



Reciting a Blessing on Seeing the President of the United States

Question: If someone sees President Obama (who is visiting Israel) should he recite the blessing of "Baruch...she-natan michvodo le-vasar ve-dam - Blessed are You...who has given of His glory to flesh and blood"? (In the Gemara in Berachot 58a, our Rabbis teach that one who sees a non-Jewish king recites the blessing. It is recorded in the Rambam, Hilchot Berachot 10:11 and Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 224:8. The Chatam Sofer, Orach Chaim #159, rules that even if one sees the king outside of his area of "rule," one must still recite the appropriate blessing).

Answer: No, the President of the United States is not a king. Halachic authorities mention four criteria in order to be considered a king for this purpose:

1. One must be the absolute ruler of his kingdom or country (Orach Chaim in name of Sefer Ha-Eshkol, Hilchot Berachot #49, Shut Ha-Radvaz 1:296). The President of the United States does not have absolute authority. He must bend to the will of the Congress whether he likes it or not.
2. The king must have the ability to administer capital punishment (Shut Chatam Sofer *ibid.*). The President does not possess this power. While he does have the power to grant life by issuing a pardon, he does not possess the power of death (Shut Be'er Moshe 2:9). If he issues a pardon to Jonathan Pollard, we can discuss this further...
3. The king must have royal clothing. The President of the United States wears a suit like everyone else (Shut Yehaveh Da'at 2:28 and Shut Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot 2:139).

4. The king must have an entourage (see Shut Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot ibid. Ha-Rav Sternbuch writes there that he heard that Ha-Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, the great Rav of Yerushalayim before the establishment of the State, once had a private meeting in a tent with the King of Jordan and he recited this blessing even though he was without his entourage). While the President is traveling with 400 guards, it is for his protection.

The Satmar Rebbe similarly ruled that one does not recite a blessing over the President of the United States since he is not a king (see the book "Edut Bi-Yosef," p. 49 #76). The Steipler Gaon also ruled that no blessing is recited over a President (Orchot Rabbenu vol. 1, pp. 93-94).

People get very scared about what the President says, but there is no need. What he says does not mean that this is the way it is. This is for two reasons: 1. The United States does not help us simply to be kind, but because they profit from it. They need us militarily. We handle this part of the world. They need us technologically. They make planes in the US, and then bring them here and the "chevra" makes them into super-planes. The biggest plane manufacturer has a plant here. It is not to be kind, but to profit. They need us no less than we need them. 2. The President must bend to the will of Congress. The Congress was pro-Israel even before the establishment of the State. They are sometimes even more pro-Israel than we are because while in Exile we learned to be weak and frightened. We need to add strength and courage and then the non-Jews will relate to us in a proper manner. The Monroe Doctrine was stated by President James Monroe that Europe would no longer interfere with the affairs of the US: America for Americans. Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, applied this doctrine to us: We will not interfere with what America is doing and America should not interfere with what we are doing here.

The President of the most powerful country, with the biggest army, the largest economy, the super-power of the world is visiting the tiny State of Israel, and yet some people say that this is not "Atchalta De-Geulah – the beginning of the Redemption." Ha-Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach in Shut Minchat Shlomo (the last responsum in vol. 1) wrote that one is obligated to recite four blessings when the Messiah arrives: 1. "Baruch...Chacham Ha-Razim – Blessed are You...Knowers of

secrets" which is recited when seeing 600,000 Jews together and certainly at least this many Jews will go out to greet the Messiah. 2. "Baruch...she-chalak mechomato lirei'av - Blessed are You...who, using His knowledge, has appointed those who fear him" which is recited when seeing an outstanding Torah scholar and the Messiah will certainly fit this criteria. 3. "Baruch...she-chalak michvodo lirei'av- Blessed are You...who has shared His glory with those who fear him" which is recited when seeing a Jewish king. 4. "Shechechyanu" - Blessing Hashem for having arrived at this moment. We still are waiting for this time to arrive, but we are continuing to advance. After all, the President of the United States is visiting the State of Israel. Instead of reciting a blessing over the President, I recommend reciting two prayers for the Nation of Israel, two which we recite every day before the Shema, but now we should do so with extra proper intention: "Blessed are You, Hashem, who chooses His Nation Israel with Love" and "Blessed are You, Hashem, who love His Nation Israel."

Q: Should we try to see the President since he is the most honored person in the world?

A: You do not need to run to greet him. The Gemara in Berachot (9b) says that a person should strive to see non-Jewish kings, so that he will be able to perceive the difference between the non-Jewish kings and the Messiah. President Bush, however, is not a king. It is possible to have a king who is not honored and an honored person who is not a king. Our Sages established this decree for a king, and provided the definition of a king. Don't worry. We will be able to tell the difference between him and the Messiah!