

Queen's Gambit: Does One Make a Bracha upon Seeing National Leaders?

Adapted from the writings of Dayan Yitzhak Grossman

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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 himself.)

R’ Yochanan says: Derive it from here: “And the hand of Hashem was on Eliyahu, 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 life[7] 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]

[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.

[3]Zevachim 102a. Cf. Mechilta DeRabi Yishmael 12:31; 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 Tei'alev, Aval Atah Lo Melech Le'inyan Habracha Al Melech*.

[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.*