



Excerpted from *Living the Halachic Process* by Rabbi Daniel Mann - Eretz Hemdah, with their permission [www.erezhemdah.org]

A Chatan Leading Bentching at Sheva B'rachot¹

Question: May a chatan lead the bentching and/or recite the sheva b'rachot at his own sheva b'rachot celebration? If he generally should not, does it make a difference if he is a greater talmid chacham than anyone else present?

Answer: We will begin with a bit of background. Two sets of b'rachot are recited under the chupa: birkat eirusin and birchot nisuin/birchot chatanim. We refer to the latter as the sheva b'rachot (which are actually six special b'rachot in addition to the b'racha over the cup of wine that accompanies them). The birkat eirusin relates to the betrothal,² and the sheva b'rachot relate to the

nisuin and are repeated through the week of celebration.³

Classical sources seem to indicate that fundamentally, the chatan himself should recite at least the birkat eirusin before fulfilling his mitzva of getting married.⁴ However, due to one or more of the following concerns, a strong minhag has developed that other people recite both sets of b'rachot (although some concerns may apply more to one than to the other).

The Mordechai⁵ says that it is haughty (yohara) for the chatan to claim the b'rachot for himself. The Rambam is reported to have said⁶ that several of the sheva b'rachot were instituted to bless the chatan and kalla, and they therefore should be recited by others. Orchot Chayim⁷ asserts that we are concerned that if the custom is established for chatanim to recite the b'rachot, those who are unable to do so will be embarrassed. The consensus is that the chatan should recite the b'rachot only if he is the sole available person who can recite them reasonably.⁸

There may be a practical difference between the reasons. Some of the sheva b'rachot are general praises of HaShem

¹ *Sheva berachot* can refer either to the days (usually seven) of celebration after a wedding, to the individual festive meals during this period, or to the seven blessings that are recited after those meals.

² The halachically most significant part of the marriage process, which makes the woman off-limits to all men but her husband. This is generally accomplished by giving the ring.

³ The second and final halachic stage of the marriage process, after which the couple lives together as husband and wife. At the time of *Chazal*, there were twelve months between the *eirusin* and the *nisuin*, during which time the families prepared for the upcoming union.

⁴ See Rambam, *Ishut* 3:23; *Tur*, *Even HaEzer* 34; *Shulchan Aruch*, *Even HaEzer* 34:1.

⁵ *Ketubot* 131.

⁶ See beginning of *Ma'aseh Rokeach* on the Rambam; see also *Aruch HaShulchan*, *Even HaEzer* 62:9.

⁷ *Kiddushin* 21.

⁸ See *S'dei Chemed* vol. VII, p. 434; *HaNisuim K'Hilchatam* 10:21; *Nitei Gavriel*, *Nisuin* 99:2.

and do not focus specifically on the chatan and the kalla. In theory, according to the Rambam's reason, the chatan should be able to recite those b'rachot. It seems that in former times, one person recited all of the b'rachot, and in an "all or nothing" situation, we prefer that the chatan do nothing. Nowadays, when we assign the b'rachot to a number of individuals, one could contend that the chatan could say the first few sheva b'rachot. Nevertheless, the prevalent minhag is that the chatan does not recite any of the sheva b'rachot. This is the correct practice according to the other reasons and, in general, is just as well (the chatan has enough limelight). This is true both under the chupa and during the week of sheva b'rachot celebrations.

The matter is less clear when it comes to leading the bentching/zimun. On the one hand, leading the bentching is fundamentally the same at a sheva b'rachot celebration as at other meals, and there should thus be no reason to exclude the chatan. On the other hand, there are clear connections between the bentching and the sheva b'rachot. The sheva b'rachot are recited specifically at the end of the Birkat HaMazon; the mezamen⁹ waits until the sheva b'rachot are finished to make the b'racha and drink the wine; and the m'zamen recites special sheva b'rachot insertions of "D'vai haseir ..." and "... shehasimcha

bim'ono." Therefore, it would not be too surprising if the chatan's ineligibility to recite sheva b'rachot would extend to being m'zamen.

Let us analyze whether the aforementioned reasons to exclude a chatan apply also to being the m'zamen. The bentching and the special insertions recited by the m'zamen do not focus on the chatan's and kalla's welfare. It is unclear whether there is a specific concern that chatanim would feel pressured to lead the bentching and/or be embarrassed if they do so improperly. Finally, it need not be perceived as haughty for the chatan to lead the zimun, considering that this is a normal task and that he is usually a guest of the sponsors of the festivities and not seizing the honors himself. Therefore, one can easily make the case that a chatan can lead the bentching, and some poskim even cite a minhag that the chatan is specifically given this honor,¹⁰ especially at seuda shlishit.¹¹

However, since the clearly prevalent practice is that chatanim do not bentch at their own sheva b'rachot (even if this practice may have been originally motivated by ignorance), it would be objectionable for one to do so without an exceptional reason. Granted, it is unclear whether the practice has reached the level of a binding minhag. Nevertheless, due to the practice, a

⁹ The person who leads the *bentching*.

¹⁰ *HaNisuim K'Hilchatam* 14:109; *Nitei Gavriel* op. cit. and 106:(12).

¹¹ See Question H-4 in this volume for a situation in which this may be halachically preferable.

chatan's leading of the bentching is likely to raise eyebrows and create an appearance of haughtiness, at least on the level of the spirit of the law. This is all the more so true if it is perceived that he is doing so because he is the most learned person there, as you inquired. However, as we noted above, the chatan may recite any of the sheva b'rachot if no one else is capable, and we can extend this to zimum when no one else feels comfortable leading the somewhat more complicated bentching.

