



Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

From the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

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What Blessings Will We Recite Upon Pollard's Release?

Q: When Jonathan Pollard is finally released from an American prison after thirty years, should he recite Ha-Gomel?

A: Certainly, as the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 219:1) rules that one who is freed from jail recites this blessing.

Q: But the Mishnah Berurah writes in the Biur Halachah (d.h. Chavush) that in the case of one who is imprisoned but not in danger, the Sefardic custom is to recite Ha-Gomel but the Ashkenazi custom is not to do so, and Pollard is Ashkenazi. Furthermore, there are rules in a American prison and people are not randomly killed there.

A: 1. He has been in danger on account of the harsh treatment he received there, including years of solitary confinement. 2. He has been with other prisoners who could have murdered him (Piskei Teshuvot 219:4). 3. He has

been in a life-threatening situation various times on account of illnesses, and he continues to be very sick.

Q: If so, it is clear that he should recite Ha-Gomel...

A: Furthermore, the Kaf Ha-Chaim (219:1) brings that Sefardim should recite Ha-Gomel when being released from jail on account of the lack of personal freedom, even if there were wonderful conditions. And Ashkenazi Poskim hold that one recites the blessing if one is bound in handcuffs and this is the case here (Piskei Teshuvot ibid. #1. Although Ha-Rav Chaim Kanievski said that Pollard should not recite Ha-Gomel based on the simple understanding of the words the Mishnah Berurah writes in the Biur Halachah brought above. Parashah Sheet "Divrei Shi'ach" – Parashat Re'eh 5775 - #131).

Q: Should we recite Ha-Tov Ve-Ha-Meitiv?

A: Yes, upon the good news of his release (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 222:1. And this is also the opinion of Ha-Rav Chaim Kanievski. Parashah Sheet "Divrei Shi'ach" – Parashat Re'eh 5775 - #131).

Q: When should we recite this blessing?

A: Upon his release.

Q: Why don't we recite the blessing now over the good news that he will be released?

A: We only recite it when he leaves the prison and is free, since there can always be complications.

Q: Should everyone recite this blessing?

A: Anyone who is truly joyous. See Aruch Ha-Shulchan (ibid. #1).

Q: Should one recite Mechaye Ha-Meitim when meeting him after his release?

A: No, since we have known all along that he was alive. We only recite this blessing if we have not heard from someone in over a year and there is a possibility that he is dead.

A: Should one recite Shehechyanu when meeting him after his release as one does when not seeing his friend for 30 days?

A: Yes. Although there are those who do not, for various reasons, customarily recite Shehechyanu over seeing a friend (see Piskei Teshuvot 225:2. And Ha-Rav Chaim Kanievski said that one should not recite Shehechyanu when

seeing Pollard based on the Mishnah Berurah 225:2. Parashah Sheet "Divrei Shi'ach" – Parashat Re'eh 5775 - #131). But Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah quotes all of these blessings in Sidur Olat Re'iyah (Vol. 1 pp. 380-382) as the basic Halachah lays out (and see Shut She'eilat Shlomo 3:83-84, 86).

Q: But Shehechyanu is only recited when one is joyous to meet his friend, and not when one has never met the person (Shulchan Aruch ibid. #2)? And is someone who visited Pollard in prison, as Ha-Rav did, in the category of a "friend"?!

A: This is a unique case (see Piskei Teshuvot ibid. #2). Pollard is all of our friend since he saved our entire Nation from the non-conventional weapons of the enemy. When the Netziv met the Aderet for the first time, he recited Shehechyanu (see Ha-Rav's commentary on Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 59:21).

Q: This was special since the Aderet was a Torah giant! And the Munkatcher Rebbe recited Shehechyanu upon seeing the Saba Kadisha for the first time (Shut Yayin Ha-Tov #48-49), as did Ha-Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld over the Munkatcher (Masaot Yerushalayim p. 21). And Ha-Rav Ephraim Greenblatt ruled that one should recite Shehechyanu the first time he meets Ha-Rav Moshe Feinstein (Shut Revivot Ephraim 6:104). It therefore seems that this is a special halachah for Torah giants!

A: One who saves his friend, and all the more so one who saves the entire community, has an aspect that is comparable to a Torah scholar. See Pele Yoetz Erech "Hatzalah", who explains the saying of our Rabbis: "Even those of Israel who are empty are as full of Mitzvot as a pomegranate [is full of seeds]." How so? It is those who save lives. And the Pele Yoetz emphasizes: One who saves lives is greater even than a Torah scholar.



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