**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**THE LAWS OF THE BERAKHOT**

**Rav David Brofsky**

***Shiur* #78: *Birkat Ha-Ilanot***

**Introduction**

Among the many *mitzvot* associated with Pesach, there is another, somewhat less known and unrelated *mitzva*, *Birkat Ha-Ilanot*. The Talmud (Berakhot 43b) teaches:

R. Yehuda says: If one goes abroad in the days of Nisan [spring time] and sees the trees sprouting, he should say: “Blessed be He who has not left His world lacking in anything and has created in it goodly creatures and goodly trees for the enjoyment of mankind.”

*Birkat Ha-Ilanot*, according to the *gemara*, is said in the month of Nisan, upon seeing “*ilanei de-ka melavlevei,*” trees that are blossoming. In this *shiur*, we will discuss the nature of this blessing, whether it is inherently related to Nisan, and its numerous *halakhot*.

**Nature of the Blessing**

Although *Birkat Ha-Ilanot* is clearly a *birkat ha-shevach*, and not a *birkat ha-mitzva* or a *birkat ha-nehenin*, it is worth contrasting this blessing to two other blessings.

As we have discussed previously, the Talmud (Berakhot 58b) teaches that upon seeing a beautiful tree, one should say the blessing “*she-kakha lo be-olamo*.” There are numerous differences between these blessings. For example, *Birkat Ha-Ilanot* is said only once each year (Shulchan Arukh 226), regardless of whether or not the tree is beautiful, and only when it blossoms. It appears that while “*she-kakha lo be-olamo*” is a blessing of praise for God’s beautiful creations, *Birkat Ha-Ilanot* seems to focus on the yearly renewal of the tree.

We also learned that the *Shehechiyanu* blessing is said on numerous occasions, including on each Festival, upon seeing a new fruit each season, upon seeing a friend after 30 days, and upon purchasing new clothes or appliances. We will discuss in a future shiur whether the *Shehechiyanu* blessing was established on enjoyment (*hana’ah*) or renewal.

It appears, therefore, that the *Birkat Ha-Ilanot* relates specifically to the renewal of a “tree,” which represents life and fertility, or the renewal of the season. Furthermore, it may relate specifically to the month of Nisan, the month of redemption; the renewal of the trees is a sign of the redemption of Israel (Sanhedrin 98a).

**Proper Time for *Birkat Ha-Ilanot***

The *gemara* cited above implies that the blessing should be said during the month of Nisan. What if one sees a tree blossoming before or after Nisan? What should one do in the southern hemisphere, where the seasons are reversed?

Most *Rishonim* (see Ritva, *Rosh Ha-Shana* 11b; Mordekhai, *Berakhot* 148) explain that although the *gemara* mentions Nisan, the proper time for the blessing depends on the place and time during which the trees blossom. Although some *Acharonim* insist that the blessing must be said during Nisan (see Kaf Ha-Chaim 226:1), most (see Eliya Rabba 226:1; Chayei Adam 63:2; Mishna Berura 226:1) rule that one may say the blessing before or after the month of Nisan. R. Ovadia Yosef (Yechaveh Da’at 1:1) writes that it is preferable to wait until the month of Nisan to say the blessing.

In the southern hemisphere, trees blossom in different months. A number of *Acharonim* (see Har Tzvi, OC 1:118; Minchat Yitzchak 10:16) rule that in this case, the blessing should be said upon seeing the blossoming of the trees. Interestingly, R. Mordechai Eliyahu, in his Ma’amar Mordechai (Mo’adim Le-Yamim 32-33) rules that in this case, the blessing should be said without *Shem* *U-Malkhut* (i.e. *barukh she-lo chiser*…).

This question may have an interesting ramification. Are women obligated in *Birkat Ha-Ilanot*? One might suggest that if the blessing must be said during the month of Nisan, then it should be considered to be a *mitzvat aseh she-hazeman gerama*, from which women are exempt. However, R. Tzvi Pesach Frank (Har Tzvi, ibid.) suggests that even if the blessing must be said during Nisan, it is not “time bound,” but rather, a function of the seasons, and it is therefore not considered to be a *mitzvat aseh she-hazeman gerama*.

In this context, we must recall that while it may be that women are obligated in *Birkat Ha-Ilanot*, it is not completely clear whether this and other *birkot ha-shevach* are considered to be obligations or a *reshut* (optional).

Some *Acharonim* suggest that one should say the blessing immediately on Rosh Chodesh Nisan. Some write that one should say the blessing as soon as possible, due to the general principle of *zerizin makdimim le-mitzvot*. Furthermore, others note that the *Rishonim* debate whether or not one must say the blessing upon seeing blossoming trees for the first time. The Maharil (Teshuvot 143) writes that one may say the blessing even if he did not say the blessing the first time; similarly, one may say the *Shehechiyanu* blessing over a “new fruit” even if one has already eaten a similar fruit, as one is still happy.

Seemingly, one might agree with the Maharil’s assumption that these two blessings are similar, yet suggest that in both cases one may not say the blessing after having already seen the blossoming tree or having eaten the new fruit (see Machatzit Ha-Shekel 226). Alternatively, as we noted above, we might distinguish between the blessings: *Shehechiyanu* was established for the joy that one feels, while *Birkat Ha-Ilanot* is said upon the yearly renewal of the tree. Even if the *simcha* is diminished after seeing the fruit, one must still thank God for the yearly renewal of the tree. Although it is customary to say the blessing even after having seen the blossoming of the tree (see Mishna Berura 226:5), this may be an additional reason to say the blessing as soon as possible.

If a child become a “*gadol*” (bar or bat mitzva) during Nisan, he/she should presumably wait until after the birthday to say the blessing, in accordance with the principle “*gadol ha-metzuveh ve-oseh*” (the fulfillment of one who is obligated in a *mitzva* is greater than on who is not obligated).

Some *Acharonim* raise halakhic and kabbalistic (Kaf Ha-Chaim 226:4) reasons not to say this blessing on Shabbat. It is customary, however, not to be concerned with this view, and some even prefer to say this blessing on Shabbat.

**Upon Which and How Many Trees is the Blessing Recited**

The Talmud does not imply that the blessing should be said over trees which bear fruit. Some *Acharonim* (see Mishna Berura 226:2) suggest that the blessing may only be said over flowers which will develop into fruit.

Some *Acharonim* (Chida, Avodat Ha-Kodesh, Moreh Be-Etzbah 198) write that one should say the blessing over at least two trees. Others, including R. Moshe Feinstein (see Rivevot Ephraim 8:77; see also Ketzot Ha-Shulchan 66:18), said the blessing over one tree.

The Tur (226) writes that once the fruit begin to grow, one my not longer say the blessing. R. Yosef Karo, in his Beit Yosef (226), cites the Mordekahi (Berakhot 148) and Hagahot Maimoniot (Hilkhot Berakhot 10:9), who rule that the blessing may be said even afterwards, but in the Shulchan Arukh (226) he rules in accordance with the Rosh. The Mishna Berura (226:5) concludes that one may say the blessing until the fruits are ripe.

Next week, we will resume our discussion of the *Shehechiyanu* blessing.