great length. (Y.B.)

158. Although the *Hazon Ovadya* (footnote on page 464) states this regarding thunderclaps, we may assume that the rule is identical for lightning bolts.

יז. הרואה ברק, או שמע קול רעם בעת התפלה, אם היה עומד באמצע פסוקי דזמרה, או באמצע קריאת שמע וברכותיה, יפסיק, ויברך עליהם. [ראה יב"א ח"ח סי' ו' אות ג]. וכן אם היה עומד באמצע לימוד תורה, יפסיק מלימודו ויברך על הברקים והרעמים. [שו"ת באר משה ח"ב סי' י]

Thunder or lightning during prayers

17) If someone sees lightning or hears thunder while he is in the midst of reciting *Pesuke Dezimra* or while he is reciting the *Shema* and its accompanying blessings,¹⁶¹ he may interrupt his prayers and recite the appropriate blessing.¹⁶²

161. Hearing thunder while in the middle of a paragraph of the *Shema*

The halakha as presented here does not specify whether the halakha is to interrupt to recite the blessing over the thunder even if one is in the middle of a paragraph or if this is the halakha between two paragraphs only. The *Magen Avraham* ruled that one is to interrupt even in the middle of a paragraph, but the *Haye Adam* ruled that it is permissible only between two paragraphs. The *Mishna Berura* (66:19) ruled according to the opinion of the *Haye Adam* and this is likewise the ruling of Maran the Rishon Letziyon in responsa *Yabia Omer* (Vol. VI, #1) and in *Yalkut Yosef* (Vol. I, page 117).

On the other hand, the *Halakha Berura* (Vol. IV, *Otzerot Yosef*, page 25) deduced from responsa *Yabia Omer* (Vol. VIII, #6:3) that Maran the Rishon Letziyon changed his mind and ruled that it is permissible to interrupt in the middle of a paragraph to recite this blessing. Therefore, he ruled (*Halakha Berura*, Vol XI, page 472) that it is permissible even in the middle of a paragraph.

Upon examining the passage in *Yabia Omer* Vol. VIII, however, there does not seem to be any proof that Maran the Rishon Letziyon changed his mind about this. Therefore, it is probably best to refrain from reciting the blessing if one is in the middle of a paragraph. Anyone who chooses

to interrupt and recite the blessing in such a case, however, certainly has a sound halakhic basis upon which to rely. Regarding *Pesuke Dezimra*, there is no question that it is permissible to interrupt even in the middle of a paragraph and recite this blessing. This is the ruling of Maran the Rishon Letziyon in responsa *Yabia Omer* (Vol. VIII, #6:3). (Y.B.)

162. Interrupting a Torah lesson

The *sefer Sha'ar Ha'ayin* (footnote on page 68) ruled that when someone hears thunder he must stop whatever he is doing to recite the blessing. Even if he is in the middle of delivering a Torah lecture and the interruption would cause many people to lose time from their Torah study, he must interrupt and recite the blessing. Once, Harav Shemuel Greineman was delivering a lecture about a deep Torah subject and he suddenly heard a thunderclap. He realized that if he would interrupt right now everyone present would lose his train of thought and it would be very difficult to pick up where he had left off, and so he opted to ignore the thunder and continue with his lecture. Later, he asked the author of *Hazon Ish* whether he had acted correctly, and the latter told him that he did not. He was obligated to interrupt and recite the blessing regardless of such considerations. (Y.B.)

❧ סימן רכט ❧

ברכת הקשת

א. הרואה את הקשת בענן, מברך: "ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם זוכר הברית נאמן בבריתו וקיים במאמרו". [חזו"ע עמ' תע]

ב. המנהג לברך אף על הקשת הטבעית שיש בה גוונים הרבה. וכן מברכים אף על קשת ששוהה זמן מזה. [חזו"ע עמ' תעא בהערה]

❧ Siman 229 ❧

Rainbows

Blessing for a rainbow 1) Upon seeing a rainbow, one must recite the blessing of ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם – May You, God our Master, King of the universe be blessed as the One Who remembers the covenant, Who is faithful to His covenant and trustworthy in His Word.¹⁷⁶

What kind of rainbow 2) The custom is to recite this blessing on the common, natural rainbow with its display of the spectrum. Likewise, the custom is to recite the blessing even if the rainbow remains visible for some time.¹⁷⁷

176. The responsa *Divre Shalom* (Vol. II, #101) ruled that if someone sees a rainbow and it disappears before he has recited the blessing, he may still recite it until a full second has passed.

177. Rainbow with the full spectrum of colors

Harav Yonatan Eibeshitz (*Ya'arot Devash* Vol. I, essay 12, page 230) stipulated that there are two variations of rainbows. The common rainbow displays the full spectrum of the colors and it appears whenever the sun's rays hit water vapor suspended in the air. The tiny droplets of water act like a prism, splitting the white light into its many hues. This, he explained, is a natural phenomenon and it is not reminiscent of the Flood or of God's covenant with Noah. The rainbow referred to in the Torah as the symbol of the covenant appears entirely blue, or *tekhelet* in Hebrew. The word *tekhelet* is related to the word *kelayah*, which means destruction. The appearance of this rainbow demonstrates that the world deserves to be destroyed, but it will not thanks to the covenant.

The *Ben Ish Hai* (*parashat Ekev* halakha 17, cited in the *Kaf Hachayim* Sofer 229:4) cited this explanation and suggested that according to this we may not recite the blessing in full with God's Name when we observe a rainbow, for perhaps this is not the type of rainbow that warrants the blessing. On the other hand, he reasoned, the *Ya'arot Devash* is not a halakhic work and perhaps we may not derive halakhic rulings from it, especially since none of the *Poskim* suggested not to recite this blessing over a common rainbow. He concluded that it is certainly permissible to recite the blessing in full, but that if someone refrains from reciting it with God's Name, it is considered an act of piety and no one may challenge his actions.

Maran the Rishon Letziyon (*Hazon Ovadya*, footnote on page 471) countered that the Ramban (commentary to *Bereshit* 15:12) described the rainbow of the covenant as being the phenomenon of the sun's rays striking moisture in the air. According to this, the common rainbow is the symbol of the covenant. Likewise, the *Shene Luhot Haberit* (*parashat No'ah* page 30), citing Rabbenu Moshe Isserlis,