



ברכת החמה שנת תשס"ט

by Rabbi Aaron Levine

This coming **ערב פסח**, Wednesday April 8th, presents us with the unique and rare **מצנה** of **ברכת החמה**. This **מצנה** occurs only once every twenty-eight years.

Background

The **תורה** tells us that the sun was created on the fourth day of creation. The fourth day of creation began on a Tuesday evening at 6:00 p.m. There is a dispute in the Talmud if creation took place in **תשרי** (fall) or **ניסן** (spring). With regard to **ברכת החמה** we follow the opinion that creation took place in **ניסן** (spring). According to our tradition, the fourth day of creation was the first day of spring. A solar year is approximately 365 days and six hours. Being that the last day of the solar year is a fraction, each year spring begins six hours later in the day than the previous year. Thus, if in the first year of creation spring began at 6:00 p.m., the times for the beginning of spring for the next four years are: 12:00 a.m., 6:00 a.m. 12:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. This four year cycle is called the **מחזור קטן**. Although the new **מחזור קטן** begins at the same time of day as the first cycle, it does not occur on the same day of the week as the previous cycle. It takes seven cycles of the **מחזור קטן** for the spring to begin again on a Tuesday evening at 6:00 p.m. This twenty-eight year cycle is called the **מחזור גדול**.

When a new **מחזור גדול** begins, the sun appears in the same position in heaven, at the same time and day of the week as it did at creation. To commemorate this event **חז"ל** have instructed us to recite the blessing **עושה מעשה בראשית**. Although the cycle begins Tuesday evening, we recite the blessing the first time the sun is visible, i.e., Wednesday morning. According to our tradition and calculation, this **ערב פסח** will commence the 207th **מחזור גדול** from the time of creation.

Laws

The earliest time for **ברכת החמה** is when the full sun rises above the horizon. Sunrise is generally defined as when the crest of the sun appears. For **ברכת החמה** we wait an additional two-and-a-half minutes for the full sun to rise. Sunrise this year **ערב פסח** in Brooklyn, NY is 6:28 a.m. Thus, the earliest time for **ברכת החמה** is 6:31 a.m.

There are different opinions for the latest time for **ברכת החמה**. Some authorities are of the opinion that it must be said before the end of the third hour of the day (9:43 a.m). Three hours are calculated similar to the way we calculate the latest time for **קריאת שמע**. Other authorities are

of the opinion that it may be said until midday (12:58 p.m.).

The sun must be visible in order to recite the blessing. It may be difficult to locate the sun early in the morning as it may be blocked by buildings and other obstructions. One may have to walk a few blocks or wait until the sun rises higher above the horizon before it becomes visible and be able to recite the blessing.

If the view of the sun is blocked by thin clouds but one can still make out an outline of the sun from behind the clouds, one may recite the blessing. If the clouds are thick and an outline of the sun cannot be seen, one must wait. One should attempt to see the sun or its outline before the end of the third hour of the day, (9:43 a.m.). If it is still cloudy, one should wait and attempt to see the sun before midday (12:58 p.m.). If midday is approaching and it is still cloudy, one should say the blessing without *שם ומלכות*. This means, one should say "ברוך אתה עושה מעשה בראשית." The other prayers that accompany the blessing may also be said. If after midday the full sun appears, one should repeat the partial blessing of "ברוך אתה עושה מעשה בראשית." However, after midday the complete blessing may not be said.

Ideally one should recite the blessing together with at least ten people in fulfillment of the principle *בָּרַב עַם הַדֶּרֶת מְלֵךְ*. All members of the group should be careful to begin the blessing together, otherwise it is as if they have recited the blessing alone. Some have the custom to appoint a leader, similar to the way we recite *הַעוֹמֵר*. If a group of ten is not possible, the next best thing is a group of three. If this is not possible, one may recite it alone.

Ideally one should stand outdoors, glance at the sun for a moment, and then recite the blessing. If this is not possible, one may recite it indoors, by viewing the sun through an open window. If one cannot see the sun through the window and cannot leave his home, one may recite the blessing indoors looking out a window as long as he is told that the sun is visible outdoors.

If the time to burn *חֲמֵץ* has arrived (10:24-11:41 a.m.) and one has not yet said *בְּרַכַּת הַחֲמֵץ*, one should first burn the *חֲמֵץ* and then say *בְּרַכַּת הַחֲמֵץ*.

If one wakes up late, there are different opinions if one should say *בְּרַכַּת הַחֲמֵץ* before or after he *davens* *שְׁחָרִית*. If it is cloudy or one has the opportunity to recite the blessing with a group then *בְּרַכַּת הַחֲמֵץ* comes first.

Women may participate in this *מִצְוָה*. Children should be encouraged to wake up early and participate.

Liturgy and Custom

The essence of the *מִצְוָה* is the blessing *ברוך אתה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מְלֵךְ הָעוֹלָם עוֹשֶׂה מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית*.

It is customary to embellish the blessing with other *תְּפִילוֹת* both before and after the *בְּרַכָּה*. There are many versions and variations which include *פְּסוּקִים*, *מִזְמוֹרִים*, and *תְּפִילוֹת* relating to the sun.

The most notable embellishment is the "קל אָדוֹן" פּיוט taken from תּפִילַת שַׁחֲרִית שֶׁל שַׁבָּת, which mention the sun, "קָרָא לְשֶׁמֶשׁ וְזָרַח אֹרֶךְ." Some have the custom to sing this פּיוט together, as we do on שַׁבָּת. We conclude with עָלֵינוּ and קָדִישׁ יְתוֹם.

It is proper to wear שַׁבָּת clothing in honor of this מַצְוָה.

Some have the custom to wear their טלית when reciting the blessing.

A בְּרַכַּת שְׁהַחֲנוּנוּ is not recited: however, some have the custom to wear a new garment and recite a בְּרַכַּת שְׁהַחֲנוּנוּ on the garment and have in mind הַחֲמָה.

Shul Schedule

On the morning of בְּרַכַּת הַחֲמָה it is customary is to *daven* כְּנֻתִיקִין in order to perform the מַצְוָה as early as possible in fulfillment of the principle זְרִיזִין מְקַדְּמִין לְמִצְוֹת. We will begin שַׁחֲרִית 20 minutes before sunrise at 6:08 a.m. and start the silent עֲשֶׂרָה עֲשׂוּנָה at sunrise, 6:28 a.m. We will then conclude the remainder of שַׁחֲרִית, go outside, locate the sun and recite the בְּרַכָּה in unison. We will have copies of the נוסח וּסְדֵר הַתּפִילָה available. Afterwards, we will return to *shul*, conduct the סיום for the בָּכוּרוֹת and enjoy a collation in honor of the סיום and fulfillment of בְּרַכַּת הַחֲמָה. For those who cannot attend the early *minyan* we will have another *minyan* at 8:00 a.m. with a separate סיום.

May we merit to recite the blessing again in twenty-eight years in יְרוּשָׁלַיִם.

וְקוֹי ה' יַחְלִיפוּ כ"ח יַעֲלוּ אֶבֶר כַּנְּשָׂרִים
יְרוּצוּ וְלֹא יִיגְעוּ יִלְכוּ וְלֹא יִיעֲפוּ (ישעיה מ' ל"א)