

Kiddush Levanah

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EARLIEST DAY TO RECITE KIDDUSH LEVANAH

Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 426:4) writes that kiddush levanah should not be recited earlier than seven days from the molad¹. Mishnah Berurah (426:20) writes that most Acharonim disagree and maintain that kiddush levanah can be recited three days after the molad².

There is a debate over whether one should recite kiddush levanah on the earliest date or wait until Motzai Shabbos. Mishnah Berurah (426:20) records both opinions but adds that during the winter, when it is more likely for the sky to be cloudy, one who says it on the earliest clear night is praiseworthy.

LATEST DAY TO RECITE KIDDUSH LEVANAH

Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 426:3) writes that kiddush levanah can be recited for a full 15 days after the molad. This means not just 15 days from the day of the molad but more precisely from the time of the molad. For example, if the molad was on Monday night at 11pm, the 15 days are calculated from that time. The Rema maintains that kiddush levanah cannot be recited past the midpoint of the month. The minimum length of a month is 29 days, 12 hours, and 793 chalokim from the last molad. Accordingly, one does not have 15 full days from the molad to recite kiddush levanah. Fortunately, the latest time for kiddush levanah is published in Jewish calendars, so it is unnecessary for anyone to calculate it themselves.

Poskim debate how to make this calculation outside of Eretz Yisroel. The molad time that we announce during kiddush hachodesh is when

the new moon is first visible in Eretz Yisroel. Is the latest time for kiddush levanah adjusted for local time? For example, if the latest time for kiddush levanah in Eretz Yisroel is 8 pm, does that mean that in Chicago (which is often 8 hours behind Eretz Yisroel), the latest time is 12 pm, corresponding to the latest time it may be recited there? Alternatively, even in Chicago, the latest time will be 8 pm local time, although it is 8 hours past the latest time for reciting kiddush levanah in Eretz Yisroel. Common practice is in accordance with the former view (See Ezras Torah Luach 5786, p. 53, for an example). Therefore, in the example cited above, if the printed time for the latest time to recite kiddush levanah is 8 pm, we would adjust that to Chicago time by subtracting seven or eight hours.

EARLIEST AND LATEST TIME OF DAY TO RECITE KIDDUSH LEVANAH

Rema (O.C. 426:1) writes that kiddush levanah must be recited at night, when the moon shines and one benefits from its light. The Mishnah Berurah (426:2) explains that the Rema intends to preclude reciting kiddush levanah during bein hashemashos (after sunset), when although the moon may be visible, but it is still daytime.

Poskim debate whether kiddush levanah may be said after alos hashachar but before hanetz hachamah. Rav Nissim Karelitz (Chut Shani: Yom Tov v'Chol HaMoed Kovetz Inyanim O.C. 12) ruled that as long as it remains dark outside and the moon is clearly visible, kiddush levanah may be recited.

CLOUDY SKIES

The Mishnah Berurah (426:3) writes that if thin clouds cover the moon but remains visible and one can benefit from its light, the berachah may be recited. If, however, the clouds are thick enough that one cannot benefit from the moonlight, the berachah is not recited. Poskim further explain that if the shape of the moon is visible, even though there is cloud coverage, the berachah may

be recited. If, however, the shape of the moon is not visible, the berachah may not be recited, even though one can see where the moon is located and some moonlight is coming through the clouds.

If part of the moon is covered with a thick cloud but part of it remains visible and one can benefit from its light, one may recite the berachah (Halichos Shlomo Rosh Chodesh ch. 1 Devar Halachah 44). If one began the berachah and the moon became covered, one may complete the berachah. However, if one anticipates that in the middle of the berachah the moon will become covered, the berachah should not be recited (M.B.).

PREFERRED DAY OF THE WEEK TO RECITE KIDDUSH LEVANAH

Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 426:2) states that kiddush levanah is recited on Motzai Shabbos while wearing nice clothes. Mishnah Berurah (426:4) explains that Shulchan Aruch's intent is that the preferred day—mitzvah min hamuvchar is Motzai Shabbos or Yom Tov (M.B. 426:5), but not that it may not be recited on other nights. The Mishnah Berurah then adds in the name of the Magid Meisharim that one will experience greater success when he recites kiddush levanah on Motzai Shabbos.

Rema asserts that one should wait for Motzai Shabbos to recite kiddush levanah only when motzai Shabbos occurs before the 10th of the month³. When Motzai Shabbos is the 11th or later in the month, one should not wait until Motzai Shabbos, out of concern that there will be a couple of cloudy nights and the moon will not be visible.

The Biur Halachah (d.h. Ela) notes that it is acceptable to recite kiddush levanah alone, and there is no obligation to recite it with a minyan. However, the principle of b'rov am hadras Melech indicates that it is preferable to recite it with a minyan. Therefore, if one anticipates being able to say it with a minyan before the 10th of the month, it is preferable to wait so that it can be recited with a minyan. Biur Halachah then adds that according to the Chaye Adam, who maintains that even three people satisfy the principle of b'rov am hadras Melech, one need not wait until he can say it with a minyan, and this is especially true during the winter, when it is more likely to be cloudy.

KIDDUSH LEVANAH ON SHABBOS OR YOM TOV

Rema (426:2) rules that we do not recite kiddush levanah when Yom Tov falls on Motzai Shabbos. Mishnah Berurah (426:12) writes that we certainly do not recite kiddush levanah on Shabbos. He

explains that there are many kabbalistic reasons for why this is so. The Sha'ar HaTziyon (426:12) suggests that since kiddush levanah is so joyous it often ends in dancing and dancing on Shabbos and Yom Tov is not allowed. Although we indeed dance on Simchas Torah because it involves a mitzvah, in that instance, we cannot celebrate and dance on any other day. In contrast, kiddush levanah can be recited during the week, so there is no reason to be lenient and dance on Shabbos and Yom Yom.

However, if one did not recite kiddush levanah and waited until after Shabbos or Yom Tov, it would be too late to recite it; it must certainly be recited. Aruch HaShulchan (426:10) adds that when kiddush levanah is recited on Shabbos or Yom Tov, only the berachah is recited and the other tefilos and pesukim are omitted.

KIDDUSH LEVANAH BEFORE YOM KIPPUR AND TISHA B'AV

Rema (426:2) writes that we do not recite kiddush levanah in the month of Av before Tisha B'Av since at that time we are in the midst of mourning which is incompatible with the desired joy that we should experience when reciting kiddush levanah (M.B. 426:8). The Gra (Maaseh Rav 159) and the Chazon Ish (Orchos Rabbeinu vol. 1 pg. 177) would recite kiddush levanah even before Tisha B'Av based on the principle, when a mitzvah presents itself, do not delay.

Similarly, the Rema maintains that in the month of Tishrei we do not recite kiddush levanah before Yom Kippur since the fear of judgment precludes us from joy (M.B. 426:9). Biur Halacha (d.h. V'lo) in the name of the Levush asserts that one should make an effort to recite kiddush levanah before Yom Kippur to generate more merit. Although this is also the position maintained by the Gra (Maaseh Rav 159), common practice is to wait until after Yom Kippur to recite kiddush levanah (Ashrei Halsh: Yomim Noraim 21:26).

After Yom Kippur one may recite kiddush levanah but one should refrain from reciting kiddush levanah immediately after Tisha B'Av or any other fast day, for example, after Asarah B'Teves. The reason for this contrast is that after Yom Kippur one can be in the desired state of simchah, whereas after Tisha B'Av we have not yet returned to a state of simchah (M.B. 426:10).

Mishnah Berurah (426:11), however, references numerous Acharonim that maintain that one can recite kiddush levanah immediately after Tisha

B'Av, but stipulate that one must eat something before reciting kiddush levanah and put on regular shoes. The rationale why these Acharonim permit reciting kiddush levanah after Tisha B'Av is that Moshiach is born on Motzai Tisha B'Av and we call to the moon and to Klal Yisroel to renew (Be'er Heitev 551:25).

WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Mishnah Berurah (426:1) writes that women are exempt from kiddush levanah since it is a positive time-bound mitzvah from which women are exempt. Moreover, although Ashkenazi women generally may voluntarily fulfill positive time-bound mitzvos, this mitzvah they do not have to fulfill since they caused the moon to shrink. Alternatively, the practice amongst Ashkenazi women to voluntarily fulfill positive time-bound mitzvos is limited to those mitzvos that involve an action, e.g., shaking a lulav, but those mitzvos that are fulfilled with a berachah, e.g., havdalah, women do not perform (Magen Avrohom 296).

A child who has reached the age of chinuch should be trained to recite kiddush levanah (M.B. 426:1). However, although it is good to train him – טוב לנהג – כן it is not an obligation. Therefore, in the summer, when kiddush levanah is said after his bedtime, there is no reason to keep him awake or to wake him up to say kiddush levanah (Piskei Teshuvos 426:6).

PROCEDURE FOR KIDDUSH LEVANAH

Looking at the Moon

Although Shulchan Aruch writes that kiddush levanah is recited when seeing the moon – הרואה לבנה בחידושה, nevertheless, Poskim write that it is not essential, and if it is recited without first looking at the moon, the obligation is fulfilled, provided that the moon is visible (Piskei Teshuvos 426:15).

The Mishnah Berurah (426:13) references three opinions about looking at the moon for kiddush levanah. Some Poskim maintain that one should look at the moon throughout the recitation, others contend that one should look at the moon until the end of the berachah, while others write that one should look at the moon before the recitation of the berachah and it should not be looked at again. Common practice is in accordance with the third opinion that one looks at the moon only immediately before the recitation of the berachah (Piskei Teshuvos 426:15).

Which Direction to Face

Rav Chaim Kanievsky (Ishei Yisroel 40:[72]) maintains that one should face mizrach when reciting kiddush levanah. Teshuvos B'Tzeil HaChochmah (3:64) explains that this is true only in places where they daven facing mizrach. However, in places where they daven facing maarav, for example, places located east of Eretz Yisroel, kiddush levanah is also recited facing maarav.

Other Poskim maintain that there is no obligation to face specifically mizrach and would recite the berachah immediately after seeing the moon regardless of the direction they were facing. Similarly, they were not particular to face the moon when saying the words כשם שאני רוקד כנגדך – Just as I dance before you (the moon) (See Piskei Teshuvos 426:[144] for an extensive list of Poskim who were not particular).

Outside

The Rema (426:4) writes that kiddush levanah is not recited while standing under a roof. Rather, it should be said while standing under the open sky (M.B. 426:21). The reason is that kiddush levanah is comparable to greeting the Shechinah and standing under a roof does not convey sufficient honor and respect for the occasion. We specifically go outside to greet the Shechinah the same manner that one goes outside to greet a king.

Standing under a tree's branches is permitted because the requirement is to be outside. Not necessarily in a place where there is nothing overhead (Yaskil Avdi 8:38:3). Similarly, the Chazon Ish would walk onto his balcony and recite kiddush levanah. Although there was a roof over his balcony, he explained that once he left his apartment, he demonstrated proper etiquette in greeting the Shechinah. It is unnecessary to be directly under the sky (Ishei Yisroel 40:[15]).

Dancing

The Rema (426:2) writes that one should dance three times – ורוקד שלש פעמים – in front of the moon and say כשם שאני רוקד וכו'. Dancing is an expression of simcha and when greeting the Shechinah, we want to embody the simchah that we are experiencing at that moment. Although the simple meaning of dancing would involve jumping in the air so that one's feet are no longer touching the ground, in practice, we lift our heels but our toes remain on the ground, similar to what we do when reciting kedushah. The reason is based on the Acharonim referenced by the Mishnah Berurah (426:14) that while dancing, one should be careful

not to bend his knees so that it does not appear as though he is bowing to the moon.

The Rema there also writes that the renewal of the moon symbolizes the restoration of Klal Yisroel's relationship with Hashem, and thus we celebrate and dance similar to the joyous dancing at a wedding. Although some Poskim maintain that the dancing that was done when saying **כשם שאני רוקד וכו'** fulfills this obligation, many have the practice to make a circle and dance together singing **טובים מאורות**. According to the Mekubalim, this dancing contains many deep kabbalistic ideas, and thus it is permitted to dance during the Nine Days and even an aveil may join the dancing (Piskei Teshuvos 426:21).

Shalom Aleichem

Rema writes that one should say three times to a friend Shalom Aleichem. The reason, explains the Mishnah Berurah (426:16), is that one previously said **תפל עליהם אימתה ופחד וכו'** – Let fear and terror fall upon them, and to communicate that those words were not directed towards the people present, one repeats three times to his friend Shalom Aleichem. There are also kabbalistic ideas contained in repeating Shalom Aleichem three times and that is why it is said in the plural and some Acharonim maintain that it is said, even when one recites kiddush levanah alone.

Although the wording of the Rema indicates that Shalom Aleichem is repeated three times to one person, common practice is to say it once to three different people. It is not required for the one saying Shalom Aleichem to wait for the listener to respond Aleichem Shalom. Furthermore, suppose the listener is in the middle of a pasuk. In that case, he should complete the pasuk before responding, and one who is in the middle of the berachah is prohibited from interrupting to answer Aleichem Shalom (Piskei Teshuvos 426:19).

Aleinu

The Biur Halacha (d.h. U'mevarech) mentions the practice of saying Aleinu after kiddush levanah. To dispel any mistaken impression that we may assign honor to the moon, we say Aleinu that includes the declaration that there is no other power that exists other than Hashem – **אין עוד**... **כי ה' הוא הא-לוקים**. The Chazon Ish and Rav Chaim Kanievsky maintained

that the recitation of Aleinu is done only when saying kiddush levanah with a tzibbur. A person who recites kiddush levanah alone does not have to conclude with Aleinu (Dirshu 426:33).

1 Poskim debate whether kiddush levanah may be recited at the beginning of the 7th day from the molad or only after 7 full days have transpired since the molad. See Elya Rabba 426:14 and Kaf HaChaim 426:61-62.

2 If one recited kiddush levanah before three days from the molad Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo: Rosh Chodesh 1:108) rules that, b'dieved, one fulfilled the mitzvah. Rav Sraya Deblitzky (Zeh HaShulchan 2:4) writes that one who recited kiddush levanah before three days should ask another person to be motzi him, but when that is not an option, one should not repeat the berachah.

3 Biur Halachah (d.h. B'Motzai Shabbos) quotes the Bach and the Vilna Gaon who maintain that one should not wait until motzai Shabbos to recite kiddush levanah and as soon as three days from the molad have passed it should be recited without delay.



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