YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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This week’s *shiurim* are dedicated by Leonard Balanson   
in memory of Rose Balanson z”l

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**Shiur #2: Mentioning God’s Name (*Shem*) and His Kingship (*Malkhut*)**

**Rav David Brofsky**

**Introduction**

Last week, we noted that there are four essential components of a blessing: the opening and ending of “*barukh,*” the *Shem Ha-Shem* (name of God), the mention of *Malkhut* (His Kingship), and the specific content of each blessing. We discussed the first requirement – that a blessing must begin and end with the “*barukh*” formula (and when it need not).

This week, we will discuss the centrality of *Shem* and *Malkhut* in the *matbe’a ha-berakha* (the blessing formula).

**Mentioning the Name of God and His Kingdom (*Shem U-Malkhut*)**

The *gemara* (*Berakhot* 40b) cites a debate regarding the central components of a blessing:

Rav said: Any *berakha* in which the *Shem Ha-Shem* is not mentioned is not considered to be a *berakha*. R. Yochanan, however, said: Any *berakha* in which [God's] Kingship is not mentioned is not considered to be a *berakha*.

While not said explicitly in the *gemara*, the *Rishonim* assume that both Rav and R. Yochanan agree that a blessing must include the *Shem Ha-Shem*. They disagree only regarding whether it is absolutely necessary to mention God’s Kingship as well. The Rosh (*Berakhot* 6:23) cites the Ri, who questioned whether the halakha is in accordance with Rav or R. Yochanan, but the *Rishonim* (see Rif, *Berakhot* 28b; Rambam, *Hilkhot Berakhot* 1:5; Tosafot, *Berakhot* 40b, s.v. *ve*-*Rabbi Yochanan*) and the Shulchan Arukh (*OC* 214) rule that a *berakha* must contain both the mention of God’s Name and His Kingship.

It is important to distinguish between the requirement to mention God’s Name and the obligation to mention His Kingship. Seemingly, *Shem Ha-Shem*, following the word “*barukh*,” defines the statement as a blessing. As we discussed last week, the *gemara* questions whether all *berakhot* must both begin and end with the “*barukh*” formula. The mentioning of His name, however, seems to be an obvious requirement.

What is the purpose of mentioning *Malkhut* in a blessing? One might suggest that the mention of *Malkhut* is not a defining factor of a blessing, but rather provides the proper context within which one blesses God. If so, it is possible that while one cannot omit the mention of God’s Name, a *berakha* may indeed be recited at times without the mention of *Malkhut*.

**Exceptions – Blessings Without *Malkhut***

The *Rishonim* note that there are several exceptions to the above mentioned rule. For example, a “*berakha ha-semukha la-chaverta*” (a blessing recited immediately following another blessing) does not begin with *Shem U-Malkhut*, just as it does not begin with the “*barukh*” formula (see *Berakhot* 49a; Rambam, *Hilkhot Berakhot* 1:5). Therefore, some explain, the blessings of *Elokai Neshama*, *Birkot Ha-Torah* (according to those who maintain that they are three separate blessings), and *Ahava Rabba* (the second of the *Birkot Keriat Shema*) do not require the mentioning of *Shem U-Malkhut*. As we saw last week, we may explain that the *Malkhut* mentioned in the first blessing carries over and applies to the adjacent blessing as well.

However, there are other blessings that are not adjacent to *berakhot* containing the mention of *Malkhut* that also do not contain mention of *Malkhut*. For example, the *Rishonim* note that the blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei* do not contain mention of *Shem U-Malkhut*. They offer two different approaches.

Some suggest that technically, “*Malkhut*” is fulfilled by other means in these blessings. For example, Tosafot (*Berakhot* 40b, s.v. *amar*) explains that “*Elokei Avraham* is akin to [mentioning] *Malkhut*, as Avraham Avinu coronated the Holy One, blessed be He, over the world by announcing His Kingship.” Similarly, the Rosh (*Berakhot* 6:3) suggests that “since [the first blessing mentions] *Ha-Kel Ha-Gadol* (the great God), that is considered [to be a mention] of His *Malkhut*” (see also Tosafot Ha-Rosh, *Berakhot* 12a, s.v. *kol*).

Other *Rishonim* explain that that the mention of *Malkhut* is simply not appropriate in every context. For example, R. Elazar of Worms (1176 – 1238) suggests in his halakhic work, the Roke’ach (363), that “[only] blessings which are praise to God contain mention of God’s Name and His Kingship. The beginning of the *Shemoneh Esrei*, however, is not praise for any benefit or mitzva, but rather for a person’s requests from God … and therefore they did not institute *Malkhut*.” Similarly, the Ra’avya (1:114) cites R. Shmaya, who suggests that the *Shemoneh Esrei* and the *Birkot Keriat Shema* (the blessings before and after reciting the *Shema*), do not require the mentioning of *Malkhut*, as “they are for mercy, and every [mention of] *Melekh* implies the attribute of justice (*midat ha-din*), as it says, ‘*melekh ba-mishpat*.’”

In addition to mentioning the word “*Melekh*”, Tosafot (*Berakhot* 40b, s.v. *amar*) explains that *Malkhut* entails mentioning that God is the “King of the world (*ha-olam*),” and that one who omits “*ha-olam*” must therefore repeat the blessing.

The Shulchan Arukh (*OC* 214) rules that one who does not mention *Shem U-Malkhut* must repeat the blessing. The Mishna Berura(4) writes that if one mentioned at least one of God’s names (i.e. *Hashem* or *Elokeinu*), he has fulfilled his obligation. The Shulchan Arukh also rules that even one who omits “*ha-olam*” must repeat the blessing. The Mishna Berura (6) notes that the Even Ha-Ozer disagrees with this ruling, and he discusses this issue further in the Bi’ur Halakha (s.v. *ve-afilu*).

The Talmud Yerushalmi (*Berakhot* 9:1) cites a debate between Rav and Shmuel regarding the importance of the word “*ata*” (You). Rav asserts that one must say “*ata*,” but Shmuel disagrees. The Divrei Chamudot writes in his commentary to the Rosh (*Berakhot* 9:7) that since the Talmud Bavli does not cite this debate, the halakha does not require one to say “*ata,*” and one who omits it does not need to repeat the blessing. The Mishna Berura (3) concurs.

**Blessings Recited in the Vernacular**

Can this requirement of *Shem U-Malkhut* be fulfilled when reciting a blessing in a different language? The *gemara* teaches:

Benjamin the shepherd made a sandwich and said, “Blessed be the Master of this bread” [“*b’rikh Marei de-hai pita*,” in Aramaic], and Rav said that he had performed his obligation. But didn’t Rav rule that any *berakha* in which God's name is not mentioned is not considered to be a *berakha*? We must suppose he said, “Blessed be the All-Merciful (“*b’rikh Rachmana*”) the Master of this bread.” … What does this tell us [that we did not already know]? That [he has performed his obligation] even if he says it in a secular language. But we have already learnt this: “The following may be said in any language: the section of the *sota*, the *viduy* *ma’aser*, the recital of the *Shema*, the *Tefilla* [i.e. *Shemoneh Esrei*] and *Birkat* *Ha-Mazon*.” It is required to be stated. For you might have thought that this is the case only if one says the grace in a secular language in the same form as was instituted by the Rabbis in the holy tongue, but if one does not say it in the secular language in the same form as was instituted by the Rabbis in the holy tongue, he has not performed his obligation. We are therefore told [that this is not so].

This interesting halakha may imply that the purpose of *Shem U-Malkut* is not necessarily the invoking of the Divine Name per se, since even a translation suffices, but rather to achieve the desired impact upon the person reciting the blessing after mentioned God’s Name and Kingship.

Interestingly, R. Yechiel Michel Epstein (1829-1908) writes in his Arukh Ha-Shulchan (202:3) that when one is unsure whether to recite a blessing, he should say the blessing in the vernacular, in which case one has fulfilled the obligation but does not risk violating the prohibition of mentioning God’s name in vain. He even attests that this was often his practice when drinking hot beverages (when a doubt regarding whether to say a blessing arises). Although this possibility was indeed mentioned years previously (see Pitchei Teshuva, *YD* 328:1, citing the Pnei Yehoshua on Tosafot, *Berakhot* 12a, s.v. *lo*), many *Acharonim* disagree with this assumption and suggest that one may even violate the prohibition of reciting a false blessing when the words are said in the vernacular (Iggerot Moshe, *OC* 4:40:27).

**Blessings Without *Shem* or *Malkhut***

In the midst of the discussion regarding the obligation to recite *Birkat Ha-Gomel* upon recovering from an illness, the Talmud relates (*Berakhot* 54b):

R. Yehuda said in the name of Rav: There are four [types of people] who have to offer thanksgiving [i.e. recite the *Birkat Ha-Gomel*): Those who have crossed the sea, those who have traversed the wilderness, those one who has recovered from an illness, and a prisoner who has been set free…

R. Yehuda was ill and recovered. R. Channan of Bagdad and other rabbis went to visit him. They said [in Aramaic] to him: Blessed be the All Merciful who has given you back to us and has not given you to the dust. He said to them: You have absolved me from the obligation of giving thanks [i.e. of reciting *Birkat Ha-Gomel*].

The passage is quite puzzling. How is it possible that one who answers *amen* to “Blessed be the All Merciful who has given you back to us and has not given you to the dust,” which does not mention the *Shem Ha-Shem* or His Kingship, has fulfilled his obligation to recite *Birkat Ha-Gomel*?!

R. Avraham b. David (1125–1198, Provence), known as the Ra’avad, suggests:

[Regarding] any blessing which has no set, established place, we are lenient. We may bring a proof from the *Birkat Ha-Zimun*, which contains neither the mention [of His Name] nor His kingship. Similarly, you will find regarding *Tefillat Ha-Derekh*, which has no mention of Kingship… All of these which have not set place [do not require the mention of God’s Name or His Kingship].

The Ra’avad suggests that some blessings do not even require one to include Gods Name and His Kingship.

The Ramban (*Berakhot* 54b) disagrees and explains that all blessings require the mention of God’s Name and His Kingship. Regarding *Birkat Ha-Gomel*, the *gemara* abridged the visitor’s actual blessing. In reality, he mentioned God’s Name (in the vernacular) and His Kingdom. Furthermore, *Birkat Ha-Zimun* does not require the mention of God’s Name and His Kingship because it is considered to be a prayer, not a blessing.

The possibility of reciting a blessing without mentioning God’s Name or His Kingship appears in several contexts. The Shulchan Arukh (219:9), for example, cites a debate regarding whether only the original four situations mentioned in the *gemara* warrant the recitation of *Birkat Ha-Gomel*. He concludes that one who was not saved from one of these situations wishes to offer thanks to God, he should preferably recite the blessing without mentioning God’s Name and Kingship (see also Shulchan Arukh 218:9). Similarly, R. Shimon b. Tzemach Duran (1361 - 1444), known as the Tashbetz, discusses whether a father may recite a blessing with God’s Name and Kingship for a child who has recovered from an illness. He suggests that one should recite the blessing and omit mentioning God’s Name and Kingship. Some *Acharonim* suggest reciting a blessing without *Shem* and *Malkhut* is situations of doubt (Mishna Berura 225:30). Although one may not actually fulfill the obligation of reciting a blessing in this case, at least prayer expressing the proper sentiment has been said.

Next week, we will discuss the required content of blessings and whether one may change the formula of a blessing.