

Dividing *Sheva Brachos* Under the *Chuppah*

Bracha Hasmucha Lechaverta

Question: In the course of planning my upcoming wedding, we were discussing the apportioning of the various *brachos* under the *chuppah*. I noted that two of the *brachos*, the fourth and the fifth, do not start with the word *baruch*. My friend explained to me that this is because they are part of a group of *brachos*, and so only the first one starts with *baruch*. I then asked him if it would therefore be a problem to divide them among different people, since the ones who recite those two *brachos* aren't starting with *baruch*. Is that a problem?

1. First Encounters

The Gemara in *Brachos*¹ quotes a *braisa* which states that, as a rule, all *brachos* both start with the word *baruch* and end with it. Exceptions to the rule are:

- Short *brachos* – which start with *baruch* but do not end with it, and
- *Bracha hasmucha lechaverta* – a *bracha* which follows a preceding *bracha*. This *bracha* ends with *baruch* but doesn't open with it.

A good example of this concept is the *shemoneh esrei*, which is actually made up of nineteen blessings, yet only the first one begins with *baruch*. Each of the subsequent *brachos* ends with *baruch* but does not open with it.

Of course, we will be keen to find out why this is the case. Why do the subsequent *brachos* not require an opening?

2. No-Blesse Oblige?

In explaining why a later *bracha* does not open with *baruch*, we find two explanations among the Rishonim. Rashi² comments: “The first *bracha*, which opened with *baruch*, exempted it.” According to Tosafos,³ however, the reason for the exemption is, “Because he *concluded* the first [*bracha*] with *baruch*, it is not necessary to start the second one with *baruch*.”

Thus, in our example, the reason why the fourth *bracha* of “*ata chonen*” in *shemoneh esrei* does not open with *baruch* is because it has been exempted by a previous *baruch*.

- Based on the above, which *baruch* would we say exempts the fourth *bracha*?

According to Rashi: The *opening baruch* of the *first bracha*.

¹ 46a.

² Pesachim 104b s.v. *veyaish*.

³ Ibid. s.v. *chutz*.

According to Tosafos: The *concluding baruch* of the *third bracha*.

We should note, however, that even Tosafos do not ascribe an inherent connection between the later *bracha* and the concluding *baruch* of the one before it. Rather, they are simply connected because it is the *closest baruch*. This means that should we ever find a case where the earlier *bracha* had an opening but not an ending, *all* would agree that it is the opening of the first *bracha* which exempts the second *bracha*.

An example of this is *hallel*. *Hallel* only has a *baruch* at the beginning, yet the final *bracha* (beginning with *yehalelucha*) does not open with *baruch*, because it is connected to the *opening* of the first *bracha*.

3. One for the Road

An important insight into the concept of *smucha lechaverta* can be gleaned from the practice of Rabbeinu Meir of Rottenberg regarding *tefillas haderech* (the traveler's prayer), as recorded in the Tur.⁴ We note, by way of preface, that this prayer ends with *baruch* (*shomei'a tefillah*) but does not open with *baruch* (rather, with *yehi ratzon*). The Tur writes:

“When R' Meir of Rottenberg used to go on a journey in the morning, he would say it [*tefillas haderech*] straight after the morning *brachos*, in order to attach it to the words *gomel chasadim* [the conclusion of the final morning *bracha*] and thus render it *smucha lechaverta*.”

These words of the Tur are most fascinating. We see that, to a certain degree, a *smucha lechaverta* relationship can be *engineered*! The possibility of one *bracha* exempting another from opening with *baruch* seems to be not so much a question of an *essential thematic* connection between the two *brachos*, but a *functional* relationship when two *brachos* are juxtaposed.

We should be curious to find out if everyone agrees with Rabbeinu Meir on this point...

4. When *Brachos* Become Friends

As mentioned in our opening question, among the seven *brachos* which are recited under the *chuppah*, the fourth and fifth do not open with *baruch*. We should also note, however, that the second and third *brachos* do open with *baruch*, even though they too are part of a group. Why do these *brachos* not have the status of *smucha lechaverta*?

⁴ Orach Chaim 110.

Rashi⁵ explains that the first two *brachos* are not essentially about marriage. Rather, they are blessings over the assembling of a large group of people to give glory to Hashem (the first *bracha*,) and over the creation of man in general (the second *bracha*). That being the case, says Rashi, they are not sufficiently connected on a thematic level to the *brachos* that come after them to a degree which would constitute a *smucha lechaverta* relationship.

From these words of Rashi, we see that in order to invoke the concept of *smucha lechaverta*, the *brachos* have to be essentially connected, not merely juxtaposed. We would dare say that for Rashi, in order to be considered *smucha lechaverta*, the *brachos* have to be *chaverim* – friends.

Tosafos⁶ also discuss the question of why the second and third *brachos* are not considered *smucha lechaverta*, and explain that this rule does not apply if the earlier *bracha* was a “short *bracha*,” i.e., one which has no concluding *baruch*. The reason is because these two adjacent *brachos* – one with no ending and the other with no opening – would sound like one *bracha*, which would be entirely inappropriate.

- Which of these two approaches would seem to be more in line with that of Rabbeinu Meir of Rottenberg?

Rabbeinu Meir was prepared to construct a *smucha lechaverta* situation between the morning blessings and *tefillas haderech*, indicating that in his opinion, an essential thematic connection is not a prerequisite for *smucha lechaverta*, they simply need to follow one another. That being the case, he would presumably side with Tosafos, i.e., that those *sheva brachos* that begin with *baruch* do so on account of the fact that they follow “short *brachos*.”⁷

5. A Blessing Shared

All of this brings us to a very interesting question regarding *smucha lechaverta*. Given that the “missing” *baruch* of a later *bracha* may be found in an earlier one, may these two *brachos* be said by two separate people? An example of this would be if one is honored with the fourth *bracha* (“*sos tasis*”) under the *chuppah*. The *baruch* for that *bracha* is to be found in an earlier *bracha* that *someone else* said – is this acceptable?

Rav Ovadiah Yosef, in his responsa *Yabia Omer*⁸ maintains that the answer to this question can be found in the words of Tosafos. When one is called to the Torah, he makes a *bracha* both before and after the Torah reading. Tosafos⁹ ask an interesting question: Why does the *bracha*

⁵ Kesuvos 8a s.v. *sameach*.

⁶ Ibid. s.v. *shehakol*.

⁷ We should note that this difference of approach between Rashi and Tosafos resonates in other areas as well, such as in explaining why the *brachos* recited together over *havdala* all start with *baruch*, as well as whether or not the paragraph recited during *birchos hatorah* beginning “*ve’haarev na*” – which follows on from a short *bracha* – is considered to be a new *bracha* which is *smucha lechaverta*, or a continuation of the first *bracha*; see further in Rashi and Tosafos quoted above.

⁸ Vol. 5 Even Ha’ezer resp. 7.

⁹ Brachos 46a s.v. *kol*.

after the reading open with *baruch*? It should be considered *smucha lechaverta* to the *bracha* beforehand!

Tosafos answer: “Since the original practice was that only the first person called to the Torah made the opening *bracha* before the reading, and the last person called to the Torah made the concluding *bracha* [and all those called in between made no *brachos*],¹⁰ there was a major intervention (*hefsek*) between the two *brachos* [rendering them unable to be considered “juxtaposed”]. Even in later times, when it was instituted that everyone called to the Torah made *brachos* both before and after, the format of the *brachos* was not changed.”

- What implications do the words of Tosafos have for our question regarding whether *brachos* that are *smucha lechaverta* can be shared between two people?

We see that Tosafos identified the reason that these two *brachos* are not *smucha lechaverta* as stemming from the “major intervention” caused by all the other people who were called to the Torah in the interim. This implies that the Tosafos did not consider the fact that these two *brachos* were originally said by two different people *itself* to be an obstruction to a *smucha lechaverta* relationship. We can thus infer that under the *chuppah* – where there is no “major intervention” between *brachos* – it should be possible to divide them.

6. A Matter of Dispute?

It’s most interesting to consider the response of another of the *Rishonim*, the Ran,¹¹ to the above question of Tosafos. He also discusses why the *bracha* after the Torah reading opens with *baruch* as opposed to relying on the *baruch* from the *bracha* recited beforehand.

These are his words: “Originally, only the first one called up recited the opening *bracha*, and the last one recited the concluding *bracha*. *Since this was done by two people*, they did not wish to give them the form of *smucha lechaverta*.”

- In what way does the response of the Ran to this question differ from that of the Tosafos?

We see from the Ran that the very fact that these two *brachos* were said by two different people was sufficient to disrupt their *smucha lechaverta* status. Thus, the proof that the Yabia Omer adduced from Tosafos would seem to be a matter of dispute among the *Rishonim*!

It is possible, however, that the Ran would in fact concur with the notion that two *smucha lechaverta brachos* can be shared between two people. The issue of two people making *brachos* on the Torah was perhaps not so much a matter of allowing *brachos* which are *smucha lechaverta* to be shared between different people, but of *establishing* them as *smucha lechaverta* in the first place! For we have already seen the opinion of certain *Rishonim* that in order for *brachos* to be considered *smucha lechaverta*, there needs to be an essential connection between

¹⁰ See Megillah 21b.

¹¹ Commentary to the Rif on *Maseches* Megillah beginning of chap. 4 s.v. *baruch*.

them. Thus, two *brachos* whose *very institution* required that they be said by two separate people were never connected enough to attain *smucha lechaverta* status. This is the intent of the Ran's words, "They [the Rabbis] *did not wish to give them* the form of *smucha lechaverta*." Namely, dividing the *brachos* prevents them from attaining the form of *smucha lechaverta*. That said, once there are two *brachos* which are *already smucha lechaverta*, we have no evidence from the Ran that it would be unacceptable for two different people to recite them.

7. Lost in Prayer

Further proof that a later *bracha* can be said by a second person and still be covered by the first person's *baruch* can be adduced from a ruling in the Mishna.¹² If a *chazzan* is in the middle of the repetition of *shemoneh esrei* and is for some reason unable to continue, another person should replace him as *chazzan*. The Mishna states: "From where does he start? From the beginning of the *bracha* where the first one faltered."

- How does this ruling shed light on our question?

If the initial *chazzan* stopped in any *bracha* other than the first one, the replacement *chazzan* will be starting a *bracha* without saying the *baruch* which covers it! We see from here that the *baruch* said by the first *chazzan* will work for the subsequent *brachos* recited by the second one.¹³

8. How Does it Work?

Having seen some of the proofs as to whether the *brachos* can be divided between two people, we now need to ask: How does it work? If the opening to a *bracha* is actually to be found in an earlier *bracha*, how can someone start "in the middle?"

One possible answer is that we employ the mechanism of *shomei'a ke'oneh*, whereby one can listen to another's *bracha* and be *yotzai* (fulfill his obligation) through that person.¹⁴ In our case, the one making the fourth *bracha* would be *yotzai* by hearing its opening from one of the preceding *brachos*.¹⁵

If this approach is correct, then there will be a number of attendant practical ramifications:

1. The one reciting the later *bracha* will have to be present and listening to the one reciting the earlier *bracha*.

¹² Brachos 34a.

¹³ The scope of this proof needs to be qualified, however, in that the Mishna is discussing a *bedi'eved* (ex post facto) situation, and thus could not be brought as evidence to support such a division even *lechatchila* (from the outset). See Responsa Har Tzvi vol. 1 resp. 44.

¹⁴ See chapter on *shomei'a ke'oneh*.

¹⁵ Responsa Tzitz Eliezer vol. 6 resp. 2.

2. *Shomei'a ke'oneh* requires *intent* on the part of both the speaker and the listener. In our case, the one making the earlier *bracha* will need intent to be *motzi* whoever will be making the later *bracha*, and the latter will need intent to be *yotzai*.
3. There can be no interruption through speech between the *baruch* of the earlier *bracha* and the reciting of the later *bracha*, for it is essentially “in the middle of a *bracha*.”

Interestingly, here we will find a practical difference between the explanations of Rashi and the Tosafos (see above section 2) as to whether it is the *baruch* at the beginning of the opening *bracha* which exempts the *smucha lechaverta* or the *baruch* at the conclusion of the most recent *bracha*.

- If one is called to recite the fifth of the *sheva brachos* (*samei'ach tesamach*), which of the previous honorees is the one who exempted him with their *baruch*?

According to the Tosafos, it would be the one who recited the most recent *baruch*, which is at the conclusion of the *previous* (fourth) *bracha*.

According to Rashi, only an opening *baruch* covers subsequent *brachos*. In this case, it would be the one who made the *third bracha* (*asher yatzar*) whose opening will cover the fourth *and* fifth *brachos*, and thus their *shomei'a ke'oneh* relationship is with him.

9. An Alternative Approach

A very different approach to the concept of *bracha hasmucha lechaverta* is presented by R' Moshe Feinstein.¹⁶ According to his understanding, *smucha lechaverta* is not an ongoing, *functional* concern. It is not that every *bracha* is required to open with *baruch*, and those later *brachos* that have no such opening fulfill this requirement by drawing off an earlier *baruch*. Rather, although generally all *brachos* need to start with *baruch*, certain *brachos* became exceptions. Since these *brachos* follow a *bracha* which does start with *baruch*, it was not deemed necessary for these subsequent *brachos* to start with *baruch* as well. Once that was the case, their status became established as *brachos* which *do not need* to open with *baruch*!

R' Moshe adduces a proof for this approach by directing our attention to a *mishna* in the beginning of the second chapter of *Maseches Brachos*.¹⁷ The Mishna discusses in which situations one may interrupt to greet someone or respond to their greeting while in the middle of reciting *shema* or its *brachos*. The Mishna distinguishes between those who are in the middle of reciting a paragraph and those who are between paragraphs. The Mishna then proceeds to delineate what is considered “between paragraphs.” The first example is one who is between the first *bracha* preceding *shema* (*yotzer ohr*) and the second one (*ahava raba*).

- What light does this shed on the question of how *smucha lechaverta* works?

¹⁶ Igros Moshe Even Ha'ezer vol. 1 resp. 94. See also Dibros Moshe Pesachim chap. 10 pp. 293-7.

¹⁷ 13a.

The first *bracha* before *shema* opens with *baruch*. The second one does not; it is *smucha lechaverta* with the first one. If we say that the second *bracha* requires a *baruch* which it receives from the first *bracha*, then why should the situation of one who is between these two *brachos* be any more lenient than one who is in the middle of a *bracha*? If he is relying on the *baruch* from the first *bracha*, then he is also in the middle!

We see from here that whatever the origins of a *bracha* being considered *smucha lechaverta* are, its enduring status is that of a *bracha* which *does not require* an opening *baruch*. That being the case, one who is in between the first and second *brachos* before *shema* is not in the middle of a *bracha* at all, and his situation is more lenient.

10. Support from Rabbeinu Yonah

In the beginning of his commentary to *Maseches Brachos*, Rabbeinu Yonah discusses the case of one who *davened maariv* in *shul* before nightfall, and thus has not yet fulfilled the *mitzva* of the evening *shema*, which begins at nightfall. Rabbeinu Yonah rules that he must recite the *shema* after nightfall and recommends that he preface it with the *bracha* of *ahavas olam*, even though he has already recited all the *brachos* of *shema* when he *davened maariv*, “for it is correct for *shema* to be preceded by a *bracha*.”

Now, the *bracha* of *ahavas olam* does not begin with *baruch*, for it is *smucha lechaverta* to the opening *bracha* of *maariv aravim*. This being the case, we should have a problem, for how is it possible to recite this *bracha* by itself? It is missing the *baruch* from the preceding *bracha*!

Rabbeinu Yonah explains that this is not a problem. Since at the time it is said *in* its context during *maariv* it does not require an opening *baruch*, then even should it be recited *out* of context, it will nonetheless not require an opening *baruch*. This is an unequivocal support for R’ Moshe’s approach.¹⁸

Rabbeinu Yonah proceeds to corroborate this point by directing our attention to *tefillas haderech*. This *tefillah*, which concludes with “*baruch atah Hashem shomei’a tefillah*,” is actually an adaptation of the *bracha* of *shomei’a tefillah* from the *shemoneh esrei*. That, says Rabbeinu Yonah, is the reason it does not open with *baruch*. Since in its original context it does not require an opening – on account of it being *smucha lechaverta* – it will not require one even when recited by itself.

- Whom have we encountered who would argue this point with Rabbeinu Yonah?

The Tur told us (see above section 3) that Rabbeinu Meir of Rottenberg would arrange to have *tefillas haderech* as *smucha lechaverta* to another *bracha*, in order to provide it with an opening *baruch*. According to Rabbeinu Yonah’s understanding of what *smucha lechaverta* means, this would not be necessary.

¹⁸ See also Kesef Mishneh Hil. Kriyas Shema 1:8.

- What are the implications for dividing *sheva brachos* among different people?

Based on the above, R' Moshe concludes that it is acceptable to assign the fourth and fifth *brachos* to different people in the same manner as the other *brachos*. They are considered separate *brachos* in every respect, without the requirement to connect them to an opening *baruch* of a different *bracha* through *shomei' a ke'oneh*.