

Sheva Berachos

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One of the joyous times in a family is the marriage of a child. Together with all of that excitement and joy is the challenge of arranging sheva berachos. One element of sheva berachos that can be anxiety provoking is making sure that there are *Panim chadashos*, literally, a new face, at each one of the meals. There are many common questions and some confusion with regards to who qualifies as *Panim chadashos* and we will address a number of the more frequent questions in this article.

ARE SHEVA BERACHOS OBLIGATORY?

Before addressing the question of who qualifies as *Panim chadashos*, it is essential to first address the question of whether it is, in fact, necessary, to have sheva berachos each night during the week following the wedding. This question was presented to the Ben Ish Chai¹. He was asked specifically whether it is obligatory to have sheva berachos during the week following the wedding or whether there is no obligation, per se, but if there happens to be a meal that has the necessary prerequisites to recite sheva berachos, then it should be recited.

The Ben Ish Chai explains that he was asked the question by a *Chosson* who does not have the means to pay for meals for a *minyan* each night of the week following the wedding. He is content to have a meal with just a *mezuman* and recite only the *berachah* of *asher bara*. His question was whether he should extend himself to invite a *minyan* to recite all the sheva berachos or is it not necessary?²

The Ben Ish Chai demonstrated from numerous sources that there is no obligation to arrange for sheva berachos and thus, one need not extend himself to assure a *minyan* at the meals during the week that follows the wedding. If one has the means, it is appropriate to take advantage of the situation to praise Hashem but when inconvenient or expensive, one should not feel as though he is falling short of fulfilling an obligation.

The Chasam Sofer³ writes in the name of the Rokeach that common practice was to recite sheva berachos only on the day of the *chasunah*, but not on the subsequent days following the wedding. The Chasam Sofer then related that the same practice remained in force during his time as well.

More recently, the Aruch Hashulchan⁴ also wrote that people do not make sheva berachos after the wedding.

PANIM CHADASHOS – INCREASING THE JOY OF THE CELEBRATION

The *gemara*⁵ rules that sheva berachos (in the *gemara*'s terminology *birkas chasanim*) is for seven days. R' Yehudah clarifies that sheva berachos are recited only when *Panim chadashos* are present. Since R' Yehudah did not elaborate on the parameters or the details of the obligation, there is room for debates about almost every aspect of the obligation.

Tosafos⁶ writes that a person qualifies as *Panim chadashos* only when that person's presence increases the joy of the celebration⁷. However, Shulchan Aruch⁸ records two opinions about this matter. When he first addresses *Panim chadashos*⁹ he only addresses the issue of whether the person has been present, previously, when sheva berachos were recited and doesn't mention anything about whether the joy of the event increases by this person's presence. He then references Tosafos, with the introductory words ויש אומרים that *Panim chadashos* are people for whom the hosts prepare more food to honor the special guest. Sefer Sova Semachos, written by R' Seraya Davlitzki, rules that although Shulchan Aruch did not issue a definitive ruling about the matter, common custom for both Ashkenazim and Sephardim is to be lenient and sheva berachos are recited whenever someone new is in attendance, even if the level of *simchah* is not increased by the presence of that person¹⁰. Thus, for example, it is acceptable to call a neighbor and have them send over one of their teenage sons to be the *Panim chadashos* in order to recite sheva berachos.

SOMEONE PRESENT AT THE CHUPPAH BUT NOT AT THE MEAL

The Bais Yosef¹¹ presents a disagreement between Rashi and the Rambam about whether someone who was at the *chuppah* but did not eat a meal in celebration of the wedding qualifies as *Panim chadashos*. Rashi writes explicitly that to qualify as *Panim chadashos* it is necessary for the person to not have previously partaken in a celebratory meal in honor of the marriage. Even someone who was present at the time of the marriage when sheva berachos were recited under the *chuppah* qualifies as *Panim chadashos*, provided that he did not yet join a meal with the wedding party. Rambam¹², on the other hand, rules that *Panim chadashos* must be someone who did not yet hear sheva berachos recited. This indicates that someone who heard sheva berachos for this couple, even if it was during the ceremony under the *chuppah*, no longer qualifies as *Panim chadashos*. Shulchan Aruch¹³ presents both opinions and then notes that common custom is in accordance with Rashi's position that hearing sheva berachos does not disqualify someone from being *Panim chadashos*, if he did not yet participate in a meal in honor of the marriage¹⁴. Accordingly, people who came

to the *chuppah* but left immediately afterwards qualify as *Panim chadashos*.

DO PANIM CHADASHOS HAVE TO EAT?

Sometimes it happens that the *Panim chadashos* cancel at the last moment or the hosts of the sheva berachos did not arrange for *Panim chadashos*. A desperate call is made during dessert to a neighbor who agrees to join for sheva berachos. Is it necessary for the *Panim chadashos* to participate in the meal? Does he have to be present for just part of the meal? Does he have to eat something at the meal to qualify for sheva berachos?

The Ritva¹⁵ writes explicitly that a person serves as *Panim chadashos* even if he comes at the conclusion of the meal and did not eat anything. Rema¹⁶, referencing the Ran, rules in accordance with this opinion as well. Sefer Sova Semachos¹⁷ rules that it is preferable for the *Panim chadashos* to eat something but if that proves difficult, he qualifies as *Panim chadashos*, nonetheless. He explains that since Shulchan Aruch does not cite the lenient opinion of the Ritva, Ran and other Rishonim, it indicates that he does not subscribe to that view. Therefore, *L'Chatchilah*, the *Panim chadashos* should make an effort to eat something. Furthermore, he considers the possibility that common custom is not in accordance with the Rema's lenient ruling since if you asked most people, they would say that one must eat something to qualify as *Panim chadashos*. However, if the *Panim chadashos* says that he is full and cannot eat, he still qualifies as *Panim chadashos* and sheva berachos may be recited. In practice, someone who comes to serve as *Panim chadashos* should be asked to eat something to join the meal but if he cannot eat, e.g., he just finished his own *melaveh malkah*, it is not necessary for him to eat and sheva berachos are nevertheless recited.

SHABBOS AND YOM TOV

Tosafos¹⁸ rules that on Shabbos it is not necessary to have *Panim chadashos* at the meals because Shabbos itself serves as *Panim chadashos*. Shulchan Aruch¹⁹ cites this opinion but limits the scope of the practice. He rules that Shabbos serves as *Panim chadashos* only for the first two meals on Shabbos. For *seudah shlishis*, one must have actual *Panim chadashos* and virtual *Panim chadashos*, such as Shabbos, is not effective, and he confirms this ruling by stating that this is the custom. Rema, however, writes that nowadays in Ashkenazi countries the custom is to use virtual *Panim chadashos* even for *seudah shlishis*. He offers two rationales for this custom. One is that in most cases it is not relevant since actual *Panim chadashos* are present. Therefore, we do not go out of our way to assure the presence of actual *Panim chadashos* for the rare instances in which *Panim chadashos* are not present, and we adopt the lenient view that virtual *Panim chadashos* suffices. Alternatively, since it is common for someone to give a *droshah*, that *droshah* can serve as virtual *Panim chadashos*²⁰.

AN ATTENDEE AT THE WEDDING BUT LEFT BEFORE BENTCHING

Sefer Imrei Yaakov²¹ wonders about someone who

participated in the wedding meal but left the *chasunah* before *birkas hamazon* so he has not yet heard sheva berachos. On the one hand, one could assert that the disqualification as *Panim chadashos* stems from having participated in a celebratory meal, even if one left before *birkas hamazon*. Therefore, someone who ate a meal at the *chasunah* is disqualified from serving as *Panim chadashos* at future meals even though he did not hear sheva berachos at that meal. On the other hand, one could argue that eating at the wedding, in and of itself, does not disqualify someone as *Panim chadashos* and it is specifically hearing sheva berachos following a meal that disqualifies one as *Panim chadashos*. Accordingly, one who ate a meal at the *chasunah* but left before *bentching* does qualify as *Panim chadashos*. Imrei Yaakov writes that in his opinion once one participated in a meal, he is disqualified from serving as *Panim chadashos*, even though he left before *birkas hamazon*.

Lastly, he addresses those who came at the end of the *chasunah*, after sheva berachos were recited, for example for the *Simchas Chosson V'Kallah*, but did not participate in the meal. He rules that it is clear that such people did not forgo their *Panim chadashos* status and if they attend one of the subsequent celebratory meals, they can serve as *Panim chadashos* and all the sheva berachos may be recited.

Rav Elyashiv, on the other hand, adopted a stringent position on this matter. He was asked²² whether someone who came to a wedding after *bentching* to dance may serve as *Panim chadashos* at a subsequent sheva berachos. He responded that if the guest danced in celebration of the wedding, he may no longer serve as *Panim chadashos*²³. This is the position of HaRav Fuerst as well.

1. Teshuvos Rav Pealim E.H. 4:6.

2. It is interesting to note that at least in the location where the Chosson lived, the practice was that the Chosson paid for sheva berachos as opposed to the parents of the Chosson/kallah or their friends and family.

3. E.H. 122

4. O.C. 640:14; see also Imrei Yaakov 62:7:[79] for additional sources that maintain that there is no obligation to host sheva berachos during the week after the wedding.

5. Kesubos 7b

6. Kesubos 7b d.h. v'hu she'ba'u

7. The Chelkas Mechokeik and Bais Shmuel both note that it is not necessary to actually make more food for the panim chadashos, all that is necessary is that his presence warrants making additional food.

8. E.H. 62:8

9. E.H. 62:7

10. In the footnote, Rav Devitzki raises the question of how we could adopt the lenient view to recite sheva berachos when, seemingly, we should follow the principle להקל בפקדון, when in doubt, we do not recite berachos. He answers that when there is a custom to recite the berachah, the principle of להקל בפקדון does not apply. It seems that the reason is that the custom resolves the doubt.

11. E.H. 62

12. Hilchos Berachos 2:10

13. E.H. 62:7

14. Shulchan Aruch's concluding words וכן פוסק המנהג in accordance with Rashi is interesting for two reasons. First of all, one would expect that in a disagreement between the Rambam, one of the three primary Poskim used by the Bais Yosef to determine halachah l'maaseh, and Rashi, the Bais Yosef would follow the Rambam. Secondly, Shulchan Aruch's presentation of the two opinions is also instructive. The style he utilized is called תם ויש, meaning he first presented a halachah and then intro-

duced the dissenting opinion with the words ויש אומרים. Generally, the rule of תם ויש is that the halachah conforms with the תם opinion. Accordingly, we have further reason to believe that Shulchan Aruch subscribes to Rambam's position on the matter. However, since the custom to be lenient and follow Rashi has spread, that becomes normative practice, even though it was not his preference. Daf Yomi learners should see Taanis 26b for an example of a practice that takes root, even though it is not taught or even paskened in accordance with that opinion.

15. Kesubos 7b

16. E.H. 62:7

17. 1:9 and footnote 42

18. Kesubos 7b d.h. v'hu she'ba'u

19. E.H. 62:8

20. This is a novel concept the Rema is introducing. If, indeed, giving a *droshah* qualifies as *panim chadashos* then this could be utilized during the week as well. Since in most cases someone gives a *droshah*, the need for actual *panim chadashos* is not essential and this should alleviate the pressure to assure the presence of *panim chadashos*. Perhaps Rema's rationale is limited to Shabbos but his wording does not indicate that that is the basis of his rationale.

21. Imrei Yaakov Even HaEzer 62 Biurim d.h. Im Lo

22. Tziyunei Halacha page 181

23. Interestingly, in the footnote there, (12), Rav Elyashiv addresses the same Ritva used by the Imrei Yaakov to prove that someone who did not eat at the wedding may still serve as *panim chadashos*. The reason he maintains a more stringent opinion is that, in his opinion, the Ritva is a *chiddush*. Once one danced in honor of the wedding, how can one argue that he is *panim chadashos* when he already participated in the celebration. Furthermore, Rav Elyashiv writes that he did not find any of the other Rishonim who agree with the Ritva about this matter and thus questions relying on his opinion, halacha l'maaseh.



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