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ותלמד
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לעשות רצונך
בלבב שלם



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Kiddush Levanah

Parshas Balak 5786

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The Institution of Kiddush Levanah

The Importance of Fulfilling Kiddush Levanah

1. Everyone does Kiddush Levanah every month, but many people are unaware of how important and special this mitzvah is. Therefore, after Chanukah, which commemorates the time when the Greeks tried to eradicate the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh from Klal Yisroel, we will write about the halochos of Kiddush Levanah in order to reinforce this mitzvah, raise awareness about its importance, and encourage precision and care in its fulfillment.
2. **Its segulah.** You will see success in a month that you say Birkas Halevanah on Motzei Shabbos; if there is a month that someone misses, ignores, or is unable to say the brochoh, that month will not be successful, chas vesholom (מגיד מישרים, מ"ב סי' תכ"ו סק"ד).

The Chiyuv

3. Chazal decreed that we should say a brochoh every month when we see the moon's renewal (גמ' סנהדרין דף מ"א ע"א). The Shulchan Aruch rules that one who sees the new moon should say "אשר" (ש"ע אור"ח סי' תכ"ו ס"א) "במאמרו וכו' ברוך מחדש חדשים".
4. **Type of chiyuv.** When it comes to other Birkos Hore'iyoh, e.g., on lightning or thunder, seeing the lightning or hearing the thunder is what obligates one to say the brochoh. However, it seems clear from the poskim that Chazal's institution of Kiddush Levanah is different: even if someone didn't see the new moon, he has a mitzvah to go out and look at it in order to say the brochoh on its renewal. Seeing the moon doesn't add anything to a person's chiyuv to say the brochoh; it is just the time and one of the conditions to say the brochoh.

Like Greeting the Shechinah

5. When one says the brochoh of Kiddush Levanah in its proper time, it is as if he greets the Shechinah (גמ' סנהדרין שם). Even if we are only zocheh to this mitzvah of greeting the Shechinah once a month, that is enough (שם). People greet every human ruler, even those that do not rule or have power over them; we should certainly greet Hashem, the King of all kings. Although He is not visible, He wants to be perceived – if so, who wouldn't seek to greet Him? Therefore, every person should arouse himself as much as possible to fulfill this great mitzvah so that it does not slip away from him (יוסף אומץ סי' תס"ז).

Women Do Not Do Kiddush Levanah

6. **Time-bound mitzvah.** Women do not say the brochoh of Kiddush Levanah because it is a time-bound mitzvah ["zman gromo"] – it may only be said during the moon's renewal, i.e., the first half of the month. Although the minhag of Ashkenazi women is to do time-bound mitzvos and say the brochoh (רמ"א סי' י"ז ס"ב, סי' תקפ"ט), they do not need to do this mitzvah since they caused the moon to diminish in size (מג"א בשם השל"ה, מ"ב סי' תכ"ו סק"א).
7. **Mitzvah is done outside.** Another reason given is that the mitzvah of Birkas Halevanah is done outside (below, 29), whereas the honor of a king's daughter is found inside (שו"ת שלמת חיים ח"א). This is also a reason women do not fulfill the mehadrin level of lighting a menorah on Chanukah themselves – it is not dignified for them to go out and make brochos (חתי"ם חי שבת).

The Zman for Kiddush Levanah

How Long after the Molad?

8. **After three days.** Some are meikel to do Kiddush Levanah after three full [24-hour] days from the time of the molad (פמ"ג א"א סק"ג), at which point one can benefit somewhat from the moon's light (ט"ז, מג"א, ערוה"ש ס"ג, מ"ב סק"כ). This is the minhag of many Ashkenazim (ב"ח). The brochoh may not be said before three days, but if one did so, he is yotzei bedieved and should not say the brochoh again (108 ארחות שלמה ר"ח פ"א ארחות הלכה הע' 108). (הגרשו"א, הליכות שלמה ר"ח פ"א ארחות הלכה הע' 108).
9. **After three days in the middle of the week or later on Motzei Shabbos?** If there is a choice between saying the brochoh after three days, in the middle of the week, or waiting until Motzei Shabbos, some poskim say it is better to say the brochoh during the week and not delay the mitzvah (ב"ח, הגר"א, נשמת אדם, החזו"א), (ארחות רבינו ח"א עמ' קע"ז). One may rely on these poskim, especially during the rainy winter season, when it is more praiseworthy to do Kiddush Levanah sooner (מ"ב סק"כ).
10. However, other poskim say it is better to wait until Motzei Shabbos since there is a hiddur (below, 14) and a preference (ט"ז, א"ר) to say the brochoh on Motzei Shabbos, assuming that there will be a tzibbur saying the brochoh then (שער הציון סק"כ).
11. **After seven days.** The Mechaber writes that the brochoh on the moon is only to be said after seven days have passed (שו"ע סי' תכ"ו). The Maggid told this to him based on mystical reasons (מגיד). Also, the indentation in the moon is not as noticeable then (שו"ת הרמ"ע סי' ע"ח) and it is brighter, providing benefit to people (לבוש ס"ג). Another reason is because a seven-day period automatically contains a Shabbos (רמ"ע שם); we find the same concept used to explain why bris milah is done on the eighth day (שו"ת חת"ם אור"ח סי' ק"ב).
12. This is the minhag of Sephardim (כפה"ח ס"ק) and Chassidim (יסוד ושורש העבודה, נימוקי אורח חיים ס"ד ועוד) (ס"א), at least when it is possible (שו"ת חת"ם אור"ח סי' ק"ב) or in places and seasons that are not so cloudy (ערוה"ש ס"ג בהג"ה); one certainly shouldn't wait to do the mitzvah with a hiddur at risk of losing the brochoh entirely.
13. **Seventh night.** Some poskim hold the brochoh shouldn't be said on the seventh night since seven full days should pass (מהרי"י). (גיקוליטא הובא בב"י, חיד"א בברכי יוסף סי' תכ"ו סק"ד). Others are already meikel on the seventh night (א"ר סק"ד). Some rely on this kula during the cloudy winter season (מהרש"ם) or when the seventh night is Motzei Shabbos, which is the best time to do Kiddush Levanah (below, 14). They hold that the seven days do not have to be seven complete days (מהרש"ם).

On Motzei Shabbos Kodesh

14. The best time to do Kiddush Levanah is on Motzei Shabbos (שו"ע). In other words, even if it is already the zman for Kiddush Levanah [i.e., three (above, 8) or seven (above, 11) days after the molad], one should wait until Motzei Shabbos, when he feels nice and is dressed nicely. The same is true for Motzei Shavuot (פמ"ג, א"א סק"ב) and Motzei Yom Kippur. It is proper to wear nice clothes when fulfilling this mitzvah since Kiddush Levanah is like greeting the Shechinah (above, 5) (לבוש).
15. **Typical place and time.** One should not wait until Motzei Shabbos if it falls on the 11th night of the month or later, since the remaining nights may prove to be cloudy and the moon hidden, causing him to lose the brochoh entirely (רמ"א שם, מ"ב סק"ז).

16. **During the winter.** During the winter, as well as in very cloudy places, the moon is almost never visible. In such a time or location, one may say the brochoh as soon as the moon is visible during the week; he should not wait until Motzei Shabbos, even if it falls before the 11th of the month (ישועות יעקב).
17. **During the summer.** In places where it is hot in the summer and there are rarely any clouds at all, e.g. in Eretz Yisroel, one may wait until Motzei Shabbos to do Kiddush Levanah even if it falls on the 11th of the month or later (ספר קידוש לבנה פ"ג אות ו').
18. **With a tzibbur or on Motzei Shabbos?** There is equal value to saying Kiddush Levanah on Motzei Shabbos and saying it with a tzibbur. Thus, if an individual sees the moon on Motzei Shabbos, he should say Kiddush Levanah alone rather than in the middle of the following week with a tzibbur due to the rule of "zerizin makdimim lemitzvos" (אשל אברהם, בוטשאטש תנינא ס"ב). Similarly, if one can say Kiddush Levanah with a tzibbur on a weeknight and he will not be able to say it with a tzibbur on Motzei Shabbos, he should say it on the weeknight with a tzibbur rather than alone on Motzei Shabbos (שער הציון סק"כ).

Specifically at Night

19. **Starting at tzeis hakochavim.** Kiddush Levanah should only be said at night, when the moon is shining and people benefit from its light (רמ"א סי' תכ"ז ס"א), i.e., starting at tzeis. It should not be said during bein hashmashos even if the moon is visible (מ"ב), unless the moon has not been visible for a while and one is afraid it will not be visible later. In such a case, there is basis to say the brochoh starting at bein hashmashos if the moon is shining (מהרש"ם בדעת תורה).
20. **Before Rabbeinu Tam.** If someone is careful to follow Rabbeinu Tam's zman for tzeis and he comes across a tzibbur or opportunity to say Kiddush Levanah, he may say the brochoh if he fears he may otherwise lose the opportunity as long as it is after the Geonim's zman for tzeis. After all, the moon also shines at night after the Geonim's tzeis, especially in Eretz Yisroel and places with a similar horizon (היכל הוראה מ"ו).
21. **Until alos hashachar.** Lechatchilah, one should try to say Kiddush Levanah before alos since some poskim hold it cannot be said after that (שו"ת ישיבת עבדי ה"ה סי' כ' סקנ"ג). Nevertheless, if necessary, one may say Kiddush Levanah after alos if the moon is shining and people benefit from its light (שו"ת התעוררות תשובה ח"א סי' קצ"ט).

While the Moon is Visible

Appearance of the Moon

22. The brochoh on the moon is only said when the moon is visible and shining, providing light to the land and its inhabitants, and people benefit from its light (פוסקים). If the moon is hidden behind clouds and not illuminating the land to the point that it is impossible to benefit from its light, the brochoh may not be said (שו"ת רדב"ז ח"א סי' שמ"א, מג"א, מ"ב סק"ג). If one said the brochoh when the moon was hidden, it is a brochoh levatoloh and he must say it again later (רדב"ז שם).
23. **Thin, transparent cloud.** If a thin, transparent cloud is in front of the moon so that its outline is not sharp, but it can still be seen and gives off enough light that something normally detectable by moonlight can still be identified, one may say the brochoh (מג"א, מ"ב שם).
24. Nowadays, it is very difficult to assess the strength of the moon's light due to the electric lighting on most city streets, which dims the moonlight, and we are not accustomed to using moonlight for anything. Thus, it is difficult to evaluate and measure the moonlight to determine if it is strong enough to identify normally-detectable things. Nevertheless, one should estimate whether he would be able to tell things apart by the moonlight if there was no electric lighting.
25. **Based on Kabboloh.** Even if there is just a thin, transparent cloud in front of the moon, some people wait until it is clearly visible and shining brightly to say the brochoh. This is the Sephardi minhag (א"א, מורה באצבע אות קפ"ד, אריז"ל שער הכוונות, כף החיים). Nevertheless, if it is getting late in the month and one has reason to fear that if he tries to wait for the moon to become clearly visible, it will end up getting hidden behind thick clouds and he will miss the zman for the brochoh, he should say the brochoh right away, even if the moon is behind a thin cloud.
26. **Partially hidden.** If part of the moon is hidden but the other part is shining, one may say the brochoh (נהגות בלקט ישר).

Will Get/Got Covered in the Middle of the Brochoh

27. **Will get covered.** If, before starting the brochoh, one estimates that if he will start the brochoh now, the moon will get covered by clouds while he is in the middle, he should not start the brochoh until he sees that he has time to start and finish the

brochoh while the moon is visible and shining (מ"ב שם). Bedieved or with no other choice, e.g., toward the end of the zman for Kiddush Levanah, one is yotzei his chiyuv even if, when he started the brochoh, the moon was going to get covered while he was in the middle of the brochoh (תפילה פט"ז ס"ב).
 28. **Got covered.** If one started the brochoh when he was allowed to, but while he was in the middle, the moon got covered, he may finish the brochoh (רדב"ז שם, מ"ב שם סק"ג).

Select Halochos of Kiddush Levanah

Under the Sky

29. We go outside for Kiddush Levanah, not just to see the moon, but also to say it under the open sky. Even if one is outside, he should not stand under any sort of roof, awning, or covering so that he is not under the same covering as something tamei (מהר"ח או"ז). (הובא במהרי"ל מהנגים, ר"ח ס"ט, מג"א). We are careful about this specifically for Kiddush Levanah since it is like greeting the Shechinah, which should be done with the utmost holiness and purity (ספר קידוש לבנה פ"ה אות א').

Looking at the Moon When Saying the Brochoh

30. Before starting the brochoh, one should first look at the moon (שו"ע סי' תכ"ז ס"ב). Some say one should look at the moon through the end of the whole Kiddush Levanah text (מ"ב); others say only until finishing the brochoh, but not afterward (חרדים); yet others say to only look at the moon before starting the brochoh, but not to look at it anymore after starting the brochoh in the same way we do not gaze at a rainbow (מג"א). When one says Kiddush Levanah from a siddur or a board on the shul wall with "Kiddush Levanah letters," instead of by heart, as the poskim say to (מ"ב סי' ק' סק"ב), he is anyway not looking at the moon while saying it.

כשם שאני רוקד

31. When saying "כשם שאני רוקד" three times, one should dance each of the times toward the moon (רמ"א ס"ב), being very careful not to bend the knees so that he does not appear to be bowing to the moon. Rather, one should stand on his toes and dance (של"ה). Based on this, it would seem that similarly, when bowing at the words "ואנחנו כורעים וכו'" during Aleinu after Kiddush Levanah, one should make sure not to face the moon so that it does not look like he is bowing to the moon.

Dancing after Kiddush Levanah

32. After Kiddush Levanah, there should be rejoicing and dancing reminiscent of a wedding in order to inspire joy over the future, when Klal Yisroel will be renewed like the moon and once again cling to her "husband," i.e., Hashem (רמ"א ס"ב). Everyone should make sure to do this; it is not just a Chassidishe minhag. This is the only place that the Ramo writes praise about dancing (גאב"ד). (גייטסווער זצ"ל, תשובות והנהגות ח"א סי' ר"ג).

Shaking Hems, Checking Tzitzis

33. **Shaking hems.** After the Kaddish following Kiddush Levanah, one should shake the hems of his clothes in order to chase away the negative external forces ["chitzonim"] created from the prosecution ["kitrug"] of the moon (אריז"ל הובא במג"א סק"א). Some shake their tallis koton since it is a royal garment (פרי עץ חיים).
34. **Checking tzitzis.** Some have the minhag to check their tzitzis to ensure that they are kosher, and while doing that, they shake them, thereby fulfilling the minhag to shake one's clothes. Also, the Gemara (מנחות דף מ"ג ע"ב) says that whoever is zealous with the mitzvah of tzitzis will be zocheh to greet the Shechinah, and the importance attached to Kiddush Levanah is due to its comparison to greeting the Shechinah (מרגליות הים סנהדרין דף מ"ב ע"א).

כאבן ידמו

35. When saying the posuk "תפול עליהם וכו'" backward, i.e., "כאבן ידמו, זורעך בגדול וכו'", be very careful to pause after the words "כאבן ידמו" and then say "זורעך בגדול וכו'". Otherwise, it implies a curse and insult toward Hashem, chas vesholom (הגרי"מ). (ריטנבארג, קל' מדי חודש בחדשו).

Saying Shalom Aleichem

36. The minhag is to bentch three people by saying "Sholom aleichem," and they respond "Aleichem sholom." Responding is equivalent to initiating, so when one responds "Aleichem sholom," he does not need to bentch others with the brochoh of "Sholom aleichem" (רמ"א ס"ב). Nevertheless, even after responding "Aleichem sholom," it is common practice to still say "Sholom aleichem."
37. One should not respond "Aleichem sholom" during the brochoh as it is an interruption. However, one may nod out of respect (מו"ר הגר"ש גראס, אורח כהלכה עמ' תנ"ט).