

HALOCHOSCOPE

Is a *Brocha* recited on smelling scented spray, solid or liquid air fresheners, candles or deodorants, or on the air [in a room or space] that has been intentionally scented this way?

The issues:

A) *Birchos Harei'ach*, the *brochos* on scents

B) The absence of the source of the scent; Transferring the scent to another item

C) Synthetic scents

A) *Birchos Harei'ach*

The logic for instituting *birchos hanehenin*, recited on benefit, is that before benefiting from this world one should acknowledge Hashem Who created it. Taking it without a *brocha* is akin to stealing. The *brochos* recited over good smells are *birchos hanehenin*. This puts them into the same category as the *brochos* recited before eating food. The *brocha* should be recited before the first whiff. That is the most beneficial.

The Talmud discusses the reason that special *brochos* were instituted for smells. We recite *brochos* for sights, such as lightning, beautiful scenes and the ocean. *Brochos* are recited on things we sense intangibly, such as feeling an earthquake or hearing thunder. These are *birchos hashvach*, praising Hashem for Creation. *Birchos harei'ach* are *birchos hanehenin*. The Talmud bases it on the last verse in *Tehilim*, that the soul praises Hashem, and is compelled to praise. Which benefit is exclusive to the soul? It must be smell. The commentators explain the choice of smell over other senses. One reason is that smell is closer to the tangible than, for example, music. Apparently small smell particles penetrate the body but do not remain permanently. This is soul-benefit.

As for foods, there are various different *birchos harei'ach*. On spice-scents that grow on a tree as fruit, flower, bark, wood, leaves, gummy or crystalline saps, or roots the *brocha* is *borei atzei besamim*, Who creates scented trees; on scents from plants that do not survive all seasons, *borei isbei besamim*, Who creates scented herbs; on scents from animals or minerals, *borei minei besamim*, Who creates species of scents; on certain fragrant oils, *borei shemen arai*, Who creates fragrant oils; on fruit that smells good, *hanosain rai'ach tov lapairos*, Who gives good scent to fruits. The consensus is not to recite this *brocha* if one is also planning on eating it and reciting the other *bircas hanehenin* on it. There is some debate about scent items that are made edible by mixing, such as flower petals. They are not eaten alone, but can be used to flavor and scent water. Is it *pairos*, a food, or an *aitz*? Do we focus on its primary beneficial purpose in Creation? Some suggest *borei minei besamim*. Just as *shehakol* works for all foods, and is resorted to in doubt, so too, this *brocha* is all inclusive. The poskim debate smelling hot bread. Some suggest *borei minei besamim*. Others maintain that it is not a spice-scent of any kind. Yet others suggest *hanosain rai'ach tov*. [Perhaps this is short for ... *lapairos*, or perhaps it deliberately omits this word because bread is not fruit. If so, we have another *brocha* on

something that is not specifically a spice scent but smells good anyhow. It is noteworthy that the Yerushalmi substitutes '*borei ..*' with '*asher nasan raiach tov ..*' for all these *brochos*.] Some rule the *brocha* to be *hanosain rai'ach tov bapas ...* to bread. Some encourage smelling the bread hot to be able to say the *brocha*, while others are hesitant about ruling on the *brocha*. Some go so far as to recommend avoiding smelling hot bread to avoid the dilemma. [See Eikev 8:8-10, Brochos 35a, 43a-b, Yer. 6:6, Poskim. Chinuch 430. Avudraham, Bir. Hareiach. Tur Sh. Ar. O.C. 216, 217:1, commentaries.]

B) The presence or absence of the source of the scent; Transferring the scent

A *brocha* only recited if the scent is meant for smelling. *Lav leraicha avida*, if they are not there for their smell, the 'benefit' is not what the item was 'created' for. The item is used for benefit, but in its present use it is not meant for this. The *brocha* must reflect the intended benefit. Scents to dispel unpleasant odors, such as in a bathroom or a solution used to wash hands after handling smelly food, do not qualify for a *brocha*. At *havdalah*, when one is required to smell *besamim* and recite a *brocha*, one may not use these.

Incense is burned to emit a smell. If it is wood from a tree, its *brocha* is the same as that of tree scents. If it is made of one of the other scented items its *brocha* is the same as the unburned item's *brocha* would be. In this case, its scent is not emitted until it is burned. Therefore, one must wait until it gives off smoke before reciting the *brocha*. Though the original item is now burned, this is how the smell is produced from it. Therefore the item is considered present. [If there is no remnant of the source, but the smell lingers, the poskim debate whether the *brocha* may still be recited.] However, incense that is burned to give its scent to clothing does not qualify for a *brocha*. The original incense was *lav leraicha avida*, but to impart its scent to the other items. As for the clothing, the issue of *brocha* is debated. In one view, scent without the source does not qualify for a *brocha*. In the other view, the only reason the actual incense was disqualified was because it was intended for a different 'benefit' – to impart its smell to the clothing. If so, by definition, this is its benefit, regardless of whether the source is present.

Shemen afarsemon, an oil made with an extremely pleasant smelling fruit, takes the *brocha* on scented oil, *borei shemen areiv*. Some say that scented oil, when used to wash one's hands after eating smelly food does not take the *brocha* of its source scent, but does take the *brocha* on oil. However, if the scented item is removed, leaving behind a scent in the oil, its *brocha* is debated. Some say that it retains its *brocha*. Others give it the *brocha borei shemen areiv*. Others say that no *brocha* is recited on it at all. Part of the basis for this debate is the case of the clothes scented by incense. The issue is the absence of the original source of the scent. The poskim debate whether the view requiring a *brocha* in the clothing incense case would say the same here. There are differences between the cases. Oil is mainly to be eaten or to be rubbed on the skin. The smell is secondary. The smell on the clothing could only be there for its scent. Also, the smell remaining in the oil is faint. The clothing has a stronger smell, since this was the obvious intent. Perfume made by soaking flower petals in liquids would require a *brocha* according to this view. The other view would disqualify even a strong scent in the absence of the source material. Further debate arises in the case of a scented material that is cooked in a liquid, then removed. In this case, there is much more reason to assume that the essence of the source item is indeed present. In cases of *bircas hanehenin* on foods, one

does not recite a fruit's *brocha* on its juice. It is considered water extract, leaving the substance of the fruit behind. However, if the item is cooked into the water, the liquid takes the *brocha* of the fruit. It is considered as though the original fruit is present in the water. Therefore, in the case of a spice cooked into oil or liquids, the *brocha* should be the same as that of the original spice. It is obviously also very strong. Nonetheless, many poskim maintain that unless the source is disintegrated in the liquid, it does not qualify for the *brocha*. On the other hand, they do recognize strongly scented juice for a *brocha*, though some say the *brocha* should be the general *borei minei besamim*.

When smelling a scent meant for another use, the smeller has benefit from the scent itself. Since the intended use of the smell is not this scent, he does not recite the *brocha*. Therefore, the cases mentioned earlier, toilet deodorizers and oils for removing food smells, as well as spices placed around a carcass or corpse, do not qualify. The smell of the incense given off while it is burned to scent clothing is also incidental to its true purpose. If one enters a spice shop and smells the spices, he should not be required to recite the *brocha*. It is *lav leraicha avida*. However, the Talmud does require the *brocha* here. The store owner wishes to attract customers with the smell of his spices. Therefore, though the spices were not released into the air to emit fragrance, their presence is a desirable end in itself, and qualifies for a *brocha*. There is a debate on whether one always recites a *brocha* on entering a spice store, or only if he intends to smell the spiced air there. However, in a situation where the intention was purely to scent the air, one would recite it even when entering incidentally. This should bear on our case, where air has been scented intentionally, with or without the source of the scent present.

In summary, the poskim debate the qualification for a *brocha* where the scent is present, either in a weakened state or in concentrated form, if the source is absent. In practice, we follow the view that one should not recite the *brocha*. Indeed, in the case of the oil it is recommended that one avoid smelling it. [The absence of this recommendation in the case of the clothing is part of what prompts the debate recorded.] [See Brochos 43a-b 53a, Poskim Tur, Sh. Ar. O.C. 216:3-6, 217:1-4, commentaries.]

By this reasoning, if one specially scents a room, for example to create a certain atmosphere, this should qualify for a *brocha*. Women would wear small containers of spices to ward off bad smells or to create attractive smells. Those worn to create scents require a *brocha*. [An unrelated man is forbidden to intentionally smell these, for obvious reasons. Therefore, he may not recite a *brocha* on them, according to some poskim even if they are not on the woman at the time.] According to the above discussion, if she wears a specific perfume, her friends could recite a *brocha* according to one view. It would then be recommended that one avoid smelling it. Would air freshener have the same rules? The air has been intentionally scented. In the case of a bathroom scent one would not recite a *brocha* [for more than one reason!] However, in a living room or bedroom, one might recite it. If the source is absent one could avoid smelling it or rely on the view not requiring a *brocha*. If the source is present, such as potpourri or some material placed in a humidifier or around an air purifier, one might need to recite a *brocha*. One would need to determine the intent of the smell being emitted there.

C) Artificial scents

The poskim debate the issue of a foul smelling source that is altered chemically to


produce a pleasant smell. Does this qualify for the *brocha* on the original item. For example, if a certain type of wood smells bad, but when another ingredient is added to it it becomes pleasant, would one recite *borei atzei besamim*? If the answer is that the tree could not be considered intended for this type of benefit, could one still recite *borei minei besamim* on the resultant scent? Could it be argued that it is as though the initial source is no longer present? Olive oil can be made to smell good if it is pressed in a certain way. In this case it does not take the *brocha* of the original, but the general *borei minei*. However, this is a scent that was not altered but was always present in latent form. However, we find that the Galbanum, a foul smelling spice was added to the *ketoress* incense in the *bais hamikdash*. One explanation is that it enhanced the other spices, and that the other spices brought out hidden scents in it. Accordingly, if a foul smelling mineral source can be stimulated to produce a pleasant smell, this must have been hidden in it since its creation. One should certainly be able to recite a *brocha* on it – at least, *borei minei*. Nonetheless, some poskim do not qualify artificial scents for a *brocha*. Some air fresheners are naturally scented. Though the 'natural' scent is not necessarily made from the supposed item it smells like (lemon scent could be produced from a lemon-like smelling rock) it would not be disqualified on the basis of the aforementioned debate. [See Droshas Haran. Piskei teshuvos 216:8, notes. Vzos Haberacha, p. 177, 321.]

In conclusion, it is probably a good idea to try to recite the *brocha* on another item that definitely requires the *brocha borei minei besamim* and to have these items in mind, in the cases where we have raised the possibility of qualifying for the *brocha*.

On the Parsha ... *And if they do not believe both these signs ... take water from the river ... and they shall become, the waters that you take from the river, they shall become blood on the dry land (Shmos 4:9) .. the double expression teaches us that they only turned to blood once they landed on the dry land .. (Rashi)*

Why would this last sign finally convince the remaining skeptics? Why did the blood not turn back to water again, as did the changes made by the first two signs? The Sforno points out that the miracle of this sign is that blood is a compound, with one of its elements water. The element does not become a compound by itself. Perhaps we might suggest that it could, however, become the compound if the correct material was added. [They haven't yet discovered how to make artificial blood, but, who knows?] The first two signs could be attributed to magic. The third sign could be attributed to a mixing of the water with some other material on the ground. For the skeptics, Moshe might just be another magician. In Mitzrayim, there was one on every corner. However, the knowledge to convert blood to water, even if it meant combining it with a heretofore unknown mineral in the ground, must have come from a Higher Source. Moshe was clearly in communication with the true Hashem, master of the entire universe and all nature. Magic is nothing special. Creation, including all of its wonders, even the hidden materials made by mixing totally unrelated items, is testament to the Creator Himself.

Further discussion: What about making apple pie in the oven when showing one's home to prospective buyers?

 **Sponsored in memory of Reb Menachem Manale ben Zeev Silver, z'l, whose**
yahrzeit is 23rd Taivais.

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