

# HALOCHOSCOPE <sup>TOI</sup>

Would a woman such as a mother or grandmother be allowed to recite the *Sheva Brochos* at a gathering including only family members?

The issues:

(A) *Tznius*, modesty, as it relates to this function

(B) *Birchas Chasanim*, the “sheva brochos”

(C) Who recites the *Brochos*?

(A) *Tznius*

This term is normally taken to refer to three areas. *Erva*, immodesty applies to the restrictions on reciting holy matters in its presence; laws of modest dress; and rules of modest behavior of men and women in each others’ presence. *Erva* forbids reciting holy things in the presence of indecency. This includes exposed parts of the body of either gender that are normally covered, and the Talmud says that the voice of a woman singing is alluring. Some Poskim maintain that one may sing Hashem’s Name (a holy thing) while his daughters join in.

Immodest dress is an issue at all times. The third issue, that of modest behavior by men and women in each others’ presence is the issue here. While flirting is forbidden, and one may not go out of his way to greet women, one may talk to women and listen to them speak, even publicly. This is not the same as listening to them singing. ( Naturally, one may not listen with the intention of being arouse.) One may certainly listen to them recite *Brochos*, and answer *Amein*. The Poskim discuss specific situations, such as when a woman recites *Hagomel* in the women’s section of Shul, and the men answer *Amein*. Furthermore, the Talmud says that theoretically, a woman could be called to the Torah, but that this is forbidden for other reasons. When women eat as a threesome, they recite *Zimun*, though many Ashkenazim do not follow this practice. However, in the presence of one or two men they should not recite it. This is because the women will be leading. The men will have to combine with the women’s *Zimun*, which oversteps the bounds of *Tznius* behavior. In fact, at any time that men will need to combine with women in a secondary role, this poses a *Tznius* behavior issue. If however, three men are present, the women may participate in the men’s

Zimun (although if the three women wish, they may separate for their own Zimun). Since women are naturally more modest and less likely to overstep the bounds of decency, they may combine with the men. These rules apply to a family as well. Thus, a father may not participate if his wife and daughters wish to recite Zimun. In a family setting where a Zimun of men is present, the Poskim indicate that the woman should not lead. [See Brochos 24a 45b Megillah 23a Erchin 3a, Poskim. Tur Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 73 74 75:3 199:6-7 282:3, Even Haezer 21, commentaries. Halichos Bas Yisroel 6:11, notes.]

### **(B) Birchas Chasanim**

The Brochos recited at a wedding and during the seven days following it were instituted very early. The consensus is that they are Rabbinically instituted. There are actually two separate obligations to recite Brochos at a wedding. In former times the wedding was divided into two ceremonies, the *Airusin* and the *Nisuin*. With Airusin the couple were joined in marriage, but did not yet live together. Nisuin was the ceremony of starting a family together. At each of these ceremonies a special Brocha is recited. Nowadays, both ceremonies take place at the same time, and both Brochos are recited then. The “*sheva brochos*” are the Brochos recited in the second half of the ceremony, for the Nisuin, and repeated during the following week. They are called *Birchas Chasanim*.

Three of the sources for these Brochos are historical, based on incidents related in the *Tanach*, rather than sources indicating an obligation. The oldest source dates to the creation of man and woman, where it is said that Hashem blessed them. This ‘blessing’ refers to Hashem’s making a *Chupa*, wedding, for them, and ‘reciting’ Birchas Chasanim. The second source dates to the betrothal of Rivka to Yitzchak with Eliezer acting as agent. In this context it says that they blessed her. Some commentaries maintain that this refers to *Birchas Airusin* only. The third source is the story of Boaz and Ruth, where it is related that Boaz gathered ten men from among the elders of the city etc. This shows us that he wished to gather a quorum for the Birchas Chasanim at the time he wished to conduct the ceremony of marrying Ruth. The fourth source is a Passuk in Tehilim (68:27) In congregations bless Hashem ... all who find their source in Yisroel. The Hebrew word used for source also refers to matters pertaining to reproduction or marriage. This shows that there is a Brocha recited at the ceremony of this occasion.

Two of these sources indicate the requirement for the presence of a *Minyan*, quorum of ten adult Jewish males, for this Brocha. Boaz gathered ten men from

among the elders, and the Hebrew word for congregations is known to mean a Minyan, from other references in the Tanach and Talmud. Normally, the requirement of the presence of a Minyan indicates that the recital is considered a Davar Shebikedusha, especially holy. It may not be recited unless the Divine Presence is present. This *Shechina* only comes when a Minyan is present. Though it is a Rabbinical requirement, this is derived from the Scriptural Mitzvah of *Kiddush Hashem*, which is in turn derived from the ten scouts (excluding Yehoshua and Kaleiv). Kiddush Hashem means the sanctification of Hashem’s Name. It refers to performing a Mitzvah in public under difficult circumstances or in defiance of a threat of death. Actually, the Poskim indicate that the Mitzvah of Kiddush Hashem itself, or its opposite, the prohibition of public *Chillul Hashem*, apply in the presence of ten women as well, or in the presence of a combination of men or women. Nonetheless, the scouts were all adult males, and the Rabbinical requirement is derived from there. The idea of Kiddush Hashem is thus applied to other times when the Name of Hashem is sanctified by being blessed in a public recital.

The presence of a Minyan also indicates publicity. For example, the Mitzvah of *Megillah* is to publicize the miracle of Purim. Though on Purim one may, if necessary, read it in the absence of a Minyan, if it is read early (such as this year in Yerushalayim, when it is read a day early for them) a Minyan must be present. There is a question whether or not women may be a part of, or constitute entirely, such a Minyan. There is also an issue of *Kavod*, respect, that is present when a larger group is present. Certain funeral practices are only done when a Minyan is present. Accordingly, since the requirement for the presence of a Minyan for Birchas Chasanim is not derived from the general idea of Davar Shebikedusha, some give these other reasons for a Minyan in our case. Nonetheless, due to the sources mentioned, it is clear that only men may constitute the Minyan for the Brocha.

Seven Brochos are recited at the ceremony. They are then repeated at the end of the meals on the seven days of feasting following the ceremony. [If both bride and groom were previously married, the Brochos are recited on the first day only.] However, not all are truly Birchos Chasanim. One of them is on the cup of wine (At the wedding it is first, at the meals it is last.) The first of the remaining six refers to the gathering in honor of the wedding. The second refers to the creation of man before the creation of woman. The last Brocha is a general praise including all the preceding Brochos and also referring to Yisroel in general. The remaining three Brochos actually refer to the couple being wed. Accordingly, the first Brocha could be recited at any time during the meal, but was attached to the others, recited at the

end of the meal. The second is recited because of the third, which refers to the creation of woman as the completion of man.

The *sheva brochos* are recited during the week following the wedding at meals where there is a new guest who did not attend previous meals. Some say that two new guests are required. The new guest must be one who provides extra joy to the newlyweds. Thus, he must be prominent enough that an effort is made to please him. Since she would not be included in the Minyan, a new female guest, however prominent she is, does not cause the *sheva brochos* requirement. However, the last Brocha may be recited even if no new guests attend. According to most Poskim, it may also be recited without a Minyan present. Most Poskim maintain that it may only be recited in the presence of invited guests of some kind. [See Megillah 23b Kesuvos 7b-8a Kallah Rabasi 1, Poskim. Tur Shulchan Aruch Even Ha'ezer 62:1 4 6-8, commentaries.]

### **(C) Who recites the Brochos?**

This is a matter of debate among the Poskim. Some maintain that ideally the groom recite it himself. Others maintain that he does not recite either because this is considered showy, or because it is to be recited by someone other than the bride or groom. With regard to the Birchas Nisuin, the consensus appears that the groom should not recite them, since they are about him. The most prominent person present should recite them. It has become accepted practice to share the Brochos between prominent guests, both at the wedding and during the week of festivities. The Poskim rule that a slave or child may not recite them. The reason is that they do not count towards the Minyan. By this reasoning a woman should also be excluded, though she is not explicitly mentioned. It has already been mentioned that even in a family situation a woman should not lead the Zimun. Presumably, the same would hold true of the *sheva brochos*. [See Kesuvos 7b-8a, poskim. Tur Sh. Ar. E.H. 34, 62:4-5, Ar. Hash. 9. Chidushei Rambam (Maasei Rokeach) on Hil. Brochos 9. Nitei Gavriel 11:9-10, notes 1, 10-12.]

Therefore, for both of these reasons, we must conclude that a woman should not be designated to recite the *sheva brochos*.

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*Avraham Abba ben Aharon Zvi Dunn z"l, whose Yahrzeit is on the twenty-fourth of Taroais.*

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