

Shevi'i Shel Pesach 5781, 2021:

Rabbi David Etengoff

*Baruch HaMakom Baruch Hu*

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

*Baruch HaMakom baruch Hu. Baruch sheh'natan Torah l'amo Yisrael, baruch Hu*

(Blessed be the Omnipresent One, may He be blessed. Blessed is He Who gave the Torah to His people Israel, blessed is He). This is one of the many celebrated and beloved portions of the Haggadah. It is juxtaposed to the *Arba'ah Banim* (Four Sons), and serves as its *hakdamah* (introduction). This prompts us to ask, “Why does this section require such a *hakdamah*?” Our question was addressed by the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century anonymous work, *Perush Kadmon*, an exegetical analysis of the Haggadah that was utilized extensively by Rashi and many other *Rishonim*:

One must utter a *bracha* prior to reciting [and analyzing] a midrashic passage. As we learn [*Talmud Bavli, Berachot* 11b]: “Many times I stood before Raba to learn a chapter of *Midrash Sifra d'Bei Rav* from him. Before beginning, he would wash his hands and recite a *bracha*, at that point he would teach us the chapter.” (Translation and brackets my own. Note: this text follows the version of the Rif)

The *Perush Kadmon* contains two crucial points regarding our question: The *Arba'ah Banim* is a midrashic passage, and, as such, requires the recitation of *birchot haTorah* prior to being taught. In some ways, *Baruch HaMakom* seems to fulfill this role, yet it is missing Hashem's name and a reference to His universal kingship (*shame u'malchut*: “*Baruch Atah Hashem Elokeinu Melech HaOlam*”), as found in the standard text of *birchot haTorah*. The

editor of the *Perush Kadmon* printed in the *Torat Chaim Haggadah* (Mossad HaRav Kook)

focuses upon this question and provides us with a fascinating answer:

One might think that the reason why Hashem's name and a reference to His universal kingship is missing from *Baruch HaMakom* is because we have already recited the standard *birchot haTorah* in the morning. This is not the case, however, since *Chazal* established special blessings before and after one is called to the Torah [that contain *shame u'malchut*], even though *birchot haTorah* have already been said. Nonetheless, although they established the recitation of *Baruch HaMakom* prior to *Midrash Arba'ah Banim*, it was not enacted as a *bracha* per se, rather, as a statement [of praise] that is similar [but not the same as] an actual blessing. As such, it does not contain *shame u'malchut*. (Translation, brackets and underlining my own)

In sum, *Baruch HaMakom* is not, in fact, a *bracha*; rather, it merely has elements that parallel a standard Torah benediction. As such, *Chazal* decreed that it be said before the *Arba'ah Banim*, but without *shame u'malchut*.

Like the *Perush Kadmon*, my rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as the Rav by his students and followers, views *Baruch HaMakom* as a modified form of *birchot haTorah*. In addition, he emphasizes that these *brachot* connote the concept of *masorah* (the passing on of Torah knowledge from generation to generation), a theme that is alluded to in the placement of *Baruch HaMakom* immediately before the *Arba'ah Banim*:

We repeat it at the *Seder* because the concern of the *Seder* is *masorah* and *kabalah* [acceptance of the Torah]. When we are about to proclaim the idea of *masorah* — “The Torah speaks about four kinds of children” — we offer thanks to the Almighty in the same manner as we do every morning. The blessing is related not only to *talmud Torah* but to the *masorah* of Torah as well. (*The Seder Night: An Exalted Evening*, commentary based on the teachings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Rabbi Menachem Genack, editor, pp. 45-46, brackets my own)

Since, in the Rav's view, *Baruch HaMakom*, like *birchot haTorah*, is strongly connected to the idea of *masorah*, we must ask ourselves which specific Torah principle should be

highlighted during the *masorah* process? The Rav's poetic analysis of Pesach night helps us formulate a response:

And on Pesach night, man, free, hopeful, and courageous, enhanced by fulfillment, exalted by independence, surges forward, expands, grows, ready to accomplish all that is related to his blessedness and freedom. All selfishness renounced, he forgets himself, rising like the mighty river to do, to practice, and to immerse himself in *hesed* [acts of kindness]. (*Festival of Freedom: Essays on Pesach and the Haggadah*, Joel B. Wolwelsky and Reuven Ziegler eds., page 31, brackets my own)

For the Rav, Pesach night confers upon the Jewish people a sense of freedom and independence that enables us to recognize the inextricable bonds that join us together. In turn, this recognition produces a powerful desire within our very souls to help others through acts of *hesed*. As such, *hesed* emerges as a key element of our *masorah* that we share on *Seder* night. After all, the Almighty, Himself, is described by Michah the prophet as “*chafetz hesed Hu*” (He who desires kindness, 7:18). With Hashem as our guide, may we ever do heartfelt *hesed* for one another. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

*Chag Sameach* and Shabbat Shalom, and may Hashem in His infinite mercy remove the pandemic from *klal Yisrael* and all the nations of the world.

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria Etengoff and the *parasha*'s name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.