



Nisan- Learning About Birkat Ha-Ilanot

Question: Whoever sees especially beautiful creations recites the blessing *shekacha lo ba'olamo*; “Who has such things in His world.”

Whoever goes out to fields or gardens in the days of Nisan and sees trees blossoming and budding recites *birkat ha'ilanot*, the blessing for the trees: “Blessed ... who has withheld nothing from His world, and has created in it beautiful creatures and trees for human beings to enjoy.” What is the difference between both blessings?

Answer: Birkat ha'ilanot vs. Shekacha lo ba'olamo: on the similarities and differences between the blessing for the trees and the blessing for seeing beautiful creatures.

In tractate *Berachot* (43b), it states: “Rabbi Yehuda said: One who goes out during Nisan and sees trees that are blossoming recites: ‘Blessed ... who has withheld nothing from His world, and has created in

it beautiful creatures and trees for human beings to enjoy.’”

This blessing is known as *birkat ha'ilanot*, the blessing for the trees. Another blessing is cited in a different context (*Berachot* 58b): “*shekacha lo ba'olamo*,” “Who has such things in His world,” and was instituted for those “who sees beautiful creatures or beautiful trees.” In light of the similarity between the two, Rambam cites them as one *halacha* (*Hilchot Berachot* 10:13): “Whoever sees especially beautiful creatures and beautiful trees makes the blessing ‘that it is such in His world’ (*shekacha lo ba'olamo*). One who goes out to fields or gardens in the days of Nisan and sees trees blossoming and buds coming forth says the blessing: ‘Blessed are You, G-d, Our L-rd, master of the Universe, who has withheld nothing from His world, and has created in it beautiful creatures and trees for human beings to enjoy.’”

However, despite the similarity, it is possible to see several significant differences between the two blessings:

The blessing *shekacha lo ba'olamo* applies the entire year, as opposed to *shelo chisar ba'olamo kelum* (*birkat ha'ilanot*), which applies only during Nisan. Even according to those who allow for an extension for the time one can say this blessing, it is still limited to the blossoming period for most trees (Adar to Iyar).

The blessing *shekacha lo ba'olamo* includes the blessing for beautiful creatures, non-fruit bearing trees as well. In contrast, *birkat ha'ilanot* was instituted when one sees the blossoms of fruit trees (according to most *poskim*).

The blessing *shekacha lo ba'olamo* applies any place and time one sees beautiful trees. In contrast, it is preferable to say *shelo chisar ba'olamo* when one goes out to “the fields or the gardens,” as Rambam writes. That is, when one goes out to see nature in its full glory: at the height of its blossoming.

Despite the fact that the blessing *shekacha lo ba'olamo* is codified as a *halacha* (Shulchan Aruch OC 225:10), the *poskim* write that we do not make this blessing *beshem umalchut* (mentioning G-d's name and kingship). This is the ruling of the Mishna Berura (ad loc., 32): “Today it is not customary to say this blessing at all,” but adds, “it is proper to say this blessing without mentioning G-d's name and kingship.” In contrast, all *poskim* hold that *birkat ha'ilanot* should be recited when seeing blossoming trees as a full blessing, as is the simple understanding of the Shulchan Aruch (§226). Moreover, there are those who customarily recite *birkat ha'ilanot* in large groups; those with alacrity say this blessing immediately on Rosh Chodesh Nisan following *shacharit*.

The former chief rabbi Ben Zion Meir Chai Uziel (*Mishpatei Uziel* I OC:6) explains the conceptual difference between the two blessings, as follows:

[Since the blessing *shekacha lo ba'olamo* is] a blessing of thanksgiving ... for the existence of the beautiful trees that the

Birkat Ha-Ilanot

When one sees blossoming fruit trees for the first time during the month of Nisan, one should say this blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ
הָעוֹלָם שֶׁלֹא חָסַר בְּעוֹלָמוֹ
כָּלוּם וּבָרָא בּוֹ בְּרִיּוֹת טוֹבוֹת
וְאֵילָנוֹת טוֹבוֹת לְהָנוֹת בָּהֶם
בְּנֵי אָדָם.

This blessing is said just once a year—the first time that one sees it.



eye and spirit derive enjoyment from their beauty and splendor ... every time one derives enjoyment from beholding them [he] thanks their Creator who fashioned His world with wondrous wisdom.

It is for this reason that the laws governing the blessing *shekacha lo ba'olamo* are similar to most other *birkot ha're'iya* (made when one witnesses certain phenomena): most of these blessings can be made once every thirty days, if one has not seen other beautiful creatures or trees during this period.

In contrast, when saying *birkat ha'ilanot*, we are thanking G-d for something else:

This is our thanks for the very blossoming and rejuvenation: that these bare trees, which seemed to be lifeless, once again blossom and are fertile. As it states: "Then shall all the trees of the field know that it is I the L-rd who has abased the lofty tree and exalted the lowly tree" (*Yechezkel* 17:24).

For this reason, this blessing was instituted to be recited once a year, as Rabbi Uziel goes on to explain that it is only during the time all fruit trees blossom, in early Spring, that we express thanks:

... for the very force of blossoming and growth that G-d instilled in the nature of creation, which is renewed in His goodness every day, and in every season, in

an invigorated, spectacular, and efficient manner, so it can give pleasure to mankind.

To build on Rabbi Uziel's beautiful explanation, we can add that this blessing is unique particularly to Nisan, the month of redemption. The rejuvenation of the trees hints also to the redemption of the Jewish People, likened to trees, as stated by *Yeshayahu* (65:22): "For the days of My people shall be as long as the days of a tree." As such, in this blessing where we thank G-d for the blossoming of the trees that seemed to be utterly lifeless, we also essentially hint to ourselves as a nation. We essentially beseech G-d that during this month, which has the potential for redemption (and "in Nisan [the Jewish People] will ultimately be redeemed," *Rosh Hashana* 11a), that He fulfill *Yechezkel's* prophecy of the dried bones. This vision describes a state in which it seems that the Jewish People are nothing but lifeless, dry bones. Yet, these bones blossom into a physical and spiritual revival for the nation, as it states (*Yechezkel* 37:11-14): "They say, 'Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone' ... I am going to ... lift you out of your graves, O My people, and bring you to the land of Israel. ... I will put My breath into you and you shall live again, and I will set you upon your own soil."

These Q&A were written by Rabbi Ehud Ahituv from Torah VeHa'aretz Institute.

WEEKLY INSPIRATION

"A Jew studying Torah is like the amnesia victim who tries to reconstruct from fragments the beautiful world he once experienced. In other words, by learning Torah man returns to his own self."

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt"l, "Redemption Prayer, Talmud Torah" p. 69