

# BIRKAS HA-ILANOS: THE BLESSING OVER TREES IN BLOOM

*by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt*

Rosh Chodesh Nissan marks the beginning of the season for Birkas ha-Ilanos—the blessing we recite upon seeing fruit trees in bloom. Since this blessing, which extols Hashem's ongoing renewal of creation[1], is recited only once a year[2], 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 exempt[3].

Question: When is Birkas ha-Ilanos recited?

Discussion: The l'chatchilah, preferred time to recite this blessing is immediately upon seeing a fruit 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[4]. Accordingly, in an area where they start blooming in Adar[5], or where they do not bloom until Iyar or Sivan[6], the blessing should be recited in those months[7]. In the countries where fruit trees blossom in Tishrei or Cheshvan, the blessing should be said at that time[8].

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 as long as the fruit of the tree has not yet ripened. Once the fruit has ripened, the blessing may no longer be said[9].

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 grow[10].

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 blessing[11].

Some poskim[12] 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 concern[13], apparently do not forbid reciting this blessing on Shabbos and Yom Tov[14]. It is customary, though, to recite the blessing only during the week[15], unless the last day of Nissan falls on Shabbos[16]. The blessing may be said at night[17].

Question: Which trees require Birkas ha-Ilanos?

Discussion: Birkas ha-Ilanos is said only on fruit-bearing trees[18]. If one mistakenly said the blessing on a barren tree, he need not repeat the blessing on a fruit-bearing tree[19].

The poskim debate whether one is allowed to recite the blessing on a tree which has been grafted from two species, since the halachah does not permit such grafting[20]. It is preferable not to make the blessing on such a tree[21].

Some acharonim prohibit the recitation of the blessing on an orlah tree[22]. A tree is considered orlah for the first three years after it is planted. Many other poskim, however, permit reciting the blessing on an orlah tree[23].

During the year of shemittah in Eretz Yisrael, it is permitted to recite the blessing even on a tree which—in violation of the halachah—has been cultivated[24].

The text of the blessing, as quoted in all of the early sources[25], is as follows: ברוך אתה ד' אלוקינו: להנות בהם בני אדם בריות טובות ואילנות טובים מלך העולם שלא חסר בעולמו כלום וברא בו [26]

In several Siddurim[27] the word *davar* appears instead of the word *klum*. But since all of the early sources indicate that the original text had the word *kum*, 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 *kum* and not the word *davar*[28].

#### Birkas ha-Ilanos—hiddur mitzvah

In addition to the basic halachos mentioned earlier, there are several hiddurim and stringencies 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 on two or more trees. No blessing 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 blessing should be said on trees in an orchard that is planted outside the city limits[32].
- The blessing should be recited in the presence of a minyan followed by Kaddish. Before the blessing is recited, V'yehi noam followed by Hallelukah hallelu Keil min ha-shamayim is said[33].
- The blessing should be recited at the earliest possible time, which is on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, unless it falls on Shabbos or it is raining[34].

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1. *Shitah Mekubetzes, Berachos 43b.*

2. O.C. 226:1.

3. Har Tzvi, O.C. 118.

4. Mishnah Berurah 226:1, quoting acharonim.

5. Be'er Heitev, O.C. 226:1.
6. Aruch ha-Shulchan 226:1.
7. Note that there are several poskim who hold that according to kabbalah, this blessing should be recited only during Nissan. See Sedei Chemed (Berachos 2:1) and Kaf ha-Chayim 126:1 who rule that one should not recite this blessing before or after Nissan.
8. Har Tzvi, O.C. 118; Minchas Yitzchak 10:16.
9. Mishnah Berurah 226:4.
10. Mishnah Berurah 226:5; Minchas Shelomo 1:73-8. 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 ha-Shekel 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 as soon as blossoms are seen.
11. Mishnah Berurah 226:2.
12. 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.
13. 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, O.C. 336:10.
14. Teshuvos Lev Chayim 2:44. See Nefesh David (Aderet), pg. 138, who insisted on reciting this blessing only on Shabbos.
15. Mi-Beis Levi, Nissan 5756.
16. Yechaveh Da'as 1:2.
17. Tzitz Eliezer 12:20-6.
18. Mishnah Berurah 226:2.
19. Shevet ha-Levi 6:53.
20. Both views are brought in Kaf ha-Chayim 225:26 and 226:11.
21. Ben Ish Chai (Re'eh 11); Sedei Chemed (Berachos 2:7); Minchas Yitzchak 3:25-3; Yabia Omer 5:20.
22. Rav Akiva Eiger (Gilyon O.C. 226); Divrei Malkiel 3:2. If one is in doubt whether the tree is orlah, a blessing may be said according to all views.
23. Dovev Meishorim 3:5; Chelkas Yaakov 2:27.

24. Halichos Shelomo 3:2-4; Mi-Beis Levi, Nissan 5756.

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

26. The text in some of the early sources (including Rambam and Shulchan Aruch) is 'tovos.' [According to dikduk, tovim is the proper form, since ilan is lashon zachar, as in the Mishnah (Avos 3:7): ilan zeh.]

27. Siddur ha-Gra; Minchas Yerushalayim; ArtScroll. The source may be Sefer ha-Eshkol, pg. 68.

28. Minchas Yitzchak 10:16; mi-Beis Levi (Nissan 5756).

29. Chida (Moreh b'Etzba 198); Halichos Shelomo 3:2, Orchos Halachah 10. Although there are poskim who hold that two trees are required even according to the basic halachah and no blessing is recited when only one tree is seen, see Da'as Torah 226:1 and Chazon Ovadyah, pg. 9-10, most poskim do not mention this requirement. See also Ketzos ha-Shulchan (Badei ha-Shulchan 46:18) that l'chatchilah two trees are required for the blessing.

30. Kaf ha-Chayim 226:2.

31. Teshuvos Halachos Ketanos 2:28.

32. Teshuvos Lev Chayim 45 quoted in Kaf ha-Chayim 226:3 and in Chazon Ovadyah, pg. 8.

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

34. Mi-Beis Levi (Nissan 5756).

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