

BLESSINGS FOR PLEASANT FRAGRANCES

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Just as one may not derive pleasure from food or drink before reciting a proper blessing, so too, one may not enjoy a pleasant fragrance before reciting the appropriate blessing.¹ There are four² different types of blessings that can be recited over pleasant³ fragrances⁴:

1.Borei atzei vesamim: Recited over fragrant shrubs and trees or their flowers (e.g., myrtle, roses⁵).

2.Ha-nosein⁶ reich tov ba-perios: Recited over fragrant, edible fruits or nuts. Many poskim rule that nowadays, when fruits are generally grown for their taste and not for their smell, one should avoid smelling these fruits, since it is questionable if a blessing is required.⁷ During the entire Yom Tov of Succos, the esrog should not be smelled at all.⁸

3.Borei isvei vesamim: Recited over fragrant herbs, grasses or flowers.

4.Borei minei vesamim: Recited over a blend of spices of different species or of undetermined species. It is also recited over pleasant fragrances of animal origin, e.g., musk. On Motza'ei Shabbos, the proper blessing is Borei minei vesamim—no matter what type of fragrance is being used.⁹

The blessing is recited immediately before one intends to smell the pleasant fragrance. B'diavad, one may recite the blessing within a few seconds after he smelled a pleasant fragrance.¹⁰

Question: Are there situations where one would not recite a blessing over a pleasant fragrance?

Discussion: A blessing over a pleasant fragrance is recited only over an object whose purpose is to exude a pleasant fragrance. If the object is primarily for another purpose—even if the object is sweet-smelling—no blessing is recited.¹¹ Some examples:

- One enters a kitchen while food is being cooked or baked. Since the purpose of the cooking or baking is not to create a pleasant aroma, no blessing is recited.¹²
- Flowers in a vase exude a pleasant fragrance. Since people usually buy flowers for their beauty, one who walks by and smells them does not recite a blessing. If, however, the flowers are picked up and smelled, a blessing must be recited.
- The fragrant smell of a backyard garden, etc. does not require a blessing. This is because a garden

is usually planted for its beauty, not for its smell. If, however, one bends over and cups a flower in his hands in order to smell it, a blessing must be said.¹³

•Some florists display flowers so that their fragrance will attract customers. In such a case, the proper blessing must be recited over the fragrance even if one did not pick the flowers up and—according to many poskim—even if he has no intention of smelling them.¹⁴ If, however, the flowers are displayed just for their beauty, or are packed up for storage, no blessing is said even though the flowers smell good.¹⁵

•A cup of coffee is poured for the purpose of drinking. No blessing is said over the aroma since the purpose of pouring the coffee is for drinking and not for its aroma. If, however, one specifically opens a fresh jar of coffee in order to smell it, a blessing is recited.¹⁶ No blessing should be recited over instant coffee.¹⁷

•No blessing is recited over air purifiers, deodorants, soaps, etc., since their purpose is to remove foul odors.¹⁸ In addition, many poskim rule that no blessing is recited over perfume, since its fragrance is a result of chemical processes, not natural ones.¹⁹

•Smelling an item to test if it smells good or if it is fit for purchase does not necessitate a blessing.²⁰

Sources:

1. O.C. 216:1. A berachah acharonah, however, was not instituted for pleasant fragrances; Mishnah Berurah 216:4.
2. A fifth type of blessing, rarely recited, is Borei shemen areiv. This is recited over sweet-smelling oil derived from the balsam tree grown in Eretz Yisrael.
3. One who does not enjoy a particular fragrance does not recite a blessing.
4. We have listed the blessings in order of priority when one is reciting blessing on more than one type of fragrance; see Peri Megadim 216:19.
5. Mishnah Berurah 216:17.
6. This is the nusach which is quoted by most poskim and all siddurim. Chayei Adam 61:2 and Mishnah Berurah 216:9, however, substitute Asher nosan for ha-nosein.
7. See Chazon Ish, O.C. 35:5-7, and Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 177. 8. Mishnah Berurah 216:53 and Be'ur Halachah, s.v. ha-meiriach. See Halichos Shelomo 1:23-37, that an esrog which will be used on Succos should not be smelled even before the Yom Tov begins.
9. Mishnah Berurah 297:1. Even if fruit is used; Aruch ha-Shulchan 297:4.
10. Halichos Shelomo 1:23-38.
11. O.C. 217:2. See also Mishnah Berurah 217:1; 216:11.
12. Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 216:46.

13. Ruling of Rav Y.Y. Fisher (Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 178); Az Nidberu 14:11.
14. Mishnah Berurah 217:1-2 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 3 and 7. See Aruch ha-Shulchan 217:1-3 and Kaf ha-Chayim 217:2 who rule that one should not recite the blessing unless he intends to smell the flowers.
15. If they are picked up in order to be smelled, a blessing is recited. See note 16 for the view of Chazon Ish.
16. Mishnah Berurah 216:16. Chazon Ish (O.C. 35:5-7), however, rules that if the coffee jar is going to be returned to the kitchen, then no blessing may be recited over it. In his view, a blessing is recited only when the spices are designated for smelling only and serve no other purpose.
17. Rav Y.Y. Fisher (Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 174).
18. Mishnah Berurah 217:10; 216:41; Aruch ha-Shulchan 217:5.
19. Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 61, note 32). This is also the view of Rav M. Feinstein (quoted in The Radiance of Shabbos, pg. 132, concerning Havdalah) and Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 181 and Avnei Yashfei 2:16).
20. Kaf ha-Chayim 216:3; Rav C.P. Scheinberg (Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 179).

Weekly-Halacha, Text Copyright © 2013 by Rabbi Neustadt, Dr. Jeffrey Gross and **Torah.org**.

Rabbi Neustadt is the Yoshev Rosh of the Vaad Harabbonim of Detroit and the Av Beis Din of the Beis Din Tzedek of Detroit. He could be reached at dneustadt@cordetroit.com