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In memory of their parents Dr. Irving & Mrs. Bernice Mehler & Mr. Gedalja & Mrs. Miriam Zupnik

לעילוי נשמת ר' יצחק מאיר בן אליהו וברינתא בת אברהם ע"ה ור' גדליה בן אברהם מנחם הכהן ומרים בת ישראל ע"ה

Kiddush Levana

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What is the earliest and latest time one may recite Kiddush Levana?

May one recite Kiddush Levana if it's cloudy?

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 42a) cites Rav Abba bar Chanina in the name of Rav Yochanan that "blessing the moon in its time is comparable to greeting the *Shechina* (Divine Presence)." This blessing is known as *Kiddush Levana*¹.

Rabbeinu Yonah (Brachos dapei haRif 21a s.v. *ki'ilu*) explains that through the moon's cycle, one can see the wonders and strength of Hashem, which makes a person more aware of His presence. This added awareness is comparable to greeting the *Shechinah*. Therefore, when one takes note of the moon's cycle, it is befitting to make a *bracha*, similar to other blessings recited when viewing other wonders of Creation. The Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 426:2) adds that even though the wonders and strength of Hashem are visible in all of Creation, it is more befitting to make this blessing on the moon because it is the closest of the celestial bodies and has a noticeable cycle. Furthermore, as mentioned in the blessing of *Kiddush Levana*, "*ateres tiferes la'amusai baten sheheim asidim lihischadesh kamosah*," "it is a crown of glory to those borne from the womb, for they are destined to be renewed likewise," the moon metaphorically represents the Jewish Nation and its future renewal.

There is debate as to what type of *bracha Kiddush Levana* is. There are three types of *brachos*: *Birchas hanehenin*, a blessing on benefits and pleasures such as eating and certain pleasant scents; *birchas hamitzvos*, a blessing recited upon performing a mitzvah; and *birchas hashvach*, a blessing of praise said as part of prayers or upon a momentous occasion.

Kiddush Levana does not seem to be a *bracha* on the benefit of the light of the moon, for if that was the case, it would be recited every time one receives benefit. The Birkei Yosef (8:2) counts *Kiddush Levana* among the *brachos* recited upon performing a mitzvah. The proof to this is that the halacha requires one to stand when reciting any *birchas hamitzvah*, and the Gemara (ibid.) says that one must stand for *Kiddush Levana*. It is difficult to understand how *Kiddush Levana* can be a *birchas hamitzvah*, though, as there is no mitzvah other than the recitation of the *bracha* itself.

Rashi (Sanhedrin ibid. s.v. *amar*) explains that the requirement to stand is because *Kiddush Levana* is considered greeting the *Shechinah*, and one must stand out of respect for the *Shechinah*. From here it is apparent that Rashi doesn't consider *Kiddush Levana* a *birchas hamitzvah*, for otherwise he should have explained, as the Birkei Yosef does, that one must stand for the *birchas hamitzvah*.

The Rambam (*Berachos* 10:16) includes *Kiddush Levana* with the *brachos* made upon seeing something extraordinary. Based on this, Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch (*Teshuvos Vehanhagos* 1:205) writes that this *bracha* is a *birchas hashvach*, a blessing of praise over the wonders of Creation. Chazal

¹ *Kiddush Levana* should not be confused with *Kiddush Hachodesh*, which refers to the sanctification of the new month by the Sanhedrin. The *bracha* we make on the moon is also referred to as *Birchas Halevana*.

instituted that *Kiddush Levana* be recited once a month and not every time one sees the moon, since the renewal of the moon occurs on a monthly basis. This is similar to the blessing recited upon blossoming trees, which is said only once a year, since the phenomenon of blossoming trees is an annual cycle. Both the blessing upon the moon and upon blossoming trees are thus recited when the cycle begins anew.

In addition to the requirement to stand during its recitation, there are a number of other halachos derived from the idea that blessing the moon is tantamount to greeting the *Shechinah*. One halacha is that *Kiddush Levana* is said outdoors under the open sky and not under a roof (Rema Orach Chaim 426:4), as it is appropriate, when greeting a king, to go out to the street to meet Him (see Mishna Berura ibid.:21). Additionally, one should be dressed appropriately to greet the *Shechinah*; therefore, the *bracha* should preferably be recited on Motzoei Shabbos while still wearing one's Shabbos finery (Shulchan Aruch ibid. 426:2).

Greeting the *Shechinah* should only be done in good spirits, as the Gemara states (Shabbos 30b) that the Divine Presence does not come to rest upon a person through gloom or laziness but, rather, through joy associated with a mitzvah. For this reason, it is customary not to bless the moon when a person is in a state of mourning, during the nine days from Rosh Chodesh Av through Tisha B'Av (which are also a time of mourning), or during the ten days from Rosh Hashana through Yom Kippur, when people are anxious about the outcome of their Divine judgment (Rema ibid.:2).

Kiddush Levana is recited at night, when it is possible to benefit from the moonlight (Rema ibid.:1). Accordingly, *Kiddush Levana* should be said when the moon is not obscured by clouds, unless they are sparse enough that items normally discernible in the moonlight are still visible (Magen Avraham 426:1).

The requirement of benefit from the moonlight also determines the earliest time one may recite *Kiddush Levana*. To properly understand this halacha, one must first understand the basic rules of the lunar cycle which govern the Hebrew calendar:

The moon orbits the earth once every 29 days, 12 hours and 793 *chalakim* (halachic moments; a *chelek* is three seconds). The conjunction, or *molad*, is the moment when the moon is aligned between Earth and the sun. At this point, it is impossible to see the moon, because the entire lit side of the moon is facing outward toward the sun and away from Earth. As the moon continues its orbit around Earth, it moves out of line with the sun, and the lit side begins to be visible from Earth. This is the basic qualification for determining *Rosh Chodesh*, the beginning of a Hebrew month. For millennia, *Rosh Chodesh* was declared by the Sanhedrin (71-member body that served as the highest court of the Jewish People) upon the first sighting

of the new moon at night. This is usually the case following the *molad* or the night after. The calculation currently used to determine the calendar is based upon this system and was created by Hillel the Second and his colleagues as a permanent calendar when they realized it was becoming impossible to properly convene a court to declare *Rosh Chodesh*.

Based upon these principles, *Kiddush Levana* should not be said earlier than 72 hours after the *molad* (Magen Avraham *ibid*: 13). This is because it takes 72 hours for the moon to grow large enough for one to benefit from its light. In some communities, the custom is to wait seven days before saying *Kiddush Levana* to ensure the necessary level of benefit from the moon's light (Shulchan Aruch *ibid*:.4).

However, the Rambam (Hilchos Brachos 10:17) and Rashi (Sanhedrin 41b s.v. *ad*) both say that the *bracha* should be recited immediately upon seeing the new moon on the first of the month. Based on this, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe Choshen Mishpat 2:47) rules that having enough light to benefit is only a *hiddur mitzvah* (a beautification of the mitzvah) and is not crucial for the basic fulfillment of the mitzvah. Therefore, someone who is concerned that he may not be able to say *Kiddush Levana* at the proper time may recite it earlier. In addition, if the layer of clouds blocking the moon is thin enough that the shape of the moon can be discerned through the clouds, or the moon is only partially covered, one can fulfill his obligation (Aishel Avraham - Butchach Mahadura Tinyana 426:1).

One may recite *Kiddush Levana*, says the Gemara (Sanhedrin 41b), "until the cavity (of the crescent moon) is full." The Gemara explains that this means until the sixteenth day of the month. On the sixteenth day, the moon is full and no longer considered "new," and the blessing, which states *Hamechadesh chodoshim* (He who renews the months) is no longer relevant (Rashi *ibid*. s.v. *ad shetismalei*). Another reason is that the *bracha* should be recited only when the moon's light is increasing, as this is considered a good omen, as opposed to when it begins to wane (Kol Bo 43).

On a practical level, the Tur (Orach Chaim 426:3) as well as the Shulchan Aruch (*ibid*.) rule that sixteen days doesn't mean sixteen days into the month; it means until, but not including, the sixteenth full day from the *molad*, meaning fifteen full days. For example, if the *molad* was on Wednesday at 7 pm, *Kiddush Levana* may be said until 7 pm Thursday evening two weeks later. The Rema (*ibid*:.3), however, writes that sixteen days really means up to the halfway point of the lunar cycle, when the moon reaches its actual zenith. As mentioned earlier, the lunar cycle is 29 days, 12 hours and 793 *chalakim*. Half of that is 14 days, 18 hours and 396.5 *chalakim*. The practical difference between these two opinions is a little less than six hours. In the above example, that would mean that the latest time according to the Rema is 1:19 pm Wednesday afternoon. It is important to note that the time of the *molad* listed in calendars is based upon the moon's renewal in Jerusalem. Since the *molad* is an astronomical event, it occurs simultaneously across the world, and so appropriate adjustments for other time zones are necessary when determining the deadline for *Kiddush Levana*.

There is also a minority opinion of the Knesses Hagedolah (cited in Bi'ur Halacha s.v. *velo*) that includes the entire sixteenth day. This is also the opinion of the Yad Ramah (Sanhedrin *ibid*.), who explains that despite the fact that the moon has passed its zenith, it is not noticeably smaller until sixteen full days have passed.

Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (Chochmas Shlomo Orach Chaim *ibid*. s.v. *ain*) rules that in a cloudy locale where the moon only first appeared in the disputed six hours, one person should say the *bracha* aloud for the community and the listeners should say the *bracha* without the name of Hashem. It seems that Rabbi Kluger would not allow an individual to recite the *bracha* with

the name of Hashem after the initial time of 14 ¾ days.

The Chasam Sofer (Shu"t Orach Chaim 102) was asked by a community suffering from a cholera epidemic, and regarded missing *Kiddush Levana* as a bad omen, if they could say *Kiddush Levana* after the Rema's deadline of 14 days and 18 hours. He replied that in a time of need, the deadline can be extended 18 additional hours to 15 days and 12 hours, as that is the time required for the waning of the moon to be noticeable (see Rosh Hashana 20b). If that's not possible, continues the Chasam Sofer, then they may say *Kiddush Levana* until the last seven days of the cycle, meaning until 23 days from the conjunction, because at that point the moon is more than half dark and has a visible cavity. (It seems that this final leniency was unique to the particular situation the Chasam Sofer was responding to, and would not necessarily be applicable to other scenarios.)

The Bi'ur Halacha (426:3 s.v. *vilo*) suggests that an individual who only remembered to say *Kiddush Levana* in the disputed six hours may rely upon the opinion of the Tur and Shulchan Aruch that the *bracha* can be said the entire 15 days and recite the *bracha* in its entirety. However, after day 15, the *bracha* should be said without the name of Hashem.

The Elef Limagain (commentary to Mateh Efraim 581:21) suggests that after 15 full days when, according to both the Rema and the Shulchan Aruch, it is too late to say *Kiddush Levana*, one should read the text of the Rambam where he discusses the text of the *bracha*: "One who sees the new moon should make the following *bracha*: ..." and recite the *bracha*, including the name of Hashem, in the context of learning the Rambam.

However, the Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 215:5) rules that in general, when learning a passage of Gemara that delineates *brachos*, one may not say the names of Hashem, as this would be a *bracha levatalah*, an unwarranted *bracha*. Based on this, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (Yabia Omer 6:38) rules that one should not rely upon the suggestion of the Elef Limagain. Rather, one should say the *bracha* without the names of Hashem.

Normally, when presented simultaneously with the opportunity to *daven ma'ariv* and recite *Kiddush Levana*, all things being equal, *ma'ariv* takes precedence. This is based on the rule of *tadir vesh'aino tadir, tadir kodem*, the more-common mitzvah precedes the less-common one. If clouds threaten to cover the moon, though, or if one was not planning to *daven ma'ariv* at that time, then *Kiddush Levana* can be said first (Sha'arei Teshuvah 426:14).

Kabbalistically, *Kiddush Levana* should not be said on Shabbos or Yom Tov (Ba'er Heitev Orach Chaim 426:5). There is also a minor halachic concern that someone may come to dance, as is customary following *Kiddush Levana*, and dancing is prohibited on Shabbos (Sha'ar Hatziyun *ibid*:. 12). There is also a concern that someone may require a *siddur* to recite the *bracha* and will carry it out to the public domain. Since the main reason is of kabbalistic origin, when the last opportunity falls out on Shabbos or Yom Tov, *Kiddush Levana* may be recited (Mishnah Berurah 426:12). In such a situation, only the *bracha* is recited, not any of the additional verses and supplications (Aruch Hashulchan *ibid*. 426:10). If *Kiddush Levana* is being recited on Shabbos or Yom Tov, it is best, if possible, to delay recitation of *kabbalas Shabbos* and *ma'ariv* in order to recite *Kiddush Levana* before the official communal acceptance of Shabbos (Elef Limagain 625:6).

In conclusion, reciting *Kiddush Levana* is an important mitzvah, and, as mentioned at the outset, is akin to greeting the *Shechina* itself. Sources state that one who recites *Kiddush Levana* need not fear that he will die during the rest of the month (see Elya Rabbah Orach Chaim 402:7 and Ba'er Heitev 402:2). Understanding the laws of this great mitzvah will help us properly appreciate and fulfill it.

Points to Ponder:

Are women obligated to recite Kiddush Levana?

How much risk of missing the deadline may one take in order to recite Kiddush Levana on Motzoei Shabbos?

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Please consult with a qualified halachic authority for all practical questions of halacha

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