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Sheva Berachot

WHAT ARE SHEVA BERACHOT AND WHAT ROLE DO THEY SERVE? WHO CAN RECITE THEM?

By Laurie Novick

Rav Ezra Bick, Ilana Elzufon, and Shayna Goldberg, eds.

Birkat Chatanim

We recite a unique series of *berachot* at the [chuppa](#) and during the following week of rejoicing. In talmudic and halachic literature, this series is called *birkat chatanim* (literally, the blessing of grooms). It is also commonly referred to as *sheva berachot* (literally, seven blessings).

We'll begin by exploring the significance and meaning of *birkat chatanim*, and go on to discuss the *halachot* of its recitation and its function at the wedding and at *sheva berachot* meals.

Masechet Kalla traces *birkat chatanim* back to the *beracha* Rivka's family gave her when she set out from her home to marry Yitzchak.

Masechet Kalla 1:1

...A *kalla* without a *beracha* is prohibited to her husband. Whence do we learn of *birkat chatanim* from the Torah? For it is said, "And they blessed Rivka and said to her, 'Our sister, may you become thousands of myriads, and may your offspring inherit the gate of their enemies'" (*Bereishit* 24:60).

We can discern two distinct aspects of *birkat chatanim* in this passage. It serves both as (1) a precursor, even a prerequisite, to a couple being permitted to have relations, and (2) a communal expression of blessing and aspiration for their marriage.

The Talmud states that *birkat chatanim* is recited in two contexts, both at the *chuppa* and over the rejoicing that follows:

Ketubot 7b, 8b

Our rabbis taught [in a *baraita*]: We recite *birkat chatanim* in the house of *chatanim* [*chuppa*] ...Our rabbis taught [in a *baraita*]: We recite *birkat chatanim* in [a quorum of] ten all seven [days of rejoicing]...

These two settings for *birkat chatanim* correspond to its twofold significance. At the *chuppa*, both personal and communal significance are manifest; during the week of rejoicing, the communal aspect predominates.

Text of the Berachot

The mix of personal and communal also shapes the text of the six *berachot* that constitute *birkat chatanim*. We recite them over wine for added ritual significance,¹ and thus the *beracha* over wine, *borei peri ha-gefen*, completes the set of seven, called *sheva berachot*.²

Ketubot 7b-8a

What does he recite? Rav Yehuda said: Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, (1) Who created everything for His honor, and (2) Who forms *ha-adam* [Adam, and humanity as a collective], and (3) Who formed *ha-adam* in His image, in the image of the likeness of his [*adam's*] structure and made from him an everlasting construction. Blessed are You, Who forms *ha-adam*. (4) The barren women [a reference to Yerushalayim] shall truly rejoice and be glad in the ingathering of her children to her in joy. Blessed are You, Who gladdens Tziyon through her children. (5) May the loving friends be truly joyous as Your Creator caused you to rejoice in the Garden of Eden of old. Blessed are You, Who gladdens *chatan* and *kalla*. (6) Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who created joy and gladness, *chatan* and *kalla*, rejoicing, jubilation, happiness, delight, love and friendship and peace and companionship, soon, Lord our God, may there be heard in the cities of Yehuda and in the streets of Yerushalayim the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the *chatan* and the voice of the *kalla*, the voice of merriment of *chatanim* from their *chuppa* and youths from the festivities of their music. Blessed are You, Who causes the *chatan* to rejoice with the *kalla*.

We can divide these six *berachot* into two groups of three:

I. Creation The first three *berachot* focus on the theme of Creation, which marriage (and procreation) can be said to complete.³

¹ Sefer Ha-yashar (Responsa) 45

Even though we have not found [reference to] a cup in the Talmud, rather, we say [in the Talmud] that one recites six [*berachot*], we should take the straight path, since they had the custom of [reciting it over] a cup and Rav Yehudai instituted that custom.

² Rambam, Laws of Marriage 10:4

If there is wine there, they bring a cup of wine and he [the *chatan*] recites the *beracha* over the wine first and [then] orders all of them [the *berachot*] over the cup. And thus, he has recited seven [*sheva*] *berachot*.

³ They also loosely track a verse in *Yeshaya* that speaks of being called in God's honor as confirming one's status as God's personal creation and employs verb roots that appear in these *berachot*.

Yeshaya 43:7

(1) “*Sheha-kol bara li-chvodo*,” “Who created everything for His honor”: They begin with a call in God’s name that attributes everything to the honor of God. Rashi maintains that this first *beracha* functions as a convocation:

Rashi Ketubot 8a s.v. *Same’ach tesamach*

...“Who created everything in His honor” is not part of the series, but is for gathering the people who are gathered there to do *chesed*...and this gathering is honor to God and this *beracha* was enacted for this.

(2) “*Yotzer ha-adam*,” “Who forms *ha-adam*”: Second comes a *beracha* over the creation of man;

(3) “*Asher yatzar*,” “Who formed *ha-adam* in His image...and made from him an everlasting construction”: Third is a celebration of the creation of man and woman in the Divine image in perpetuity. Rashi identifies the lasting “building” of the third *beracha* specifically with the *kalla*:

Rashi Ketubot 7b

“Who formed *ha-adam*” speaks of the male “and made from him an everlasting construction” is the female. An everlasting construction - A structure customary for generations, and Chava is called a structure according to “and He constructed the rib” (*Bereishit* 2).

II. Rejoicing The last three *berachot* focus on rejoicing:

(4) “*Sos tasis*,” “Who gladdens Tziyon through her children”: The rejoicing of Yerushalayim, which, in a prophetic metaphor,⁴ becomes a childless woman awaiting her children;

(5) “*Same’ach tesamach*,” “Who gladdens *chatan* and *kalla*”: The personal rejoicing of *chatan* and *kalla* as a realization of the joy of Adam and Chava;

(6) “*Asher bara*,” “Who causes the *chatan* to rejoice with the *kalla*.” Finally, enumerating the multiple forms of the couple’s rejoicing in each other that spread far and wide.

Rabbanit Dr. Chana Friedman shares the meaning that she finds in the *berachot*.⁵

Rabbanit Dr. Chana Friedman, “Bridal Reflections,” *Geluya* 5.11.20

Whoever is called in My name and for My honor, I have created him and formed him and also made him.

Shita Mekubetzet Ketubot 8a

These three *berachot* are in accordance with the verse “Whoever is called in My name and for My honor, I have created him,” “who created everything for His honor”; “and formed him,” “who forms *ha-adam*”; “and also made him,” “who formed *ha-adam*...”

⁴ *Yeshaya* 54:1

Rejoice barren one who has not given birth, break out in joyous song and be merry....

Targum Yonatan *Yeshaya* 54:1

Praise Yerushalayim, which is like a barren woman who has not given birth...

⁵ Available here: <https://gluya.org/bridal-reflections/>

The *sheva berachot* that are recited under the *chuppa* by the officiant or by friends, take off with a world of images and interpretations of the occasion of marriage. The creation of a new world, Adam and Chava in the Garden of Eden, personal and national redemption, and an abundance of expressions of joy and intimacy (rejoicing, jubilation, happiness, delight, love and friendship and peace and companionship) teach about our wonder at the greatness of the event, at the far reaching meaning that we assign to it.

The couple's personal rejoicing is consummated only once it is clearly situated within this broader framework of meaning. The *berachot* play a special role for the couple at the wedding because they enable us to recognize every marriage as a culmination of Creation and Divine purpose, and thus a source of personal and communal joy.

Minyan

Both at the *chuppa* and during the rejoicing that follows, *birkat chatanim* requires an assembly of ten. This requirement reflects the communal aspect of *birkat chatanim*, and the Talmud cites two verses as potential sources for it:

Ketubot 7b, 8b

A baraita taught: Whence is *birkat chatanim* with [a quorum of] ten? For it is said, "And he [Boaz] took ten men from the elders of the city and said: sit here" [*Rut* 4:2]. Rabbi Abbahu said: From here: "In assemblies bless God the Lord from the source of Israel" [*Tehillim* 68:27]...What is "from the source"? On matters of the source [i.e., uterus—childbearing]....For Rabbi Yitzchak said Rabbi Yochanan said: We recite *birkat chatanim* with ten, and *chatanim* count toward the number.

Why does Boaz gather ten male elders in the first verse cited in this passage? There seem to be a few possible explanations for this. The assembly might attest to and publicize his changed relationship with Rut,⁶ or it might be fundamentally needed in order for their marriage to take effect. The second verse cited, from *Tehillim*, potentially points to a third explanation. It emphasizes the community joining in praise or prayer to God, suggesting that it is specifically the *beracha* which requires ten, and not necessarily the *nissuin*.⁷

If the assembly is meant merely as an act of publicizing the marriage, then it might be possible for women to count toward the ten, much as some halachic authorities count women for a group of ten to publicize miracles on [Purim](#) and [Chanuka](#). Rav Zvi Rayzman argues that this could apply according to some views of *birkat chatanim*:

Rav Zvi Ryzman, "The Essence of Sheva Berachot and Their Meaning for a Woman's Participation in the berachot," *Emunat Itecha* 122 (5779): 22-34.

⁶ *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 19

All attestation is believed for Israel, is with ten. The lyre that David played had ten strings. Attestation of *berit mila* is with ten...attestation of the *beracha* of marriage [*birkat nissu'in*] is with ten, for it is said [*Rut* 4:2] "And he [Boaz] took ten men."

⁷ The Talmud goes on to explain that this verse is relevant to weddings because of the word "*mekor*" which can also mean uterus. The opinion that [birkat eirusin](#) likewise requires a minyan is based on this word being applicable to *eirusin* as well.

Sefer Ha-ittur Sha'ar 2 Birkat Chatanim 63, column 1

Birkat Eirusin is also in the presence of ten, for they are also regarding matters of the *makor* [uterus], and so wrote Rav Acha...

...Certainly it is possible to say that women also count towards the “*rabbim*” [multitude] before whom it is necessary to publicize *birkat chatanim* in honor of the *chatan* and the *kalla*.

However, halachic consensus is that *birkat chatanim* requires a [minyan](#) of ten adult men:

Shulchan Aruch EH 62:4

We only recite *birkat chatanim* among ten adult freemen, and a *chatan* counts toward the number.

Indeed, the Mishna groups *birkat chatanim* with a number of other *mitzvot* for which a minyan is required:

Mishna Megilla 4:3

We do not make an abbreviated communal repetition of *Shema* [for those who missed saying it], and we do not pass before the *aron kodesh* [as a prayer leader], and they [the *kohanim*] do not raise their hands [to bless the congregation], and we do not read from the Torah, and we do not read haftara from the Prophets, and we do not perform the ritual standing up and sitting down [in a funeral procession], and we do not say the *beracha* of mourners and the consolation of mourners and *birkat chatanim*, and we do not recite a *zimmin* with God’s name with fewer than ten.

At least the first items in this mishna are considered *devarim she-bikdusha*, matters that require a minyan because they sanctify God’s name.⁸ Some consider *birkat chatanim* to be a *davar she-bikdusha* as well, perhaps akin to an element of communal tefilla:

Shita Mekubetzet Ketubot 7b

...For he [Boaz] only gathered them for *birkat chatanim*, for if it were for witnessing or a *kinyan*, two would be enough. Therefore, he gathered them only for the *beracha* alone, and since it is a *davar she-bikdusha* to bless God, he gathered ten. The language of the Geonim.

This understanding of *birkat chatanim* might find additional support in Rabbi Abbahu’s citation of *Tehillim* 68:27 (“In assemblies bless God...”) as the source for *birkat chatanim*.

Others disagree and view the requirement for a minyan as a prerequisite for the convocation of those assembled, which is how Rashi describes the first *beracha*. Along these lines, Aruch Ha-shulchan maintains that *birkat chatanim* is not a *davar she-bikdusha*, but it still requires an assembly of ten, as a matter of honor.

⁸ Megilla 23b

Whence these words? Rav Chiyya bar Abba said Rabbi Yochanan said: For the verse said, “and I will be sanctified in the midst of *benei Yisrael*.” Any *davar she-bikdusha* should not be less than ten...

Ran Megilla 13b (Rif Pagination)

In the gemara their rationales are explained alongside the other [cases] of the mishna...“And every *davar she-bikdusha*” should not be less than ten...and this rationale suffices for “we do not make an abbreviated communal repetition of *Shema* and we do not pass before the *aron*,” because of the sanctity that they have...

Aruch Ha-shulchan EH 62:11

We only recite *birkat chatanim* with ten adult freemen and not bondsmen, and the *chatan* is included in the count, for since these are *berachot* of joy and he is in a state of joy, why should he not be a part of the minyan, both when we say them at the time of the *nissuin* and when we say them at the feast after *birkat ha-mazon*. And even though it is not a *davar she-bikdusha*, like *kaddish* or *kedusha*, which are not said with fewer than ten—in any case, since we say, “who created everything for His honor” in honor of those assembled, and we mention the building of Yerushalayim, it is not respectful to mention them with fewer than ten.

Sheva Berachot at Meals

Origins

We began our discussion of *birkat chatanim* by noting that it is recited in two contexts, at the *chuppa* and during the rejoicing thereafter. Just as the *beracha* at the *chuppa* may be based on the *beracha* that Rivka Imeinu received before leaving to marry Yitzchak, the rejoicing following the *chuppa* may likewise have its roots in Rivka's family.⁹

Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer 16

Rabbi Yosei says: Whence do we learn of the seven days of feasting? From Yaakov Avinu, when he wed Leah he made seven days of feasting, for it is said “complete the week of this one” [*Bereishit* 29:27]. And all the people of the place gathered to do *chesed* for Yaakov, for it is said “and Lavan gathered all the people of the place and made a feast” [*Bereishit* 29:22].

The Talmud Yerushalmi, on the other hand, describes them as an enactment of Moshe Rabbeinu, along with the seven days of sorrow of a *shiva*.

Yerushalmi Ketubot 1:1

Moshe enacted the seven days of feasting [for marriage] and the seven days of mourning.

Here, and elsewhere, the Torah seems to establish the significance of a week as a unit of time and transition. Ramban explains that Moshe's enactment corresponded to a wedding practice that long preceded him:

Ramban Bereishit 29:27

“Complete the week of this one”—I didn't know that the seven days of feasting are an enactment of Moshe for Israel (Yerushalmi *Ketubot*)? And perhaps we will say that initially the honored ones of the nations practiced them...

Though the Torah and Ramban mention a week, the time for reciting the *berachot* isn't always a week. Let's look at the when, where, how, and why of reciting the *berachot* at meals.

⁹ Avot De-Rabbi Natan makes the same derivation:

Avot De-Rabbi Natan (version 2) ch. 1

Whence is [learned] feasting of seven days? For it is said “complete the week of this one,” etc.

When: First marriages and subsequent marriages

The time allotted for rejoicing is linked to the degree of joy the new couple are expected to feel. When it is a first marriage for both bride and groom, a full week of rejoicing and reciting *birkat chatanim* is observed. The Talmud discusses various cases where it is not a first marriage, and joy is assumed to be more moderate:

Ketubot 7a-7b

Rabbi Chelbo said Rav Huna said Rav Abba bar Zavda said Rav said: Both a virgin and a widow require a *beracha* [*birkat chatanim*]...And Boaz was a widower who married a widow!...'We recite *birkat* [*chatanim*] for a virgin seven [days] and for a widow one day.'...Isn't that even for a widow who gets married to a bachelor? No, to a widower, but [a widow getting married] to a bachelor, what is the halacha? Seven [days]...

The assumption seems to be that the anticipation and joy at getting married for the first time are usually unique, though that should in no way diminish the capacity to rejoice, in the short and long term, in a second marriage. Perhaps for this reason, when both bride and groom were previously married (whether widowed or divorced), *birkat chatanim* is typically recited only on that first day, the halachic day of the wedding.

Shulchan Aruch EH 62:6

Until when do we recite this *beracha*? If it was a widower who married a widow, we recite it on the first day only. But if it is a bachelor who married a widow or a widower who married a virgin, we recite it all seven days of feasting. (And these seven days begin immediately after the *sheva berachot* that he first recited [under the *chuppa*].)

In practice, as long as one member of the couple is marrying for the first time, *sheva berachot* are recited for a week. There is room to permit seven days of *beracha* even if that spouse is not a virgin.¹⁰

¹⁰ The halachic ruling when one spouse was previously married, and the other spouse was never married but is not a virgin at the wedding, has been subject to debate. Bach notes that not having been **married** is cause for seven days of *sheva berachot*, though he doesn't specify what he would rule in the case of a non-virgin woman who had never married marrying a divorced or widowed man.

Bach EH 64:1-2

...For the *beracha* that comes on account of the increased joy in the heart of a *chatan* and bachelor who has not yet married, [who] is more happy. And a virgin who marries a widower also, since she is a virgin, he is more happy. But [for] a widower who marries a widow, when he isn't so very happy, one day of *beracha* suffices...Regarding the *beracha*, as long as she is a widow, even if she didn't have relations, she has the halacha of a widow, for he is not so very happy when she has already been married.

Rav Shemuel Landa, son of Noda Bi-Yehuda rules that if the spouses previously had relations with each other, there is only one day of rejoicing—and applies this ruling to any case where neither is a virgin.

Responsa Noda Bi-Yehuda, Second Edition EH 82

For a woman who has had relations has the status of a widow, and naturally also the one who slept with her has the status of a widower regarding this, and they only need one day of *beracha*. And the reason for the matter is that the essence of *sheva berachot* is on account of his rejoicing and her rejoicing, and this is if the two of them did not yet experience relations, which is not the case with a man and a woman who slept with each other. They already tasted the taste of relations and they only have rejoicing like a widower who marries a widow. So it seems in my humble opinion: Shemuel son of Rav Yechezkel Landa ob"m of Prague

Where: Location of Sheva Berachot Meals

We learned [previously](#) that living together is a central element of *nissuin* and that the *chuppa* represents a couple's joint household. Traditionally, the rejoicing after the wedding would thus be held specifically in their *chuppa*, meaning whatever location was the center of their weeklong festivities and thus represented their home:

Sukka 25b

There is no rejoicing except in the *chuppa*.

Tosafot Sukka 25b s.v. Ein simcha

It sounds from here that if a *chatan* has left his *chuppa*, even with his *kalla*, and they go to eat in a different house, that they recite neither [*zimmun* with] “*she-ha-simcha bim'ono*” nor *birkat chatanim*, since “there is no rejoicing except in the *chuppa*”...The main place of dwelling of the *chatan* and *kalla* is called *chuppa*—and not an improvised place—and there [at their main dwelling place] they recite *birkat chatanim* all seven days.

Rejoicing in one place that represents the new couple's home adds a level of symbolic weight to the festivities, as though inaugurating their new household and status through the *beracha* ritual. This remains the practice in some Sefaradi communities. Even so, common halachic practice for Ashkenazim and, increasingly, among Sefaradim,¹¹ is to allow *sheva berachot* to take place in any setting in which the

Chatam Sofer disagrees. He maintains that there are seven days of rejoicing as long as the *chatan* was never married, even if he is not a virgin.

Responsa Chatam Sofer 3 (Eh 1) 123

The doubt is whether his rejoicing, over which he recites a *beracha*, is the rejoicing of relations, and if so, if he already experienced relations, even if prohibited, he no longer recites the *beracha*. And how much more so when he marries a woman with whom he had relations. Or perhaps the rejoicing over which he recites a *beracha* is the rejoicing of the wedding and marriage. If so, even if he has experienced relations, in any case he recites a *beracha* over the marriage...And it seems to me that the *beracha* was enacted on each of them...And if so, even though he has experienced relations, since it is his first marriage he recites the *beracha* all seven [days]

Rav Moshe Sternbuch adds that as a matter of *kevod ha-beriyot*, human dignity, there are seven days of rejoicing as long as the *kalla* was never married, even if she is not a virgin, as long as her sexual relationship was not public. In some situations, the halacha may be different for two converts who marry, depending on their personal history.

Teshuvot Ve-hanhagot 1:755

...I would say based on reasoning that the deficiency of [a woman] having had relations is only when the matter was publicized, as when she is pregnant, but with a woman who only had relations where it was not known, she is not cheapened, and he [the *chatan*] is very happy with her, and therefore their law is seven days, and therefore I thought since if I wouldn't recite the *beracha* it would humiliate the woman God forbid, and human dignity [*kevod ha-beriyot*] is great enough even to push away a rabbinic prohibition, i.e., a *beracha le-vatala* which according to most halachic authorities is rabbinic, I took the side of reciting the *beracha* and relying on the above reasoning...and in practice it seems that in a case where they did not live together publicly like man and wife it seems that one should be lenient because *kevod ha-beriyot* is great....

¹¹ Rav Shlomo Levi argues that nowadays Sefardi couples can also rely on the ruling permitting recitation of *sheva berachot* where they have their meals:

<https://asif.co.il/wpfb-file/zhr-30-1-pdf/>

Rav Shlomo Levi, *Saying Sheva berachot out of the chatan's home*, Zohar 30 5767

In my humble opinion it is plain that a Sefardi *chatan* and *kalla* can also enjoy the abundance of *berachot* at any meal made in their honor in any place.

wedding party settles for a meal. This permission is based on a ruling of Rabbeinu Asher, the scope of which is debated.¹²

Rabbeinu Asher begins by defining the term “*chuppa*” in this context as a sedan chair in which *chatan* and *kalla* are seated during their festivities. He then points out that this does not mean that we should take the Talmud’s statement that rejoicing is unique to the *chuppa* as implying that *birkat chatanim* is restricted to the *chuppa*. As long as the *chatan* plans to leave the *chuppa* behind, the rejoicing can move with him:

Rosh Sukka 2:8

We have the practice in Ashkenaz of making a covered sedan for seating the *chatan* and *kalla* and it is called *chuppa*. And it seems that there is no proof from here [Sukka 25b] that one may not recite *birkat chatanim* in a place to which *chatan* and *kalla* go to eat, in a different home. For this is the interpretation here: “There is no rejoicing except in the *chuppa*,” because he doesn’t plan to leave the *chuppa*...and afterwards he returns to his *chuppa*. But if he completely leaves for another home, he and his friends after him, and they make that home the main [residence], there, too, is called *chuppa* and he can recite *birkat chatanim* there...

To be clear, a couple is not required to have *sheva berachot* meals throughout their days of rejoicing. But when the conditions for *sheva berachot* are met, then there is an obligation to recite them. The main condition, aside from minyan, is *panim chadashot*.

How: Needing Panim Chadashot

Birkat chatanim is recited at a festive meal only in the presence of *panim chadashot* (lit., a new face), i.e., a new person—or, according to some views, two new people¹³—joining the festivities.¹⁴

Ketubot 7b

Our rabbis taught in a baraita: We recite *birkat chatanim* with ten all seven [days]. Rav Yehuda said: And that is [only] when *panim chadashot* have come.

There are two main ways to understand the *panim chadashot*, the new arrival at *sheva berachot*: as someone who has not yet heard the *berachot*, or as someone for whom the simcha is increased, because their presence is impactful.

¹² See Shulchan Aruch EH 62:10 and commentaries.

¹³ Responsa of Rav Avraham son of Rambam, *Berachot* 2:10

The definition of *panim chadashot* according to what was transmitted to me in the name of my father, my master [Rambam], in this matter is no less than two. For *panim* is plural, and the minimum plural according to Halacha is two...And so the matter is explained from the composition [the *Mishneh Torah*] in his [Rambam] saying, “But if there were others eating etc.” And the meaning of “others” is plural, and at least two.

¹⁴ Shabbat is the exception. No person needs to serve as *panim chadashot*, since we increase simcha and feasting for Shabbat itself:

Tosafot Ketubot 7b s.v. ve-hu she-ba’u panim chadashot

Ri says that *panim chadashot* refers only to people for whom we increase the simcha more. We consider Shabbat to be *panim chadashot*, as we say in the aggada, “*mizmor shir le-yom Ha-Shabbat*” “A psalm, a song for the Shabbat day”—God said: *Panim chadashot* have come here [in the form of Shabbat], let us utter song. There, too, in honor of Shabbat we increase *simcha* and feasting.

I. The Berachot Rambam suggests this is someone who has not previously been present for the recitation of the *berachot*, warranting a new recitation of them.

Rambam, Laws of *Berachot* 2:10

This *beracha* [*asher bara*] that we add in the home of *chatanim* is the final *beracha* of the *sheva berachot* of *nissuin*. To what circumstance does this apply? When those eating were those who stood at *birkat nissuin* and heard the *berachot*. But if those eating were others, who did not hear *birkat nissuin* at the time of *nissuin*, we recite *sheva berachot* after *birkat ha-mazon* for them in the way that we recite the *berachot* at the time of *nissuin*, and this is when there are ten, and *chatanim* count.

Rambam rules that the *beracha* of *asher bara* can be recited even without *panim chadashot*. But to recite the full set of *berachot*, *panim chadashot* need to be present. He places this ruling on *sheva berachot* in the context of his discussion of *birkat ha-mazon*.

II. Increased Simcha An alternative view emerges from the Tosafists. Rabbeinu Asher suggests that *panim chadashot* is someone who did not previously join in a festive meal in the couple's honor, whose newfound presence causes us to increase our rejoicing and thus warrants a new recitation of the *berachot*.

Rabbeinu Asher *Ketubot* 1:13

...*Panim chadashot* that did not eat [a festive meal] until now, even if they were there at the time of the *chuppa*. And it seems that only people on whose account we increase *simcha* are called *panim chadashot*.

Women as Panim Chadashot

A woman might not yet have heard the *berachot*, or might be a significant person on whose account rejoicing is increased. Does that mean that a woman can count as *panim chadashot*?

Ritva argues that a woman cannot function as *panim chadashot*, because women are not counted toward the minyan for *sheva berachot*.

Ritva *Ketubot* 7b

A woman is not eligible for this even if she is important, for *panim chadashot* can only be someone who is fit to be counted toward the ten for *birkat chatanim*.

Many halachic authorities closer to our day, including Rav Ovadya Yosef,¹⁵ rule accordingly. Chatam Sofer, however, raised the possibility that a woman could in fact count as *panim chadashot*, if she truly enhances the *simcha*:

Chatam Sofer *Ketubot* 7b

For the *kahal* [assembly] in which we recite *birkat chatanim* needs to be ten adult freemen as Rambam writes in [Laws of] *Berachot* 2, and the assembly of *panim chadashot* suffices even with a woman or minor, anyone on whose account we

¹⁵ Responsa *Yabia Omer* III EH 11

A minor or a woman don't count towards the ten to recite *sheva berachot*. And even if there are ten without them, they are not considered *panim chadashot*.

increase *simcha*.

Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv reportedly ruled this way in practice, counting women as *panim chadashot*.¹⁶ So, too, Rav Baruch Gigi, Rosh Yeshivat Har Etzion wrote in response to Deracheha's query:

Rav Baruch Gigi, Communication to Deracheha

If it is a woman who is significant for the rejoicing of *chatan* and *kalla*, she is considered as *panim chadashot*.

Why: Birkat Chatanim and the Festive Meal

We can understand the link between *birkat chatanim* and the festive meal in one of three ways. The *berachot* recited at meals may be a manifestation of a continuous *simcha* throughout the week that was not inherently or initially connected to meals. The festive meals may be a focal point for *simcha*. Or the *berachot* may be seen specifically as a joyous appendix to the *birkat ha-mazon* recited after the meals.

I. Continuous Simcha It seems that *birkat chatanim* was originally recited at any time during the seven days when *panim chadashot* would join the wedding party for rejoicing, as a continuation of the wedding celebration:

Masechet Soferim 19:9

Our sages had the practice of saying *birkat chatanim* in the morning [after the wedding] over a cup [of wine] with ten, and with *panim chadashot* all seven [days]. And so, in the evening prior to the meal.

Over time, it became customary to recite *birkat chatanim* specifically after meals. Ramban explains that this is merely because meals became the center of communal rejoicing and does not exclude other possible timings for recitation.

Ramban Ketubot 8a

Now they are accustomed [to recite *birkat chatanim*] only at the time of a meal, because we only gather to gladden him [the *chatan*] at that time, but on Friday [night] and on Shabbat itself, because the *chatan* comes out of the synagogue and we bring out the *kalla* from her chamber and they enter the *chuppa*, they recite [*birkat chatanim*] prior to the meal, for this is the great rejoicing that the people gladden him.

(The specific example that Ramban brings is no longer in practice.)

II. Focus of the Simcha Alternatively, we could understand *birkat chatanim* during the week of rejoicing as enacted to take place specifically at a festive meal.

The same Talmudic passage that restricts rejoicing to the place in which *chatan* and *kalla* dwell goes on to mention the significance of the festive meal:

¹⁶ Available here: https://olamot.net/sites/default/files/pdfimages/58_08.png

Kuntras Yismach Lev 339

So ruled our master, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, that an important woman for whom we increase [the rejoicing] is considered *panim chadashot*.

Sukkot 25b

There is no rejoicing except at the *chuppa*...there is no rejoicing except in the location of the meal.

That is to say, the meal is an essential component of rejoicing. Rav Yosef Karo cites Rav Moshe Ha-Kohen of Lunel as formulating this idea in more clearly halachic terms with respect to *sheva berachot*. He connects the recitation of *birkat chatanim* directly with the *seuda*:

Beit Yosef EH 62

Rav Moshe Ha-Kohen wrote regarding it, in accordance with the Talmud's discussion, *birkat chatanim* was enacted [to be said] at the *seuda*.

This connection aligns especially well with the position that we saw in the name of Rosh that *panim chadashot* are those who have not been present at a festive meal, for whom *simcha* is thus now increased.

III. Birkat ha-mazon A last possibility links *birkat chatanim* more closely to *birkat ha-mazon*. This possibility, too, may be hinted at in the Talmud:

Ketubot 8a-b

Rav Yitzchak said Rabbi Yochanan said: *Chatanim* [grooms] are counted [for *birkat chatanim*], but mourners are not counted. Objection: [A baraita states:] *Chatanim* and mourners are counted. When this baraita was taught, it was regarding *birkat ha-mazon* [where it was once customary to add certain passages in a house of mourning]; when Rabbi Yochanan said it, it was regarding [mourners] in the line [of those comforting them].

This passage can be read as implying a specific connection between *birkat chatanim* and *birkat ha-mazon*. So, for example, Rabbeinu Meshulam maintains that only one cup is necessary for both *birkat ha-mazon* and *birkat chatanim*, since they are intertwined:

Tosafot Pesachim 102b sv, she-ein

For we don't say two sanctifications over one cup—There are those who therefore have the custom at [the meal following] a *chuppa* not to say *sheva berachot* over the cup of *birkat ha-mazon*, but instead they bring another cup ...But Rabbeinu Meshulam would say everything over one cup...here it is one matter, for *birkat ha-mazon* causes [the obligation of] *birkat nissuin*...

Why should *birkat ha-mazon* lead us to recite *sheva berachot*? Ritva explains that this is an extension of the idea that the meal is cause for reciting *birkat chatanim*:

Ritva Ketubot 7b

...For *birkat ha-mazon* and *birkat chatanim*...that [*birkat*] *ha-mazon* comes after the meal and it [the meal] is the cause [of *birkat ha-mazon*], and *birkat chatanim* also comes over the meal, and it [the meal] is the cause [of *birkat chatanim*], they [*birkat ha-mazon* and *birkat chatanim*] are considered like one matter.

According to Ritva, the meal leads to obligations in both *birkat ha-mazon* and *birkat chatanim*, so that these obligations merge. This view aligns well with Rambam's position that *panim chadashot* are those who did not yet hear the *berachot*.

In practice, Sefardi authorities tend to follow the position of using a single cup. Ashkenazi authorities tend to require separate cups for *birkat ha-mazon* and *birkat chatanim*, indicating a distinction between the *mitzvot*.

Shulchan Aruch EH 62:9

There are those who say that one should not say *sheva berachot* over the cup of *birkat ha-mazon*, but rather bring another cup and recite *sheva berachot* over it, and go back and take the cup of *birkat ha-mazon* and say *borei peri ha-gafen* over it. And there are those who say that this isn't necessary, but rather one recites *sheva berachot* over the cup of *birkat ha-mazon*, and thus has the custom spread. ([Rema:] In these lands our custom is like the first reasoning.)

Those following Ashkenazi practice typically use three cups, to enable the *chatan*, the *kalla*, and the one reciting *zimmin* (and *borei peri ha-gafen*) to each drink from their own cup. The *zimmin* for *birkat ha-mazon* is recited over one cup, and *sheva berachot* over the second cup. Some of the wine from each cup is then poured into a third cup, and then some of the wine from the third cup is poured back into each of the first two, so that all three cups contain a mix before anyone drinks from them.

Type of Obligation

Now that we've introduced the main ideas of the *berachot* and conditions for reciting them, at the *chuppa* and following it, let's look more closely at the nature of the obligation to recite them. The themes of personal and communal celebration also come to the fore here, and in discussion of who can recite them.

At the *chuppa*, there are two main ways to understand *birkat chatanim*: (1) as a precursor to *nissuin* that is obligatory on the *chatan* (and possibly the *kalla*), or (2) as a *beracha* of *tefilla* or *shevach* (prayer or praise) that is obligatory on the community. Only the second would be relevant to a *sheva berachot* meal. Let's look at each of the possibilities for understanding *birkat chatanim* at the *chuppa*, keeping in mind that only the second is relevant to a *sheva berachot* meal.

I. Precursor to Nissuin Rambam rules that *birkat chatanim* must be recited prior to *chuppa*:

Rambam, Laws of Marriage 10:3

One must recite *birkat chatanim* in the house of the *chatan* prior to *nissuin*...

Beit Yosef suggests that this is because Rambam views *birkat chatanim* at the wedding as akin to a ***birkat ha-mitzva*** (*beracha* over a *mitzva*) incumbent on the *chatan* personally before the *nissuin* is completed (much as some describe [*birkat eirusin*](#)):

Beit Yosef EH 62

...Before entering the *chuppa*. So wrote Rambam in the Laws of Marriage (10:3)

and the reason is explained because “for all *mitzvot*, one recites a *beracha* over them prior to doing them” (*Pesachim* 7a).

Ramban reads Rambam differently. He describes *birkat chatanim* as *shevach* and *tefilla*, and not as *birkat ha-mitzva*. This is why *birkat chatanim* can be recited for up to a week of rejoicing following the wedding.

When first recited, however, Ramban suggests that *birkat chatanim* also acts as a ***matir***, a *beracha* that permits us to take a given action, or to partake in something. In this case, the *berachot* would permit the couple to have *yichud* (seclusion) and relations. He maintains that this is why Rambam calls for it to be recited before *nissuin*. In this comment, Ramban uses the term *chuppa* in two senses, to refer both to the wedding canopy that symbolizes the couple’s *yichud* and to their full-fledged *yichud* afterwards, which he identifies with Rambam’s use of the term “*nissuin*.”

Ramban *Pesachim* 7b

So is the custom with *birkat nissuin*, that we only recite it after she enters the wedding canopy [*chuppa*], for these are none other than *berachot* of *tefilla* and *shevach*. Know it, for behold we recite them all seven [days]. And so it seems from Ba’al Halachot Gedolot. But Rambam said to [to say it] before *nissuin*, and I tend to agree. For *chuppa* is [actually] *yichud*, and we need [the *kalla*] to be fit for relations [beforehand], and a *kalla* without a *beracha* is prohibited to her husband like a [woman in] *nidda*. And [Rambam’s view that we recite it before *chuppa*] is not because it is included in the rule ‘for all *mitzvot*, one recites a *beracha* over them prior to doing them.’

For both these readings of Rambam, the personal mitzva or *matir* element comes to the fore at *chuppa* and creates an obligation on the *chatan* because of its personal halachic significance for him and his *kalla*. Perhaps this is why Boaz took personal responsibility for assembling his minyan of elders.

According to Beit Yosef’s reading of Rambam, that *birkat chatanim* is a *birkat ha-mitzva*, one might argue that it is solely the *chatan*’s mitzva, much as Rambam views the mitzva of *kiddushin* as exclusive to the *chatan*. But according to Ramban’s reading, the *matir* aspect of the *beracha* might apply to the *kalla* as well, since she, too, is not permitted to have relations “without a *beracha*.”

II. Only Shevach Alternatively, one can argue that the *berachot*, even at the wedding ceremony, are not really a *matir*, and the phrase “without a *beracha*” refers only to the *chuppa* itself, and not to *birkat chatanim*.

Mordechai *Kiddushin* 545

They sent the matters before the Rav [Shimshon, Rash] of Sens...and he replied and this is his language...For it makes sense that the “*kalla* without a *beracha*” who is prohibited is [one] without *chuppa*, but it [*Masechet Kalla*] used the language of “without a *beracha*” because we make a *beracha* at the time of *nissuin*...From the hands of Shimshon son of Avraham ob”m.

According to this view, *birkat chatanim* at *chuppa* could be either a standard *birkat ha-shevach*, or a more elevated *davar she-bikdusha*.

If *birkat chatanim* is an obligatory set of *berachot* of praise, whose obligation is it to recite or hear it? There are a few possible answers to this question:

A. Every Individual in attendance We've seen that Rambam views *birkat chatanim* at the *chuppa*, which he addresses in the laws of marriage, as a type of *birkat ha-mitzva* or a *matir*. However, it is noteworthy that his discussion of the *sheva berachot* recited during the week of rejoicing appears elsewhere, in the laws of additions to *birkat ha-mazon*. During rejoicing, he seems to rule in the direction of every community member having their own individual obligation.

Rambam, Laws of *Berachot* 2:9

In the house of *chatanim*, we recite *birkat chatanim* after these four *berachot* [of *birkat ha-mazon*] at every meal that we eat there, and bondsmen and minors do not recite this *beracha*.

As we saw earlier, Rambam establishes that only *asher bara* (the concluding *beracha* of *birkat chatanim*) is recited in the absence of *panim chadashot*. Here, he adds a stipulation about who **cannot** recite it. On a simple reading of Rambam, every free adult should add *birkat chatanim* into their personal recitation of *birkat ha-mazon*.

Indeed, Rav Moshe Feinstein has written explicitly that all attendees at a wedding meal are obligated in reciting *sheva berachot*, as part of his view of the *berachot* as a function of *birkat ha-mazon*:

Iggerot Moshe OC 1:56

...For the obligation of the *sheva berachot* after the meal is incumbent on all those who eat at the wedding meal, and even on those who do not see the *chatan* and *kalla*, as explained in *Even Ha-ezer* 62:11. And consequently they are not permitted to leave before the recitation of *sheva berachot*, or they should recite the *sheva berachot* on their own with a minyan when they don't have time to wait until after the end of the meal...[Someone] who did not obligate himself in *zimmun* with ten, and not even in *zimmun* with three, is not obligated in the *sheva berachot* nor in *asher bara*.

Those who follow this view generally require individuals who ate bread at a wedding to stay for the recitation of *birkat ha-mazon* at the end of the meal, or at the very least to say it with a minyan of their own (with some exceptions). This logic could apply to *sheva berachot* meals throughout the week as well.

B. The Community as a Whole Ramban suggests that *birkat chatanim*, and other *mitzvot* listed in the mishna as requiring a minyan, is a *chovat ha-tzibbur* (a communal obligation).

Ramban, *Milchemet Ha-shem* Megilla 3a (Rif Pagination)

...The items taught in our mishna [we do not make an abbreviated communal repetition of *Shema*...and do not read from the Torah...with fewer than ten] all are obligations of the community and are only for those obligated in the matter. But [with respect to] megilla, just as the community is obligated, so is each and every individual obligated...

Ramban contrasts the obligation for a minyan here with the quorum needed for megilla, which is also an individual obligation. This may challenge the idea that the minyan for *birkat chatanim* is for mere publicity like the quorum for megilla.

Ramban notes that the communal obligation applies to “those who are obligated in the matter.” By this he might mean that the essential obligation is for the community to ensure that *birkat chatanim* take place. In that case, individual community members would be free of obligation. Or it might be that at least ten men from the community must hear or recite the *berachot*.

On either reading, Rambam’s or Ramban’s, it’s not clear whether women would be included, since women are part of the community that gladdens *chatan* and *kalla*, but not part of the minyan required for *birkat chatanim*.

Rav Soloveitchick embraces the notion that *birkat chatanim* is a communal obligation as part of a general conceptual understanding of the nature of the mitzva to perform *chesed*:

Lecture Notes of Rav Soloveitchik, *Bava Kamma* 93a

...One can explain the law explained in the mishna in chapter three of *Megilla* (23b) and this is its language, “And we don’t say the *beracha* of mourners and the consolation of mourners and *birkat chatanim*, etc., with fewer than ten.” For it seems difficult, why do these *mitzvot* of simple *chesed* need specifically ten? Indeed, according to the foundation of Rav Chayyim ob”m, one can explain that in all the *mitzvot* of *chesed*, aside from the obligation of the individual, there is also a communal obligation...and for this reason we need ten for the *beracha* of mourners and *birkat chatanim* etc., that there be a community there in order to fulfill the communal mitzva of *chesed*.

Following this line of reasoning, the individual obligation is to perform the *chesed* of gladdening the *chatan* and *kalla*, fulfilled by feasting and dancing and the like. A complementary communal *chesed* obligation is fulfilled through the recitation of *birkat chatanim*.

In a responsum on women reciting *birkat chatanim* (a question to which we’ll return shortly), Rav Shaul Yisraeli has similarly argued that the *berachot* are part of the *chesed* of *simchat chatan ve-kalla*. He maintains that women are exempt from performing the *chesed* of *simchat chatan* altogether, and thus are not obligated in *birkat chatanim*.¹⁷

¹⁷ Available here: <https://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=43736&st=&pgnum=161>

Responso Chavat Binyamin 2:80

It seems that the content of the *berachot* is classified as gladdening the *chatan*. Just as there is a mitzva to gladden him with dance and song before him and the like, as is explained in *Ketubot* (17a), so, too, the *berachot* that we recite for him at this opportunity are an action in the framework of the rejoicing that we cause for him, and this is what the verse said, “in assemblies bless God.” And this mitzva to gladden the *chatan* is not incumbent upon women, for it is not the way of *tzeniut* to go before a *chatan* to gladden him with dance and in song, naturally they [women] have no obligation in the *berachot*, for it is, as was said, part of the action of rejoicing...For these *berachot* are in the framework of the *simcha* of the *chatan*, in which a woman has no obligation whatsoever...

The simple reading of halachic sources, however, is that women **are** obligated to perform acts of *chesed* like these, since women are obligated in the mitzva of loving one's fellow, which is a positive commandment that is not time-bound.¹⁸

Rambam, Laws of Mourning, 14:1

To gladden the *kalla* and the *chatan*, and to feast them with all their needs, these are acts of *chesed* that one does personally that have no fixed measure, even though all these mitzvot are rabbinic, behold they are included in "love your neighbor as yourself." All the things that you would want others to do for you, do them for your brothers in Torah and *mitzvot*.

Women's Obligation

What does all this mean for women's obligation and for the possibility of women reciting *birkat chatanim*?

Whether a woman is obligated in *birkat chatanim* and whether a woman could recite it depend on the different perspectives that we've seen on how to understand it. Let's review the various possibilities and how they intersect with this question.

Birkat Ha-mitzva for the Chatan If *birkat chatanim* at the *chuppa* is a *birkat ha-mitzva* obligatory solely for the *chatan*, women would never be subject to the obligation, so a woman could not recite *birkat chatanim* on the *chatan's* behalf under the *chuppa*. (We discuss this principle [here](#).)

Matir If *birkat chatanim* at *chuppa* serves as a *matir*, and not a *birkat ha-mitzva*, then that obligation might be shared by the *kalla*, and perhaps could be discharged on the couple's behalf by another woman.

Rav David Bigman and Rav Dr. Yosef Slotnick make this point:¹⁹

Rav David Bigman and Rav Dr. Yosef Slotnick, "Can a Woman Recite Birkat Chatanim?" *Zohar* 43 (5779): 202-203.

One is not compelled to say that the permission is focused more on the *chatan* than the *kalla*. The phrase in *Masechet Soferim* is indeed "a *kalla* without a *beracha* is prohibited to her husband like a *nidda*," and this phrase is focused on the prohibition that falls on the husband. But on the other hand, from the comparison to the prohibition of *nidda*, one can learn that the woman is also included in the prohibition of relations during the time of *eirusin*, for the prohibition of *nidda* applies equally to both members of the couple. If the *beracha* indeed focuses on both members of the couple and permits them both, there is no reason to assume that only the man can recite the *beracha*. In practice, the sources that discuss *birkat chatanim* are not sufficiently clear, and it is difficult to establish with certainty whether they focus equally on both members of the couple, or only on the *chatan*.

The prohibition of *yichud* before *nissuin*—and thus the permission afterwards—applies equally to the *chatan* and the *kalla*, as can be inferred by the comparison to *nidda*.

¹⁸ At the end of his listing of positive commandments, Rambam notes this mitzva, 260, as one of the sixty mitzvot that are fully obligatory and from which women are **not** exempt.

¹⁹ Available here: <https://asif.co.il/wpfb-file/9-pdf-42/>

Theoretically, this would imply that the *beracha* is also equally incumbent on both *chatan* and *kalla*. Still, Rabbis Bigman and Slotnick are not confident that those who view *birkat chatanim* as a *matir* would leave room for a woman to recite it.

Davar She-bikdusha If *birkat chatanim* is considered a *davar she-bikdusha*, then whether a woman could recite it might depend on a debate regarding whether a woman may recite a *davar she-bikdusha* in the presence of a minyan,²⁰ as well as whether this recitation is meant to discharge a communal obligation.

Communal Obligation If *birkat chatanim* is an obligation of *chesed* that falls on the community, then a woman might be able to recite the *beracha* because she is a full member of that community and obligated in causing *kalla* and *chatan* to rejoice.

Rabbis Bigman and Slotnick argue for the possibility of viewing *birkat chatanim* in this way, even at the *chuppa*:

Rav David Bigman and Rav Dr. Yosef Slotnick, "Can a Woman Recite Birkat Chatanim?" Zohar 43 (5779): 205-206.

...Many others understood that *birkat chatanim* is a type of *birkat ha-shevach*, which indeed can be said only in public, but whoever is obligated in it can say it. Since the *chatan* and *kalla* are the focal point of the praise of this *beracha*, the obligation to praise falls equally on men and women; therefore a woman can recite this *beracha*...Therefore, we should not push away a community that chooses to give a significant role to women at the *chuppa*...

In a note to Deracheha, Rav Baruch Gigi acknowledged that an argument can be made in support of a woman reciting *sheva berachot* under the *chuppa* or at a *seuda*, but noted that he does not allow for it in practice.²¹

Alternatively, perhaps only those who count toward the minyan are subject to the communal obligation of reciting the *beracha*, and thus only they can recite the *beracha* on others' behalf.²² Rav Yisraeli argues that women cannot recite *sheva berachot* for this reason:

²⁰ Me'iri maintains that a woman can never recite a *davar she-bikdusha*:

Beit Ha-bechira (Me'iri), Berachot 47b

A *davar she-bikdusha* is not given over to women.

Others leave open the possibility that women can. In the context of a discussion of mourner's *kaddish* (though without specific reference to *barechu*), Chavot Ya'ir succinctly makes this point: Responsa *Chavot Ya'ir* 222A woman is commanded in *kiddush Hashem*.

Rav Baruch Gigi, Communication to Deracheha on a Woman Reciting Sheva Berachot under the Chuppa or at a Meal

There is room to allow it in the presence of a minyan. In practice, I do not allow it.

²² Rav Yisraeli and others cite in support of this position a related comment in *Kesef Mishneh*, explaining that a minor and bondsman don't recite *sheva berachot* because they don't count for minyan. However, this comment appears only in some printed versions of *Kesef Mishneh*, and in brackets, and does not actually seem to have been written by Rav Karo.

Rav Yehuda Gershuni, "In the Matter of Honoring a Woman with Sheva Berachot," Chochmat Gershon 165

One should see the words found in brackets in the above *Kesef Mishneh*, "It seems clear, for even a bondsman and a minor do not count for a matter that requires ten, how much more so that they should not recite the *beracha*"- as an error, for they are not found in the first edition...

Chavat Binyamin 2:80 “Regarding Birkat Chatanim and Women’s Participation in Them,” p. 161.

For here the *berachot* are said in order to discharge [the obligation] of the participants, all those who are included in the “assemblies” upon which falls the obligation of “bless God.” And since, from the perspective of the law, those who make up the assembly, that is to say a minyan of men, are only adult freemen... We learn that in the matter of *sheva berachot* there is no place for a woman to say them, for a woman does not count toward a minyan of the assembly, if so, she has no obligation in the *berachot* and naturally she also cannot discharge others in their saying of these *berachot* that are not obligatory for her.

Rav Yehuda Henkin has pointed out that this is not necessarily the case. Sometimes, a woman can recite a *beracha* in the presence of a minyan even when she does not count toward the minyan:

Responsa Benei Banim 3:27

Who [can] recite the *beracha* doesn’t necessarily depend on counting towards the ten, as I cited from [a woman reciting] *birkat ha-gomel*, and similarly a woman would read from the Torah, were it not for *kevod ha-tzibbur*, even though she does not count [towards the minyan]... But we do not take action because we can compare matters to each other, especially with something that requires ten...

Rav Henkin expresses caution about the practical application of this halachic possibility, because the comparisons that he draws are not foolproof. A woman recites *birkat ha-gomel* when it is her personal obligation, which may make its halacha different from *sheva berachot*. Additionally, there are ways to understand [reading from the Torah](#) that do not entail discharging a communal obligation, which may make its halacha different.

Birkat Ha-mazon If *birkat chatanim* at a meal is connected with the obligation in *birkat ha-mazon*, then perhaps only those who count toward a *zimmun* could recite *birkat chatanim*. Rav Zalman Nechemya Goldberg makes this claim.

Rav Zalman Nechemya Goldberg, “Women in Birkat Sheva Berachot,” in Responsa Be-mareh Ha-bazak 5 (Jerusalem: Eretz Hemda, 2006), 185.

For all who eat from the meal of a *chatan*... recite *birkat chatanim*, and therefore a woman cannot discharge their obligation since she does not count towards the ten, and so with *birkat ha-zimmun*, since the *mezammen* needs to discharge the obligation in *birkat ha-zimmun* for all those eating, and a woman who does not count [towards the ten] cannot discharge the obligation of others... For it is understood from the language of Rambam that *birkat chatanim* is part of *birkat ha-mazon*, and therefore its law is like *birkat ha-mazon*, that one needs to be obligated in the matter... With a woman, since she does not count towards the *zimmun*, all the more so she does not recite *zimmun*, and therefore she cannot recite the *beracha* of *asher bara*. Still, one should explore, for since women recite *zimmun* for themselves, if so, it is possible that they can recite *zimmun* for themselves and the *beracha* of *asher bara* could be recited by a woman.

It follows that he might allow for women to recite *asher bara* when there is no minyan but there is a woman’s *zimmun*. Though Rav Goldberg leaves this as something that

requires study, Rav David Auerbach and Rav Yehuda Henkin explicitly permit it:

Responsa Benei Banim 3:27

...During the seven days of rejoicing, in my humble opinion, it is permissible for women to recite *zimmun* for themselves with the *chatan* and *kalla* when there is no *zimmun* of men there, and to recite the *beracha* of *asher bara*...That which I wrote, that women who recite *zimmun* for themselves can recite the *beracha* of *asher bara*, Rav David Auerbach also wrote thus in a letter, and this is his language: "If three women ate together with the *chatan* and the *kalla*, they can well recite this *beracha*...for women also count for this [for *zimmun*]..."

Rav Goldberg rules that women may not recite *sheva berachot* at a meal when a minyan is present because women do not create the minyan for *zimmun*. This ruling rests on connecting the halacha of *sheva berachot* with the *halachot* of *birkat ha-mazon* and *zimmun*.

However, Rav Yehuda Gershuni makes this connection with a different result. First, he points out that Rambam does not mention women among those who cannot recite *sheva berachot* at a meal (and Shulchan Aruch follows him). Rav Gershuni goes on to note that a men's *zimmun* does create an obligation of *zimmun* for women, even though women cannot make up the minyan for it. (See more here.) Therefore, he argues that women are obligated in *sheva berachot* at a meal as men are, and thus can recite *sheva berachot*.

Rav Yehuda Gershuni, "In the matter of Honoring a Woman with *Sheva Berachot*," *Chochmat Gershon* 165

In truth, it is known that the words of Rambam and Shulchan Aruch are very precise, and if so one should relate to the fact that both of them ruled (*Berachot* 2:9, EH 62:5) that bondsmen and minors do not recite this *beracha*, and left out women even though they always mention women, bondsmen, and minors in one group...For they [women] are obligated like men in reciting the *sheva berachot*. For Rav Moshe Feinstein explained (*Iggerot Moshe* 1:56) that *birkat chatanim* is connected to *birkat ha-zimmun*, for it is impossible to recite one without the other, both for the *beracha* of *asher bara* with a *zimmun* of three and for *sheva berachot* with a *zimmun* of ten. And it is known that women who eat with the men are obligated in *birkat ha-zimmun* (ShA OC 199:7) and if so, they are obligated in *birkat chatanim* like men. It emerges that the fundamental halacha is that they [women] can recite the *berachot*. But...one should be concerned whether, in reality, she can recite the *beracha*. For a woman who eats with men is obligated in *birkat ha-zimmun* but does not recite *zimmun*, and we have seen that *birkat chatanim* is connected to *zimmun*. But in truth, there are a number of halachic facts that prevent a woman from being the *mezamenet* that are not relevant to honoring a woman with one of the *sheva berachot*...With *sheva berachot* we specifically use two cups to distinguish the two sanctifications, and for reciting *sheva berachot*, which have now been separated from *birkat ha-mazon*, women have the same obligation as men have. And it should be added that all of this is said only regarding *sheva berachot* that we recite at the meal, for with these *berachot* Rambam and Shulchan Aruch were careful not to exclude women from those reciting.

On the one hand, Rav Gershuni's argument roots a woman's obligation in *sheva*

berachot in the connection of the *berachot* to *birkat ha-mazon* and *zimmun*. On the other hand, he allows a woman to recite them because separate cups indicates that there is a distinction between *zimmun* and *sheva berachot*, and some factors specific to *zimmun* would thus not apply.

Customs and communal norms Women have not customarily recited *sheva berachot*. In some communities, doing so might also conflict with communal norms, and this is an additional consideration. In our piece [here](#), we explore hesitations that have been voiced about women discharging obligations in practice, even when women are fully obligated. Rav Zalman Nechemya Goldberg goes so far as to identify these considerations with respect to *birkat chatanim* with the key halachic concern raised regarding a woman reading Torah for the community, [kevod ha-tzibbur](#).²³

Though not going this far, Rav Yehuda Henkin has argued that a woman may not recite the *berachot* at a large gathering, out of concerns for customs and norms:

Responsa Benei Banim 3:27

...To permit a woman to recite *sheva berachot* under the *chuppa* before the whole gathering... even were a source to be found for this in halacha, in my humble opinion one should not permit it... And changing an existing custom is more serious than inventing a new custom... with *sheva berachot* where many people are present, it is simple that one should be concerned...

Elsewhere, he acknowledged that this ruling deliberately left open the possibility that a woman might recite *sheva berachot* at a meal, at least a more private one, where the occasion would be less clearly public.

Rav Yehuda Henkin, Letter to Edah Journal, 3.16.2003

Others have asked whether the wording “under the chupah before the whole gathering” and “public *sheva berachot*” hints at a difference between the wedding ceremony and feast on the one hand, and the more intimate *sheva berachot* held in private homes on the other? Indeed, it does. As opposed to women reciting the wedding blessings at the wedding or wedding feast proper, if some chose to do so at *sheva brachot* in a private home when ten men are present, I would not protest.

At a meal, there is also no question of the *berachot* being a *matir*, since the couple are already permitted to each other.

Rav Gershuni likewise suggests caution with respect to communal norms, though he expresses doubt that people would go against the will of *chatan* and *kalla* at their *simcha*, if they would choose to honor women with reciting any of the *sheva berachot*.

Rav Yehuda Gershuni, “In the matter of Honoring a Woman with *Sheva Berachot*,” *Chochmat Gershon* 165

Of course, if the fact that a woman recites a *beracha* will arouse conflict and

²³ Rav Zalman Nechemya Goldberg, “Women in *Birkat Sheva Berachot*,” in Responsa *Be-mareh Ha-bazak* 5 (Jerusalem: Eretz Hemda, 2006), 185.

It makes sense why Rambam did not write that a woman should not recite *birkat chatanim*, because Rambam already wrote regarding *keri'at ha-Torah* that a woman should not read communally, and so is the halacha with *birkat chatanim*, it is communal...

unpleasantness among those eating, it is better that she not recite a *beracha*, so that it does not come about that an act that should express the joy of the celebration lead to conflict. But since all those present are obligated in gladdening the *chatan* and *kalla*, and the *chatan* and *kalla* choose to honor [those] who will gladden their hearts, it is difficult to believe that someone would oppose it... We should not prohibit that which is permissible... furthermore, this will offend women who wish to use the means permitted to them to participate in the *simcha* of *chatan* and *kalla*, for especially nowadays we need to be careful not to offend women who are learned and see themselves as participants as much as possible in the world of Torah...

Rav Gershuni also views offering women an opportunity to participate in ritual where there is halachic room for it as an important consideration. In a responsum reviewed by Rav Nahum Eliezer Rabinovitch, Eretz Hemda's Responsa *Be-mar'eh Ha-bazak* cautions a couple about keeping to communal norms, but likewise cautions community members to respect that there is a lenient view that can be relied on:

Responsa Be-mareh Ha-bazak 5:113

Question: At a "*sheva berachot*" meal...is it permissible for one of the women to recite one of the *sheva berachot*?...Response:...The later halachic authorities debated the matter...And it seems that, on account of the doubt regarding the *berachot*, one should avoid allowing a woman to recite one of the *sheva berachot* [at a meal] (this is guidance for the *chatan* and *kalla*). However, we'd add that if the *chatan* and *kalla* very much want this, and the request comes from religious feeling, and they want to rely on Rav Gershuni, that then, since there is room to permit, it is not fitting for those eating to cause dispute and thus to cause sorrow for the *chatan* and *kalla* and to prevent them from honoring those who gladden them (and this is guidance for guests).

Women participate in the *chesed* of causing bride and groom to rejoice, and listen to and respond to the *berachot* in fulfillment of the communal obligation. Reciting them, however, remains subject to debate. We discuss roles women can play at a wedding in practice in our upcoming piece on the marriage ceremony.

[Can we rely on a minority opinion regarding women reciting Sheva Berachot at a meal?](#)

This is a tricky question. On the one hand, a couple may feel strongly about women taking an active role in the ritual aspects of their marriage festivities. Having a woman recite one or more of the sheva berachot could be a fitting and authentic way to accomplish this. On the other hand, we lack halachic precedent for women reciting sheva berachot and there are well-founded opinions that would preclude it, at least at the wedding and possibly also at a meal.

The key ruling explicitly permitting women to recite sheva berachot is Rav Gershuni's. Rav Gershuni limits his ruling to a meal, where there are fewer arguments against a woman being able to recite sheva berachot. However, even at a meal, he urges a couple to choose a path that will be sensitive to the norms of their community. Be-mareh Ha-bazak reiterates this argument to a couple, but balances it with a plea to rabbis and to guests to be accepting if a couple chooses to rely on a different opinion nevertheless.

Throughout our discussion of sheva berachot, we have tracked the interplay of the personal and the communal. The wedding and ensuing festivities are at once unique to the couple and in constant dialogue with the community. The sheva berachot themselves speak of both personal and communal aspects to the simcha. For this reason, it is of utmost importance that the community be sensitive to and accepting of the couple as part of bringing them joy and ushering them into their ranks. And for the very same reason, the couple need to show deference to the norms of the community in which they take their place. In the case of a wedding, community includes not only the couple's friends and neighbors but also their families and communities of origin.

A mesader kiddushin can be instrumental in helping a couple to find their path in balancing their individual priorities with communal sensitivity. In some contexts, relying on a minority view might be essential to a couple's happiness or embraced by the communities invested in their wedding. In others, they may find that prioritizing communal norms over personal preference can be a meaningful choice in its own right.

Over time, some minority opinions become more widely embraced, while others fade. With this case, as with others, time, and the aggregate of many individual couple's choices, will tell.

Further Reading

- *Responsa Be-mareh Ha-bazak* 5:113 and Response of Rav Zalman Nechemya Goldberg (Jerusalem: Eretz Hemda, 2006). Available [here](#).
- Rav Avarya Berzon. "Birkat Chatanim." *Techumin* VI (1985): 100.
- Rav David Bigman and Rav Dr. Yosef Slotnick, "Ha-im Isha Yechola Le-varech Birkat Chatanim?" *Zohar* 43 (5779): 202-203. Available [here](#).
- Rav Yehuda Gershuni, "Be-inyan Kibbud Nashim Be-Sheva Berachot," *Chochmat Gershon* 165.
- Rav Yehuda H. Henkin, *Benei Banim* III:27. Available [here](#).
- Rav Zvi Ryzman. "The Essence of Sheva Berachot and Their Meaning for a Woman's Participation in the berachot." *Emunat Itecha* 122 (5779): 22-34. Available [here](#).
- Dr. Joel Wolowelsky. "Chiyuv Nashim Be-vir'at Chatanim." *Techumin* VI (1985): 118.