The SheHeheyanu Blessing

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Rabbi Johnny Solomon teaches Tanakh, Halakha, and Jewish Thought at Machon Ma'ayan and is a freelance Jewish Education Consultant. Prior to his move to Israel, he held a number of senior positions in Jewish educational institutions, and most recently, he was the Head of Judaic Studies at Hasmonean Girls' School (London). He studied at Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavne, University College London, and at the Montefiore Kollel in London. This article appears in issue 26 of Conversations, the journal of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

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PART I: AN EXAMPLE OF MISUNDERSTANDING AND MISAPPLICATION

A. Introduction

One of the common criticisms of Orthodoxy is that its excess focus on law detracts from the overall religious experience, and that the halakhic lifestyle replaces heartfelt emotions with halakhic mechanics. Although I disagree with such a broad criticism, I do accept that the trend toward the codification of halakha can lead to a disconnect between the emotions that a person may feel at a particular moment, and the prescribed halakhic response to such a moment.

But there are also occasions when the halakha as codified provides ample room for individual expressions of joy and exaltation, but the trend toward "measuring" all manner of experiences—including joy itself—leads to outcomes which do not reflect the purpose of the given halakha.

A case in point is the *SheHeheyanu* berakha as it applies to the purchase of items, and as I hope to explain below, this berakha has been profoundly limited by the attempt to "measure" moments of joy which should only be measured by the feelings of the person who has received or purchased an item. As I will also explain, rather than helping to bring clarity to the situation, the proliferation of numerous halakhic handbooks have actually added further misunderstanding and misinformation concerning this blessing.

B. *SheHeheyanu* on the Purchase of New Items

The Mishna[1] rules that if someone builds a house or buys new vessels, he or she must recite the berakha of *SheHeheyanu*; and in response to this Mishna, the Gemara[2] informs us of a debate between Rav Huna and Rav Yochanan.

According to Rav Huna, the blessing of *SheHeheyanu* relates to the possession of the item (or what we may refer to as the *hefza,* meaning "the item"). According to this reasoning, the blessing should only be recited if the individual does not already own a house or vessel, but if he or she does, no blessing should be recited. However, Rav Yochanan is of the opinion that the blessing is connected with the emotions of the individual at the point of purchase (or what we refer to as the *gavra*—"the person"), which means that the blessing may be recited as long as the person feels a sense of joy when purchasing the item. This may be the case even if the item was previously owned by someone else. Thus, *SheHeheyanu* is solely a reflection of the feeling of the person (*gavra*) rather than a measure of the need of the item (*hefza*). It is this view of Rav Yochanan that is recorded in the Tur,[3] who also cites how his father, the *Rosh,* [4] was of the opinion that *ein haBerakha elah al simhat haLev*—the blessing [of *SheHeheyanu*] is solely contingent on the feelings of the person.

A few lines later, the Tur mentions the opinion of *Tosafot,*[5] who draw a distinction between "important" and "unimportant" items, suggesting that *SheHeheyanu* should be recited upon purchasing "important" items such as a

cloak, but not on the purchase of less important items, such as socks and shoes. In response to this, the Tur again cites the opinion of his father, who rules that the blessing of *SheHeheyanu* is determined by the emotional response of the person, since "it can only be determined by the person, for you can have a poor person who is overjoyed with the purchase of a cloak far more than the [joy felt by a] rich person who purchases important vessels."[6]

However, while the majority of posekim concurred with the Rosh and the Tur, the majority of people did not act in accordance with that opinion. Instead, influenced by the *Tosafot* cited above as well as an opinion of Rav Sherira Gaon, [7] a shift in attitude occurred whose conclusion was that *SheHeheyanu* began to be measured not only on the feelings of the person (*gavra*), but also the value of the object (*heftza*).

This jarring between two conflicting attitudes is clearly evident in Rabbi Yosef Karo's *Shulhan Arukh,* which first quotes the above-cited words of the Rosh that "*ein haBerakha elah al simhat haLev,*"***[8]*** but then introduces the distinction made by *Tosafot* between important and less-important items. Although Rabbi Karo then adds that "if a poor person purchases such items and feels a sense of joy, he may recite the blessing,"[9] Rabbi Moshe Isserles, (Rema) appends this comment with the observation that this was not the custom in Ashkenazic communities. Therefore, even a poor person should not recite a blessing in this case.[10] In fact, it would seem that even among Sephardim who are not bound by the remarks of Rema, this custom of measuring the appropriateness of reciting *SheHeheyanu* by both the feelings of the person (*gavra*) *and* the value of the object (*hefza*) has become the norm,[11] despite numerous posekim challenging such a conclusion.[12]

The result of this inversion of the law is both remarkable in terms of its impact, and profoundly disappointing in terms of its spiritual cost. Rather than seizing the moment and expressing appreciation to God through the blessing of *SheHeheyanu*, someone who has purchased an item feels the need to "measure" the moment, with the hope that the joy that they feel as a result of the purchase is reflective of the importance of the item that they have purchased (see **Table 1** below).

However, what is no less telling is the manner in which contemporary rabbis and posekim have taken comfort in the shift toward measuring the blessing of *SheHeheyanu*, reflecting the trend identified by Rabbi Haym Soloveitchik in his seminal essay "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy"[13] of measuring Jewish practice in

accordance with minimal requisite quantities (*shiurim*). This is despite the fact that such measures were not reflective halakha as recorded or as lived by Jews for thousands of years, and in the case of *SheHeheyanu*, the shift is even clearer. However, very few posekim appear to have the courage to validate that something has gone awry with respect to this blessing, and instead, they continue to perpetuate the misunderstanding and misapplication of this blessing.

However, one such posek who had sufficient courage to take a second look at the formulation of the laws of *SheHeheyanu* was Rabbi Haim David Halevy. While Rabbi Halevy initially fell into the trap of auto-codifying, which is a term I have coined to describe the process whereby an author of a halakhic handbook records rulings found in previous halakhic handbooks with limited regard for their overall logic and consistency,[14] it was in response to a letter he received in February 1986, where Rabbi Halevy recognized how the halakha as codified and practiced was not in accordance with the halakha as required. He agreed and asserted that notwithstanding the misunderstanding and misapplication of this blessing, it should be recited whenever someone purchases any item that brings him or her joy.[15] Yet, despite the fact that such a conclusion is both correct and evident from all the classic and modern sources, the majority of modern halakha handbooks do not quote Rabbi Halevy and continue to perpetrate the sin of auto-codifying, and especially when exploring the rules of *SheHeheyanu* with respect to the purchase of a home and the purchase of shoes.

C. *SheHeheyanu* on the Purchase/Building of a New Home

As was noted above, the Mishna rules that if someone builds a house he or she recites the berakha of *SheHeheyanu*. However, as has been noted by the Magen Avraham,[16] the Ben Ish Hai,[17] the Kaf HaHayim,[18] and others, it would seem that the opinion of Rav Sherira Gaon, coupled with the longstanding misunderstanding of the *SheHeheyanu* blessing has led to its falling into disuse upon the purchase of a home. Thus, there are those who do recite *SheHeheyanu* upon purchasing a home, those who do not, and those who adopt the (absurd) suggestion that in order to halakhically “cover yourself” when reciting a *SheHeheyanu*, they should either eat a new fruit or wear a new piece of clothing and intend that the *SheHeheyanu* on the fruit or clothes also includes the new home.[19] As should be clear from my comments above, not only do I find this third option in direct conflict with an explicit Mishna, but the premise that the joy

felt when purchasing a home is equivalent to that felt when purchasing a piece of clothing or eating a new fruit is absurd, and reduces the *SheHeheyanu* blessing—whose recitation was supposed to be *al simhat haLev*, meaning a genuine personal expression of joy—to a false mechanical reaction.

D. Halakhic Handbooks and Auto-Codification

I previously noted how the distinction between important and unimportant items was introduced by the *Shulhan Arukh* and how contemporary rabbis and posekim have taken comfort in the shift toward "measuring" the blessing of *SheHeheyanu*. To clarify, it is clear that such a distinction exists. However, in contrast to the way this distinction has been presented in halakhic handbooks, it should be clear that the only person who can "measure" the importance or otherwise of a particular item is the purchaser.[20]

Perhaps the most remarkable expression of this attempt to "measure" the importance of an item is a table that I encountered in Rabbi Michael Yehoshua Newman's *Something NEW: A Comprehensive Guide to the Halachos of the Shehecheyanu Brocha*" (Feldheim, 2009). While it is important to note that Rabbi Newman presents some of the halakhot in a clear manner, he, too, slips into the trap of auto-codification. However, given the specific nature of this halakhic handbook, the results of this error are all the more glaring. For example, while he notes that "a person should recite a *Shehecheyanu brocha* when purchasing a new and expensive garment, provided he is very happy about its acquisition,"[21] he then adds that "the general guidelines for determining which new garment requires a *Sheheheyanu* depend on its monetary worth and how frequently the garment is purchased."[22] As has been shown above, this is not the case.

However, what particularly interested me in this book was the table where the author specified which items do and do not meet the criteria for reciting the *SheHeheyanu* blessing:

Table 1. SheHeheyanu on New Garments[23]

	Do not recite SheHeheyanu blessing	Recite SheHeheyanu blessing
Coat		•
Hat (expensive)*		•
Head covering	•	
Lady’s skirt of outfit (expensive)		•
Leather belt	•	
Pants	•	
Raincoat (with lining)		•
Scarf	•	
Shoes	•	
Shtreimel		•
Sweater	•	
Tallis gadol		•
Tallis katan	•	
Undershirts or socks	•	
Vest	•	

*If a hat is made of fur (for example, a shtreimel), the *SheHehayanu* blessing is still recited.

It should be stressed that, while the table is not accompanied by any footnotes, it is clear that the author collated information found in this table from an assortment of other works. However, while much could be discussed about the content of this table, I would like to focus on just one feature, that being the claim that we do not recite *SheHeheyanu* upon the purchase of new shoes.

E. *SheHeheyanu* on the Purchase of New Shoes

As has been noted above, *Tosafot* draws a distinction between "important" and "unimportant" items, suggesting that *SheHeheyanu* should be recited upon purchasing important items, such as a cloak, but not on the purchase of less important items, such as socks and shoes.

While one could debate whether a person is overjoyed with the purchase of a pair of socks, I think that it is fair to say that many people are thrilled when they purchase a pair of shoes, which is why the mention of shoes by *Tosafot*, Rema, and Rabbi Newman is all the more perplexing.

To understand why this is mentioned, it should be noted that Rema cites the opinion of the German posek Rabbi Yaakov Weil,[24] who was of the opinion that *SheHeheyanu* is not recited for leather items since their production involves the death of an animal. Although Rema dismisses this as being a weak reason, he does admit that this is probably why many people choose not to make this blessing when purchasing shoes.[25] However, this consideration does not appear to the basis for *Tosafot*'s initial remark, so the question remains why shoes were not considered to be important?

A possible answer to this question is found in Rabbi Eliezer Melamed's popular *Peninei Halakha* books.[26] Though he does not refer to historical works, Rabbi Melamed claims, I believe correctly, that the purpose of shoes have changed, and where they previously were viewed to be a simple way of protecting the foot while walking, they are now regarded as being items of

importance and fashion. Given this shift in the perspective and value of shoes, and the fact that many of us receive no less joy and pleasure from our shoes than other items, Rabbi Melamed explains that they should be viewed as all other important types of clothes; consequently, it would be appropriate to recite the *SheHeheyanu* blessing on their purchase. Of course, it goes without saying that such logic is unnecessary for the Rosh who believes that *ein haBerakha elah al simhat haLev*, so, if shoes make you happy, you should recite the *SheHeheyanu* blessing.

F. Conclusion

The *SheHeheyanu* blessing was established to capture a moment of joy through expressing appreciation to God. However, for a variety of reasons outlined above, it has been reduced through a series of misunderstandings and misapplications to become a blessing that far too few of us recite. Rather than *SheHeheyanu* expressing heartfelt emotions, it has now become an example of halakhic mechanics.

In addition to this, the solutions offered by some posekim to meet the criteria suggested by outlying opinions (such as the suggestion to halakhically "cover yourself" when reciting a *SheHeheyanu* by eating a new fruit or wearing a new piece of clothing) has marginalized this blessing even further.

But beyond presenting how this blessing has devolved, what the examples cited above are intended to show is the ease in which people fall into the trap of auto-codification, which I have defined as the act of writing halakhic handbooks with limited regard for their overall logic and consistency. As I noted, even Rabbi Halevy fell into this trap. However, consistent with his pursuit of intellectual honesty, when this matter was brought to his attention, Rabbi Halevy revised his ruling. Suffice to say, the time has come to reconnect with the beautiful *SheHeheyanu* blessing and to realize that we don't need a halakhic handbook to teach us that *ein haBerakha elah al simhat haLev*.

PART II: AUTO-CUSTOMIZATION, OBJECTIFICATION, AND VALIDATION OF THE JOY OF A BRIDE AND GROOM

A. **Introduction**

In Part One, I described the disconnect between *SheHeheyanu* as a blessing of joy and its usage in the modern period. Rather than *SheHeheyanu* being a spontaneous expression of joyful feelings at a particular moment, halakhic handbooks—as opposed to the emotions of the individual at a particular moment—have become the arbiters for gauging *simha* (joy). Rather than *SheHeheyanu* expressing heartfelt emotions, it has now become an example of halakhic mechanics.

In this section, I explore *minhagim* (customs), specifically, the various customs concerning the recitation—or non-recitation—of *SheHeheyanu* on the occasion of a wedding. In so doing I hope to show how we have fallen into the trap of "auto-customization" (which is a term I have coined to describe the process of maintaining customs with little regard for their logic and their symbolism), and how the prevalent custom the groom reciting a *SheHeheyanu* blessing under the Huppah deserves a further look. I will also be highlighting the work of Rabbi Haim David Halevy (1924–1998), whose pursuit for intellectual honesty led him to adopt a refreshing approach to this issue.

B. ***SheHeheyanu* by a Groom under the Huppah**

Among the many customs performed at Jewish weddings is that the groom wraps himself with a tallit while standing under the Huppah.[27] Although the inclusion of a tallit as part of the wedding ceremony is regarded by many to have considerable halakhic significance,[28] it is also a well-known and oft-cited practice that the groom is given a *new* tallit on which he recites the *SheHeheyanu* blessing.[29] While this practice itself is unremarkable, what is remarkable is what the groom is expected to "have in mind" while reciting this *SheHeheyanu* blessing. As the well-known Sephardic halakhic handbook *Yalkut Yosef*[30] explains:

> Prior to [the groom] reciting the *SheHeheyanu* blessing, the rabbi who is the *Mesader Kiddushin*[31] should inform him that he should intend that the *SheHeheyanu* blessing be primarily associated with the new tallit while also intending to include within the *SheHeheyanu* blessing the mitzvah of

marriage, and similarly, to include the clothes and the new hat that he is wearing on his wedding day. And this also applies to the house, and the new furniture and the other new items that he received as gifts for their wedding [and on the bride who is new to him].[32]

What we see in this passage is that when the groom recites the *SheHeheyanu* on his new tallit, he should have in mind the act of marriage, a variety of other items, and his new bride. Especially given the way that this passage has been written, it would seem that the recitation of *SheHeheyanu* by the groom implicitly objectifies the bride,[33] and that the joy of a wedding is considered to be secondary to the joy of wearing a new tallit. Moreover, it would appear from this excerpt, which only speaks about *SheHeheyanu* being recited by the groom, that we are only concerned with the joy felt by the groom, notwithstanding the fact that numerous other rabbinic sources emphasise the importance of bringing joy to both bride and groom on their wedding day.[34]

In order for us to understand this practice we must take a step back and address a number of simple questions such as: a) Whether *SheHeheyanu* should be recited at a wedding; b) if the *SheHeheyanu* blessing should be recited at a wedding, who should recite it; and c) Why do we employ this convoluted "solution" as a way for the groom to express the joy he is feeling at his own wedding?

C. **Should *SheHeheyanu* Be Recited at a Wedding?**

To begin with, neither the Gemara nor Rambam mentions the practice of reciting *SheHeheyanu* at a wedding. For some, this omission leads to the conclusion that *SheHeheyanu* should not be recited,[35] while others point out that we cannot draw any conclusions from this fact.[36] Nonetheless, what does emerge from this debate are two schools of thought concerning the recitation of *SheHeheyanu* at a wedding. Some authorities insist that a wedding certainly qualifies as a time of sufficient joy to demand the recitation of the *SheHeheyanu* blessing, while other authorities are either of the opinion that *SheHeheyanu* should not be recited at a wedding, or at least they try and offer reasons why this is not the common practice.

i. ***SheHeheyanu should be recited.***

According to a number of halakhic authorities, *SheHeheyanu* should be recited at a wedding, and according to Rabbi Yaakov Emden,[37] *SheHeheyanu* should be recited at both an engagement and at a wedding.[38] The rationale for this position is that *SheHeheyanu* is an outlet for expressing joy and the joy of a wedding is certainly of sufficient magnitude to deserve the recitation of the *SheHeheyanu* blessing. Thus, Rabbi Emden rules that *SheHeheyanu* should be recited at a wedding by both the bride and groom since given that they are both joyous.

ii) SheHeheyanu should be recited "B'lo Shem U'Malkhut."

While citing the opinion of Rabbi Emden and agreeing with his logic, Rabbi Hayyim Yosef David Azulay—often referred to by the acronym "Hida"—states that *SheHeheyanu* should be recited at a wedding but "*B'lo Shem U'Malkhut,*"[39] meaning in an abridged form without using the name of God. While the Hida does not explain why this blessing should be recited without including God's name, Rabbi Elazar Horvitz[40] suggests that this may be due to the possibility that the couple may not bring joy to each other's lives,[41] and consequently, the blessing may be in vain.[42]

iii) SheHeheyanu should be recited, but practically, we are not sure when to recite it.

A third approach is offered by Rabbi Yechiel Michael Epstein, author of the *Arukh haShulhan*. While Rabbi Epstein recognizes that a wedding is a fitting occasion to recite the *SheHeheyanu* blessing, he explains that there is no truly suitable time during the marriage ceremony when this blessing should be recited, and in so doing, justifies the practice of its non-recitation.[43]

iv) SheHeheyanu should not be/is not recited at a wedding.

Finally, a number of authorities rule that *SheHeheyanu* should not be recited, or at least find a rationale for its non-recitation, for the following reasons:

- A wedding does not have a fixed time and (according to some authorities), we do not recite a *SheHeheyanu* on an event that does not occur *miZeman*

laZeman.[44]

- We do not recite a blessing on an act that is dependent on the will of another [45]
- *SheHeheyanu* is not recited on a mitzvah that is long-lasting.[46]
- The key mitzvah of a marriage is the mitzvah of *peru u'Revu* (be fruitful and multiply), which means that the mitzvah of marriage is not fully completed at a wedding ceremony.[47]

D. Why We Do What We Do

Given the considerable debate on the issue of reciting *SheHeheyanu* at a wedding, few communities insist that it be recited by the bride and groom,[48] and few communities take an absolute position that it should not be recited.[49] Instead, the common practice is that the groom recites *SheHeheyanu* on his new tallit while "having in mind" the wedding. However, as I have sought to explain, this practice is not a fair reflection of any of the above-mentioned opinions. As noted above, Rabbi Emden considered it a duty of both bride and groom to recite *SheHeheyanu*, while common practice only involves the groom. In fact, even Rabbi Yaakov Sofer, who records the debate between Rabbi Yaakov Emden and the Hida and who sides with the Hida, records a different solution to the one prevalent in Jewish weddings. According to Rabbi Sofer, both bride and groom—as well as the fathers of both the bride and groom[50]—should either recite *SheHeheyanu* on a new piece of clothing or a new fruit, and "have in mind" the wedding. However, if this is impractical, Rabbi Sofer is of the opinion that *SheHeheyanu* should be recited at the wedding (apparently by all these parties) *B'lo Shem U'Malkhut*.[51] Thus, neither Rabbi Emden, the Hida, or Rabbi Sofer suggest that *SheHeheyanu* should only be recited by the groom, nor suggest that this blessing should "cover" all the gifts and clothes that the couple receive as wedding gifts.[52] Thus, the ruling of *Yalkut Yosef* does not authentically reflect any of these opinions. Instead, it records common practice, notwithstanding the fact that this does not reflect the opinion of any of the primary sources that address this issue. Rather, it conflicts with the values implicit in those opinions by disregarding the joy of a bride on her wedding day.

E. Rabbi Halevy's Approach to *SheHeheyanu* at a Wedding

In contrast to the ruling of the *Yalkut Yosef*, Rabbi Halevy, adopts quite a different approach to this issue, which provides a fascinating reflection of his intellectual honesty, as well as an example of how he recognized the central role of emotions in Jewish practice.[53] Rabbi Halevy was fully aware of the different opinions on this matter, and he was also well aware of common practice amongst Sephardim. At the same time, Rabbi Halevy was of the belief that weddings are joyous occasions, and are seemingly suitable and necessary occasions for *SheHeheyanu* to be recited. This led Rabbi Halevy to an unusual situation where he felt the need to explain the general custom of not reciting the *SheHeheyanu* blessing at a wedding while also explaining why, and how, this blessing should be recited on a wedding day.

To begin, Rabbi Halevy states that he is unconvinced by the rationale offered by Rabbi Epstein regarding the impossibility of identifying when the blessing should be recited, [54] and he also dismisses those who claim that *SheHeheyanu* should not be recited at a wedding because it does not have a fixed time. Rabbi Halevy then addresses those opinions who defend the omission of *SheHeheyanu* at a wedding because the couple may not bring joy to each other's lives, making specific reference to the remarks of Rabbi Moshe Sofer (often referred to as the Hatam Sofer), who distinguishes between the *SheHeheyanu* recited when a person receives an object due to a predetermined divine plan, and the *SheHeheyanu* which a person may wish to recite when marrying a partner whom he or she has chosen of his or her own free will.[55] Yet, here too, Rabbi Halevy is skeptical of this distinction, since a person is no less free to purchase an item or a home for which *SheHeheyanu* would be recited than he or she is to choose a marriage partner.

This leads Rabbi Halevy to offer his own rationale concerning why *SheHeheyanu* is generally not recited at a wedding. He explains that while a wedding day is a day of joy, it is also a day when both bride and groom are anxious. He proves this point by referring to the many rabbinic sources which speak about the need to bring joy to the bride and groom,[56] from which he learns that there is a need to bring joy to the bride and groom on their wedding day since it is a day of mixed emotions when they may be nervous about their future. Based on this reasoning, Rabbi Halevy explains the general Sephardic practice, which is based on the ruling of the Hida, of reciting the *SheHeheyanu* blessing *B'Lo Shem U'Malkhut*.

However, it appears that Rabbi Halevy is not entirely satisfied. There is a sense that Rabbi Halevy feels torn on this issue, and in light of his halakhic approach, which places considerable emphasis on the role of emotion in Jewish

practice, it would appear as if Rabbi Halevy has a nagging feeling that notwithstanding all the different reasons that he and others have offered in order to defend why this blessing is not recited at a wedding, the joy of a wedding is certainly of sufficient magnitude to deserve the recitation of *SheHeheyanu*. Therefore, when Rabbi Halevy records this practice in his *Mekor Haim Hashalem*, he quotes both Rabbi Emden and the Hida while apparently leaving it up to readers to choose their own direction. As he explains:

> A man who is worthy to marry a suitable wife who is dear to him should recite *SheHeheyanu*. And our teacher the Hida ruled that he should recite the blessing *B'Lo Shem U'Malkhut.*[57]

Thus, Rabbi Halevy is true to his community, while also allowing his readers to be true to themselves. Yet, what should also be noted is that Rabbi Halevy draws no connection between the *SheHeheyanu* recited upon wearing a new tallit and the *SheHeheyanu* recited as an expression of joy by a bride and groom who are getting married.[58] At the same time, it should also be noted that his comments in *Mekor Haim Hashalem* do not address the possibility of a bride reciting the *SheHeheyanu* blessing.

However, in his work *Mekor Haim LiB'not Yisrael,* Rabbi Halevy provides a more thorough treatment of this issue where he explains the following:

> Someone who marries a suitable wife who is dear to him should recite *SheHeheyanu.* And the woman herself should also recite *SheHeheyanu.* However, our teacher the Hida ruled that the blessing should be without the mention of *Shem U'Malkhut*. Therefore, the correct thing to do is when the groom and bride are putting on their new clothes on their wedding day they should recite the *SheHeheyanu* blessing and while doing so, intend to include the wedding with this blessing.[59]

What we see here is how Rabbi Halevy identifies a pathway that still adheres to the opinion of the Hida but that also provides a framework for both bride and groom to express the joy they are feeling on their wedding day.[60] Consequently, when a bride and groom are getting themselves ready for their

wedding and putting on their new clothes, he suggests that they take a moment to reflect on the significance of this occasion by reciting the *SheHeheyanu* blessing. In contrast to *Yalkut Yosef*, which records a custom whose origins are tenuous at best and which not only disregards the joy of a bride but in fact objectifies her, Rabbi Halevy's ruling takes the emotions of both bride and groom into consideration while also showing regard for the common custom of not reciting *SheHeheyanu* on the wedding alone.[61]

F. **Conclusion**

As I have explained, there are divergent opinions regarding whether *SheHeheyanu* should be recited at a wedding. However, the common practice of including the recitation of *SheHeheyanu* when the groom puts on a new tallit is not in keeping with any of those who endorse its recitation. Rather than the *SheHeheyanu* reflecting the mutual joy felt by bride and groom, the current practice objectifies a bride, despite the fact that her independence, both in terms of her personhood and her joy, are core to the values underpinning a Jewish wedding. Given all the above, I consider the common practice to be a good example of "auto-customization," where we follow a practice with little regard for its logic and symbolism. Although Rabbi Halevy does not insist of reforming the wedding ceremony, his keen eye and sensitivity to Jewish law and human emotions identifies an authentic pathway in keeping with the practices of his community, while also reflecting the emotions of both bride and groom.

[1] Mishna *Berakhot* 9:3.

[2] *Talmud Bavli, Berakhot* 59b–60a.

[3] *Orah Hayyim* 223.

[4] See commentary to *Berakhot* 9:16.

[5] *Berakhot* 59b *sv. VeRabbi Yochanan.*

[6] Tur, *Orah Hayyim* 223.

[7] As recorded by *Tosafot*, *Sukkah* 46a *sv. Ha'oseh.*

[8] *Shulhan Arukh Orah Hayyim* 223:4.

[9] *Shulhan Arukh Orah Hayyim* 223:6.

[10] *Ibid*.

[11] See *Mekor Hayyim HaShalem* 2 p. 184 note 104, *Yalkut Yosef* Vol. 8 p. 595.

[12] See Responsa *Radbaz* 1:395, Responsa *Chatam Sofer* OC 55.

[13] *Tradition* Vol. 28, No. 4 (Summer 1994), available at http://www.lookstein.org/links/orthodoxy.htm.

[14] See *Mekor Hayyim HaShalem* 2 p. 184.

[15] *Asseh Lekha Rav* Vol. 8 pp. 55–61.

[16] *Orah Hayyim* 223:5.

[17] Year 1, *Re'eh* 6.

[18] *Orah Hayyim* 223:20.

[19] See *Yalkut Yosef* Vol. 8 pp. 596, *Piskei Teshuvot* Vol. 2 p. 891.

[20] On this point, see *Hayyei Adam* 62:3.

[21] Rabbi Michael Yehoshua Newman, *Something NEW: A Comprehensive Guide to the Halachos of the Shehecheyanu Brocha*, Feldheim: 2009 p. 38.

[22] *Ibid*. p. 39.

[23] *Ibid*. p. 42.

[24] Responsa No. 37.

[25] *Orah Hayyim* 223:6.

[26] *Peninei Halakha: Berakhot* p. 368 footnote 4, also available on http://ph.yhb.org.il/10-17-04/.

27 *HaNissuin KeHilkhatam* 12:67, quoting *Huppat Hatanim Dinei Birkat Eirusin.*

28 See for example *Shulhan HaEzer* 7:3:1.

29 See *Shulhan Arukh Orah Hayyim* 22:1.

30 This work is written by Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef, current Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, and is primarily based on the rulings of his father, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef *zt"l*.

31 This is a rabbinic term for the wedding officiant.

32 *Yalkut Yosef* Vol. 20 (*Sovah Semahot* Vol. 1) pp. 132–133.

33 Lest the reader think that this remark is an over-exaggeration, we should not forget the usage of the term "acquisition" in terms of marriage (e.g., see Ruth 4:10, Mishna *Kiddushin* 1:1). It is in order to counter a misunderstanding of this "acquisition" that the Gemara responds with remarks such as "Granted that the husband owns the labor of her hands, does he own the hand itself?!" (*Gittin* 77b). In fact, it is precisely because a woman is not entirely equivalent to an object or fully acquired by her husband which is one of the reasons given why *SheHeheyanu* is not required by most authorities for a wedding (*Sefer Birkat SheHeheyanu* by Rabbi Itamar Tapp pp. 840)! Notwithstanding this, it is clear from these remarks that *Yalkut Yosef* objectifies the bride.

34 See *Berackhot* 6b, *Ketubot* 17a.

35 See for example *Tosafot Sukkah* 46a DH *HaOsseh*, Responsa of the Rashba 1:245, who discuss the fact that the Gemara does not mention the practice of reciting *SheHeheyanu* at a Berit Milah.

36 See *Tosafot Menahot* 42b DH *V'Eilu* and Rambam, *Pe'er HaDor* No. 49. Given this, Rambam rules that *SheHeheyanu* should be recited at a Berit Milah and Pidyon haBen (see *Mishne Torah, Berakhot* 11:9), which led some to conclude that *SheHeheyanu* should also be recited at a wedding. See Responsa *Peulat Tzaddik* 3:99.

37*Mor U'Ketziah* 223. See also the opinion of the Ri Boton as quoted in *Responsa Halakhot Ketanot* Vol 1 No. 7.

38 It is noteworthy that Rabbi Emden offers a biblical basis for his position, finding support for the manner that Eliezer the servant of Avraham praised God (see *Bereishit* 24:27) when introduced to Rivkah as a prospective bride for Yitzchak. What is particular significant about this example is that the prospective couple still faced numerous challenges prior to their wedding. Rabbi Emden supports his position by quoting Gemara *Sukkah* 46a, which rules that *SheHeheyanu* should be recited upon the building of a Sukkah, even though this is done prior to the festival. Based on this reasoning, Rabbi Emden states that "how much more so [should *SheHeheyanu* be recited] for the Simhat Mitzvah of this [moment of getting married]."

39 Hida—*Mahzik Berakha* 223:5. See also *Sefer Halakha Berura* Vol. 11 p. 274 note 30.

40 *Responsa Yad Elazar Orah Hayyim* 21.

41 In fact, Rabbi Horovitz quotes the *Or Shraga,* who famously suggests that, especially given the possibility that couple may not bring joy to each others' lives, perhaps a more fitting blessing to be recited at a wedding should be "*Dayan HaEmet*"!

42 Despite this "risk," we have previously noted the sources cited by Rabbi Emden that make it clear that *SheHeheyanu* should be recited even when the outcome is not certain. As Rabbi Horvitz beautifully explains, "based on this logic, how are we ever able to recite the Zeman (i.e., *SheHeheyanu*) blessing on anything that brings us joy, such as when it starts to rain or when someone buys a house or when one's wife gives birth to a son? [In such cases] we have no idea if this 'good' is truly going to be good for the long run, or whether it will develop into a more bitter experience from which bad things could emerge from this good

[moment]… [In fact], how would it ever be possible for a person to bring a thanksgiving offering for any good or any miracle that occurred to him since it is possible that this good [moment] will eventually lead to bad outcomes. Therefore, it is necessary to say that a person only has [the ability to judge] what his eyes see and what his heart understands."

43 *Arukh haShulhan* 223:4. He explains that prior to *eirusin*, it is improper to recite the *SheHeheyanu* blessing as nothing significant has happened yet. However, once the Huppah occurs, the moment of greatest joy has already occurred.

44 This explanation is offered by the Semak and cited by the Maharik (Shoresh 128) to defend the practice of not reciting *SheHeheyanu* at a wedding, and it would seem that the Maharik is seeking a rationale for the fact that *SheHeheyanu* is not recited at a time when it would certainly be expected. See also *Shakh Yoreh Deah* 28:5. (nb. It should be noted that there is a significant debate regarding whether this is a factor in the recitation of *SheHeheyanu*. See *Sefer Halakha Berura* Vol. 11 p. 274 note 30).

45 *Tevuot Shor* 28:4. See also *Hatam Sofer Orah Hayyim* 55.

46 See *Mordehai* quoted by *Magen Avraham* 641:1.

47*Tevuot Shor* 28:4, *Gilyon Maharsha* (*Yoreh Deah* 28). See also *Shulhan Arukh HaMeKutzar* (Nissuin p. 227).

48 See Rabbi Yitzhak Ratzabi's *Shulhan Arukh HaMeKutzar* (Nissuin p. 226 note 417), who records that this is the custom amongst some Yemenite communities.

49 See for example *Nitei Gavriel* Ch. 60 note 10, who mentions that Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson of Lubavitch instructed that *SheHeheyanu* not be recited at a wedding.

50 The reason for this is explained in Rabbi Sofer's *Hukei Haim* (Wedding 2) who notes that the fathers of both bride and groom are also duty-bound to recite the *SheHeheyanu* blessing as they have fulfilled the duty of marrying off their children which is alluded to in the verse "take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands" (*Yirmiyahu* 29:6).

51 *Kaf HaHaim, Orah Hayyim* 223 Note 25.

52 In fact, logic would dictate that the blessing of *HaTov VaHaMeitiv* should be recited on the wedding gifts received.

53 Unless specified, all of the below is found in *Mekor Haim Hashalem* Vol. 2 pp. 191–192.

54 *Ibid*., note 141.

55 *Hatam Sofer Orah Hayyim* 55.

56 *Berakhot* 6b, *Ketubot* 17a.

57*Mekor Haim haShalem* Vol. 2 p. 191.

58 See also *Mekor Haim haShalem* Vol. 5 p. 32.

59 *Mekor Haim LiB'not Yisrael* p. 43.

60 While Hida suggests that the bride and groom could recite a blessing on a piece of clothing or a piece of fruit, it seems that the former offers a route to more strongly associate the blessing of *SheHeheyanu* with the wedding itself. It also seems that Rabbi Halevy prefers bride and groom to recite *SheHeheyanu* while using God's name when getting ready for the wedding over them both reciting this blessing *B'lo Shem U'Malchut* under the Huppah.

61While researching this topic, I was drawn to a further question regarding why the bride does not recite *SheHeheyanu* upon receiving her ring under the Huppah. Not only would this be halakhically required (or at least, recommended), but it could provide a framework for both bride and groom to recite *SheHeheyanu* with the name of God under the Huppah. Though few halakhic authorities address this question directly, a fascinating discussion of this issue is found in Responsa *Avnei Derekh* 6:29, who agrees with this logic but who cites the opinion of Rabbi Yaakov Ariel that the reason for not doing so is due to this being an infraction of the laws of modesty.