

Weekly Halacha Discussion

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A discussion of Halachic topics provided weekly. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

Birkas Ha'ılanos - The Blessing Over Trees In Bloom

Rosh Chodesh Nissan, marks the beginning of the season for saying a blessing upon seeing fruit trees in bloom - *Birkas Ha'ılanos*. Since this blessing, which extols Hashem's ongoing renewal of creation¹, is recited only once a year², its halachos are difficult to remember. Women, too, may recite this blessing, since it is not considered a "time related mitzvah" from which women are exempt³.

The text of the blessing:

The text of the blessing, as quoted in all of the early sources⁴, is as follows:

ברוך אתה ה' אלוקינו מלך העולם שלא חסר בעולמו כלום וברא בו בריות טובות ואילנות טובים להנות בהם בני אדם

In several *siddurim*⁵ the word *davar* appears instead of the word *klum*. But since all of the early sources indicate that the original text had the word *klum*, not the word *davar*, and the reason for the change is unsubstantiated, it is, therefore, proper to follow the early sources and recite the word *klum* and not the word *davar*⁶.

When is Birkas Ha'ılanos recited?

The *l'chatchilah*, preferred time to recite this blessing is immediately upon seeing a tree in bloom during the month of *Nissan*. Most *poskim* agree that the halacha mentions 'Nissan' since generally, that is the month in which trees begin to bloom⁷. Accordingly, in an area where trees start blooming in *Adar*⁸, or where they do not bloom until *Iyar* or *Sivan*⁹, the blessing should be recited in those months¹⁰. In the countries where trees blossom in *Tishrei* or *Cheshvan*, the blessing should be said at that time¹¹.

If a tree bloomed in *Nissan*, but one did not see it until later; he may recite the blessing the first time he sees the tree in bloom as long as the fruit of the tree has not yet ripened. Once the fruit has ripened, the blessing may no longer be said¹².

One who saw the trees in bloom during *Nissan*, but forgot or neglected to recite the blessing, may recite the blessing at a later date but only until the time that the fruit of the tree has begun to grow¹³.

The blessing is said upon seeing the actual blooming (flowering) of the tree. The growth of leaves alone is not sufficient to allow one to recite the blessing¹⁴.

Some *poskim*¹⁵ hold that this blessing should not be

said on Shabbos and Yom Tov, since we are concerned that it may lead to shaking or breaking a branch off the tree. All other *poskim* who do not mention this concern¹⁶ apparently do not forbid reciting this blessing on Shabbos and Yom Tov¹⁷. It is customary, though, to recite the blessing only during the week¹⁸, unless the last day of *Nissan* falls on Shabbos¹⁹. The blessing may be said at night²⁰.

Which trees require Birkas Ha'ılanos?

Birkas Ha'ılanos is said only on fruit-bearing trees²¹. If one mistakenly said the blessing on a barren tree, he need not repeat the blessing on a fruit-bearing tree²².

The *poskim* debate whether one is allowed to say the blessing on a tree which has been grafted from two species, since the halacha does not permit such grafting²³. It is preferable not to make the blessing on such a tree²⁴.

Some *achronim* prohibit the recitation of the blessing on an *orlah* tree²⁵. A tree is considered *orlah* during the first three years of its life. Many other *poskim*, however, permit reciting the blessing on an *orlah* tree²⁶.

During the year of *shmittah* in *Eretz Yisroel*, it is permitted to recite the blessing even on a tree that - in violation of the halacha - has been cultivated²⁷.

Birkas Ha'ılanos - Hiddur Mitzvah

There are several *hiddurim* mentioned in the *poskim* concerning this once-a-year mitzvah. According to the *kabbalah*, especially, this blessing has special significance. Among the *hiddurim* are:

- The blessing should be recited only on two or more trees. No blessing is said on a single tree²⁸. Although the two trees do not have to be from two different species²⁹, several *poskim* mention that the more trees the better³⁰. Indeed, *l'chatchilah* the blessing should be said on trees in an orchard that is planted outside the city limits³¹.
- The blessing should be recited in the presence of a *minyan* followed by *kaddish*. It should be preceded by *V'yehi noam* and followed by with *Hallelukah hallelu Keil min hashamayim*³².
- The blessing should be recited at the earliest possible time, which is on *Rosh Chodesh Nissan*, unless it falls on Shabbos or it is raining³³.

¹ *Shita Mekubetzes*, *Berachos* 43b.

² *O. C.* 226:1.

³ *Har Tzvi* *O. C.* 118.

⁴ See *Berachos* 43b, *Rambam* (*Berachos* 10:13); *Rokeiach* pg. 235; *Ohr Zarua* 1:179; *Avudraham* (*Berachos*); *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch* *O. C.* 226; *Siddur Rav Yaakov Emdin*; *Chayei Adam* 63:2; *Siddur Ba'al ha-Tanyah*; *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 60:1; *Aruch ha-Shulchan* 226:1

⁵ *Siddur ha-Gra*; *Minchas Yerusholym*; *ArtScroll*. The source may be *Sefer ha-Eshkol*, pg. 68.

⁶ *Minchas Yitzchok* 10:16; *mi-Bais Levi* (*Nissan* 5756).

⁷ *Mishna Berura* 226:1 quoting *achronim*.

⁸ *Be'er Heitev* *O. C.* 226:1.

⁹ *Aruch Ha-Shulchan* 226:1.

¹⁰ Note that there are several *poskim* who hold that according to *kabbalah*, this blessing should be recited only during *Nissan*. See *Sdei Chemed* (*Berachos* 2:1) and *Kaf ha-Chayim* 126:1 who rule that one should not recite this blessing before or after *Nissan*.

¹¹ *Har Tzvi* *O. C.* 118; *Minchas Yitzchok* 10:16.

¹² *Mishna Berura* 226:4.

¹³ *Mishna Berura* 226:5. *L'chatchilah*, however, one should be particular to recite the blessing the first time he sees the blossoming, since several *poskim* maintain that the blessing may not be said if one failed to say it the first time - see *Machatzis Hashekel* 226, *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 60:1 *Sha'ar ha-Tziyun* 226:3 and *Ketzos ha-Shulchan* (*Badei ha-Shulchan* 46:18). For this reason it is important to know the text of the blessing by heart so that the blessing can be said the as soon as the blooming is seen.

¹⁴ *Mishna Berura* 226:2.

¹⁵ *Kaf ha-Chayim* 226:4 quoting *Moed Kol Chai*. *Kaf ha-Chayim* also rules that according to *kabbalah* this blessing may not be said on Shabbos and Yom Tov.

¹⁶ Indeed, it is clearly permissible to smell a *hadass* which is attached to a tree on Shabbos since we are not concerned that the branch will be broken off - *O. C.* 336:10.

¹⁷ *Teshuvos Lev Chaim* 2:44.

¹⁸ *Mi-Beis Levi*, *Nissan* 5756.

¹⁹ *Yechaveh Da'as* 1:2.

²⁰ *Tzitz Eliezer* 12:20-6.

²¹ *Mishna Berura* 226:2.

²² *Shevet ha-Levi* 6:53.

²³ Both views are brought in *Kaf ha-Chayim* 225:26 and 226:11.

²⁴ *Ben Ish Chai* (*Re'eh* 11); *Sdei Chemed* (*Berachos* 2:7); *Minchas Yitzchok* 3:25-3; *Yabia Omer* 5:20.

²⁵ *R' Akiva Eiger* (*Gilyon O. C.* 226); *Divrei Malkiel* 3:2. If one is in doubt whether the tree in question is *orlah*, a blessing may be said according to all views.

²⁶ *Dovev Meishorim* 3:5; *Chelkas Yaakov* 2:27.

²⁷ *Harav S. Vozner* (*mi-Beis Levi*, *Nissan* 5756).

²⁸ *Chida* (*More Beatzva* 198). Although there are *poskim* who hold that *halachically* two trees are required and no blessing is said when only one tree is seen, see *Chazon Ovadia*, pg. 9-10, most *poskim* do not quote this requirement. See also *Ktzos ha-Shulchan* (*Badei ha-Shulchan* 46:18) that *l'chatchilah*, two trees are required for the blessing.

²⁹ *Kaf ha-Chayim* 226:2.

³⁰ *Teshuvos Halachos Ketanos* 2:28.

³¹ *Teshuvos Lev Chaim* 45 quoted in *Kaf ha-Chayim* 226:3 and in *Chazon Ovadia*, pg. 8.

³² See entire procedure in *Kaf ha-Chayim* 226:7-8.

³³ *Mi-Beis Levi* (*Nissan* 5756).