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Why *Sheva Berakhot*? – From the Inclusion of "New Faces" to an "Act of Lovingkindness" – or Vice Versa?

Introduction

Today, it is common practice among traditionally-observant Jews to arrange a festive meal and gather a *minyan* each day of the week following a wedding in order to recite the seven blessings known as "*sheva berakhot*," which are appended to the grace after meals (*birkat ha-mazon*). Many people would perhaps be surprised to learn, however, that only a generation ago in the United States, the *daily* recital of *sheva berakhot* following a wedding was not all that common, certainly not in the Modern Orthodox community. They would be equally surprised to learn that this practice is *not* a halakhic requirement. Indeed, prominent medieval and even early modern authorities limited the recitations of the blessings to Shabbat and perhaps once during the week, sometimes citing the precarious existence of the Jewish communities they lived in as reason for tamping down joyful expressions. Some more recent authorities have even commented on the historically unprecedented nature of daily meals for this purpose and the resulting burden they can create for the couple and for family members.[1]

To better appreciate the contemporary trend, it might be helpful to reassess the origins of the practice. Understanding the initial motivation for the recitation of the *sheva berakhot* subsequent to the wedding will in

[1] For some of the most noteworthy views and references, see Ari Zivotofsky, "What's the Truth about *Sheva Berachot*?" *Jewish Action*, Winter 2008, 62–66, which is also available online as "Requires Study [*tsarikh iyyun*]: Sheva Berachot," https://www.ou.org/torah/machshava/tzarich-iyun/tzarich_iyun_sheva_berachot/. It should be pointed out that originally the recitation of the blessings was independent of meals and the *birkat ha-mazon*. See discussion below.

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turn enable us to see its enduring significance in a different and, hopefully, more meaningful light.

The Origins of the Sheva Berakhot

At some point during the Talmudic period, a form of the blessings for a bride and groom that eventually became known as the *sheva berakhot* began to be recited, not only under the *huppah* ("marital canopy") but also during the week of celebration that followed. Palestinian sources take for granted that the festivities were to continue, taking their cue from Genesis 29, which famously relates how Jacob worked for Laban in exchange for his marriages to Leah and Rachel. The passage explicitly notes (29:22) that Laban made a feast (*mishteh*) to celebrate what was supposed to be the wedding of his daughter Rachel to Jacob after the patriarch completed the agreed upon seven years of service. When Jacob realizes that he had been duped by Laban into consummating the union with Rachel's sister Leah instead, he agrees to work an additional seven years in exchange for his immediate marriage to Rachel. This time, however, the Torah only states (29:27–28) that Laban, after insisting on a week-long delay, "waited out the bridal week of the one [Leah], and then he gave him his daughter Rachel as wife." There is no allusion to an additional feast or week-long celebration of Jacob's marriage to Rachel. The Torah's silence is taken up in both the *Talmud Yerushalmi* and in *Genesis Rabbah*, where the late third- early fourth-century C.E. Palestinian *amora* Rabbi Yaakov bar Aha concludes from Laban's delay of Jacob's marriage to Rachel that "we do not muddle one celebration with another."[2]

The medieval commentator Rabbi David Kimchi ("Radak," 1160-1235) took Yaakov bar Aha's assertion to mean that precisely because Laban waited until the week to be over to fulfill his end of the agreement he must have also celebrated the wedding of Rachel to Jacob then in

[2] *JT Mo'ed Katan* 1, 80d. *Genesis Rabbah* 70:19. For another biblical wedding feast, see Judges 14:10–18, where Samson marries a Philistine woman. Some versions of Tobit 11:19 have Tobit sponsor a seven-day feast when his son Tobias returns with his bride Sarah to Nineveh, this after having celebrated for two weeks with his in-laws in Ecbatana. See Joseph Fitzmyer, *Tobit* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 251. See too Geoffrey David Miller, *Marriage in the Book of Tobit* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 125–129 and Michael Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2001), 178–180, who calls attention to the Byzantine period inscription found in a synagogue mosaic at Khirbet Susiya southeast of Hebron in which one Rabbi Isi ha-Kohen announces the donation of the mosaic at a "feast" (*mishteh*) made apparently to celebrate the marriage of his son Rabbi Yohanan ha-Kohen ha-Sofer *beribbi*.

precisely the same manner, with a feast and a festive week.[3] Kimchi's understanding certainly is in line with the perspective of the sages of the Talmudic period on the proper reception and incorporation of newlyweds into Jewish society, even if it does not explain the motivation of the rabbis for formalizing specific benedictions to be recited not only at the ceremony but also at the festivities that continued following the wedding day.

The usual explanation for the recitation of *sheva berakhot* beyond the *huppah* is based on the discussion of a *baraita* in the Babylonian Talmud (*Ketubot* 7b-8a) that informs us that "the *birkat hatanim* ('blessing of the grooms,' as the *berakhot* were originally designated) is recited with the [presence of] ten [men] all seven [days]." The third-century Babylonian *amora* Rav Yehuda expands upon the *baraita* by first noting that *panim hadashot* or "new face(s)"[4] are required (in addition to a *minyan*) at each recitation of the *birkat hatanim*. He then goes on to present six of the blessings that eventually were to be incorporated into the standardized *sheva berakhot*, that over wine having not yet been included:[5]

1. Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, for whose honor all has been created.
2. And [Blessed are You…] who fashions man.
3. And [Blessed are You…] who fashioned man in His image, in the image of the likeness of His form, and prepared for him out of him (i.e., out of His image = out of Adam, *and* via his mate who came from his rib) an everlasting abode.[6]
4. May the barren one (i.e., Jerusalem) be exceedingly joyful (*sos tasis*…) and rejoice when her children are assembled within her midst in joy. Blessed are You, Lord, who gladdens Zion by means of her children.

[3] This may be inferred from Radak's comments to Genesis 29:27. Cf. *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 36, which is discussed below. For a late rabbinic attribution connecting the "*birkat hatanim*" (on which, see ensuing discussion) with the blessing of Rebecca in Genesis 24:60, see the minor post-Talmudic tractate *Kallah* 1:1. Cf. the comments of *Tosafot* on *BT Ketubot* 7b.

[4] The plural form *panim* can be taken as singular or plural. Ashkenazim maintain that only a single "new face" is required. Sefaradim maintain that two are required. There are also differences of opinions as to whether the "new face" is someone who participated in the wedding feast but did not hear the *berakhot* under the *huppah* (Rambam, *Hilkhot Berakhot* 2:10) or someone who attended the ceremony but who did not eat at the reception (see *Tur, Even ha-Ezer* 62:7).

[5] This version follows ed. Vilna. The third blessing is missing entirely in MS Munich 95, which is curious in view of the discussion in the ensuing *sugya* as to whether Rav Yehuda's formulation had five or six *berakhot*. See below. All other variants in MS Munich 95 are minor.

[6] This understanding will be fully elaborated below.

5. Grant abundant joy to the beloved companions, like the joy of your creation in the Garden of Eden of old. Blessed are You Lord who gladdens the groom and bride.
6. Blessed are You our Lord who created gladness and joy, groom and bride, rejoicing, exultation, amusement, merrymaking, love and harmony, peace and companionship. Lord our God, may there speedily be heard in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem the sound of mirth and joy, the sound of groom and bride, the sound of joyful shouts of grooms from their marital canopy and of youths from their songful feasts. Blessed are You Lord, who gladdens the groom with the bride.

The concept behind Rav Yehuda's insistence on the inclusion of "new faces" seems pretty straightforward: The countenances of fresh participants gladden the bride and groom, as is emphasized in the last three blessings, thereby affording an opportunity to celebrate anew. This in turn necessitates the recitation of the blessings to mark the occasion. It is curious, however, that by the medieval period the presence of *panim hadashot* was *not* required on Shabbat. It seems that Shabbat, and eventually, by the late fourteenth century, *yom tov*,[7] were personified and regarded as stand-ins for "new faces." As *Tosafot* to *BT Ketubot* 7b explains:

A. Rabbi Yitshak says that only those for whose sake we especially increase the celebration are referred to as *panim hadashot.*
B. And we consider Shabbat to be [equivalent to] *panim hadashot,* as we explain in an aggadah: A Psalm. A song for the Sabbath day [Psalm 92:1] — The Holy One blessed be He says, "A new face (i.e., the Sabbath) has arrived here, let us recite a song."[8]
C. There [among humans] they too increase the honor of Shabbat with joy and with a festive meal.

Evidently, the honor accorded to Shabbat and the joy that it brings both in the heavens and below among humans make the presence of "new

[7] See the comments of Menahem ha-Meiri, *Beit ha-Behirah* to *Ketubot* 7b. Cf. Israel M. Ta-Shma, *Ha-Tefilla ha-Ashkenazit ha-Keduma*: *Perakim be-Ofya u-veToledoteha* (Jerusalem, Magnes Press, 2003), 190. Ha-Meiri notes that the custom of not insisting on the participation of *panim hadashot* eventually was extended to the second day of the festivals in the Diaspora (*yom tov sheni shel galuyyot*).

[8] Ha-Meiri, *ad loc.*, has the attending angels alert the Holy One blessed be He of the arrival of the personified Shabbat/*panim hadashot.* In their joy they call for the recitation of the song/psalm.

faces" – here, according to Rabbi Yitshak, those especially worthy of having the celebration extended in their honor – unnecessary on the seventh day. Shabbat is considered equivalent to such a "guest" as its honor equals, indeed exceeds and cancels out, that of any *panim hadashot,* who on all other days make it possible for the celebration to be prolonged.[9]

This reasoning actually suggests that there is much more to the origins of the recitation of *sheva berakhot* following the wedding day than additional opportunities to share the joy of the bride and groom with a larger community of celebrants. After all, if this were the motivation, why would the requirement for *panim hadashot* not apply on Shabbat (and *yom tov*) as well? Notwithstanding the quaint explanation that the Tosafist Rabbi Yitshak of Dampierre ("Ri," d. 1189) borrows from the "aggadah," would Shabbat not be an especially appropriate day to strive to include additional new faces, both to honor the couple and the day?

Moreover, why is it that the *Talmud Yerushalmi*, as opposed to the *Bavli,* does *not* mention the requirement of *panim hadashot* with reference to the recitation of *birkat hatanim* altogether?[10] To be sure, *Tosefta Megilla* 3:14, that is, another Palestinian source, glosses the anonymous assertion that *birkat hatanim* is to be recited on all days of the week including Shabbat with the opinion of the second-century tanna Rabbi Yehuda (bar Ilai) that this is only the case when *panim hadashot* are present. But R. Yehuda's position appears to be, at most, a minority view that fails to gain any traction in *Erets Yisrael.* Indeed, this is the *only* instance in sources of *Erets Yisrael* from the Talmudic era that mentions *panim*

[9] Nahmanides, *Hiddushei Ramban* to *Bavli Ketubot* 8a, disagrees with the reasoning of *Tosafot.* Cf. Ta-Shma, *Ha-Tefilla ha-Ashkenazit ha-Keduma,* 189f., and Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-Fshuta* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1955–1988), 5 (*Seder Mo'ed, Megilla*): 1184. Note too the comments of Rabbi Moshe ben Yitshak Yehuda Lima, *Helkot Mehokek* to *Shulkhan Arukh, Tur Even ha-Ezer* 62:8, who qualifies Rabbi Yitshak's seeming insistence that the *panim hadashot* be limited to exceptionally worthy persons who had not yet had the opportunity to celebrate with the bride and groom.

[10] Or, for that matter, with reference to *birkat avelim,* the benediction for mourners. As will be discussed below, *BT Ketubot* 8b expressly indicates that *birkat avelim* is recited all seven days in the open square when *panim hadashot* are present to comfort the mourners. No such requirement for "new faces" is specified in the *Yerushalmi.* A connection of *panim hadashot* with mourning is made in the *Yerushalmi,* but not where *birkat avelim* is the concern. See following note. Interestingly, the phrase *panim hadashot* has a wider conceptual application in the *Bavli* encompassing inanimate objects whose halakhic status has been transformed because their character (i.e., "face") has somehow changed. This suggests that *panim hadashot* was indeed a more frequently resorted to and developed concept in Babylonia. See *BT Shabbat* 112b (=*BT Eiruvin* 24a) and *BT Baba Kamma* 96b.

hadashot with reference to *birkat hatanim* and, more remarkably, R. Yehuda's opinion takes for granted that there is no distinction between Shabbat and the other days of the week![11] At least from his point of view, *birkat hatanim* required the presence of new faces even on Shabbat.

Israel Ta-Shma traces the "aggadah" excerpted by Rabbi Yitshak of Dampierre to a medieval cosmological "midrash" found in *heikhalot* literature that circulated among the Hasidei Ashkenaz. In the fuller versions, which appear in thirteenth-century Provence, each element of the first week of creation is represented by an angel who ministers before God. The "new face" of Shabbat belongs to the ministering angel of the Sabbath (*sar shel shabbat*), who, like all personified divine representatives of creation, sings before God.[12]

This larger framework for the aggadah alluded to by Rabbi Yitshak explains its spread and popularity and the receptivity in medieval times to the notion that *panim hadashot* are not required on Shabbat. Originally, however, there was no insistence on the inclusion of "new faces" during the weekdays in *Erets Yisrael*. Rather, it was the requirement found in the *Bavli* that ultimately prevailed in medieval Ashkenaz.[13] The question that

[11] See Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-Fshuta* 5 (*Seder Mo'ed*):1184. In *p. Berakhot* 3, 5d (=*p. Mo'ed Katan* 3, 82b), the tanna Rabbi Eliezer insists that if there are *panim hadashot* present after the second day of mourning, the mourners do not wear *tefillin*. In contrast, the tanna Rabbi Yehoshua maintains that their appearance makes no difference, meaning that mourners are not aggrieved anew by the presence of new persons who have come to console them, and so they are not distracted from praying and may don *tefillin*. As Ta-Shma, *Ha-Tefilla ha-Ashkenazit ha-Keduma,* 190f., following Lieberman *Tosefta ki-Fshuta* 5:1183; and 1 (*Seder Zera'im*):49f., suggests, it would appear that the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua and the anonymous view of *T. Megilla* 3:14 that makes no mention of *panim hadashot* in connection with *birkat hatanim* are in sync. That is, they do not grant the presence of *panim hadashot* any influence on the relevant *halakhah*. The view of Rabbi Yehuda that *panim hadashot* are required every day including Shabbat for the recitation of *birkat hatanim* would be more in line with the consideration Rabbi Eliezer gives to *panim hadashot,* albeit in an entirely different halakhic scenario – the wearing of *tefillin* by a mourner. The *Bavli,* as opposed to the *Yerushalmi,* appears to run with the perspective of Rabbi Eliezer (and Rabbi Yehuda) vis-à-vis *panim hadashot* where the *birkat hatanim* is concerned. That is, *panim hadashot* matter.

[12] Ta-Shma, *Ha-Tefilla ha-Ashkenazit ha-Keduma,* 194, notes that the midrash appears in *Bereshit Rabbati,* a midrashic compilation of the early eleventh-century Rabbi Moses ha-Darshan of Provence and is reworked in a thirteenth-century elaboration of a *piyyut* ("La-El asher Shavat") found in *Sefer ha-Mahkim* of Rabbi Nathan ben Rabbi Judah. In the latter work, *sar shel shabbat* sings the second verse of Psalm 92 "It is good to praise the Lord," in response to "A Psalm. A song for the Sabbath day," which is sung by Adam, who was created on the day preceding the first Shabbat.

[13] Cf. the comments of Ta-Shma, *Ha-Tefilla ha-Ashkenazit ha-Keduma,* 191, on the harmonization of customs from *Erets Yisrael* with Babylonian halakhic practices

interests us is why is there a difference between the approaches of the Palestinian and Babylonian sources and how does it inform our understanding of the origins and purpose of the recitation of *birkat hatanim*? As we shall see, the sources from *Erets Yisrael* and *Bavel* emphasize two distinct aspects of the recitation of *birkat hatanim,* both of which provide insight into the development of the full-fledged rite known today as "*sheva berakhot*."

An Alternative to the Usual Explanation

To understand the dynamics, and, as we shall maintain, the probable origins of the recitation of *sheva berakhot,* we need to appreciate that the rite was perceived as a charitable act. There are two forms of "charity" in Judaism: *tsedaka,* which is usually thought of as "almsgiving," and *gemilut hasadim,* which refers to the act of "bestowing lovingkindness."[14] An early rabbinic source, *Tosefta Pe'ah* 4:19, establishes their overall and relative value:

A. *Tsedaka* and *gemilut hasadim* are equal in worth to all the commandments of the Torah.
B. However, *tsedaka* applies to the living; *gemilut hasadim* applies to [acts in behalf of] the living and the dead.
C. *Tsedaka* applies to the poor; *gemilut hasadim* applies to the poor and the wealthy.
D. *Tsedaka* applies to money; *gemilut hasadim* applies to money and to one's body.

"*Tsedaka*" actually refers to "righteousness" in the Tanakh and only in the Talmudic period would come to encompass charitable acts and almsgiving expressly for the poor.[15] *Gemilut hasadim* goes beyond *tsedaka,*

that took place with the eventual proliferation of the study of the *Bavli* in medieval Ashkenaz. Ta-Shma points to the tradition in the post-Talmudic Tractate *Soferim* 19:9 wherein *panim hadashot* are required for the daily recitation of *birkat hatanim.* While this tractate is from *Erets Yisrael*, it is post-Talmudic and at times incorporates Babylonian customs, as Ta-Shma notes.

[14] For a fine overview of the "vocabulary of charity" in pertinent biblical and rabbinic texts, see Yael Wilfand, *Poverty, Charity and the Image of the Poor in Rabbinic Texts from the Land of Israel* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 44–60.

[15] On the expansion of *tsedaka* from its early rabbinic sense of providing "charity for poor men" to funding rabbinic activities and institutions in the post-Talmudic era, see Gregg E. Gardner, *The Origins of Organized Charity in Rabbinic Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2015), 26–32. On the conceptual difference between *gemilut hasadim* and *tsedaka,* see Max Kadushin, *Worship and Ethics*: *A Study in Rabbinic Judaism* (New York: Bloch, 1963), 21 and 27. Also see following note.

as it applies to both rich and poor and involves a communal sense of mutuality. Indeed, acts regarded as *gemilut hasadim* are incumbent upon all and the beneficiary is oftentimes someone who is only casually known, if at all, to the one bestowing *hesed*. In contradistinction to *tsedaka*, *gemilut hasadim* more often involves actions and deeds from which *all* stand to benefit and that have a "paying it forward" quality. It is for good reason that Tzvi Novick suggests we translate *gemilut hasadim* as the "reciprocation of lovingkindness."[16]

Perhaps not surprisingly, the parallel to *Tosefta Pe'ah* 4:19 in the *Yerushalmi* (*p. Pe'ah* 1, 15c) insists that *gemilut hasadim* is dearer to God than *tsedaka*.[17] Indeed, *gemilut hasadim* is portrayed in rabbinic sources as an activity that affords people the opportunity to imitate God (*imitatio dei*) in whose image they have been created. Yair Lorberbaum has incisively argued that the concept of creation in the image of God was introduced into the halakhic system by the Tannaim, who regarded humans as this-worldly extensions of the deity. As such, their suffering (and, I would add, their joy) would be not only shared, but felt by God.[18] It is no wonder that aggadic passages frequently portray God engaging in acts of *gemilut hasadim,* particularly with regard to tending to the first couple, Adam and Eve, and to the burial of Moses, two acts that notably frame the Torah.[19] These are obvious attempts by the rabbis to encourage humans to emulate God and live accordingly by caring for each other. Remarkably, examples of God engaging in different forms of *gemilut*

[16] Tzvi Novick, "Charity and Reciprocity: Structures of Benevolence in Rabbinic Literature," *Harvard Theological Review* 105:1 (2012), 34, who points out (p. 42f.) that the root g/m/l bears the connotations of reciprocity and even "interchange." This sense, he notes, can already be found in Ovadiah 1:15.

[17] Cf. *BT Sukkah* 49b and see Wilfand, *Poverty, Charity and the Image of the Poor*, 52f.

[18] See the statement attributed to Rabbi Meir in *M. Sanhedrin* 6:4 and cf. Yair Lorberbaum, "Imago Dei in Judaism: Early Rabbinic Literature, Philosophy, and Kabbalah," in *The Concept of God, the Origin of the World, and the Image of the Human in the World Religions,* ed. Peter Koslowski, (New York: Springer, 2001), 59–69 (esp. p. 63f.). Cf. idem, *In God's Image: Myth, Theology, and Law in Classical Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2015), 3–8. For an interesting attempt to correlate the rabbinic notion of *gemilut hasadim* as *imitatio dei* to perceptions of righteous acts in early Christianity, see Donizeti Ribeiro, "Acts of Lovingkindness as Imitatio Dei: Jewish Sources and the Ethical-eschatological Response of Mt 25," *Sens: Juifs et Chrétiens dans le monde aujourd'hui* 354 (2010), 788-805. Cf. Wilfand, *Poverty, Charity and the Image of the Poor,* 23f.

[19] This observation is attributed to the Palestinian amora Rabbi Simlai in *BT Sotah* 14a. For a more expansive presentation of Rabbi Simlai's view in a source from *Erets Yisrael*, see discussion below. See too the similar view attributed to Rabbi Berakhia in *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 7:7.

hasadim are common, and only in post-Tannaitic texts is his dispensing of charity occasionally merged with the concept.[20] *Genesis Rabbah* 58:9 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 2:629f.) preserves the biblical sense of *tsedaka* and emphasizes the distinctiveness of *gemilut hasadim*:

A. And then Abraham buried [his wife Sarah]. Thus it is written (Proverbs 21:21): "One who pursues righteousness (*tsedaka*) and kindness (*hesed*) attains life, righteousness, and honor."
B. The "one who pursues righteousness" is Abraham, as it says (Genesis 18:19), "[For I have singled him (i.e., Abraham) out]…to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is righteous."
C. And "kindness" – for he [Abraham] bestowed (loving)kindness upon Sarah.
D. "Attains life" – as it says (Genesis 25:7), "This was the total span of Abraham's life: one hundred [and seventy-five years]."
E. "Righteousness and honor" — Rabbi Shmuel bar Yitshak commented, "The Holy One Blessed be He said [to Abraham], 'My profession is one who bestows lovingkindness (*gomel hasadim*). You have taken up my profession. Come and wear my garment.' As it says (Genesis 24:1), 'Abraham was now old, [advanced in years and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things']."

Abraham's tending to the burial of his deceased wife Sarah is regarded here by Rabbi Shmuel bar Yitshak (at E) as an act of lovingkindness that is rewarded by God precisely because it is imitative of God's "profession." Being cared for once one is deceased is certainly a need that all humans share. So too is being consoled after a loss, which essentially is what God, according to Rabbi Shmuel bar Yitshak, is doing here for Abraham. It is for this reason that *birkat avelim*, the "blessing for mourners," which might seem like the polar opposite of *birkat hatanim*, actually has much in common with it.[21] Indeed, earlier in *Genesis Rabbah* (8:12–13), the late-third/early-fourth-century Palestinian amora Rabbi Abbahu asserts that when Genesis 1:28 states that "God blessed them" it means God took the "cup of blessing" (*kos shel berakhah*) and blessed Adam and Eve upon their creation. A gloss attributed to Rabbi Simlai, a younger contemporary of Rabbi Abbahu, explains further that "the Holy One Blessed

[20] See Novick, "Charity and Reciprocity: Structures of Benevolence in Rabbinic Literature," 47f., and below, n. 23.

[21] Cf. Maimonides, *Hilkhot Evel* 14:1, who includes needs pertaining to the dead and those of the bride and groom as *gemilut hasadim* precisely because they fall within the category of "Love your fellow as yourself" in Lev. 19:18. See above discussion of the mutuality of *gemilut hasadim*.

be He blesses grooms, adorns brides, visits the infirm, buries the dead, and recites the birkat avelim,"[22] obviously activities that the rabbis viewed as essential to social cohesion and the overall welfare of society.[23] Similarities between the *halakhot* of mourning and of marital celebrations have been frequently noted,[24] but the comparison specifically of their *berakhot*, as Max Kadushin long ago explained, offers insight into the shared conceptual underpinning and development of these rites as expressions of *gemilut hasadim*.[25] While the *birkat avelim* is not practiced any longer,[26] its origins and function parallel that of *birkat hatanim,* and, as will become apparent, enable us to understand the deeper meaning and probable origins of the *sheva berakhot*.

Both the *birkat hatanim* and the *birkat avelim* were once performed in public. It appears that the *birkat avelim* was first recited, according to the *Yerushalmi,* in the synagogue (*JT Pesahim* 8, 36b), or according to the *Bavli,* in an open square (*rehavah, BT Ketubot* 8b) for up to seven days if *panim hadashot* are present.[27] It was also repeated in the house of

[22] Cf. the comment attributed to Rabbi Hama bar Hanina in *BT Sotah* 14a.

[23] Novick, "Charity and Reciprocity: Structures of Benevolence in Rabbinic Literature," 48, draws attention to *Targum Pseudo Jonathan* to Deuteronomy 34:6, which frames the care shown by God towards Adam and Eve as charity rather than as *gemilut hasadim*. Novick devotes much discussion to the post-Tannaitic blurring of the concepts of charity and *gemilut hasadim,* a subject taken up earlier by Max Kadushin, *Organic Thinking*: *A Study in Rabbinic Thought* (New York: Bloch, 1938), 131–140.

[24] For example, *M. Megilla* 4:3 includes both *birkat hatanim* and *birkat avelim* among ceremonies that require a quorum of ten men. See further *p. Megilla* 4, 75a (= *p. Ketubot* 1, 25a) which compares the seven-day celebration of a marriage and the seven days of mourning. Cf. *BT Ketubot* 8b and above, n. 10.

[25] Max Kadushin, *Worship and Ethics*, 151-159. The discussion of mourning rites and marital celebrations in the same context should not surprise. As Gary Anderson, "Celibacy or Consummation in the Garden? Reflections on Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Garden of Eden," *HTR* 82:2 (1989), 133, astutely points out: "…the pleasures that are most characteristic of the experience of joy are those which stand in typological contrast to those of mourning. Thus, just as mourning consists of fasting, rending the garments, putting dust on the head, and sexual continence, so the experience of joy included eating and drinking, putting on festal attire, anointing oneself with oil and bathing, and sexual union." Here we shall further develop the conceptual basis for the relationship between mourning and marital rites as derived from their perception as "acts of lovingkindness."

[26] Nevertheless, its influence is still felt. The *birkat ha-mazon* recited in a house of mourning today includes phrases intended to acknowledge and console the mourners much as the *birkat avelim* once did. See *Shulkhan Arukh, Tur Yoreh De'ah* 379 and cf. Rabbi Gavriel Zinner, *Nitei Gavriel*, *Avelut,* 1:527.

[27] The *Yerushalmi* passage also speaks of consolations (*tanhumei avelim*) that were recited by those "in line" (*be-shurah*), an apparent reference to people attending a funeral who escorted the mourners out of the graveyard. Similar consolations apparently were worked into the original *birkat avelim*. See discussion below, especially n. 33.

mourning (*bet ha-evel*).[28] The *birkat hatanim* was first recited at the *huppah* when the couple was wed[29] and continued throughout the week at the residence of the *hatan,* where the couple now established their home—in both instances, even if there was no celebratory feast (*se'udah*).[30] Interestingly, the recitation of the *birkat hatanim* in the home of the groom subsequent to the wedding when it became the abode of bride and groom is clearly *not* what is done today, another indication of the extent to which the recitation of *sheva berakhot* has changed over the centuries. In any event, it should be apparent that the reciprocal and communal nature of *birkat avelim* and *birkat hatanim* is essential to their characterization as acts of lovingkindness.

An analysis and comparison of the *birkat avelim* and *birkat hatanim* brings this motif to the fore. It is likely that in *Erets Yisrael*, as in *Bavel,* both series of *berakhot* evolved. Indeed, in *Erets Yisrael* it appears that the original form of both the *birkat hatanim* and the *birkat avelim* grew to include three separate benedictions with distinct themes. This may only be conjectural in the case of *birkat hatanim,* whose contents are only spelled out in the *Bavli* by Rav Yehuda, but with regard to *birkat avelim* it is explicitly indicated in *Tosefta Berakhot* 3:23–24:

[28] On the duration of the recitation of the *birkat avelim,* see above, nn. 10 and 24. According to Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-Fshuta, Berakhot*, 49f., esp. n. 58, because the first couple of days of mourning were regarded as the most intense in *Erets Yisrael*, *birkat avelim* was recited in the *bet evel* even without meals and the recitation of the grace after meals, and, of course, would not have required *panim hadashot* (see above, notes 10 and 11), just as on the remaining days. This Palestinian perspective would be reflected in the actions of Resh Lakish and his *meturgeman* in *BT Ketubot* 8b, who console the mourning Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba on the second day of his bereavement (see below). On the various venues and scenarios for reciting the *birkat avelim,* see Nissan Rubin, *Time and Life Cycle in Talmud and Midrash: Socio-anthropological Perspectives* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2008), 177–182, who regards the "open square" as a "plaza" near the cemetery. This is by no means certain, since *rehavah/rehovah* is used for town squares in general in which various public rituals took place. See Stuart S. Miller, *Studies in the History and Traditions of Sepphoris* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), 104f., where I discuss the fast day ritual in *M. Ta'anit* 2.

[29] See the interesting discussion in *BT Ketubot* 7a on the custom in Judah to recite the *birkat hatanim* at the betrothal (*erusin/kiddushin*), which in this era preceded the actual wedding (*nissu'in*) by a period of time. Cf. *T. Megilla* 3:14 and the comments of Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-Fshuta* 5:1182f., See too Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity,* 68–92, who discusses the various connotations of "betrothal" during this period.

[30] The follow-up recitations of the relevant *berakhot* in a *bet evel* or *bet hatanim* were not necessarily associated with a meal. In this sense, they were truly picking up in the more private sphere where the public recitations left off, paralleling the *birkat hatanim* at the *huppah* and the *birkat avelim* in the local square, which surely did not involve a *se'udah.* See Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-Fshuta, Berakhot,* 49f. and cf. Kadushin, *Worship and Ethics,* 152f.

A. Where it is the practice to recite *birkat avelim* as three [benedictions], three are recited. [Where it is the practice to recite] two, two are recited. [Where it is the practice to recite] one, one is recited.
B. Where it is the practice to recite *birkat avelim* as three [distinct benedictions],[31] the first includes[32] the resurrection of the dead and closes with "the One who resuscitates the dead [*mehayye metim*]."
C. The second opens with consolations for the mourners [*tankhumei avelim*] and closes with "the One who comforts His people in His city."[33]
D. The third opens with [the theme of] the bestowal of lovingkindness and is not closed with [a closing benediction].[34]

Saul Lieberman long ago suggested that the *birkat hatanim* of *Erets Yisrael* was similar in structure and developed along comparable lines to the *birkat avelim*. He took his cue from the anonymous post-Talmudic "List of Differences between Babylonian and Palestinian Customs," which explicitly indicates that the tradition among the Babylonians (*anshei mizrah/benei bavel*) was to bless the groom with seven benedictions, whereas that of those living in Israel (*benei Erets Yisrael*) was to recite three *berakhot*.[35] Apparently, by the onset of the Amoraic period, the

[31] As opposed to one *berakhah* containing the three themes to be discussed herein. See Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-Fshuta, Berakhot*, 50.

[32] Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-Fshuta*, *Zera'im* 1:51, suggests that *kollel* ("includes") refers here to the inclusion of the first benediction in the introduction to the *birkat ha-mazon*, the invitation (*zimmun*) to all to recite the grace after meals. Accordingly, the Tosefta is depicting the three *berakhot* of the *birkat avelim* as it was eventually incorporated into the grace. See following notes 33 and 34.

[33] Lieberman, *ad loc.*, explains that these words of consolation were part of the third *berakhah* inserted into the the grace after meals for mourners, which begins with "Lord our God, comfort (*nahem*) the mourners of Jerusalem…" Cf. above, n. 27.

[34] Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-Fshuta, Zera'im* 1:53, maintains that the last *berakhah* did not have a closing benediction when it was recited in the *bet avelim* in the fourth *berakhah* of the *birkat ha-mazon, ha-tov ve-haMeitiv*, since the latter does not have a closing *barukh* formula. Otherwise, it is likely that the third *berakhah* of the *birkat avelim* did have a closing benediction, although its formulation is not certain. For a possible, hypothetical reconstruction, see ensuing discussion and n. 62.

[35] Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-Fshuta, Zera'im* 1: 50. Cf. Mordechai Margaliot, ed., *Ha-Hillukim she-bein Anshei Mizrah ve-Anshei Erets Yisrael* (Jerusalem, 1937), 143; Benjamin M. Lewin, *Otsar Hilluf Minhagim bein Benei Erets Yisrael u-vein Benei Bavel* (Jerusalem, 1942), 58; and Joel ha-Cohen Müeller, *Hilluf Minhagim bein Benei Bavel li-vnei Erets Yisrael* (Vienna, 1878), 27f. Lewin suggests the possibility of a scribal error which had a *gimmel*, i.e., three, instead of a *vav*, i.e., six. See Azriel Hildesheimer, "The History of the Betrothal and Marital Benedictions" [in Hebrew], *Sinai* 10 (1942), 111-119, who sees this as correct. Müeller, however, attempts to prove that the original *birkat hatanim* consisted of three *berakhot*, which seems likely in view of the additional arguments made here. See below, n. 63.

birkat hatanim consisted of three essential benedictions, which were regarded by some, even in *Erets Yisrael*, but especially in Babylonia, as open to further expansion. This is evident from the discussion in the *Bavli* (*Ketubot* 7b–8a), which testifies not only to the fluidity of the *birkat hatanim,* but also to the fact that the six blessings ascribed to Rav Yehuda originated with input from *Erets Yisrael.*[36] After Rav Yehuda presents his formulation of the six benedictions in *BT Ketubot* 7b–8a, the gemara indicates that the third-century Palestinian Levi recited five benedictions at the wedding of Rabbi Shimon son of Rabbi Yehuda ha-Nasi, both of whom were residents of *Erets Yisrael.* The context suggests that subsequent generations of Babylonian amoraim questioned the seeming redundancy of Rav Yehuda's second and third benedictions, both of which acknowledged God as creator of humankind (see below). In any event, still later in the *sugya,* we learn that another Palestinian amora, the third-generation Rabbi Tahlifa "bar Ma'arava" ("of the West"), recited an elongated version, apparently of the six benedictions, when he was visiting Babylonia. By the Geonic period, these six blessings were recited together with the blessing over wine and the whole began to be referred to as the "Seven Benedictions" (*sheva berakhot*),[37] but even then, variant formulations of individual *berakhot* existed.[38]

[36] Adiel Schremer, *Male and Female He Created Them: Jewish Marriage in the Late Second Temple, Mishnah and Talmud Periods,* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 2003) sees the Babylonian formulation of *birkat hatanim* attributed to Rav Yehuda as entirely distinct from that of Palestine. He thinks that the Babylonians had a very different perception of marriage which would have resulted in distinct versions. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, 65f., too regards the Babylonian and Palestinian vantage points as distinct. See below, n. 54. However, even if Rav Yehuda and the Babylonian Amoraim took the emphasis of the earlier sages in *Erets Yisrael* in a different direction, they were still starting from the same Tannaitic framework with respect to both the *birkat hatanim* and *birkat avelim.* As we shall see forthwith, they certainly compared notes, so to speak, with their Palestinian counterparts, some of whom had already added to the three blessings of the *birkat hatanim,* even if the more widespread tradition in *Erets Yisrael* into the Geonic period, at least according to the "List of Differences between Babylonian and Palestinian Customs," was to recite only the original three.

[37] See Margaliot, *Ha-Hillukim she-bein Anshei Mizrah ve-Anshei Erets Yisrael*, 144, who documents the use of the expression "*sheva berakhot*" in the Geonic period. Cf. the post-Talmudic tractate *Kallah Rabbati* 1:1, which uses the phrase *sheva berakhot* and lists them. Hildesheimer, "The History of the Betrothal and Marital Benedictions," 112f., discusses the possibility that "in whose dwelling is joy" (*she-haSimhah bi-meono*), which was eventually incorporated into the introduction to grace after meals at a wedding feast, was the seventh blessing. Cf. *BT Ketubot* 8a.

[38] Cf. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity,* 65, who cites Joseph Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud*: *Forms and Patterns*, trans. Richard S. Sarason (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), 47, in order to make the case that it was the Babylonian sages who

It stands to reason that the Tannaitic *birkat avelim* also underwent a period of development and even a bit of expansion in Amoraic Babylonia, if not as extensive as the *birkat hatanim*. And once again, the practices of Palestinian amoraim are cited in the *Bavli. BT Ketubot* 8b has the third-century Palestinian amora Resh Lakish visit Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba, an erstwhile Babylonian, on the occasion of the death of the latter's son, at which time he asks the *meturgeman* Yehuda bar Nahmani, his Tiberian colleague, to formulate some words of consolation. Resh Lakish presses him to come up with impromptu words of consolation[39] that in the end address precisely the same three themes presented in a Tannaitic source, *T. Berakhot* 3:23–24, which was cited above. Yehuda bar Nahmani includes closing *berakhot* for all three themes, unlike the Tosefta which specifically states that there was no closing *berakhah* for the third benediction.[40] The *meturgeman* also adds an additional fourth benediction that calls upon God to ward off afflictions from Israel.

The fact that the *Bavli* attributes versions of the *birkat hatanim* and the *birkat avelim* to specific Palestinian amoraim and that Yehuda bar Nahmani's formulation of the latter is so obviously improvised very much substantiates that these *berakhot* went through periods of development.[41] Perhaps this was the result of the informal contexts in which these *berakhot* were recited subsequent to their initial recitation at the wedding or

standardized the *birkat hatanim*. Actually, Heinemann calls attention to *Leviticus Rabbah* 23 where we hear of a *minyan* that gathers in which not a single member is able to properly lead the recitation of the *Shema,* the service of the synagogue, the *birkat hatanim*, or the *birkat avelim*. Heinemann asserts that there was a lack of a single standard and fixed formula which meant that there was a constant need "to create the prayers anew each time they were recited." Elsewhere in *Prayer in the Talmud*, 74, 76 (English) and 290f. (original Hebrew excerpts) Heinemann produces variants of some of the benedictions of the *birkat hatanim* that continued in existence even in the Geonic period.

[39] Only after the *meturgeman* comes up with a rather morbid explanation of death, does Resh Lakish encourage him to recite words praising the Holy One, consoling the mourners, praising the consolers, and supplicating God for all of Israel, all of which are formulated as *berakhot*. See ensuing discussion. The obvious glosses to the passage, particularly to the opening remarks of the *meturgeman*, testify further to the rather fluid nature of such traditions and *berakhot* well into Late Antiquity.

[40] This may be because the Tosefta's formulation of *birkat hatanim* was intended for inclusion in the *birkat ha-mazon* (see above, n. 34), whereas here there is no indication that Yehuda bar Nahmani was partaking of a meal. Indeed, each of his blessings are spontaneously produced in response to Resh Lakish's requests.

[41] The relevant medieval sources from Ashkenaz regarding the *birkat hatanim* discussed by Ta-Shma, *Ha-Tefilla ha-Ashkenazit ha-Keduma,* 188–196, certainly convey the impression that the received Talmudic traditions continued to be open to interpretation even in the medieval period.

funeral. The *bet evel* and *bet hatanim* certainly lent themselves to a more intimate and personal dynamic. The fact that even in less formal venues people, including rabbis, may have occasionally turned to a skilled figure to help them find the right words, as we have just seen in the case of Resh Lakish and his *meturgeman,* Yehuda bar Nahmani,[42] only reinforces the impression that the wording of the *berakhot* was originally malleable. The rabbinic formulations that eventually emerged were very likely attempts to formalize more popular, orally transmitted words of gladdening or consolation. As Lawrence A. Hoffman reminds us with regard to a different but relevant context, it is important to keep in mind that real "worshipping communities" existed behind, or as he puts it "beyond," the texts that we have inherited from the past.[43]

With these considerations and Hoffman's important caveat in mind, it obviously would be difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct with any degree of certainty the wording and components of the *birkat hatanim* as conceived and formulated by the rabbis of *Erets Yisrael*.[44] What is important for our purposes is to demonstrate that the earliest rabbinic formalization of the *birkat hatanim* arguably included themes that corresponded

[42] For the involvement of a *hazzan*, see *Soferim* 19:9 and below, n. 72.

[43] Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1987), 8–13. Hoffman demonstrates the point through the textual analysis of the fast day ritual described in *M. Ta'anit*, which, similar to our discussion, poses questions regarding the number of original benedictions and their formulation. I have repeatedly emphasized that the textual bias in scholarship pertaining to the Talmudic era has led to a faulty understanding of the "facts on the ground" as it has viewed the rabbis as determining rather than attempting to regulate popular, pre-existing practices that were part of a "complex common Judaism" out of which they themselves emerged. See most recently Stuart S. Miller, *At the Intersection of Texts and Material Finds: Stepped Pools, Stone Vessels and Ritual Purity Among the Jews of Roman Galilee* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015). Also see the following note.

[44] *Leviticus Rabbah* 23 (cited above, n. 38) has the third-century amora Rabbi Hanan of Sepphoris regard anyone who leads the recitation of the *Shema*, the service of the synagogue, the *birkat hatanim,* or the *birkat avelim* when there is no one else capable of doing so as one who is engaged in an act of lovingkindness. The midrash is an exegesis of Song of Songs 2:2: "Like a lily among thorns" and also appears in *Song of Songs Rabbah* 2. The one who is able to lead any of these recitations is obviously performing something on behalf of others who likewise should be able and want to do the same. In order to encourage this act of *hesed,* the passage tells the story of the tanna Rabbi Elazar who was embarrassed when he was unable to recite the Shema publicly and, after learning to do so, gained the title *Hisma* ("the strong") for having overcome his inhibition. I think this passage points to the rabbis' determination to regularize and standardize the synagogue liturgy rather than to a general ignorance on the part of the worshipers.

to those of the *birkat avelim* and that the recitation of both series of *berakhot* were originally imbued with the concept of *gemilut hasadim*.

Taking into consideration Lieberman's analysis, Kadushin's conceptual framework, and the formulations already discussed in *T. Berakhot* 3:23–24 and in *BT Ketubot* 7b–8b, it would appear that the *birkat hatanim* and the *birkat avelim* originally had the following elements in common:[45]

1) A general opening theme emphasizing the shared humanity of each member of the *tsibbur* ("community") who is about to experience the joy of the bride and groom or the grief of the mourners, as the case may be. Here the common thread is creation by God, who, at least in the *birkat hatanim* of Rav Yehuda, is "the One who fashions man (*yotser ha-adam*)."[46] In the case of *birkat hatanim,* the gladdeners commence by thanking God for all of creation, which of course includes humankind, beginning with Adam and Eve; in the case of *birkat avelim* the consolers acknowledge God as the one who resurrects humankind (lit., "the dead," *metim*).

Remarkably, the apocryphal work known as Tobit, which is thought to have been written ca. 200 B.C.E. and certainly circulated in *Erets Yisrael* both in Hebrew and Aramaic, has Tobias, the son of Tobit, recite a prayer (8:5–8) before consummating his marriage to his bride Sarah,[47] which

[45] My argument here is based on Lieberman's and Kadushin's analysis but deviates especially from the latter's dependence upon the structure of the *birkat hatanim* as presented by Rav Yehuda, which became the backbone for our present-day *sheva berakhot*. I wish to emphasize that my reconstruction is in no way an attempt to arrive at an urtext of either the *birkat hatanim* or the *birkat avelim,* something that I believe is pointless in view of the probable dependence on oral tradition and especially popular ritual that was the backdrop to the rabbinic attempts at formalization. It is also irrelevant to the overall point I am making here about the meaning and purpose of these rites.

[46] See Meir Bar Ilan, "Birkat Yotser Ha-Adam – The Places of its Appearance, Its Purpose, and Meaning" [in Hebrew], *HUCA* 56 (1985), 9–28, who regards the blessing "one who fashions man" as having a polemical intent aimed at those who contended that God was not responsible for the creation of humankind, which, he claims, explains its recitation in the diverse settings he discusses, including in cemeteries and in some versions of the grace after meals said in a house of mourning. According to Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshuta Berakhot,* 51, n. 67, it is likely that the opening *berakhah* of the *birkat avelim* included a phrase similar to "Who created man in his image…" (*asher yatsar et ha-adam be-tsalmo*) of the fuller *birkat hatanim*. For the probable origin of this phrase in *Erets Yisrael,* see Louis Ginzberg, *Perushim ve-Hiddushim ba-Yerushalmi* (New York: Ktav, 1941–1961), 3:228f.

[47] One Hebrew and four Aramaic fragments of Tobit have been discovered at Qumran. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Aramaic and Hebrew fragments of Tobit from Qumran Cave 4," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 57:4 (1995), 655–675. On Tobias'

begins with a blessing over the creation of Adam and Eve, from whom "the human race has sprung."[48] Fragments of what according to some is a rudimentary "Blessing of the Bridegrooms/Marriage" have been found at Qumran (4Q502). This papyrus scroll appears to begin with a similar celebration of "man and his wife" (*ha-adam ve-ishto*) who have been brought into existence "to generate offspring" (*la'asot zera*).[49] These themes eventually surfaced in the Babylonian Rav Yehuda's formulation of the *birkat hatanim*. Rav Yehuda follows up his second blessing, in which God has already been recognized as the creator of man (*yotser ha-adam*), with a third in which God, "who fashioned man in His image," further fashioned humankind in "the image of the likeness of His form" (*be-tselem demut tavnito*)[50] and, in the process, "prepared for Himself out of him (i.e., out of His image = out of Adam, *and* via his mate who came from his rib) an everlasting abode," i.e., humanity (*ve-hitkin lo mi-menu binyan adei ad*).[51]

prayer, see Miller, *Marriage in the Book of Tobit*, 124f. For the possible indebtedness of the Christian nuptial blessing that emerged ca. the fourth century C.E. to both Tobit and the themes of the developing *birkat hatanim*, see Kenneth Stevenson, "The Origin of Nuptial Blessing," *The Heythrop Journal* 21:1 (1980), 412–416.

[48] I follow the rendering of NRSV here.

[49] The understanding of the fragments as connected with the "Ritual of Marriage" was first suggested by Maurice Baillet and was subsequently challenged by several scholars, including Joseph Baumgarten and Michael Satlow. For refutations of these counterclaims, see Moshe Weinfeld, *Normative and Sectarian Judaism in the Second Temple Period* (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 62 and 67; and Aharon Shemesh, "Marriage and Marital Life in the Dead Sea Scrolls," Adolfo D. Roitman, Lawrence H. Schiffman, Shani Tzoref, eds, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Contemporary Culture: Proceedings of the International Conference held at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem (July 6-8, 2008)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2011), 592–594.

[50] Lorberbaum, *In God's Image,* 237, notes that the use of *tavnit* is distinct from *tselem* ("image") and *demut* ("likeness"), both of which are used in Genesis with reference to the creation of humankind (1:26–27, 5:1–3, and 9:6). He notes that both biblical sources and the Dead Sea Scrolls employ *demut* as a reference to the physicality of humankind, which is generally treated negatively, as opposed to its use in the *birkat ha-hatanim* where "Gods image and likeness is encapsulated in humankind's concrete existence" and is, therefore, glorified. Interestingly, II Kings 16:10 reports that King Ahaz replaced the altar of Solomon at the Temple with one modelled after the "likeness" (*demut*) and "form" (*tavnit*) of one he had seen in Damascus. Clearly physicality is intended here.

[51] See Yair Lorberbaum, "The Image of God and the Commandment to be Fruitful and Multiply: The Sages and Rambam" [in Hebrew], *Iyyunei Mishpat* 24:3 (2001), 721f., n. 100, who points out that Rav Yehuda's fifth blessing expressly connects the groom and bride with Adam and Eve *in Gan Eden*, an allusion derived from their creation in God's image in Genesis 1:26–27 ("male and female he created them"), which is the thrust of his first three blessings. The phrasing "and prepared for him out of him" (*ve-hitkin lo mi-menu*) in Rav Yehuda's third blessing is frequently taken to mean that God prepared woman "for man out of himself," that is, it is understood

Palestinian rabbinic tradition too would regard the union of man and woman in Genesis 2:22–24 as the paradigm for all weddings and procreation to follow, as we especially see in midrashic contexts.[52] Evidently, the implications of God's provision of a helpmate for Adam for the survival of humankind was fully appreciated in the late second Temple period and served as the background to the Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic tradition.[53] But the rabbis would develop this theme and take it in another direction. Neither the book of Tobit nor 4Q502 connects marriage and procreation with the image of God, an association that first appears among the tannaim and is reflected in Rav Judah's formulation of the first three *berakhot,* which flow one to the next, culminating in the emphasis on *imitatio dei*.[54] It was the rabbis who so conceptualized marriage and procreation. In creating humankind in His image, God not only provided

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as a straightforward allusion to God's creation of Eve from Adam's rib in Genesis 2:22. The rendering adopted here, which follows Lorberbaum, emphasizes that the consequence of fashioning man in His image and creating woman "out of him" (*mi-menu*) was the capability to procreate and therefore perpetuate humankind, that is, God's image, which, as alluded to in Rav Yehudah's first blessing, was especially "*for God's* (not man's) glory." This explanation ties together not only each element of the third blessing – providing an organic relationship between creation of humankind in God's image, creation of woman, and the resulting "everlasting abode" – but also similarly binds the first three of Rav Yehuda's blessings, thereby highlighting marriage's procreative purpose. See Lorberbaum, *In God's Image*, 235–240, and the translation and commentary of Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren Siddur* (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2009), 1040f. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity,* 293, n. 123, takes issue with Lorberbaum's understanding, as he sees "abode" (*binyan*), not as an allusion to the outcome of the union of Adam and Eve, but as an intentional, midrashic play on *va-yiven* in Genesis 2:22, with reference specifically to Eve's creation, which it undoubtedly is. The two understandings, are not, however, mutually exclusive. In fact, the linguistic ambiguity of the blessing, especially the use of *mi-menu,* which could be rendered either as "out of him (man)" or "out of Himself (God)," may have been intentional. See Lorberbaum, *In God's Image,* 238, esp. n. 51.

[52] Aside from *Genesis Rabbah* 8:12–13 cited above, see *Genesis Rabbah* 18:1, both of which are discussed by Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity,* 62–64.

[53] Cf. David Flusser and Samuel Safrai, "In the Image of the Likeness of His Form," [in Hebrew], *Sefer Yitshak Aryeh Zeligman*, ed. Alexander Rofe and Yair Zakovitch (Jerusalem: E. Rubenstein, 1983), 453–461 who regard Rav Yehuda's third *berakhah, asher yatsar ha-adam be-tsalmo,* as originating in the Second Temple period.

[54] See Lorberbaum, *In God's Image*, 239f. Cf. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity,* 61–67, who argues that the Palestinian rabbis "shaped" what was essentially a Stoic notion of a primal marriage sanctioned by the gods and provided it with a "Jewish idiom." Accordingly, these sages regarded the union of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 as the "archetype" for all future marriages, which were essential for a properly functioning human society. The Babylonians, Satlow maintains, saw marriage in simpler terms as a mechanism for channeling sexuality and ensuring reproduction.

it with a mechanism to perpetuate itself, but also ensured that His own image would be forever preserved.[55]

2) This emphasis was followed by a specific benediction that begins as a prayer and directly aims to comfort the mourners or gladden the bride and groom. God here is invoked and recognized in the closing *berakhah,* as we saw regarding *birkat avelim* in *T. Berakhot* 3:24, as the "One who comforts His people in His city" (*menahem ammo be-iro*),[56] or as Lieberman suggests with regard to *birkat hatanim*, as the "One who gladdens his people in His city" (*mesammeah ammo be-iro*).[57] In the *birkat hatanim* assigned to Rav Yehuda that was apparently recited in Babylonia (*BT Ketubot* 7b-8a) and in the *sheva berakhot* of today, the corresponding benediction opens with a supplication, "May the barren one (i.e., Jerusalem) be exceedingly joyful (*sos tasis*) and rejoice when her children are assembled within her midst in joy," and closes with "Blessed are You, Lord, the One who gladdens Zion by means of her children" (*Barukh Ata Hashem mesammeah tsiyyon be-vanehah*).
3) Finally, attention seems to have turned towards the consolers and gladdeners themselves, who are deserving of a blessing for their bestowal of lovingkindness. This is suggested, as we have seen, in *Tosefta Berakhot* 3:23–24 with regard to the last blessing of the *birkat avelim*, which appears to acknowledge the *gemilut hasadim* of the consolers who have just appealed to God in behalf of the mourners in the previous benediction. In the version ascribed to the Palestinian *meturgeman* Yehuda bar Nahmani in the *Bavli*, the consolers are addressed as "Our brothers, bestowers of lovingkindness [and] children of those who bestow lovingkindness."[58] Yehuda goes

[55] Here again I follow the incisive interpretation of Lorberbaum, "Imago Dei in Judaism: Early Rabbinic Literature, Philosophy, and Kabbalah," 66f. and *In God's Image*, 237–239. See too Lorberbaum's "The Image of God and the Commandment to be Fruitful and Multiply: The Sages and Rambam," where he points out (p. 721) that the last three of Rav Yehuda's benedictions, although certainly connected to the first three (see above, n. 51), still retain a distinct emphasis, focusing, as they do, on joy (*simhah*). I wish to reiterate that my emphasis here is on emerging themes rather than the development of each benediction, which is a trickier matter to sort out in light of the existing textual evidence.

[56] Cf. Yehuda bar Nahmani in *BT Ketubot* 8b: *barukh menahem avelim*.

[57] For these formulations, see *p. Ketubot* 1, 25a and Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-Fshuta, Berakhot,* 51f. Lieberman extrapolates his reconstruction of the parallel in the *birkat hatanim* to *menahem ammo be-iro* of the *birkat avelim* from the reading in the *siddur* of Rav Saadiah Gaon, which has "the One who gladdens His people *in Jerusalem*" (*mesammeah ammo bi-yrushalayim*).

[58] "*Aheinu gomelei hasadim benei gomelei hasadim.*"

on to characterize the consolers as those who keep the covenant of Abraham and then calls upon the "Master of Recompense" (*ba'al ha-gemul*) to reward them. When this third *berakhah* was recited independent of the *birkat ha-mazon,* it likely ended with a closing benediction[59] along the lines of that attributed to Yehuda bar Nahmani in *BT Ketubot* 8b: "Blessed are You who recompenses a good deed" (*Barukh Ata meshallem ha-gemul*).[60]

The corresponding benediction of the *birkat hatanim* in the Palestinian version may well have paralleled the sentiments and form of the third benediction of the *birkat avelim* by having its reciter turn to God to reward the gladdeners. However, the fifth benediction in the formulation of the Babylonian Rav Yehuda is "Grant abundant joy…" (*sammah tesamah…*), which continues the appeal to God introduced in Rav Yehuda's previous *berakhah*, "May the barren one be exceedingly joyful" (*sos tasis…*). But this time the joy of God's creations in the Garden of Eden is invoked, with the hope that the "beloved companions," i.e., the newlyweds, will experience similar rejoicing. At least in the Babylonian Rav Yehuda's formulation, this *berakhah* closes with "Blessed are You Lord who gladdens the groom and bride" (*Barukh Ata Hashem mesammeah hatan ve-khallah*).[61] If this or a similar formula comprised, say, the third *berakah* in the original Palestinian *birkat hatanim,* it would have constituted another example of the role of the gladdeners in partnering with God and enhancing the joy of the couple, thereby further fulfilling *gemilut hasadim,* and, in the process, imitating God, whose role as the ultimate gladdener they acknowledge. Accordingly, this closing benediction would not have praised the gladdeners and, therefore, would not have paralleled the emphasis in the *birkat avelim* on the consolers' fulfillment of an act of lovingkindness.

[59] As already indicated, both the *birkat avelim* and the *birkat hatanim* were originally recited independent of the *birkat ha-mazon*. When they were part of the grace after meals, this particular *berakhah* did not close with a benediction. See below, n. 62.

[60] *P. Berakhot* 3, 6a preserves a *baraita* that stipulates that ten cups of wine were drunk in a house of mourning, three of which followed the meal. There is some discrepancy between the *Yerushalmi* and the parallel in *Semahot* 14:14, but they both have two cups in recognition of the consolation of the mourners (*tanhumei avelim*) and the bestowal of lovingkindness, themes that were included in the *birkat avelim* in *T. Berakhot* 3:23–24 cited earlier. Cf. Maimonides, *Hilkhot Evel,* 14:1, and the analysis of Ginzberg, *Perushim ve-Hiddushim ba-Yerushalmi*, 2:63–67.

[61] See *BT Ketubot* 8a.

There is, however, some late but rather suggestive evidence that the final *berakhah* of the original *birkat hatanim* did in fact praise the kindness of the gladdeners at this point. With regard to the third and final *berakhah* in the Palestinian version of *birkat avelim,* Lieberman posited, as an alternative to Yehuda bar Nahmani's "Blessed are You who recompenses a good deed" (*Barukh Ata meshallem ha-gemul*), a formulation found in the late, post-Talmudic pseudepigraphic compilation, *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, chapter 17: "Blessed are You, Lord, who recompenses those who engage in acts of kindness with a great reward" (*Barukh Ata Hashem gomel* [ed. Higger: *noten*] *sakhar tov le-gomelei hasadim*).[62] As we shall see, *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* actually states that this *berakhah* was also recited when newlyweds were greeted. If the original *birkat hatanim* that was once recited in *Erets Yisrael* closed in this or similar fashion, the larger theme of this *berakhah* undoubtedly paralleled that of the corresponding benediction of the Palestinian *birkat avelim* here as well.

Whether or not the *birkat avelim* and *birkat hatanim* were precise bookends both numerically and substantively from the outset in *Erets Yisrael*, with time they certainly shared the basic themes just delineated. In both instances, these themes were further expanded with the addition of a benediction that spelled out the larger good brought about by the *gomelei hasadim*. Thus, in *BT Ketubot* 8b, after asking Yehuda bar Nahmani to rise three times and recite before the bereaved Rabbi Hiyya distinct blessings comprising: 1. words containing praise of God, 2. words that reflect on the mourners, and 3. words that pertain to the consolers, Resh Lakish asks him, one last time, to "arise and say something with regard *to all of Israel.*" His response is a prayer to protect Israel from a long list of calamities "that come upon the world," which he closes with "Blessed are You who thwarts a plague" (*Barukh Ata otser ha-magefa*). Evidently, the kindness of the consolers who are praised in Yehuda's preceding *berakhah*

[62] Cf. Ramban, *Torat Ha-Adam, Sha'ar ha-Evel, Inyan ha-Avelut*, who makes this connection between the formulation of Yehuda bar Nahman and that of *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*. Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-Fshuta, Berakhot,* 53, says such a closing formulation would have been used on the two days on which the *birkat avelim* was recited (see above, n. 28), but not as part of the grace after meals in the house of mourning, since the theme of the third benediction of *birkat avelim* would have been associated with the blessing *ha-tov ve-haMeitiv,* which does not have a closing benediction. However, the passage from the ca. eighth-century *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, which is paraphrased and discussed further below, does suggest that a *berakhah* emphasizing *gemilut hasadim* was once recited independent of the *birkat ha-mazon* with regard to both occasions, consoling mourners and celebrating with newlyweds, and does not leave the impression that with regard to the former it was only recited on the first two days. See discussion below.

on this occasion not only redounds to their benefit but also to that of all of Israel. Similarly, the concluding benediction of the series of six *berakhot* that make up the more extended *birkat hatanim* of the Babylonian Rav Yehuda famously draws upon Jeremiah 33:10–11 in order to recognize God not only for creating bride and groom, but also for bringing into existence joy in all its expressions, as well as love, harmony, wellbeing, and friendship, all of which are activated by those who celebrate with the newlyweds. The result, adapting Jeremiah's words, is "the sound of mirth and joy, the sound of groom and bride" that will be heard "in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem."[63] Once again, the benefits of the kindness displayed by the individual *gomelei hasadim* towards the couple extend to the larger *tsibbur*. These (Babylonian?) additions to the original benedictions of the *birkat hatanim* and the *birkat avelim* make the same point: All of Israel benefit when they bestow lovingkindness upon each other precisely because the reciprocity of *gemilut hasadim* engenders an ideal society in which humans emulate the deity in whose image they were created.

Thus the *birkat avelim* and *birkat hatanim* have much in common. Kadushin, who takes his cue from Rashi's comments in *BT Ketubot* 8a with regard to *birkat hatanim*, rightly refers to the "conceptual continuum" that encapsulates the religious experience of the consolers or gladdeners, which begins to unfold with the opening *berakhah*. As Kadushin points out, the consolers and gladdeners are taking part in a "corporate act," one that does not even require that they be acquainted with those who are grieving or with the bride and groom.[64] The shared humanity of the individuals who make up the community prompts them to grieve along with the mourners or celebrate with the bride and groom. The acknowledgment of God as the "creator of all" in the *birkat hatanim* and as the one who will someday revive the dead in the *birkat avelim* is all that is needed to set this continuum in motion.[65]

[63] Müeller, *Hilluf Minhagim bein Benei Bavel li-Vnei Erets Yisrael*, 27f., maintains that the original three benedictions of the *birkat hatanim* in *Erets Yisrael* included this as its final blessing. The whole, according to Müeller, consisted of 1. *yotser ha-adam,* 2. *same'ah tesamah,* and 3. *asher bara sason ve-simhah*. If this is correct, the third and final *berakhah* in Müeller's scheme would capture the effect of the gladdeners' efforts. In any case, the themes I have outlined here are all included in Müeller's reconstruction.

[64] Kadushin, *Worship and Ethics,* 151f. and 155–157.

[65] Again, see Kadushin, *Worship and Ethics,* 155–158, and cf. Rashi to *BT Ketubot* 8a, *same'ah tesamah*. Also see Tosafot, *ad loc.*, who present a different view than that of Rashi and cf. Hildesheimer, "The History of the Betrothal and Marital Benedictions," 113f.

In sum, *gemilut hasadim* is the glue that holds together the entire structure of both the *birkat avelim* and *birkat hatanim* as conceptual continua, each component of which emphasizes God's love on the occasion of either comforting the mourners or celebrating with the bride and groom.[66] *Gemilut hasadim* was, in all probability, the concept and communal value that generated *birkat avelim* and *birkat hatanim* and undoubtedly helped their recitation catch on in the first place.[67]

Conclusion: From Acts of Loving Kindness to New Faces

We are left wondering why the view assigned to the third-century Babylonian amora Rav Yehuda in the *Bavli* that the daily recitation of *birkat hatanim* requires the participation of *panim hadashot* won the day and why the very origin of this rite is usually attributed to the desire to include these new participants, thereby extending the celebration. This could very well have been due to the ultimate influence of the *Bavli* on medieval rabbis in Ashkenaz, who, if they were at all aware of the conceptual grounding of the *birkat hatanim* (and of the *birkat avelim*) in sources of *Erets Yisrael*, undoubtedly did not see it as offering a different and independent perspective.[68]

But it did. Thus, while the desire and opportunity to include those who had not yet participated in the wedding festivities appears to be reason enough for the survival and promotion of the daily recitation of *sheva*

[66] I obviously do not see a stark structural or thematic division between the first and last three of Rav Yehuda's six benedictions. Cf. above, nn. 51 and 55, and see Anderson, "Celibacy or Consummation in the Garden? Reflections on Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Garden of Eden," 131–136. I posit instead that *gemilut hasadim* is an additional link that ties the first and second groups of three together. Whether the creation and union of man and woman or the sexuality and possibility of procreation that were its byproducts led to the joy expressed in the final three of Rav Yehuda's *birkat hatanim* is immaterial to my point: The entire dynamic of both the *birkat hatanim* and the *birkat avelim* is suffused with the concept of *gemilut hasadim*.

[67] Kadushin, *Organic Thinking,* 138, captures the corporate nature of *gemilut hasadim* with the following assertion: "Deeds of Loving-kindness, then, are not prescribed in detail by law but are deeds necessary for the welfare of others that are done out of love and kindness."

[68] See above, n. 13. It is generally presumed that knowledge of the *Yerushalmi* in Ashkenaz was scant until sometime in the High Middle Ages. When precisely this began to change is disputed. See Haym Soloveitchik, *Collected Essays II* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2014), 61, n. 94 and 158f. For a recent summation of the debates concerning the transmission to and influences on Ashkenaz of traditions from *Erets Yisrael*, see Alan Jotkowitz, "Haym Soloveitchik's Collected Essays: An Appreciation," *Tradition* 49:4 (2016), 81–84.

berakhot, the more immediate origins of the practice and its acceptance more likely stem, just as in the case of mourning practices, *from the impulse of the people to perform acts of gemilut hasadim,* an ethic that the rabbis certainly cultivated and reinforced.

This would explain why "new faces" were not originally required or insisted upon for post-wedding recitations of *birkat hatanim* in *Erets Yisrael*. For sure, the introduction of the daily recitations had little if anything to do with the presumed eagerness of the *hatan* and *kallah* to share their joy with others beyond the original celebrants – or with other latter day popular explanations[69] – and instead is rooted in the inclination of *kelal Yisrael* to celebrate by further "gladdening" the newlyweds.

Just as the people of Israel felt a communal need to comfort mourners, so were they inclined to gladden the hearts of the *hatan ve-kallah*. Is it any wonder that by modern times the recitation of *berakhot* before the bride and groom moved from "the house of the *hatan*" to the homes and other assemblies of friends and family, who today oftentimes go out of their way to ensure daily meals as well as the recitation of the *berakhot* – despite the fact that the meals are not even a prerequisite for the *berakhot* (only the *minyan* is)[70] and that they need not be recited every day? Obviously, the joy (or in the case of mourning, the sadness) is generalized to all of Israel, and the resulting opportunity to gladden (or comfort) is perceived as its responsibility, one that happens to fulfill an evidently important spiritual need *of the community*.

[69] A frequently heard rationalization for week-long daily *sheva berakhot* today is that they are a testimony to the unselfishness of Jewish newlyweds, who prefer to continue to celebrate with their communities, friends, and relatives following the wedding rather than immediately embarking on a honeymoon. This may be the effect of such celebration and certainly is a nice message, but it hardly was the motivation for the practice. See Aryeh Kaplan, *Made in Heaven: A Jewish Wedding Guide* (New York, 1983), 230. A related, less edifying and incorrect view that has been making the rounds in recent years in communities in the United States is that the daily recitations were instituted because this was not an ideal time for a honeymoon, as the bride, who presumably had sexual relations for the first time on her wedding night, is now in a quasi-*niddah* state, which, according to *halakhah,* meant that the couple is prohibited from having physical intimacy and relations. See, for example: http://forward.com/just-married/169990/best-honeymoon-ever-sea-urchins-and-all/ and http://www.jweekly.com/2004/04/30/sheva-brachot-newlyweds-play-king-and-queen-for-a-week/.

[70] See *Soferim* 19:9 where the *birkat hatanim* is recited over a cup of wine in the evening, *before* a feast. In twelfth-century Provence the custom was to recite the *sheva berakhot* even without a feast when the groom and his entourage left the synagogue on Shabbat. See Ta-Shma, *Ha-Tefilla ha-Ashkenazit ha-Keduma*, 191–193. Cf. Zivotofsky, "What's the Truth about *Sheva Berachot*?" 66 n. 6, where he cites the discussion in Zinner, *Nitei Gavriel*, *Nissu'in* 2:165 (n. 25). On the need for a *minyan* see *BT Ketubot* 7b.

Post-Talmudic sources capture the very point I am attempting to make. These sources relate that Solomon understood the greatness of fulfilling *gemilut hasadim* before God and, for this reason, had two sets of gates constructed on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, one for grooms and the other for mourners (and the excommunicated). On Shabbat, people would gather and sit between these gates, according to *Masekhet Soferim* (19:9), "in order to demonstrate kindness towards them" (*ligemol hasadim*), or according to *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* (17), "so that all of Israel would fulfill their obligation to perform *gemilut hasadim*" (*kedei she-yeitsu kol yisrael yedei hovatan bi-gemilut hasadim* [ed. Higger: *hesed*]). According to the latter source, after the destruction of the (Second) Temple, it was decreed that mourners and grooms (brides are not mentioned!) would go to synagogues and *battei midrashot,* where the people would see the *hatan* and rejoice with him, and where they could sit with the mourner on the ground, again, "so that *all of Israel* would fulfill their obligation to perform *gemilut hasadim*."[71] A *berakhah* was also pronounced, "Blessed are You Lord, who recompenses those who engage *in acts of kindness* with a great reward" (*Barukh Ata Hashem gomel* [ed. Higger: *noten*] *sakhar tov le-gomelei hasadim.*)[72]

Interestingly, *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer,* which, again, is a post-Talmudic collection of rabbinic traditions, most from *Erets Yisrael* but also including some material from Babylonia, continues the theme emphasized in the earlier Palestinian sources discussed above, which inform us that there were distinct periods of celebration for Jacob's marriages to Leah and Rachel. The following passage (*Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 36, ed. Higger) is remarkable and brings our earlier discussion of Genesis 29 full circle:

A. Jacob began to serve [in exchange] for his wife for seven years. After seven years, he (Jacob? Laban?) made a feast for seven days and then married Leah. He then added another seven days of feasting and gladness and married Rachel.
B. As it is written (Gen. 29:27-28): "Wait until the bridal week of this one is over…and Jacob did so; he waited out the bridal week [of the one, and then he (Laban) gave him his daughter Rachel as wife]."

[71] The *mefarashim* question whether this post-Destruction practice of sitting with mourners on the ground could have applied to Shabbat when mourning is prohibited. See the comments of David Luria to *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, who notes that the parallel in *Masekhet Soferim* clearly has in mind Shabbat. However, *Soferim* only has the mourners say *Kaddish* after *mussaf* (of Shabbat) and makes no allusion to sitting on the ground.

[72] Who pronounced this *berakhah,* a *hazzan* (see *Soferim* 19:9) or the *tsibbur,* is unclear.

C. And *all the people* gathered *to bestow lovingkindness* upon our patriarch Jacob, as it is written (29:22): "And Laban gathered all the people of the place and made a feast."

The emphasis here (at C) on the participation of "all the people" – be they *panim hadashot* or otherwise – in bestowing *gemilut hasadim,* reflects a continued awareness in the post-Talmudic period of the conceptual origins of *birkat hatanim,* which would find expression not only in the *sheva berakhot* based on the Babylonian tradition but also in the evolving liturgy for the occasion. The tenth-century Spanish liturgical poet, Dunash ibn Labrat, in his addition to the *zimmun* of the *birkat ha-mazon* recited before *sheva berakhot,* has the one who leads call upon God to "Banish grief and sorrow – So that the mute will celebrate with song!" (*devai haser ve-gam haron ve-az illem be-shir yaron*). This plea is made on behalf of all those who have gathered to celebrate and expresses their collective determination to imitate God by performing what amounts to an act of *hesed* for the bride and groom – one that has the added benefit of dispelling sorrow, at the very least for all present.

To be sure, "new faces" similarly keep the hope articulated in the closing *berakhah* of Rav Yehuda in *BT Ketubot* 8a and in our *sheva berakhot* very much alive, as their participation allows for the "sound of mirth and joy, the sound of groom and bride" (*kol sason ve-kol simha kol hatan ve-kol kallah*) to spread and be heard throughout Israel.[73] The differing emphases in the *Yerushalmi* and the *Bavli* ultimately are not at odds since the newcomers now have an opportunity to bestow lovingkindness on the bride and groom. Their participation only further emulates and advances the "love and harmony, peace and companionship" (*ahava ve-ahahva ve-shalom ve-rei'ut*) for which God is acknowledged in this *berakhah*.[74]

[73] This final *berakhah* is the only one that according to *halakhah* may be recited with the grace after meals *without a minyan* and certainly by women as well. The question of women participating in the reciting of all of the *sheva berakhot* has been widely discussed. Their participation would seem to be in keeping with the meaning and whole point of the recitation of the blessings as discussed herein. Nevertheless, different approaches to this issue exist. See Yehuda Henkin, *Responsa on Contemporary Jewish Women's Issues* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 2003), 88-95; and Joel Wolowelsky, *Jewish Law and Modernity: New Opportunities in a Post-Feminist Age* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1997), 56-69 and 136-139. See too the responsum published in *Be-Marei Ha-Bazak,* 5:113 to which an analysis by Rabbi Zalman Nechemia Goldberg has been appended: http://www.eretzhemdah.org/Data/UploadedFiles/FtpUserFiles/Books/shotBemarehH/5.pdf

[74] Cf. Rabbi Daniel Toledano's discussion of Ramban's view of *panim hadashot* (above, n. 9) in *Mekavtse'el: Kovets Hiddushei Torah* 30 (2004), 255-262. Ramban appears to see the inclusion of "new faces" in the case of *birkat hatanim* as increasing the joy of the celebration rather than as the cause for extending the celebration.

In the final analysis, the determination of *kelal Yisrael* to gladden the bride and groom as well as its efforts to comfort the mourner are intended to hearten the celebrants and the one who has suffered a loss, thereby unifying all of Israel in acts of *hesed* that are ultimately the quintessential expression of love and, therefore, of behavior befitting humans created in the image of God.