

BIRCAS HA'ILANOS - THE BLESSING OVER TREES IN BLOOM

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

The following is a discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

Rosh Chodesh Nissan marks the beginning of the season for saying a blessing upon seeing fruit trees in bloom - Bircas Ha'Ilanos. Since this brachah, which extols Hashem's ongoing renewal of creation(1), is recited once a year(2), its halachos are difficult to remember. Women, too, may recite this brachah, since it is not considered a "time related mitzvah" from which women are exempt(3).

THE TEXT OF THE BRACHAH:

In many siddurim(4) the following text is cited:

Boruch Ata HaShem Alokaynu Melech Haolam Shelo Cheesar Baw'olawmo "Davar" ,U'vara Vo Breeos Tovos, V'ilanos Tovim,(5) L'hanos Bahem Bnei Adam

A search through all the of the early sources(6) reveals that the original text had the word "klum", not the word "davar" which appears in our text. The reason for the change is unsubstantiated, and it is, therefore, proper to follow the early sources and recite the word "klum" and not the word "davar"(7).

WHEN IS BIRCAS HA'ILANOS RECITED?

The l'chatchilah, preferred time to recite this brachah is immediately upon seeing a tree in bloom during the month of Nissan. Most poskim agree that the halachah mentions 'Nissan' since generally, that is the month in which trees begin to bloom(8). Accordingly, in an area where trees start blooming in Adar(9), or where they do not bloom until Iyar or Sivan(10), the brachah should be recited in those months(11). In the countries where trees blossom in Tishrei or Cheshvan, the brachah should be said at that time(12).

If a tree bloomed in Nissan, but one did not see it until later, he may recite the brachah 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 brachah may no longer be said(13).

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

grow(14).

The brachah is said upon seeing the actual blooming (flowering) of the tree. The growth of leaves alone is not sufficient to allow one say the brachah(15).

Some poskim(16) hold that this brachah 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 concern,(17) apparently do not forbid reciting this brachah on Shabbos and Yom Tov(18). It is customary, though, to recite the brachah only during the week(19), unless the last day of Nissan falls on Shabbos(20). The brachah may be said at night(21).

WHICH TREES REQUIRE A BIRCAS HA'ILANOS?

Bircas Ha'ilanos is said only on fruit-bearing trees(22). If one mistakenly said the brachah on a barren tree, he need not repeat the brachah on a fruit bearing tree(23).

The poskim debate whether one is allowed to say the brachah on a tree which has been grafted from two species, since the halachah does not permit such grafting(24). It is preferable not to make the brachah on such a tree(25).

Some achronim prohibit the recitation of the brachah on an orlah tree(26). A tree is considered orlah during the first three years of its life. Many other poskim, however, permit reciting the brachah on an orlah tree(27).

During the year of shmittah in Eretz Yisroel, it is permitted to recite the brachah even on a tree which - in violation of the halachah - has been cultivated(28).

BIRCAS HA'ILANNOS- HIDDUR MITZVAH

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

The brachah should be recited only on two or more trees. No brachah is said on a single tree(29). Although the two trees do not have to be from two different species(30), several poskim mention that the more trees the better(31). Indeed, l'chatchilah the brachah should be said on trees in a orchard that is planted outside the city limits(32).

The brachah should be said 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(33).

The brachah should be recited at the earliest possible time, which is on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, unless it falls on Shabbos or it is raining(34).

FOOTNOTES

1. Shita Mekubetzes Brachos 43b.
2. OC 226:1.
3. Har Tzvi OC 118.
4. Siddur Hagrah; Minchas Yerushalyim; ArtScroll. Their source may be Sefer Ha'eshkol pg. 68.
5. The text in many of the early sources [including Rambam and Shulchan Aruch] is 'tovos'.
[According to proper dikduk, tovim is the proper form, since ilan is lashon zachar, as in the Mishnah (Avos 3:7): ilan zeh.]
6. See Brachos 43b, Rambam (Brachos 10:13); Rokeiach pg. 235; Ohr Zarua 1:179; Avudraham (Brachos); Tur and Shulchan Aruch OC 226; Siddur Rav Yaakov Emdin; Chayei Adam 63:2; Siddur Baal Hatanyah; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 60:1; Aruch Hashulchan 226:1
7. Minchas Yitzchok 10:16; Mibais Levi (Nissan 5756).
8. Mishnah Berurah 226:1 quoting achronim.
9. Be'er Heitev OC 226:1.
10. Aruch Hashulchan 226:1.
11. Note that there are several poskim who hold that according to kabbalah, this bracha should be said only during Nissan - See Sdei Chemed (Brachos 2:1) and Kaf Hachayim 126:1 who rule that one should not recite this brachah before or after Nissan.
12. Har Tzvi OC 118; Minchas Yitzchok 10:16.
13. Mishnah Berurah 226:4.
14. Mishnah Berurah 226:5. L'chatchilah, however, one should be particular to recite the brachah the first time he sees the blossoming, since several poskim hold that the brachah may not be said if one failed to say it the first time - see Machatzis Hashekel 226, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 60:1 Shaar Hatzion 226:3 and Ktzos Hashulchan (Badei Hashulchan 46:18). For this reason it is important to know the text of the brachah by heart so that the brachah can be said the as soon as the blooming is seen.
15. Mishnah Berurah 226:2.
16. Kaf Hachayim 226:4 quoting Moed Kol Chai. Kaf Hachayim also holds that according to kabbalah this brachah may not be said on Shabbos and Yom Tov.

17. Indeed, it is clearly permissible to smell a hadas which is attached to a tree on Shabbos since we are not concerned that the branch will be broken off- OC 336:10.
18. Teshuvos Lev Chaim 2:44.
19. Mibais Levi Nissan 5756.
20. Yechave Daas 1:2.
21. Tzitz Eliezer 12:20-6.
22. Mishnah Berurah 226:2.
23. Shevet Halevi 6:53.
24. Both views are brought in Kaf Hachayim 225:26 and 226:11.
25. Ben Ish Chai (Re'eh 11); Sdei Chemed (Brachos 2:7); Minchas Yitzchak 3:25-3; Yabia Omer 5:20.
26. R' Akiva Eiger (Gilyon OC 226); Divrei Malkiel 3:2. If one is in doubt whether the tree in question is orlah, a brachah may be said according to all views.
27. Dovev Meishorim 3:5; Chelkas Yaakov 2:27.
28. Harav S. Vozner (Mibais Levi, Nissan 5756).
29. Chida (More B'atzba 198). Although there are poskim who hold that halachically two trees are required and no brachah is said when only one tree is seen, see Chazon Ovadia pg. 9-10, most poskim do not quote this requirement. See also Ktzos Hashulchan (Badei Hashulchan 46:18) that lchatchillah, two trees are required for the brachah.
30. Kaf Hachayim 226:2.
31. Shu"t Halachos Ketanos 2:28.
32. Shu"t Lev Chaim 45 quoted in Kaf Hachayim 226:3 and in Chazon Ovadia pg. 8.
33. See entire procedure in Kaf Hachayim 226:7-8.
34. Mibais Levi (Nissan 5756).

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