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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

## Shehecheyanu on New Fruits

Rabbi Yosef Melamed

*What is considered a new fruit for reciting shehecheyanu?*

*May one recite a shehecheyanu on vegetables?*

As Tu Bishvat (the fifteenth day of the Jewish month of Shevat), the new year for fruit trees, approaches, many have begun their preparations to celebrate this holiday by purchasing beautiful and exquisite arrangements of the fruits that Hashem has created. This custom is recorded in the Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 131:16) and Mishna Berura (ibid.:31). Many have the custom to specifically eat a fruit upon which a *shehecheyanu* blessing can be made. These customs are indeed an appropriate way to show our thanks to Hashem for the wonderful world he created for our benefit (see Jerusalem Talmud Kiddushin 48b with Pnei Moshe's commentary; Elya Rabba Orach Chaim 225:6). This article will discuss when it is appropriate to recite the *shehecheyanu* blessing upon a new fruit.

The Gemara (Eruvin 40b) states: Rabbah said, "We asked Rav Huna, 'Is there an obligation to recite *zman* (*shehecheyanu*)<sup>1</sup> on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur?' Rav Huna was not clear on the matter. When I came to Rav Yehuda, he said, 'I even make *zman* on a new gourd.'" Rabbah explained himself, "I understand that one may voluntarily recite *zman* [for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, similar to making *shehecheyanu* on a new gourd, which is also only voluntary], my question is if there is an obligation to recite *zman* on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur."

We learn two things from this passage of Gemara: 1) One may recite *shehecheyanu* on a new fruit. 2) Reciting *shehecheyanu* on a new fruit is not an obligation, but voluntary. The Elya Rabba (Orach Chaim 225:6) cites a dispute if this means that the *bracha* of *shehecheyanu* is voluntary even for someone actually eating a new fruit, or only for someone who saw a new fruit but does not wish to eat it<sup>2</sup>. The Mishna Berura (225:9) writes that *shehecheyanu* is voluntary even for someone eating the fruit, but that one should be careful to recite it if possible. What is not clear from the Gemara is what is considered a new fruit.

**What kind of fruit:** The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 225:6) rules that the main criterion for making *shehecheyanu* is that the fruit in question be a fruit that becomes newly available once a year. This is because *shehecheyanu* was instituted to offer thanks specifically for something that is unique to a specific time period (Bais Yosef ibid.). This precludes fruits which are available year-round (Mishna Berura ibid.:16). Interestingly, this is the reason that one does not make a *shehecheyanu* on non-vegetative items such as fish, meat and eggs, as they are also consistently available year-round and do not have a specific season of production (Magen Avraham ibid.:12). In any of these

<sup>1</sup> Which concludes with the words "*lazman hazeh*," "this time," as the blessing thanks Hashem for allowing one to reach this auspicious time.

<sup>2</sup> Strictly speaking, the primary time to recite *shehecheyanu* is upon first sighting a new fruit (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 225:3). The custom is to wait until eating it to recite *shehecheyanu* (ibid.). According to the above opinion in the Elya Rabba, the voluntary status of *shehecheyanu* only applies to the initial *bracha* upon seeing the fruit, but *shehecheyanu* when eating the fruit is obligatory.

cases, a *shehecheyanu* is not recited even if one has not partaken of that item in a very long time (Shulchan Aruch ibid.), or even if one has never partaken of the item in his lifetime (Mishna Berura ibid.:16). The Bais Yosef writes that a fruit which grows biannually is also included in this criterion. In this case, one would recite a separate *shehecheyanu* when a fruit of the new crop is eaten (Mishna Berura ibid.:17). Sefardim however, only make the *bracha* over one new season per year (Kaf Hachaim ibid.:42, Halacha Berura 11:225:41; see ibid. fn. 47 at length). Apparent from this is that *shehecheyanu* would technically be recited upon any food item that is not available year-round, not just upon fruits. Indeed, the aforementioned Talmudic source for reciting *shehecheyanu* over a new fruit discusses a new gourd, which is a vegetable, not a fruit (see Yalkut Yosef Orach Chaim 7:225 fn. 2). This halacha is also spelled out in the Bi'ur Halacha (ibid.:1 s.v. *pri*). However, a *shehecheyanu* may only be made on a vegetable if it is not a very common item and has some level of importance, and is thus cause for some degree of joy. It is for this reason that people typically do not recite a *shehecheyanu* on most vegetables, which are very common and are not regarded as important foods (Chayei Adam 62:9). An example of a vegetable that one can make *shehecheyanu* on would be a watermelon, which is halachically considered a vegetable (Vizos Habracha pg. 160 citing Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach)<sup>3</sup>. It is also clear that, contrary to popular belief, what determines whether one should recite a *shehecheyanu* is not if one has partaken in that fruit within the year, but whether this particular item is something not available year-round<sup>4</sup>. A *shehecheyanu* can be made multiple times on a seasonal fruit, and it cannot be made at all on a non-seasonal fruit.

**Modern Storage and Import Practices:** Having determined what type of fruit is subject to the recitation of *shehecheyanu*, the matter must be considered in light of storage practices and global markets in today's world. There are two realities encountered in developed countries today. First, thanks to modern storage techniques, certain fruits can be stored for many months and made available during times of year when they are not being harvested. Second, many fruits are imported from other locations across the globe when they are unavailable in a particular locale. Would either of these factors preclude a *shehecheyanu* blessing from being recited when the first fruits of the new crop in a region arrive at the marketplace, since the fruit is available year-round? Conversely, would one recite a *shehecheyanu* on a fruit arriving from another location when it is from the first fruits of the crop in that far-flung locale? For example, if the new crop of peaches in Colorado becomes available in May, but a person in Colorado obtained a peach from the new crop of peaches from Chile in February, may he recite a *shehecheyanu* on this peach? An

<sup>3</sup> There may be an additional reason not to make a *shehecheyanu* on greens; see Prisha Orach Chaim 225:5 and Mishna Berura ibid.:18.

<sup>4</sup> It can be conjectured that this misconception arose from the need for a fruit to be unavailable year-round and then come from a new crop, which generally occurs on a once-a-year basis.

analysis of the sources will yield an answer to these questions:

The Rema rules, based on the aforementioned criterion that a *shehecheyanu* fruit not be constantly available, that one would not make a *shehecheyanu* on a vegetable that remains in the ground throughout the year. The Magen Avraham (ibid.:14) explains that the Rema is not referring to a vegetable which grows in the ground year-round, but rather a vegetable which is stored in pits in the ground year-round. Due to this storage, the vegetable is kept fresh and is no longer distinguishable as new or old<sup>5</sup>. Based on this, the Mishna Berura (ibid.:18) rules that a *shehecheyanu* is not said on a new crop of potatoes, because they are stored in these pits and last for a long time. Based on this, some *poskim* rule that if, due to the technological advancements in storage and modern import practices, a fruit or vegetable is available year-round, a *shehecheyanu* cannot be made upon it (Teshuvos Vihanhagos 1:201; Vizos Habracha pg. 160 citing Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv; see also Sha'ar Hatziyun 225:23 for a support of this view). They explain that the limitation of *shehecheyanu* on potatoes or similar stored crops is due to the lack of excitement on the new crop of such foods, since the old crop is indistinguishable from the new. As such, the contemporary reality of having constant access to different kinds of produce year-round greatly diminishes the excitement over the new crop, and *shehecheyanu* cannot be made. However, even according to this view, if there is a distinct difference in quality, freshness, or taste between the new and old crop, a *shehecheyanu* may be recited (Vizos Habracha ibid. based on Aruch Hashulchan 225:12). Additionally, the availability of an item in a preserved but altered form, such as canned or dried fruit, will not change the *shehecheyanu* status of the new crop, as an item in that form is tangibly different from fresh fruit, and the new crop is still a source of excitement (Vizos Habracha pg. 160). Sefer Vizos Habracha (ibid.) cites Rabbi Elyashiv who says that even when an item can only be found year round in specialty stores and at a much greater expense, one may still not recite a *shehecheyanu* over the more abundant and economical arrival of the fruits of the new season. Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch disagrees. He argues that *shehecheyanu* is not specifically made on the joy of a new enjoyment of the fruit, but upon the joy of the fruit becoming widely and cheaply available. He writes that the custom outside of Eretz Yisrael seems to be to make *shehecheyanu* on the new fruits of the season, even though most fruits are available year-round in limited quantities in specialty stores at expensive prices (Teshuvos Vihanhagos ibid.; see also ibid. 2:151).

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe Orach Chaim 3:34) takes a different approach. He explains that the question of making a *shehecheyanu* on foods stored year-round is dependent on how to understand the *shehecheyanu* blessing over fruits. A *shehecheyanu* is recited due to of an exciting and joyful event. However, in the case of new fruits, Rabbi Feinstein explains that there are two potential causes for joy; one is the enjoyable taste of the new crop, and the second is due to the fact that a new crop has become available, as a person's perception of the arrival of a new crop causes him to rejoice in the sustainability of the food item<sup>6</sup>. Rabbi Feinstein explains that these two causes are actually the point of disagreement between the Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 225:14) and Rabbi Yaakov Emden in his halachic work Mor Uktzia (ibid.:225 s.v. *udika'amar*) regarding reciting a *shehecheyanu* over an item that does not have a different taste than the old crop, but is still distinguishable by its appearance. The Magen Avraham rules that a *shehecheyanu* is recited,

<sup>5</sup> See Mishna Berura 225:18 in the name of the Prisha for an alternate explanation of the Rema.

<sup>6</sup> An item which grows year-round, however, does not provide this perception and attendant joy. True, if it were to stop growing, the item would no longer be available, but it is the renewal of the crop that provides this perception, and this renewal is lacking in a food item that grows year-round.

indicating that, although there is no cause for joy due to the taste, there is cause for joy due to the very appearance of the new crop<sup>7</sup>. The Mor Uktzia says that a *shehecheyanu* is not recited, which indicates that he believes that a new taste is necessary to induce the joy necessary to recite the blessing. Rabbi Feinstein concludes that although the halacha would seem to follow the Magen Avraham, nonetheless, since the *shehecheyanu* blessing is voluntary, one should not make a *shehecheyanu* in this case.

Although Rabbi Feinstein is discussing produce which can be properly stored, it would seem, based upon Rabbi Feinstein's reasoning, that according to the Magen Avraham, one would be able to make a *shehecheyanu* on a new crop even where the item is consistently available through imports, since the fruit itself does not actually grow year-round and has a set season when it is renewed (see Vizos Habracha pg. 160). It seems to this author that an item commonly grown in a greenhouse and without a set season would not warrant a *shehecheyanu* even according to Rabbi Feinstein's understanding of the Magen Avraham. This is because in such a case, the fruit actually grows without a set season, albeit due to modern technology and, even according to Rabbi Feinstein, a *shehecheyanu* should not be made upon fruits which grow year-round, as there is no perception of renewal (see footnote 7 above). However, in a case where an item has seasonal availability in most stores and is only available year-round in specialty stores and at a greater expense, it would seem that one may follow the aforementioned opinion of Rabbi Shternbuch and recite *shehecheyanu*, since one also has Rabbi Feinstein's understanding of the Magen Avraham in regard to seasonal fruits that are stored and thus available year-round to rely upon. (Although Rabbi Feinstein, as noted above, says not to rely upon this Magen Avraham, one may rely upon it in tandem with Rabbi Shternbuch's ruling.)

This, however, is true regarding reciting *shehecheyanu* on a new crop that has grown in a particular area, e.g., Colorado peaches in Denver. What about new crop fruits which are imported from a different location? It would seem that as long as the item in question is seasonal in its place of origin, this fruit would have the same halacha as new crop fruit grown in a locale, and a *shehecheyanu* can be made at the fruit's destination, provided that it is not available year-round (with the exception of specialty stores), as discussed in the previous paragraph. This is because one is benefiting from a new crop of that item, albeit from afar (see Teshuvos Vihanhagos 2:151 who writes that this seems to be the accepted custom. See there for an argument against this custom). However, if the fruit is available year-round in its place of origin, a *shehecheyanu* cannot be recited in the location to which it is imported, even if it is only imported periodically (Vizos Habracha pg. 161 citing Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv). One should note that a *shehecheyanu* may not be recited on an esrog (Mishna Berura 225:16) or coconut (Vizos Habracha ibid.), as these fruits grow year-round. Someone who has the custom of reciting a *shehecheyanu* on an esrog should consult with a halachic authority (see Sefer Shaarei Habracha fn. 48).

In conclusion, Tu Bishvat is indeed a proper time to thank Hashem for all of His wonderful fruits, and making a *shehecheyanu* on a new fruit is an appropriate way of doing so. However, understanding the halachos of *shehecheyanu* enables a person to recite this *bracha* properly according to halacha.

<sup>7</sup> As for the halacha that a vegetable normally stored in the ground does not require a *shehecheyanu*, Rabbi Feinstein explains that this is because the food item has the inherent ability to be stored for long periods of time. This quality is considered part of the natural growing process, and the storage process itself thus renders such a vegetable one that "grows" year-round. Modern storage methods such as refrigeration that allow a particular food to be made available year-round, however, do not change that item's status to one that grows year-round, since its natural state is that it does not last in storage and is considered to be a renewing crop.

## **Points to Ponder:**

***Must one ensure all of the criteria are met when obtaining a shehecheyanu fruit for the second night of Rosh Hashana?***

***May one recite a shehecheyanu on dried fruit?***

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

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