

Dear Friends,

In an email earlier this week, in response to a question about saying blessings or prayers on the occasion of the presidential inauguration, I discussed the laws of the blessing *HaTov v'HaMeitiv*, which is recited on the arrival of good news that benefits the one saying the blessing as well as others. In that email, I explained that this blessing is said only by someone who directly benefits from the event in question. A farmer would say this after the arrival of rains, but an apartment dweller would not, even if they benefit indirectly. In the case of elections or inaugurations, as discussed in my previous email, one would not say the blessing in its entirety, though it could be recited without mentioning G-d's name or kingship.

There is one item in the news these days which might merit saying *HaTov v'HaMeitiv* in its entirety. Thank G-d, vaccines against the COVID-19 virus are becoming more and more widely available locally, and many members of our community have begun getting vaccinated, or at least scheduling appointments to do so.

Receiving the vaccine is clearly of direct benefit to the one receiving it, whose likelihood of becoming ill is reduced by 95%. At this point, it is unclear whether the vaccine significantly reduces the likelihood of someone spreading the virus, which would be of clear benefit to others by allowing us to interact with vaccinated people without risking contracting the virus. However, even if it turns out the vaccine does not significantly reduce the risk of transmission, it still has the indirect benefit to those who are not receiving it, that we all now live in a community where more people are vaccinated, and as a result, fewer people are becoming seriously ill or dying, and less strain is put on the healthcare system than there would have been without the vaccine.

For this reason, a number of poskim, including Rav Dov Linzer, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah have ruled that **one may recite *Barukh HaTov V'HaMeitiv* in its entirety upon receiving the first dose of the vaccine.** One who did not recite the blessing when receiving the first dose, may recite it when receiving the second dose, instead. That blessing, in its entirety is,

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַטּוֹב וְהַמְּטִיב

*Barukh Attah A-donai E-loheinu Melekh Ha'olam Hatov v'hameitiv*

Blessed are You Hashem, Our G-d, King of the Universe, Who is good and does good.

In addition to *HaTov v'HaMeitiv*, there are other prayers which are appropriate for the occasion of receiving the COVID-19 vaccine.

#### **Saying a Prayer before receiving the vaccine:**

The Shulchan Arukh (Orach Chayim 230:4) states:

הַנִּכְנֵס לְהַקִּיז דָּם אוֹמֵר יִהְיֶה"מ ה' אֱלֹהֵי שִׁיחָא עֲסַק זֶה לִי לְרִפּוּאָה כִּי רּוּפֵא חֲנֻם אַתָּה וְלֵאחֶר שֶׁהִקִּיז יֹאמֵר בְּרוּךְ רּוּפֵא חוֹלִים

One who goes to have blood let should say the following prayer: “May it be Your will, Hashem, my G-d that this be a matter of healing for me, for You Heal Freely.” After the bloodletting, he should recite “Blessed is the Healer of the sick.”

Nowadays, of course, bloodletting is no longer standard medical practice, as it was from the time of the Talmud through the days of the Shulchan Arukh. However, the same prayer can be recited for any medical procedure or treatment, though there is disagreement about what types of procedures merit saying “Blessed is the Healer of the Sick” (*Barukh Rofei Cholim*) afterwards as a full berakha, with some arguing that this blessing should be reserved for procedures that involve significant risk.

**At any rate, the *Yehi Ratzon* prayer that is recited prior to a medical procedure should be recited before receiving the vaccine.** Unlike *Hatov v'HaMeitiv*, which is recited after receiving the first dose, and can only be recited once, this *Yehi Ratzon* should be recited prior to receiving each dose of the vaccine, just as it would be prior to any type of medical treatment.

### **Bentching Gomel**

There is a blessing typically said in synagogue or with a minyan by one who has survived a dangerous situation. While some authorities limit recitation of this blessing in its entirety to the specific situations named in the Talmud (one who has traveled by sea, through the wilderness, someone who has given birth, survived an illness or been released from prison), it is a widespread practice to recite this blessing after surviving other types of dangerous situations not listed in the Talmud, such as car accidents, muggings or terrorist attacks.

While all poskim would agree one should recite Gomel after recovering from COVID-19, there is a question about whether to recite it after receiving the vaccine. Some poskim are reluctant to suggest reciting Gomel after receiving the second dose of the vaccine, either because (1) they generally limit it to the cases explicitly mentioned in the Talmud, or (2) because they don't consider the risk of contracting COVID-19 to be enough of a danger to describe receiving a vaccine as being saved from a dangerous situation. For those who do recite Gomel after escaping from dangerous situations that are not listed in the Talmud, it seems to me that most people who have not had COVID are at significant enough risk of contracting the disease to merit bentching Gomel after receiving the second dose of the vaccine.

Unlike the other prayers we've discussed, Gomel is said in a minyan in order to express gratitude for salvation publically. Accordingly, a person should wait until the first time they come to shul after receiving the second dose of the vaccine and recite it then. The custom is for men to bentch Gomel after receiving an aliyah, however one can bentsch Gomel any time there is a minyan present. While there is some debate about whether women are obligated to bentsch Gomel, it is certainly permissible and laudable for a woman to do so. Anyone who is unable to come to shul should bentsch Gomel without reciting G-d's name.

### **One More Berakha**

As I was preparing this message, my friend and colleague Rabbi Hershey Novack shared with me a novel idea about what we might say upon receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. There is a berakha that our Sages instituted on seeing an outstanding secular scholar (separate from the berakha instituted for encountering an outstanding Torah scholar), in the recognition that all wisdom and intelligence are gifts from the Creator. That berakha begins in the manner of all berakhot, "Blessed are You Hashem, Our G-d, King of the Universe," and concludes "Who has given of His wisdom to flesh and blood." While the vaccine is not an exceptional scholar, it is a product of miraculous scholarship and ingenuity, the work of scientists, of whom, if we met them, we might make the aforementioned blessing. Therefore, while it would not be permissible to say the full berakha, Rabbi Novack suggested it might be appropriate, upon receiving the vaccine, to say this berakha while omitting G-d's name and kingship.

### **Psalms**

Lastly, while rabbis and scholars may disagree about the applicability of a particular blessing to a particular case, and the halakhic value of not taking G-d's name in vain leads us to be generally conservative about when we say blessings, reading psalms is always appropriate.

It would certainly be appropriate to recite psalms or other verses of thanksgiving after receiving the vaccine.

### **In conclusion**

Following this message, I have included a printable version of the prayers and blessings I recommend reciting upon receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. Some of these blessings are not universally agreed upon, but I have not recommended saying anything that involves invoking the name of G-d, which isn't recommended or approved by some authorities greater than myself. I also have omitted HaGomel, not because I think it is inappropriate but because it is best said in synagogue.

I hope that in the discussion of which berakhot might be appropriate and which might not, or when to say them, we don't lose sight of the fact that the purpose of reciting all of these prayers and berakhot is to give expression to the awe we should be feeling at participating in what is no less than a modern medical miracle, and the gratitude for the safety it affords to those who receive it. Whatever blessings we do or do not recite, we should prepare to receive the vaccine, as we should all medical treatments, aware that ultimately health and sickness are in the hands of our Creator, and that the best doctors and nurses and the most advanced medical technologies can only heal when G-d wills it.

May we swiftly see the day when the COVID-19 vaccine is available to all, and reliable and effective therapies to treat COVID-19 are developed, and until that moment comes, may Hashem place a spirit of cooperation and selflessness in the hearts of all people in this land, so that we take the steps necessary to protect one another from the spread of this infection.

Shabbat Shalom!

Garth Silberstein

ps—Those interested in more in-depth discussion of some of the berakhot mentioned above can see [Rav Dov Linzer's English language article on the subject](#) or [this article in Hebrew by Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon](#).

### **Prayers and Blessings for receiving the COVID-19 Vaccine.**

Prior to receiving each dose of the vaccine, say:

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵי שְׁמֵהּ אֵשֶׁק זֶה לִי לְרִפוּאָה כִּי רוּפָא הָנָם אַתָּה

*Y'hi Ratson Mil'fanekha A-donai E-lohai shey'hei eisek zeh li lir'fu'ah ki rofeh chinam attah.*

**May it be Your will L-rd, my G-d, that this endeavor provide healing for me, for You heal freely.**

Upon seeing the vial or syringe with the vaccine in it, say:

בָּרוּךְ שְׁנָתָן מִחֲכָמָתוֹ לְבָשָׁר וָדָם

*Barukh SheNasan Meichokhmato l'vasar vadam.*

**Blessed is the One who gave of His wisdom to flesh and blood.**

After receiving the first dose of the vaccine (if this was not recited after the first dose, it can be recited after the second):

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַטוֹב וְהַמְּטִיב

*Barukh Attah A-donai E-loheinu Melekh Ha'olam Hatov v'hameitiv*

**Blessed are You L-rd, Our G-d, King of the Universe, Who is good and does good**

After each dose of the vaccine, recite a chapter of Psalms such as Psalm 100, which follows:

מִזְמוֹר לְתוֹדָה הָרִיעוּ לֵה' כָּל־הָאָרֶץ: עֲבַדוּ אֶת־ה' בְּשִׂמְחָה בָּאוּ לִפְנֵי יוֹ בְּרִנָּה: דַּעֲו כִי־ה' הוּא אֱלֹהִים הוּא־עָשָׂנוּ וְלֹא [וְלֹא]  
אֲנִיָּהּנוּ עָמָל וְצָאן מִרְעִיתוֹ: בָּאוּ שְׁעָרָיו בְּתוֹדָה חֲצִרְתָּיו בְּתִהְלָה הוֹדוּ־ל'וּ בְּרָכוּ שְׁמוֹ: כִּי־טוֹב ה' לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ וְעַד־דָּר וְדָר  
אָמוֹנָתוֹ:

A Psalm of thanksgiving. Make a joyful noise to the L-rd, all the earth. Serve the L-rd with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know that the L-rd he is G-d: it is he who made us, and we belong to him; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful to him, and bless his name. For the L-rd is good; his steadfast love endures forever; and his faithfulness to all generations.