

Birchas Ha'Ilanos
The Blessing on the Trees



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TALMUD ① מ' (ג'רובא - 2:1)

The Gemara digresses to teach about another type of blessing:
 - האני מאן דנפיק ביומי ניסן - Rav Yehudah said: - אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה
 - One who goes out during the days of Nissan - וְהוּא אֵילָנֵי דְקָא
 - and sees fruit trees in bloom - אָמַר בְּרוּךְ שְׁלֵא חִסֵּר - מִלְּבָבֵי
 - says: Blessed are You, Hashem etc. Who did not
 leave anything lacking in His universe, - בְּעוֹלָמוֹ כְּלוּם
 וּבְרָא בוֹ בְרִיּוֹת טוֹבוֹת - and created in it good creatures and good trees,
 - וְאֵילָנוֹת טוֹבוֹת - and created in it good creatures and good trees,
 - to cause mankind pleasure with them. [10]

SHITA MEKUBETZES ② ע"ה מקובצת (פ) **האי**
 מאן דנפיק ביומא ניסן וכו'. וקנש ברכה
 זו לפי שהוא ענין שבה חמתן לזמן וכוז ענין
 מחודש שאדם מבקר על על ס יבשים חמרתיו הקב"ה,
 ויהא נשם ומלכות :

TALMUD ④ מ' (ע"טין - 5)

The Gemara recounts the third incident mentioned by R' Yochanan in which reckless action led to disaster:

As a result of the incident involving the side of a carriage, Bethar was destroyed. - אַשְׁקָא דְרִיסְפֵּק חֲרִיב בֵּיתָר - In Bethar they had a custom that when a baby boy was born, they planted a cedar tree, - כִּי הָיָה מִתְּוֹלֵד יְנוּקָא - שְׁתִּילֵי אֲרָזָא - and when a baby girl was born, they planted a pine tree. - וְנוֹקְתָא שְׁתִּילֵי תוֹרְנִיתָא - When [a boy and girl] wed, [the people] would cut down [their trees] and make the wedding canopy out of the wood. - קְוִיֵּצִי לְהוּ וְעִבְרוּ גִנָּא - יוֹמָא חָד - One day, Caesar's daughter was passing by - הָיָה קָא חֲלָפָא בְּרַתִּיהָ דְקִיסָר - when the side of her carriage broke. - אַתְבַּר שְׁקָא דְרִיסְפֵּק - [Her attendants] cut down a cedar tree that had been planted for one of the boys in the town, and put it in the place of the broken panel. - קַצוּ אֲרָזָא וְעִילּוּ לָהּ - אֲתוּ נְפוּל עֲלֵיהוּ מְחוּבְרוּ -

אָתוּ אָמְרוּ לֵיהּ - אֲתוּ אָמְרוּ לֵיהּ [The Jews] fell upon them and smote them. [43] - אֲתוּ אָמְרוּ לֵיהּ [The Romans] went and reported to Caesar, - מְרִדוּ בְּךָ - [The Jews have rebelled against you!] - יְהוּדָאִי - אֲתָא עֲלֵיהּ [Caesar] came upon [the Jews of Bethar] in battle.

TALMUD ③ ג' (ב'ק' - 3:א)

The Gemara elaborates on the prohibition of cutting down trees:
 - אָמַר רַב - Rav said: - דִּיקְלָא דְטַעֲנָא קָבָא אֲסוּר לְמַקְצִיעָהּ - A palm tree that bears a kav of dates is forbidden to be cut down.

The Gemara objects:
 - בְּמָה יְהֵא בְּוִית - They challenged this from a Mishnah: [28] - מִיִּתְבִּי - HOW MUCH produce MUST THERE BE ON AN OLIVE TREE THAT ONE NOT BE PERMITTED TO CUT IT DOWN? - וְלֹא יִקְצֻ - A QUARTER - רֹבַע - Why, then, does Rav state that a date palm must yield an entire kav to be forbidden to be cut down?

The Gemara answers:
 - שְׂאֵנֵי זֵיתִים דְּחֻשְׁבִּי - Olive trees are different, for they are valuable. [29]

The Gemara elaborates further on this prohibition:
 - אָמַר רַבִּי חֲנִינָא - R' Chanina said: - אֵילָא דְקָץ - לא שכיב שיבחת ברי אלא דקץ - My son Shivchas died prematurely for no reason other than that he cut down a fig tree prematurely. [30]

RAMBAM ⑤ רמב"ם (ה' סנהדרין - 2:ה)

ועור אמרו: כל המעמיד לישראל דין שאינו הגון - כאלו הקים מצבה. שנאמר: ולא תקים לה מצבה אשר שגא יי אלהיה. ובמקום תלמידי חכמים - כאלו נטע אשרה. שנאמר: לא תטע לה אשרה כל עץ אצל מזבח יי אלהיה. וכן אמרו חכמים: לא תעשון אתי אלהי כסף - אלוה הבא בשביל כסף וזהב. זה הדין שמננהו מפני עשרו בלבד.

Our Sages also declare:³⁵ "Whoever appoints a judge who is not appropriate for the Jewish people is considered as if he erected a monument, as [implied by Deuteronomy 16:22]: 'Do not erect a monument which is hated by God, your Lord.'³⁶ [If he is appointed] instead of a Torah scholar, it is as if one planted an asherah,³⁷ as [Ibid.:21] states: 'Do not plant an asherah [or] any other tree next to God's altar.'³⁸

And our Sages³⁹ interpreted [Exodus 20:23]: "Do not make gods of silver and gods of gold together with Me" to mean "Do not appoint a judge⁴⁰ because of silver and gold." This refers to a judge who was appointed because of his wealth⁴¹ alone.⁴²

PIRKEI AVOS ⑥ פירקי אבות (2:5)

[22] He used to say: Anyone whose wisdom exceeds his good deeds, to what is he likened? - to a tree whose branches are numerous but whose roots are few; then the wind comes and uproots it and turns it upside down; as it is said: 'And he shall be like an isolated tree in an arid land and shall not see when good comes; he shall dwell on parched soil in the wilderness, on a salted land, uninhabited.'⁴ But one whose good deeds exceed his wisdom, to what is he likened? - to a tree whose branches are few but whose roots are numerous; even if all the winds in the world were to come and blow against it, they could not budge it from its place; as it is said: 'And he shall be like a tree planted by waters, toward the stream spreading its roots, and it shall not notice the heat's arrival, and its foliage shall be fresh; in the year of drought it shall not worry, nor shall it cease from yielding fruit.'⁵

