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QUEEN'S GAMBIT: DOES ONE MAKE A BRACHA UPON SEEING NATIONAL LEADERS?

Adapted from the writings of Dayan Yitzhak Grossman

On September 8, Queen Elizabeth II died at the age of 96.¹ Her reign of 70 years was the longest of any British monarch in history.²

HONORING MONARCHS

Chazal instruct us to show honor to kings; according to some of the Chachamim, this extends even to wicked kings:

“And he went out from Paroh’s presence in burning anger” (Shmos 11:8)... Reish Lakish said: Moshe slapped him and left.

Did Reish Lakish actually say this? Isn't it written: “...And you shall stand to meet him on the bank of the Nile...” (Shmos 7:15); and Reish Lakish said: He is a king, so show him favor. R' Yochanan said: He is wicked, so be brazen toward him.

(The Gemara answers;) Reverse (the names of the disputants; it was Reish Lakish who said that Moshe was commanded to be brazen).

R' Yanai said: Fear of the kingship should always be upon you, as it is written, “And all these your servants shall come down to me and bow to me...” (Shmos 11:8). (He mentioned Paroh's servants, but not Paroh

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¹ Wikipedia contributors. Death and state funeral of Elizabeth II. In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Death_and_state_funeral_of_Elizabeth_II&oldid=1110319095.

² Wikipedia contributors. Elizabeth II. In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Elizabeth_II&oldid=1110313420.

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PARSHAS NITZAVIM

GIVING THE FIFTH

Excerpted and adapted from a shiur by
Dayan Yitzhak Grossman

It is not in Heaven, that you should say,
“Who will go up to Heaven for us and take
it for us, to tell it to us, so that we can do
it?” Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should
say, “Who will cross to the other side of the
sea for us and take it for us, to tell it to us, so
that we can do it?”

Devarim 30:12-13

The Gemara (Eiruvin 55a) offers three *drashos* on these *psukim*. The first is that if the Torah would in fact be found only in Heaven or across the sea, one would need to travel there to acquire it. The She'iltos maintains that this *drashah* is accepted as halacha. Therefore, one whose *rebbe* is across the ocean would have to travel there to study Torah. But the Netziv in his Ha'amek She'eilah points out that the Rambam and other *Rishonim* do not cite this *drashah*. One may infer that they accept one of the other *drashos* as the halacha.¹

How much money must one spend to fulfill a mitzvah other than talmud Torah? The

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¹ The second and third *drashos* understand the *psukim* to be teaching that Torah cannot be acquired by someone who is arrogant or haughty like the heavens.

Seamus O'Braille

Q May I discard an old siddur written in Braille, or must it be put in *sheimos*?

A The Torah warns (Devarim 12:4), “Lo sa'asun kein lashem elokeichem” (Do not do so to Hashem your G-d). This *pasuk* follows the mitzvah of eradicating idols, and it forbids destroying an inscription of Hashem's name. But the Shach (Y.D. 179:11) writes that the Torah only forbids erasing a Divine name if it's written in Hebrew. (Even in another language, he says it shouldn't be erased unnecessarily; see below.) R' Chaim Ozer Grodzensky (Achiezer 3:32) adopts the Shach's ruling.

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himself.)

R' Yochanan says: Derive it from here: "And the hand of Hashem was on Elyahu, and he girded his loins and ran before Achav..." (Melachim I 18:46).³

THE BRACHA UPON SEEING A MONARCH

A *bracha* is recited upon seeing a king, Jewish or not:

The Chachamim taught...One who sees Jewish kings recites: Blessed...Who shared of His glory with those who revere Him. One who sees kings of the nations of the world recites: Blessed...Who gave of His glory to flesh and blood.⁴

Several (although apparently not all) recent authorities extend the recitation of the *bracha* to queens as well as kings.⁵

There is considerable debate among authorities of the past century about whether the *bracha* should be recited over heads of state and heads of government in the modern era, such as kings and queens, presidents, and prime ministers. Much of the discussion revolves around a ruling of R' Avraham Av Bais Din (Ra'avad II), cited by R' David ibn Zimra (Radvaz) and later authorities, that

Anyone who is important in his position of authority like a king, and can judge and execute (his subjects) by his law, and there is no one who can overrule his orders...he is like a king, and we recite upon him the *brachos* of "Who shared of His glory" and "Who gave of His glory."⁶

Based on this passage, some authorities rule that a *bracha* is not recited even on as powerful a ruler as the president of the United States, since he does not have the power of life⁷ and death.⁸ Others suggest that the power to send forces into combat may

satisfy this requirement.⁹ Still others argue that the *bracha* is not recited on presidents and prime ministers because their powers are limited and shared with other branches of government and they can be impeached by the legislature,¹⁰ or because they hold power for limited terms.¹¹ Some recommend that the *bracha* be recited upon modern national leaders without Hashem's name (*sheim umalchus*).¹² It is reported that R' Zelig Epstein recited the *bracha* on President Bill Clinton,¹³ although it is unclear whether he did so with *sheim umalchus*.

Some maintain that the *bracha* is recited upon modern constitutional monarchs,¹⁴ while others argue that if they are really just figureheads, the *bracha* is only recited without *sheim umalchus*.¹⁵

R' Osher Weiss writes that the *bracha* is not even recited today on dictators and despots, who are absolute rulers with the power of life and death, because

This *bracha* was instituted on kings whose judgment was in accordance with justness and integrity, and not on these who judge arbitrarily, without law and justice. On them the *bracha* of "who gave of His glory" should not be recited, since in the eyes of the family of enlightened nations this is not glory at all, but rather ignominy and great disgrace, and we should not bless Hashem "who gave of His glory to flesh and blood" regarding something that is not glory but shame and disgrace.¹⁶

9 Shu"t Sha'arei Ezra *cheilek* 2 end of *siman* 17 s.v. *Lefi zeh mistaver*.

10 Teshuvos Vehanhagos *ibid*; Rav Weiss *ibid*. os 5; Cf. HaRav Aviner *Lanasi* Putin.

11 Rav Weiss *ibid*; R' Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky (the Steipler), cited in HaRav Aviner *Lanasi* Putin. The Satmar Rebbe (R' Yoel Teitelbaum?) and R' Chaim Kanievsky are also cited there as maintaining that the *bracha* is not made on the president of the United States.

12 Be'er Moshe *ibid*.

13 R' David Zauderer, *Parshas Vayigash: A Blessing on POTUS*.

14 Sheivet Halevi *ibid*. (It is not entirely clear what sort of monarch he is referring to, but by making no distinction, he would seem to be including contemporary constitutional monarchs in his discussion.)

15 Be'er Moshe and Rav Weiss *ibid*, and cf. Teshuvos Vehanhagos *ibid*.

16 Rav Weiss *ibid*.

3 Zevachim 102a. Cf. Mechilta DeRabi Yishmael 12:3; Shmos Rabbah 7:3; Rashi Shmos 6:13 and 11:8; Tanchuma Toldos 12; Rashi, R' Yosef Kara, and Radak to Melachim I 13:2; Shu"t Chasam Sofer C.M. *siman* 190; R' Osher Weiss, Va'eira: *Kvod Malchus* (os 1).

4 Brachos 58a.

5 Shu"t Sheivet Halevi *cheilek* 1 *siman* 35; Shu"t Be'er Moshe *cheilek* 2 *siman* 9; Shu"t Teshuvos Vehanhagos *cheilek* 2 *siman* 139.

6 Shu"t Radvaz *cheilek* 1 *siman* 296, cited by Magein Avraham *siman* 224 s.k. 5; Mishnah Brurah *ibid*. s.k. 12.

7 Ra'avad II and Radvaz mention only the power of death, not life. The latter is mentioned by Shu"t Chasam Sofer O.C. *siman* 159.

8 Shu"t Be'er Moshe *cheilek* 2 *siman* 9; R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, cited in HaRav Aviner *Lanasi* Putin: *Slichah, Al Te'alev, Aval Atah Lo Melech Le'inyan Habracha Al Melech*.

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On the other hand, a Hebrew word written in Braille might be viewed as Hebrew. The lettering may be foreign, but the word is *lashon hakodesh* because the dots represent the letters of the Hebrew aleph-bais.



RAV ARYEH FINKEL

Yet the *poskim* debate whether even script Hebrew is considered Hebrew writing, given that the letters have a different form (see the comprehensive discussion in Yabia Omer Vol. 4 Y.D. 20:5). Those with the lenient view would certainly extend it to Braille. But even the stringent opinion may view Braille more leniently: Script letters are accepted universally as a way of writing, so they represent aleph-bais, even if their appearance differs. Braille, however, is undecipherable to most Hebrew readers, so arguably it never evolved into a substitute for Hebrew letters. (If someone were to invent his own new aleph-bais characters and inscribe Hashem's name, erasing it certainly poses no *de'Oreisa* violation.) The Chelkas Yaakov (O.C. 124), though, doesn't follow this reasoning, as he clearly equates Braille with regular aleph-bais letters and forbids erasing a Braille inscription of Hashem's name.

Still, even in cases where the *de'Oreisa* prohibition doesn't apply, *poskim* say that one must still give proper honor to Hashem's name and to Torah inscriptions and avoid degrading them. R' Yitzchak Zilberstein (Chashukei Chemed, Sanhedrin 21b) says that Braille *sfarim* should be placed in *sheimos*.

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G e m a r a
(B a v a
Kama 9b)
a s s u m e s
that one

must spend a third of his money on a positive mitzvah. The Ra'avad explains that we don't want a person to become poor by spending too much on a single

mitzvah. This is also the *psak* of the Rama (O.C. 656:1), that one need not spend a *hon rav* (large fortune) to purchase a lulav or esrog. How much, then, must he spend? Some *Acharonim*, including the Chayei Adam, hold that one must pay up to a *chomesh* (a fifth of his money) on one mitzvah, while others,

including the Aruch Hashulchan and Minchas Asher, argue that not paying a "hon rav" includes even a large sum less than that amount. According to the Chelkas Yo'av and Minchas Asher, one must pay the amount that the mitzvah object is worth, but not more.

Poskim also debate whether one

must suffer pain to fulfill a positive mitzvah. The Rosh Yosef says no, but the Birkei Yosef says yes.

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