Mai Mevarech: A Berakha for Testosterone Gel

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She'eilah

What is the blessing that one should say over administering testosterone gel daily?

Introduction

I have been asked this question and others related to sanctifying HRT more broadly by trans folks seeking to honor the sacredness of their transition for some time now. It was not until I had the experience myself that I felt a new clarity and curiosity about the berakha that felt most appropriate, as our tradition teaches: "אנו לדיזי אלפים מה שちょうど רואים," "a judge has only what his eyes see," (Bava Batra 131a) that a teacher, a dayan, or posek must bring their own experience to their halakhic analysis.¹ Our sages demand that we learn, teach, and shape halakha that is authentically rooted in what we ourselves have perceived and encountered, understanding that our experiences are real, authoritative material out of which halakha is (re)formed.

The Talmud names three central attributes that grant someone the ability to adjudicate cases independently that would otherwise require a bet din of three and to respond when a halakhic question emerges: gemara (having learned the received tradition from a teacher), kabbalalah (having been accepted or chosen by those seeking an answer), and sevara.² Informed by Menachem Elon's Ha-Mishpat Ha-Ivri, my teacher and chevruta R' Benay Lappe describes sevara most often as one's moral intuition informed by deep learning and understanding of the tradition and the human condition.³ Commenting on a sugya in Sotah 20a, Rashi describes the process of honing and using one's sevara, in the following way:

¹ See also Sanhedrin 6a, Niddah 20a; for a careful treatment of this principle see Joel Roth, The Halakhic Process: A Systemic Analysis (1986). For references to this principle as it applies to trans folks examining and exploring halakha, see Jericho Vincent's teshuva “Genderqueer Torah on Niddah: Jewish Practices of Sacred Sexuality for Nonbinary Folks & People of All Genders” published by Trans Halakha Project (2023).

² See Sanhedrin 6a, specifically Yad Ramah's comment on "אני לדיזי אלפים מה שthresha"

Rashi makes this clear: sevāra is our tradition’s mechanism for ensuring that seemingly new emergent realities and the questions they bring with them are not shunned from the beit midrash but instead find their home in our mesorah, our tradition, through deep learning and understanding. This is how our tradition grows, how the Torah expands, and how halakha moves.

Our power as trans teshuva-writers and teachers lies in our ability to find the places where—Gd willing—our gemara and sevāra meet and to synthesize them in ways that help us all understand our seemingly unprecedented realities so fully that we see the ways in which they are so deeply preceded. As Rashi says, this is a process of exploration and analogy—not about “Can we...?” but “How can we...?” and “In what way...?” Or, in Rashi’s language, "What is this like and where can I learn it from?"

Instead of asking for permission to exist, we ask what the frameworks are that we might uncover to ground, to compare, and to learn/teach the new things of our lives (which we know are not new, only new to this moment in these iterations!). We visibilize the questions that are asked in our learning spaces. Recovering these questions is, for me, what lies at the heart of creating space for halakhic euphoria⁴ which honors and elevates the ways in which we fit and unearths the principles in our tradition that enable us to express ourselves authentically and joyfully through the language of halakha.

With Gd's help, I offer this teshuva from my own experience, rooted in what I humbly hope is sevāra. I know it will not reflect the experiences of all trans men or transmasculine people

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(and kal va’chomer all trans an non-binary people)—I offer it in the spirit of Rava who teaches the following:

אמר לו רבי לבר פפא ולבר הווא נברק ודבר יושע כ אתי פסקא דדני דידי קימיון דהוא

בוה פורמיא לא תקרעהו דאתיות לקמיא ואאתי לי טעמא מתניית לכ ואא לא דרניא ב

Rava said to Rav Pappa and to Rav Huna, son of Rav Yehoshua: If a conclusion of mine comes before you and you see in it a reason to challenge, a fault, or an issue, do not simply tear it up, but come to me. I may have a response to your challenge, which I will share with you. Or, I will change or retract my conclusion.

If you find a pircha, an error or a challenge in my words, please share it with me so that I can learn from it! Only HaShem is perfect, after all...

Teshuva

Rabbi Meir would say, חטיב אדם לברפ מאה ברכות כל יום, that a person that a person is obligated to recite 100 blessings a day (Menachot 43b). Berakhot are our language for responding to the moments of everyday life—both the painful and the joyful, and everything in between. Famously in Fiddler on the Roof, community members ask the local rabbi to bless everything from the Tzar to a new sewing machine. To bless something is to give it a home in halakha. And while, “May G’d bless and keep the Tzar far away from us,” (amen) is indeed a blessing, I aimed to locate my experience of taking testosterone in the formulation of existing Talmudic berakhot, from which we are cautioned against deviating, and so this teshuva will attempt to locate my experience blessing T within the existing lexicon of berakhot.

Our tradition teaches, אسور לו לאדם שיהנה מה אוולה הזה♭ but only when we receive that one should not receive benefit from something without first acknowledging the Source by reciting a berakha, and that if we fail to do so it is as though we have misappropriated a sacred object (Berakhot 35a). While the benefit I receive from HRT is hard to precisely and fully describe in my own words, berakhot carry intertextual meanings that have been poured into them throughout our unfolding tradition that help me—and each of us—convey that which is beyond our individual and particular experience. And so, we must clarify which blessing one should say in this particular case of taking hormones.

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5 See Tosefta Berakhot 4:5; Berakhot 40b; Mishneh Torah Hilkhot Berakhot 1:5; for a robust exploration of this principle see Ruth Langer, To Worship God Properly: Tensions Between Liturgical Custom and Halakhah in Judaism (1998), especially the first chapter.
It has become a common practice among many trans Jews to bless HRT with shehechiyanu. My teacher Joy Ladin describes her experience marking taking progesterone with this berakha in a stunning essay. She writes:

> And so, every day, when I take the medication that is making this possible, I say the blessing that registers the wonder and privilege of being, the awe and responsibility of becoming: Baruch atah Adoshem, Elokeinu melech ha-olam, shehechiyanu, v’kiyemanu, v’hiyeyanu, la-zman ha-zeh.

Ladin’s use of shehechiyanu is deeply radical: combating transphobic tropes that pathologize and demonize our transitions, she notes that this berakha is “never said over a disease,” and is similarly “not said over medication.” By naming these attributes and saying this blessing as she takes progesterone, Ladin affirms herself, and all of us along with her, within and through our tradition. She confirms that our transitions and our trans-ness itself are both sacred, holy, and deserving of blessing. Our sages teach that the customs of our people are beautiful, valid, and authoritative. This minhag is a beautiful one, and I do not intend to invalidate it, but instead to add to it.

HRT comes in many forms: pills, patches, injections, and creams, to name a few. I (currently) take testosterone administered in the form of a daily gel, which is applied in the morning after showering. The first time I administered T gel, I felt ecstatic, nervous, anticipatory, and magical. And as I began administering the gel each morning, it became a more regular, ordinary daily moment—much like the other sacredly ordinary moments of my morning routine—and it lacked the spectacularity and infrequency that I associate with shehechiyanu. Ladin, too, addresses this complexity in her essay, stating that “it is specifically not to be said over daily events, for which there are different blessings...” As Ladin remarks, this berakha is not for the ordinary, daily behaviors of life. I honor and learn from Ladin's experience of taking progesterone as a daily miracle, one that helps her settle into “the wonder and privilege of being, the awe and responsibility of becoming,” and inspired by her exploration of shehechiyanu I sought a berakha that would feel as aligned for me as shehechiyanu felt for her.

Like putting on tzitzit, washing my hands, getting dressed, or saying birkhot hashachar, administering testosterone is a regular embodied practice in my life, and I sought to more

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7 Those who see their HRT as a form of medicine for whatever reason will likely not resonate with what is contained within this teshuva, and may consider exploring an alternate approach of blessing דַּבַּר נָא לֹעַ יָפְקֵד (SA OH 230:4).

8 See Berakhot 60b and subsequent halakhic discourse for a conversation about whether, how, and to what extent shehechiyanu can be repeated for multiple similar actions.
precisely discern *dvar mitoch dvar*, as Rashi says, what thing in our tradition this might be more analogous to my experience in order to locate a *berakha* for taking testosterone in this form that I might say each day.

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Generally speaking, our tradition has three main forms of blessings: 1) *birkot shevach ve'hoda'ah*, which are said over praiseworthy events like experiencing thunder, 2) *birkot nehenin*, which are said in relation to a pleasurable sensation that one experiences, particularly from which one derives benefit (*hana'ah*), and 3) *birkot mitzvah*, which are said upon fulfilling one's obligation to do a *mitzvah*.

I experience some dimensions of *each* of these forms when I take testosterone, and therefore I yearned to find a *berakha* that would reflect the inherent fluidity of these categorizations. What follows is my exploration of *ha'tov ve'ha'meitiv*—a *berakha* that is said over good news, transformative states, and variations—as a *berakha* that can be said over taking testosterone daily. In the subsequent appendix, I offer the *seder* of my current practice, which incorporates administering testosterone into *birkot ha'shachar*’s *seder* of embodied blessings as one wakes in the morning, as outlined in the Talmud and by later *poskim*.

*Nehenin & Shevach: Examples of Ha'Tov Ve'Ha'Meitiv*

*Birkot ha'nehenin* are blessings recited over that which causes pleasure and enjoyment, including foods, fragrances, and other physical sensations. One common feature they share is the connection between the blessing and the immediate benefit derived; the principle that stands behind these *berakhot* is the aforementioned notion that ברכות של העולמים והזה בא ברכה, and therefore immediately before deriving benefit from something, one must make a *berakha*.

“Nehenin” has the Hebrew root ינות, which translates to “to be handsome,” “to be becoming,” “to adorn oneself,” “to be pleased,” and “to enjoy.” These definitions beautifully capture

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9 The word *hana'ah* holds both a general and specific meaning: generally, it functions as the noun of *ne'henin*, which may be translated as “enjoyment” or “benefit, and specifically it is used to describe a precise category of benefits that include financial benefits as opposed to eating. For example, there are categories of foods that are prohibited to consume but permitted to receive *hana'ah*, which one may sell to others, and consumption as opposed to deriving benefit is made distinct in this way. Throughout this teshuva I will use the term *hana'ah* in its general meaning, as the noun expressing benefit generally rather than the specific category of permitted items *be'hana'ah*. 

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what it has meant for me to take testosterone, to benefit deeply from a pleasurable process of transition and self-actualization that is possible through HRT.

When eating an apple, the berakha of borei p’ri ha’etz is recited to acknowledge—and in some perspectives to permit me to access—the physical pleasure that I derive from tasting and eating the apple. The hana’ah that I am blessing over is not the nutrients, vitamins, and sustenance. (The berakha achrona, which is a de’oraita obligation based on the pasuk האלכתחיינא נכת is, on the other hand, an appreciation for and acknowledgement of the sustenance.) This is why one blesses over candy that has no nutritional value, but one does not make such a berakha over a multivitamin that carries that same nutritional value and impact as an apple without the pleasure of consumption. In order to merit or require a birkat ha’nehe’nin, the object over which one is blessing must cause immediate pleasure and benefit through some felt physical sensation (like an apple, a fragrance, or candy), rather than a long-term positive impact that will eventually lead to some benefit in the future (like a multivitamin).

In the case of testosterone and HRT more broadly, it is not clear that the consumption or imbibing of hormones itself is the object of the blessing. In fact, the physical sensation of applying testosterone gel is more like applying Purell and less like eating delicious fruit. The impact is pleasurable, but the experience of absorbing it is not. And so, an analogous berakha is not simply something that is said over hana’ah gained from pleasurable sensory consumption.

Instead, I turned to a berakha that is associated with a more nuanced notion of benefit: ha’tov ve’hameitiv, the blessing made over good news.

Ha’tov ve’hameitiv is described in the mishnah in the following way:

על הימים, על הימים, על הימים, על הימים,敖מר ברוך שתה וברוך על הימים שהשמש עברה. ברך יודה אמר, הרואה את יום ההודא אמר ברוך yaşעשת את יום ההודא.

10 Devarim 9:1; see Rambam MT Hilkhot Berakhot 1:1.

11 Though the lack of blessing over a multivitamin is also related to its size. For blessings recited over healing endeavors, see SA OH 230:4, Mishnah Berurah SA OH 230:4, 7).

12 For those who hold that a berakha serves as a matir, i.e., something that gives an individual permission to derive benefit from the object, this ambiguity is equally significant.

13 For a resource that outlines some of the long term benefit and impact of testosterone, see The Testosterone Survey Zine: A Community Health Art Project by Rena Yehuda Newman.

14 Mishnah Berakhot 9:2
When a desirable event occurred to a person or they heard good news, even if it appears that this good will ultimately cause them difficulty, they should recite the blessing *hatov v'ha'meitiv*.

Good news, good tidings, a desirable event—these are all fairly ambiguous terms. What events and moments warrant this *berakha*? The Rashba explains the forms of benefit that merit *hatov v'ha'meitiv*:

Not in every kind of benefit that is to a person and others warrants the blessing *hatov v'ha'meitiv*. For if this were the case, one would bless *hatov v'ha'meitiv* on a new gourd. Rather, [it is said] in regards to a thing in which there is real substantial use (תועלת = “profit,” or “use”) and *hana'ah* to an individual, and to others along with them...

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15 Mishneh Torah Hilkhot Berakhot 10:4
16 Teshuvot HaRashba 4:77
17 Referencing Eruvin 40b.
According to this, ha’tov ve’ha’meitiv is not said on things of ordinary benefit: it is recited over things that have substantial—or perhaps material—impact and benefit. (A more robust discussion of “others along with them” will follow.)

Ha’tov ve’ha’meitiv is precisely said on transitions that are not those of nature, but are beyond nature. In the case of testosterone, the majesty of HRT is in its delightful non-natural—and therefore not inevitable—intervention that creates a process of transformation and transition. It is holy and sacred to acknowledge that my body has not grown and shifted in this way of its own accord; I am moved by the fact that ha’tov ve’ha’meitiv contains that acknowledgement within it.

This berakha holds a particular creative place in the lexicon of blessings: the gemara notes that unlike other blessings featured in birkat ha’amazon that have an asmachta to connect them back to the Torah, ha’tov ve’ha’meitiv was established by the sages of Yavneh—תנאי יבנה ותנאיה as a liminal, special addition. We’re taught that in the world-to-come, this berakha will remain, for there will be so much tov to bless that it will warrant saying this berakha all of the time. In its liturgical history, it reflects the liminality of not fully hana’ah, but not fully shevach; it is said in moments of goodness and anticipation, in moments of potential transformation, and in moments of communal joy. (It also is an amazing aural pun on “T” which, every time it leaves my mouth, adds a layer of delicious and delightful queer wordplay to this practice.) In these ways I have been moved by this berakha as a border-crossing blessing that honors the material transformation that T creates along with the personal—and communal—pleasure that transition creates more broadly.

All of these dimensions of this berakha have informed my suggestion—and personal practice—of reciting ha’tov ve’ha’meitiv over the daily embodied practice of applying testosterone gel. There are two particular moments in which this berakha has evolved that provide language for how and why ha’tov ve’ha’meitiv serves as a berakha for testosterone

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18 See Sanhedrin 42a & Chochmat Shlomo’s comment.

19 This parallels conversations among trans folks who see milah as a powerful corollary experience to transition. See T4Torah, Mitzvah #2: Circumcision | Every Single Mitzvah, available on YouTube; see the appendix to Willemina Davidson’s teshuva “Caring For & Removing Body Parts Related to Gender-Affirming Care” (2023) published by the Trans Halakha Project.

20 An asmachta / asmachta, literally “something to lean on,” is described by Menachem Elon: “The term asmachta is used to distinguish between a law developed through interpretation and a law derived from one of the other legal sources (such as tradition or legislation), for which interpretation merely provides a link to a Scriptural verse” (Jewish Law: History, Sources, Principles Vol. II, p. 305).

21 Berakhot 48b

22 See Pesachim 50b and Rashi’s comment there.
administered in this way: 1) upon introducing a new wine to a shabbos table, and 2) upon hearing about geshem, rain, in a time of need. We turn now to each of these analogous examples as they help us understand more deeply what it might mean to bless testosterone in this way.

Shinui Yayin: On New Varieties of Wine

Le’ma’aseh—in practical application—this blessing is most commonly associated with the addition of a new additional bottle of wine to a shabbos table. When a meal is in progress and kiddush has already been made, if a new bottle of wine is brought to the table, ha’tov ve’hameitiv is recited. This is a fairly unique practice and, generally speaking, is not applied to other foods, as we will explain. R’ Eliezer Melamed explains in his popular Peninei Halakha that “only for wine did the sages institute a special blessing for variety,” recognizing that it is the variation itself that merits the blessing.23

Tosafot outline why this berakha is applicable to wine specifically and not any food item, like bread or meat. According to their analysis, wine has two unique qualities of wine that merit this special berakha: (1) ṣuṣid, it satiates, and (2) ḥomim, it causes happiness.24 Unlike bread and meat which only satiate and do not bring joy (simcha), wine holds these multiple attributes, making it worthy of this multi-dimensional berakha.

Given that bread and meat do not possess these attributes, we can imagine what constitutes these qualities.25 At the root level, ṣuṣid is “to support” and “to strengthen,” beyond a typical sense of sustenance that is achieved through consuming food. These unique qualities—particularly when reading se’id more closely—are equally unique to HRT, a product and a process that engenders support and simcha.

Ha’tov ve’ha’meitiv is recited when a new wine is introduced in the middle of a meal. Rishonim debate whether the wine must be new and better, but all agree that it must be different in some manner. In this way, the Rishonim understand the emphasis of ha’tov

23 R’ Melamed’s analysis: This law is unique to wine. If people were eating one type of bread and then began eating another type of bread, the original "Hamotzi" blessing covers the second bread as well. The same is true of different types of meat; one blessing is enough for them all. Only for wine did the sages institute a special blessing for variety.

This is because wine is unique in that not only does it satiate, it also gladdens the heart. In addition, each type of wine has its own unique character, and when additional types of wine are consumed in company there is greater joy. This is why the sages instituted a special blessing over the consumption of additional types of wine (Berachot 59b; Tosefot and Rosh ad loc.).

24 See also the Rosh for a further elaboration about the unique quality of wine.

25 The Ran points out that this is a French custom and that some do, in fact, say ha’tov ve’ha’meitiv on bread.
*ve'ha’me’itiv* on the newness itself, rather than the wine. It is fundamentally the variation—the *shinui*—that is blessed.\(^{26}\) This is further exemplified by the approach of R’ Kalonymos Ha’zaken who teaches that one can bless *hatov ve’ha’me’itiv* even after drinking the wine in appreciation of the change that happened.

Rashi, Rashbam, and the Rosh argue that to merit this blessing, the wine must be not only new, but new and better.\(^{27}\) To merit this berakha, there must be a change and an improvement; Rashi comments that the new wine must be more *tov* than tov before. For them, *hatov ve’ha’me’itiv* is about positive, new change and a transformation for the better. What constitutes “better” among commentators is up for exploration, including the Nachalat Tzvi who suggests that something that is better for our bodies would certainly be elevated and improved (משובח) enough to warrant a blessing,\(^{28}\) and the Terumat HaDeshen who claims that as long as there is a felt sense of *simcha*, the wine can be blessed.\(^{29}\)

Rabeinu Tam,\(^{30}\) on the other hand, argues that simply the newness of the wine is enough to merit this blessing. In this perspective, it is newness and change itself that is tov. The transformation does not need to be a “positive change,” change is positive enough to warrant this blessing.

Supporting this is the notion that even if one said *borei perei hagafen* and had both types of wine in mind, they still—according to some—say *hatov ve’ha’me’itiv*.\(^{31}\)

This position for positive or neutral changes in the wine aligns with another principle we find in the gemara and later codified throughout halakhic discourse: the notion that one need not be *entirely* or *exclusively* full of joy or happiness about the action or activity in order to bless *hatov ve’ha’me’itiv*. As we learn in the gemara (Berakhot 60a):

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\(^{26}\) See the Meiri *Beit HaBechirah* Berakhot 59b and R’ Kalonymous Ha’zaken as quoted in *Beit HaLevi, Inyanim Shonim, Be’inyan Birkat Ha’tov Ve’ha’me’itiv Be’emtza Seuda*.

\(^{27}\) Rashi’s comment to Berakhot 59b: משני יותר ששתה יין במעודה והבישה ויאמר טוב ומ יותרADV יאpagerדר פירי. It is worth noting, however, that Rashi does not include this sense of improvement in his comment in a parallel conversation in Pesachim 101a, and simply says ש✪大国 לא יאpagerדר גיורא. See also Rashbam on Pesachim 101a, and Rosh on Berakhot 59b.

\(^{28}\) See Nachalat Tzvi OH 165:1-2 and Bach 165:2.

\(^{29}\) Terumat HaDeshen Siman 34

\(^{30}\) See also the Mordechai Pesachim 35b and Nachalat Tzvi OH 165:1-2.

\(^{31}\) Nachalat Tzvi OH 165:1
When one finds a lost object even though they are fearful that a king will hear about it and seize the object, they should bless ha’atov ve’ha’meitiv, for in that moment they feel the joy and benefit of being united with this object.

This is codified by all major poskim, who agree that one should bless hatov ve’ha’meitiv even if they are fearful or worried about the eventual outcome of an event. One need not feel only jubilation or excitement; if one feels worry, anxiety, fear—none of these prevents an individual from reciting this berakha. If something positive happens and we are afraid a king or a cop or a transphobic doctor will take it away, we still bless! The mishnah is read as though to say: bless the bad that is part of the good.

To bring this analysis back to our case, we know that transition is a complex, beautiful process: by participating in co-creating ourselves and authentically embodying who we are, we receive the benefit of alignment, of freedom, and of wholeness. We simultaneously may be fearful of the outcomes. What will happen? What will we lose? And, as in this cautionary moment codified in halakha, we open ourselves up to danger from the “kings” around us who seek to suppress us. This berakha can hold this, and it recognizes the ways in which the joy of subjugated people always opens us up to harm, retaliation, or persecution.

Our first example of hatov ve’ha’meitiv in practice being the introduction of new wine to a Shabbat table helps us understand the power of this blessing to honor a specific moment of change and variety, honoring transformation and blessing not specifically the wine itself but the very fact that we might encounter a new flavor and sensation as we anticipate it. This aspect of variety (Rabeinu Tam) and improvement (Rashi et al) gives voice to a significant aspect of what I experience through taking hormones, and conveys part of what I am seeking to bless. This analogy helps get at my sense of hana’ah here in this case: the benefit that comes with improvement and enhancement, but also that acknowledges variety, distinction and change. It is, in some ways, yoter min ha’rishonin to use Rashi’s language of elevation as a deeper approximation of myself that I co-create through HRT. And in some ways it is simply shinui—a change, neither superior nor inferior, but just

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32 See, for example, Tur OH 222: מברק על התובה הטוב והמטיב אפיון שירא שמה יב על רעה תובה קונ שמה פצייתא ע”י. שירא שמה ימשם למלך ויוחו לארץ.
different. This *berakha* contains and conveys all of that, and when it is used it helps me articulate more deeply what is happening when I take testosterone daily.

*Al Ha'Geshamim: On Rain*

We turn now to our second example in which this blessing is said: *al ha'geshamim*. As we saw, this moment is named specifically in the Mishnah alongside “hearing of good news” more generally. Rain is good news, but it carries particular associations and conditions that make it worthy of being mentioned in and of itself.

The gemara (Ta'anit 6b) describes the particular moment in which this *berakha* is to be said: מָשִׁישָׁהוּ תְחִלָּה לְרָאוּת כָּלָה, “from when the groom goes out to meet the bride.” Responding to the ambiguous language of the gemara, Rabeinu Gershom explains that this metaphor of loving partners is used to describe “moment at which the rain falls in such a way that the water from above comes to meet the waters from below as beloveds meet each other.”

The gemara highlights the ways in which the rain and the land are in deep partnership: the land requires the rain in order to produce that which it is intended to produce. Together they are co-creators of harvest, and *ha'akov ve'ha'meitiv* is recited over this collaborative creation process.

The sensation of rain itself is possibly unpleasant and does not itself cause *hana'ah*. Here the rain is appreciated in its representation of relief. This is highlighted in the debate upon the precise moment one should recite *ha'akov ve'ha'meitiv* on the rains: is it upon hearing that rain has fallen, upon hearing the rain that is falling? Which is the good news? Hearing that the rain is falling and hearing the rain that is falling are two distinct emotional experiences: the latter being an expression of gratitude that is matched with a felt sense of physicality (hearing, in this case), and the latter being an expression of appreciation that is not coupled with a physical sensation. In both cases, though, the rain represents a sign of goodness to come, and both *is* and *is not* about a blessing-worthy physical experience.

It—or news of its presence—comes to correct, heal, or offer relief after a period of distress over lack of rain. In the language of the Shulkhan Aruch (OH 221:1):

> מא של ל(tags) מחמת עירוב נשמות ויזד, נשמות מברכים עליה עם שלא ייזד עויי, כי
> רביעא

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32 See Rabeinu Gershom on Ta'anit 6b.
34 See Rema's gloss to S'A OH 221:2.
35 See Meiri *Beit HaBechirah* Berakhot 59b.
If there is distress \textit{(tza'ar)} caused by a delay in rains and the rains fall, bless upon them even if there has not been enough rain yet to cause fructification (i.e. heavy rainfall)

There has not yet been enough rain to materially relieve one from the distress that would be caused by a lack of rain. But the \textit{tza'ar} that the drought causes \textit{is} relieved, at least in some part, by the falling rain.

Here it is worth noting that the Rambam—seemingly uniquely—does not emphasize suffering as a prerequisite of reciting this blessing over rain.\textsuperscript{36} For almost others (and even potentially for the Rambam, see Bi'ur Halakha on OH 221:1), \textit{tza'ar} that is caused by a period of delay is a necessary component of reciting this blessing over \textit{geshem}.

And this is, in part, what has led to the limited use of this \textit{berakha} throughout the diaspora, in places where rain patterns are distinct from those of \textit{eretz yisrael}.\textsuperscript{37} As the Rema (OH 221:1) notes:

\begin{quote}
 הננה מה שלח אונ נוהים ברכו הנה בברכת הנסתרים משם демידון והלא חנרי הנסתרים אוינו
 נטרינו כל זכר (מס"ג אותר görevו)

And we do not have this practice now to bless the rains, because in our lands the rain falls and it does not stop in this manner.
\end{quote}

If there is \textit{tza'ar} without the rain, then one blesses its arrival. However, it is not the \textit{tza'ar} itself that enables the blessing, but the \textit{simcha} that follows when the source of the \textit{tza'ar} is addressed. In explaining the Rema's comment, the Mishnah Berura clarifies (OH 221:1, 1-2):

\begin{quote}
(א) אם היה בתער - אفرق דברי, "שמח" שמה יובש נחלוכ וכרפה עת הנשמה והנה יורד חכמה
כלアクセד שמחה ב...

“If there is distress” - this is possible in \textit{eretz yisrael}, where it is very dry, and when the season of rain comes and the rain falls in the proper time, every person is joyful (\textit{sameach}) from it...

(ב) אוינ נטרינו ככ "ר"י אוי! לוה שמחה בידית הנשמה והנה" אפיה בואתי אוראט לברל
בממותมะ אוינ נטרינו והנה הנשמה רוב נחלוכ י النووي אוכryo אוכר ידית הנשמה לברל.

“And [the rain] does not stop in this manner” - this is to say that people don't experience joy (\textit{simcha}) when the rain falls. And granted that if in these lands where there is regular rainfall the rain stopped and there was \textit{tza'ar} and then the rain fell, it would be necessary to bless.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{36} See Bi'ur Halakha OH 221:1 for an analysis of \textit{tza'ar} in this instance, and Arukh haShulchan OH 221:1.

\textsuperscript{37} See Mishnah Berurah OH 221.
The tza’ar is relevant inasmuch as joy follows when it is alleviated. If the rain will cause simcha, it is worthy of a blessing. This centrality of tza’ar and its antithesis, simcha, is important to uplift in our exploration of HRT: I believe there are potentially powerful conclusions and analogies to be drawn between tza’ar and dysphoria that enhance this berakha as a statement of relief from dysphoria (here analogized to tza’ar that emerges without the falling of rains). As in the case of rain, taking testosterone does not immediately bring material relief, but just as tza’ar is alleviated as the rain falls, so dysphoria can be relieved and broader anticipation of euphoria can arrive as one takes HRT in its various forms.

In this case, hatov ve’hamaitiv is recited to honor the relief caused by something that will, over time, lead to a material transformation that will be of benefit. This is a complex spiritual distinction. This is not to say that the blessing is made on the future outcome itself, which would subvert the norms of berakhot, as expressed by the Rambam38:

שאני מנכרים על העריצות אלא על מה שאמורה עתמה:

Blessings are not recited in consideration of future possibilities, but rather on what happens at present.

In some sense, it is recited over a moment of indirect benefit that symbolizes a future outcome; we bless to express gratitude for the symbol itself alongside our anticipation of the future. This is profoundly different from an appreciation of the experience of rain itself. Unlike the apple which is blessed for its pleasurable experience, the rain in this case is blessed for what will come from it, for what it will cause, and for how the land is transformed by its presence.

As with our previous cases, in the case of geshem, the benefit must be felt in a real, substantive way. This is expressed most clearly in the gemara’s (Berakhot 59b) instruction that specifically those who own land—those who have a direct stake in the fact of the rain falling—should recite this blessing. The common understanding and plain meaning of this text is the following: upon hearing of rainfall, one who co-owns land with another should say hatov ve’ha’maitiv, and one who owns land entirely on their own should say shehechiyanu.39 This distinction is used to articulate a principle about the distinction between between hatov ve’hamaitiv and shehechiyanu: the former is said in moments in which others share in the hana’ah in some meaningful way, the latter is said when the

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38 Rambam Mishneh Torah 10:4

39 See Berakhot 59b, the Rif (paraphrased below), Ritva, Rashba for examples.
individual alone is impacted by the news or the action. In the case of rain as with the case of the introduction of new wine, ha'rov ve'ha'meitiv is recited on things that will bring others into our joy.

When the benefit of something is exclusively mine, I should recite shehechiyanu; when the han'ah is shelo ve'al shel chaveiro I should recite hatov ve'hameitiv. This may seem to pose a potential challenge to readers who see their particular acts of transition, and specifically taking HRT, as singularly beneficial acts akin to purchasing a new piece of clothing that they alone will wear. However, there is nuance to be explored here, regarding both this berakha and the experience of HRT.

This sense of connection to others and acknowledgement of who is intimately involved in one's han'ah and pleasure is why ha'rov ve'hameitiv is recited upon receiving a gift, rather than shehechiyanu—the blessing most commonly said upon acquiring a new item for oneself—because the gift-giver will experience joy (simcha) from having given me the gift.

The benefit is mine exclusively, but there is joy to be had in this shared experience. Simcha that is shared—even if the han'ah is individual—warrants ha'rov ve'hameitiv.

The Rosh argues—holding a minority opinion—that even if one does not have partners in owning the land, they should still recite hatov ve'hameitiv (rather than shehechiyanu). This is because there is collective benefit derived from the rain, paraphrased below.

The Ri’f says that if one co-owns the land, they should say ha'rov ve'hameitiv, and if they own the land singularly, they should say shehechiyanu. And this is not how I perceive this case—such a requirement that a person must have a partner in owning the land is unnecessary, for when an individual owns land, all of his neighbors are joined together with him. [He does not need a co-owner of the land, because owning the land makes one a co-owner with all other land-owners.]

... In order to make this berakha it is not necessary that there should be another partner with him in the goodness and benefit, just that it will be good news for others along with him.

Therefore in this case [of rain] even if there are not others with him in owning this land, there are others together in the good news with him, for the good news of rain is for all those who own land, and so he should bless hatov ve'hameitiv.

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41 SA OH 223:5

42 See also the Meiri Beit HaBechirah Berakhot 59b, who similarly argues: כיון שהמשיכו обучל מעשה לכל העולם, טעמר בפיי איכא אחורי ברדיה.
The Rosh brings this sevara to wine as well. After introducing the notion that one should not say this blessing if they are not dining with others, he concludes that one can bless ha’tov ve’ha’meitim if there are others in their household, even if they are not partaking in the meal itself. It is good for them, too, he says.43

This sevara from the Rosh articulated something for me that I had felt and experienced in my own transition, which is perhaps, at least in part, what may have called me to this berakha in the first place. I have not felt like the exclusive beneficiary of HRT, even though it is in just my body alone when I take and bless it. Like the Rosh’s assessment of geshem, I feel connected to all others who are depending on this transformation-enabling substance. And like the Rosh’s assessment of wine in a household in which there are others present who are not partaking of the meal itself—it is a good for those in our households, in both the most limited and expansive sense.

Perhaps this is why the pasuk-turned-maxim-turned-principle לב ידוע מרות נפשו, “the heart knows its own bitterness”44—or more commonly understood “we know our own experiences”—ends with וא ה-death לא יאשר ורור, “and a רור does not join in their happiness.” A רור is an "other," one who places themselves on the outside, defined by Jastrow as an “oppressor” or “enemy” from the root רא, “to go around” or “to turn away.” According to this pasuk, a zar doesn’t join in our simcha, but a beloved comrade does. The Rosh helped me see the second half of this pasuk as a warning, not a description. A zar will not join in our euphoric expressions, and they will not find simcha with and through our joy. The acheirim who love us, however, will. Therefore the joys of our transition are tovot lanu u’le’acheirim,45 and merit this blessing.

Here we see a thread that weaves together each of these cases: simcha. The capacity to create simcha is what makes wine most unique, and worthy of this specific berakha when a new bottle is opened on Shabbat. Simcha is what is brought by rainfall to alleviate distress and concern over a dry spell, catalyzing our recitation of ha’tov va’ha’meitim. Simcha is felt by one who gives a gift, making the experience of receiving a gift an experience of collaboration that warrants ha’tov ve’ha’meitim. And in our case of testosterone and HRT more broadly, we acknowledge the ways in which others—our beloveds, G!d-willing—find

43 Later Rishonim and Achronim continue to debate the degree to which one must be in shutafut with others in order to say this blessing as opposed to shehechiyanu. Many argue that the presence of one’s family counts as shutafut; see, for example, S”A OC 223:1.

44 See “Towards Halakhic Euphoria” (fn. 4); R’ Xava de Cordova’s teshuva “Are Trans Women Obligated in Niddah? How Can That Obligation be Fulfilled?” (fn. 1) & Ariel Ya’akov Berry’s teshuva “Milah & Hatafat Dam Brit in a Case of Sakanah (Danger)” published by the Trans Halakha Project (2023).

45 See the Tur’s language OH 222:1.
simcha in our transitions through their solidarity and love. This solidarity is one that makes this moment, too, worthy of this berakha. As the Arukh HaShulchan writes about ha’tov ve’ha’meitiv:

יאז גבר המ קה שמועה טوبة, והנגרא שצירי להחיית טובה ושמעה שמשת ברכה,

בבר נז היוהッツי כת הכנ, והכל לפי העיני, וברוחו אל הז מפש תוכלת.

And it is not clear what is called “good news,” and it appears that it needs to be significantly good that it would bring someone much joy, for example the joy brought by resources (mamon) and others like this. And regarding mamon this depends on their wealth and positionality, that something for a person who is lacking resources would be a significant event might not be so significant for someone who is positioned differently. This is how we understand simcha here, [that it shifts based on someone’s positionality and experience]. And these blessings necessitate shem u’malkhut.

Simcha is a uniquely felt sensation, and in these cases is brought on by a sense of renewed variation, of improvement, of transformation, of anticipation, and of solidarity. Each of these is contained and expressed in ha’tov ve’ha’meitiv in a powerful way, as simcha unites and undergird them all. It is this simcha for me—perhaps best translated as “euphoria”—that makes this berakha a most powerful one to recite on the application of testosterone.

Those for Whom Transitioning is a Mitzvah

Our discussion thus far has addressed the first two categories of blessings: hana‘ah and shevach. We now turn to the third category: birkat mitzvah, a blessing said upon the fulfillment of a mitzvah.

There are those who argue that to transition is—in and of itself (begufo)—a mitzvah de’oraita. Notably, Lexi Kohanski wrote in her shita published as part of the Teshuva-Writing Collective:

Gender transition is a mitzvah for trans Jews. The positive, d’Oraita commandment “Be whole with Hashem your god” (Dvarim 18:13) obligates us, among other things, to remove any belief we may harbor that our signs of gender have the power to determine our gender for ill. A trans Jew, for whom any given sign of gender influences their gender to be not as they desire, is halakhically obligated in any concretely achievable acts of transition that will be effective to remove that belief.

46 Arukh HaShulchan OH 222
Because transitioning is a mitzvah, our Torah and tradition acknowledge and guide us through this core life journey.

For those aligned with this shitah, achievable actions towards transition are part of fulfilling the mitzvah of temimut, making ourselves whole with HaShem based on the pasuk תחתיו עשו אלהים (“Be whole with Hashem your God”).

So, if taking testosterone—or hormones in general—are a behavior that enables the fulfillment of this mitzvah, does the action of taking testosterone in daily gel necessitate a berakha shel mitzvah? In order to answer this, we must understand 1) whether taking HRT is a direct fulfillment of a mitzvah in some way, and 1a) whether the fulfillment of such a mitzvah would require a blessing within the category of birkot mitzvah and 1b) what would the precise formula for this blessing be.

Birkot mitzvah are said on the action of doing a mitzvah, and are recited immediately upon the action itself: אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל:אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל אמר: After all the mitzvot, one recites a blessing over them prior to [over] their performance” (Pesachim 7b). There are two main approaches among the Rishonim as to what these blessings are intending to do. The first is that of the Rambam, who sees birkot mitzvah as akin to that of hanah: אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל אמר אומרים אמר אומרים: The second is that of the Ritva, arguing that birkot mitzvah are for the purpose of sanctifying oneself before G!d prior to doing the mitzvah: אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומרים אמר אומﴄנהו.hןא ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמואל אמר ר' יהודה אמר שמوءלւים על המצות, בברכה. בברכה על המצות על המצות, בברכה. In order to bless over a mitzvah, one must be yoztei in the mitzvah through that particular act. In other words, birkot mitzvah bless one’s state of commandedness, but are evoked particularly and specifically to acknowledge the fulfillment of a mitzvah that immediately occurs after the blessing’s recitation.

Unlike these examples, the mitzvah of temimut is never fully complete; one cannot point to one specific action that indicates that they have fulfilled it entirely. In this way, transition is more like tzedakah, a mitzvah over which there is no berakha, than lulav.

The Rashba (Teshuvot HaRashba 1:8) explains why various mitzvot are done without a recitation of a berakha:

47 This is an excerpt from his larger teshuva; I have included only the relevant sections for our cases.
And so with visiting the sick and comforting mourners and bringing peace between people, because all of these are dependent on others, and perhaps a person’s actions will not be accepted by them, and they will subsequently have uprooted a mitzvah.

He argues on two fronts that are particularly relevant to our case: we do not bless mitzvot for which there is no specific action; (וכן מצוה שאינה ביצועה أخي וברכינו’); we don’t bless mitzvot that are done in order to fulfill another mitzvah (מצוה שביעירה אחר מצוה).
In our case of temimut, there is no specific ma’aseh that is done over which the blessing would be appropriate (like shemitat kesafim and other obligations that require multiple actions and behaviors over time), similarly taking HRT is taken not as a specific mitzvah but as the fulfillment of a larger mitzvah. Like yibum aims to fulfill the mitzvah of procreation, HRT aims to fulfill the mitzvah of temimut.\(^{48}\)

Additionally, because the outcomes of HRT are unknown and fluid as one transitions, taking HRT may not lead to one fulfilling the mitzvah of temimut entirely. Also, because transitions are varied and unique and may not include HRT at all, the fulfillment of temimut does universally hinge on this particular action. Therefore, it is the case that here, too, no blessing should be said.

It might be that our case of taking HRT might be more similar to an individual behavior that is done on Shabbat in order to contribute to the overall sense of Shabbat observance. On Shabbat we do not make a berakha shel mitzvah over every one of the behaviors we do that are associated with oneg Shabbat, like eating delicious foods, for example. Instead, we bless the food as is typical, using a berakha shel hana’ah. We do not recite a blessing while eating delicious foods, “…who has commanded me to observe Shabbat.” In this view, transitioning is a mitzvah, but the individual behaviors associated with one’s transition and medical self-realization through various means do not necessitate a berakha shel mitzvah.\(^{49}\) (Here we see another connection to hatov ve’hametiv, which is the enhancement of Shabbat through the introduction of a new wine.)

It is again clear here that a mitzvah that requires many actions—like shemitat kesafim, tzedakah, Shabbat—and that itself is only one part of the mitzvah does not require a berakha shel mitzvah.

While this does not require a berakha shel mitzvah, our tradition has an additional way to acknowledge that an action is being done for the sake of a mitzvah: the recitation of a short kavanah prior to recitation of a berakha that helps one cultivate presence and awareness. This is in the spirit of the Ritva’s approach to birkat mitzvah, which is designed In this case,

\(^{48}\) See also R’ Elazar of Worms in Sefer HaRokeach Chapter 366 who argues that the chachamim did not establish a blessing for mitzvot that are generally logical and common sense and are therefore performed by non-Jews as well, as the declaration “asher kidishanu be’mitzvotav” implies a particularism to the Jewish people. Given that transition & temimut are rooted in ‘svara,’ no berakha would be said for this blessing, as in the case of tzedakah.

\(^{49}\) And here it is important to note that there are those (Rambam & HaRav Soloveitchik) who argue that birkat mitzvah are parallel to birkot hana’ah, and their purpose is to acknowledge the benefit we are to receive from performing this mitzvah.
one might say לְשֵׁם מִצְוָת תִּמִּימָה / leshem mitzvat temim tihiyeh, “for the sake of the mitzvah of being whole with G!d” daily prior to making the blessing ha’tov ve’ha’memitiv.50

Psak

One who administers testosterone daily may recite barukh ha-tov ve’hameitiv with shem u’malchut:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה’ אֱלֹקֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעָלָמִים וְהַמֵּטִיב

In my experience and analysis, the benefits derived from our transitions are not individual hana’ah, but are part of a broader collective experience in which simcha is experienced by others. This practice acknowledges the ways in which the impact of taking hormones both does and does not reflect a collective benefit (as described by the Rosh).51

However, at times when a berakha does not not unambiguously fulfill all necessary conditions and when there are those who are particularly concerned about making a berakha levatalah, many adopt the practice of saying the blessing without shem u’malchut—without acknowledging G!d’s name and royalty. This absence is our tradition’s way of acknowledging that much but not all of the criteria for the blessing has been fulfilled. And so, because this berakha is used in moments that honor an experience that is both individual and collective, and out of concern for reciting a berakha in which not all of the conditions are fulfilled, those who feel ambivalence about the collective benefit of taking hormones and are choshesh about reciting a berakha levatalah could consider reciting the blessing without shem u’malchut:

בָּרוּךְ הָסְו בֶּם הַמֵּטִיב

One who holds by the shitah that transition is a mitzvah and sees this action as part of their fulfillment of the mitzvah of temimut, may recite a short kavanah beforehand, such as:

לָשֶׁם מִצְוָת תִּמִּימָה לָשֶׁם מִצְוָת תִּמִּימָה

50 This formulation is described by Lexi Kohanski in Tefillat Trans, “intention-setting upon undertaking a step towards gender transition” and is based on similar kavanot made while doing mitzvot that require intention like tying tzitzit.

51 Priort o writing this teshuva, my practice was to recite this berakha without shem u’malkhut. After opening myself to these sources and preparing this teshuva, I have begun reciting the full blessing with shem u’malkhut. As Jamie Weisbach recently taught (“Day of Learning with the Trans Halakha Project,” 2023), the process of writing a teshuva—if we do it right—should teach us something as writers.
It is recommended that this berakha be incorporated into the regular daily morning embodied seder of blessings referred to as birkot hashachar. A seder that incorporates hatov ve’hameitiv can be found in the attached Appendix.
Appendix

The following sugya details a seder of embodied practices and their proper blessings that should be said as one rises in the morning that is later described as “birkot ha’shachar.” According to this sugya (and later poskim), these blessings should be said with their accompanying actions.⁵²

Berakhot 60b⁵³

Upon hearing the sound of the rooster, one should recite: Blessed...Who gave the heart/rooster [sekhvi] understanding to distinguish between day and night. Upon opening his eyes, one should recite: Blessed...Who opens closed eyes. Upon sitting up straight, one should recite: Blessed...Who sets releases the bound. Upon dressing, one should recite: Blessed...Who clothes the naked. Upon standing up straight, one should recite: Blessed...Who raises those bowed down. Upon descending from one's bed to the ground, one should recite: Blessed...Who spreads the earth above the waters, in thanksgiving for the creation of solid ground upon which to walk. Upon walking, one should recite: Blessed...Who prepares our steps. Upon putting on his shoes, one should recite: Blessed...Who has provided me with all I need. Upon putting on his belt, one should recite: Blessed...Who girds Israel with strength. Upon spreading a shawl upon his head, one should recite: Blessed...Who crowns Israel with glory.

⁵² See Rambam Mishneh Torah Hilkhot Tefillah 7:1-9. Rambam notes that it is common in synagogues and minyanim to recite these as part of a matbeah of tefillah, recited together in order as separate from those actions, but that this should not be done:

ברכה אלא אם כנחתי בה:

See also Arukh HaShulchan OH 46:3 for an explanation of why these berakhot should be said along with their particular actions. See S“A OH 42:2 who describes the practice of reciting these berakhot in a seder together:

Upon wrapping himself in ritual fringes, one should recite: Blessed…Who has made us holy through His commandments and has commanded us to wrap ourselves in a garment with ritual fringes. Upon donning his phylacteries on his arm, one should recite: Blessed…Who has made us holy through His commandments and has commanded us to don phylacteries. Upon donning phylacteries on his head one should recite: Blessed…Who has made us holy through His commandments and has commanded us to wrap tefillin. Upon ritually washing his hands: Blessed…Who has made us holy through His commandments and has commanded us with regard to the washing of the hands. Upon washing his face, one recites: Blessed…Who removes the bands of sleep from my eyes and slumber from my eyelids.

And may it be Your will, O Lord my God, to accustom me in Your Torah, attach me to Your mitzvoth, and lead me not into transgression, nor into error, nor into iniquity, nor into temptation nor into disgrace. Bend my evil inclination to be subservient to You, and distance me from an evil person and an evil acquaintance. Help me attach myself to the good inclination and to a good friend in Your world. Grant me, today and every day, grace, loving-kindness, and compassion in Your eyes and the eyes of all who see me, and bestow loving-kindness upon me. Blessed are You, O Lord, Who bestows loving-kindness on His people, Israel.

Seder Including Testosterone

Upon waking up, one should recite: Blessed are You, Adonai our G!d, Eternal Royal, who gives the rooster understanding to distinguish between day and night.

Upon opening their eyes, one should recite: Blessed are You, Adonai our G!d, Eternal Royal, who opens closed eyes.

Upon sitting up straight, one should recite: Blessed are You, Adonai our G!d, Eternal Royal, who releases the bound.
Upon putting one's feet on the ground, one should recite:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, אַלְמָהָ נָא, מֶלֶךְ הַעָלָם וְיֵשָׁר הָאָרֶץ עַל הַמָּיִם.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Eternal Royal, who spreads the earth above the waters.

Upon standing straight, one should recite:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, אַלְמָהָ נָא, מֶלֶךְ הַעָלָם מְזַעְפְּנֶךָ.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Eternal Royal, who straightens the bent.

Upon taking several steps, one should recite:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, אַלְמָהָ נָא, מֶלֶךְ הַעָלָם מַלְבִּישׁ עֲרֻמִּים.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Eternal Royal, who clothes the naked.

Upon washing one's hands, one should recite:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, אַלְמָהָ נָא, מֶלֶךְ הַעָלָם מַעֲבִרְתָּ שֵׁנָה מֵעֵינִי וּתְנוּמָה מֵעַפְעַפָּי.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, King of the Universe, Who removes sleep from my eyes and slumber from my eyelids.

Upon washing one's face, one should recite:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, אַלְמָהָ נָא, מֶלֶךְ הַעָלָם אֶשֶּׁר קִדְּשָׁנָה מֵעֵינִי וּתְנוּמָה מֵעַפְעַפָּי.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, King of the Universe, Who removes sleep from my eyes and slumber from my eyelids.

Upon administering testosterone, one should recite:

לְשֵׁם מִצְוֹתָיו תָּמִים תִּֽהְיֶה בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, הָ' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעָלָם.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Eternal Royal, who is good and increases goodness.

Upon donning tzitzit, one should recite:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, אַלְמָהָ נָא, מֶלֶךְ הַעָלָם אַשֶּׁר קִדְּשָׁנָה מֶצְוָתָיו עַל מִצְוַת צִיצִית.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Eternal Royal, who sanctifies us with mitzvot and commands us to wear tzitzit.

Upon putting on clothing, one should recite:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, אַלְמָהָ נָא, מֶלֶךְ הַעָלָם מַלְבִּישׁ עֲרֻמִּים.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Eternal Royal, who clothes the naked.

Upon putting on shoes, one should recite:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, אַלְמָהָ נָא, מֶלֶךְ הַעָלָם שֶׁעָשָׂה לְיוֹ טִלּוּ לִי כָּל־צָרְכִי.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Eternal Royal, who provided me with all my needs.

Upon buckling or tying a belt, buttoning pants, or the equivalent, one should recite:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, אַלְמָהָ נָא, מֶלֶךְ הַעָלָם אוֹזֵר יוֹשֵׁבָה בִּגְבוּרָה.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Eternal Royal, who girds Israel with strength.

Upon putting on a kippah, a hat, a headband, or a tichel, one should recite:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, אַלְמָהָ נָא, מֶלֶךְ הַעָלָם עֹטֵר יוֹשֵׁבָה בְּתִפְאָרָה.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Eternal Royal, who crowns Israel with glory.
Once fully dressed, one should recite:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אַֽלְמָהָנוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁעָשַׂנִי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Blessed are You, Adonai our G!d, Eternal Royal, who made me a Jew.

וִיהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲבֹתֵינוּ שֶׁתַּרְגִּילֵנוּ בְּתוֹרָתֶךָ וְדַבְּקֵנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ, וְאַל תְּבִיאֵנוּ לֹא לִידֵי חֵטְא וְלֹא לִידֵי עֲבֵרָה וְלֹא לִידֵי נִסָּיוֹן וְלֹא לִידֵי בִזָּיוֹן וְאַל יִשְׁלֹט בָּנוּ יֵצֶר הָרָע וְהַרְחִיקֵנוּ מֵאָדָם רָע וּמֵחָבֵר רָע וְדַבְּקֵנוּ בְּיֵצֶר הַטּוֹב וּבְמַעֲשִׂים טוֹبִים וְכוֹף אֶת־יִצְרֵנוּ לְהִשְׁתַּעְבֶּד־לָךְ וּתְנֵנוּ הַיּוֹם וּבְכָל־יוֹם לְחֵן וּלְחֶסֶד וּלְרַחֲמִים בְּעֵינֶיךָ וּבְעֵינֵי כָּל־רוֹאֵינוּ וְתִגְמְלֵנוּ חֲסָדִים טוֹבִים:

And may it be Your will Adonai, our G!d and G!d of our ancestors, that we habituate ourselves in Torah and that we cleave to your mizvot. Do not bring us into the hands of transgression or harm, do not cause us to be tested or disgraced. Let us not be ruled over by the harmful inclinations, and keep us far from people—especially companions—who seek harm. Help us cleave to good instincts, and to do good deeds, and compel our instincts towards harm to fall. Grant us this day and every day grace, kindness, compassion in your eyes and the eyes of all who perceive us, and bestow upon us abundant goodness. Blessed are You Adonai, who bestowed bountiful kindness to the collective of Israel.