



FROM THE VIRTUAL DESK OF THE OU VEBBE REBBE

RAV DANIEL MANN



Mechayei Hameitim After Long Separation

Question: I will soon see my son-in-law after a more than two year Corona-forced separation. We have been in frequent contact and have seen each other often on Zoom. Should I say the *beracha*, “... *mechayei hameitim*” (Who brings the dead to life)?

Answer: The *gemara* (Berachot 58b) says that upon seeing a friend after separation, after thirty days he recites *Shehecheyanu* and after twelve months, “... *mechayei hameitim*”. According to most opinions, if one recites the latter, he does not recite the former (Magen Avraham 225:2; Mishna Berura 225:4). The *berachot* are predicated on the assumption of significant joy over the reunion, making it logical that it is only for friends one is fond of (Tosafot 58b), and even very fond of (Shulchan Aruch, OC 225:1).

Shehecheyanu is a common, general *beracha* for a wide variety of happy experiences. *Mechayei Hameitim* is surprising for this context, as its daily usage relates to belief in Hashem literally resurrecting

the dead, not reuniting with a live person. The Mishna Berura (ibid.) is among those who explain that since after twelve months, Rosh Hashana has passed, in which a person’s fate was decided, one can be happy that his friend survived. There is precedent for a celebratory *beracha* for another’s survival (Berachot 54b regarding *Hagomeh*).

Mechayei Hameitim’s unique nature may help explain why people do not commonly recite it (as reported by the Ben Ish Chai (I, Eikev 13) and many others) in this context with the full formula, including Hashem’s Name, known as *shem u’malchut*. (People often say “*baruch mechayei hameitim*” as a half-joke upon seeing someone after a long absence). The Panim Meiros (I:65) says that since it is borrowed from *Shemoneh Esrei*, where it lacks the full formula, it is recited without Hashem’s Name. The Ben Ish Chai explains that it is because not everyone about whom it would be said appreciates the comparison.

Finally, in regard to your question, the Aruch Hashulchan (OC 225:2) says that since the *beracha* relates to resolving the doubt whether a friend is alive, if one communicated with him during the twelve

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months, he does not recite it. The Mishna Berura (ibid. 2) cites a *machloket Acharonim* about this and says not to make a *beracha* due to *safek* even regarding *Shehecheyanu*. However, Yechaveh Da'at (IV:17) takes issue with him because the logic (see Aruch Hashulchan ibid.) and sources (Halachot Ketanot I:120 gives a different explanation) on the matter apply only to *Mechayei Hameitim*.

Therefore, we cannot recommend reciting *Mechayei Hameitim* in your case. *Shehecheyanu* is a much more plausible option, for the happiness of seeing someone for the first time in [well over] thirty days, as Yechaveh Da'at ibid. and Yaskil Avdi (OC 25:3) recommend. Many *poskim* are against even *Shehecheyanu* and even if the two were not in touch, as not every friendship qualifies for the *beracha*. This approach is augmented by the opinion that such a *Shehecheyanu* is not mandatory (see Yechaveh Da'at ibid.). Although you seem close, Chesed La'alafim (OC 225:15) and

Nimukei Orach Chayim (225:1) say that since if the *beracha* were commonplace in this context, people would be embarrassed not to recite *Shehecheyanu* for a friend even if they are not close, the *minhag* developed to stop saying it for friends. Perhaps for a close relative this is not a concern (ibid.). Regarding a child-in-law, the question is interesting. On the one hand, the relationship is often very close. On the other hand, it is not as emotionally intense, and since it varies greatly from family to family, it makes sense to be concerned about embarrassment and opt for a *lo plug* without a *beracha*. Also, while Zoom is not like seeing in person, it might reduce the excitement of subsequently seeing in person and precludes the *beracha* (see ibid.). The stronger claim is that it does not preclude excitement in person, so that the *beracha* is appropriate.

In summary, while *Shehecheyanu* is probably called for, those who opt for halachic caution can thank Hashem (important) informally (see Birkat Habayit 24:1). ■

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