Birkat Ha-chammah
Blessing the Sun

And God said: Let there be lights in the vastness of sky to separate day from night...
And they shall serve as lights in the vastness of space, to shine upon the earth.
And it was so.  
(Genesis 1:14-15)

Every 28 years, the Jewish community celebrates the return of the sun to its original place in the heavens at the precise time and day of its creation.

“Anyone seeing the Sun at its turning point...should say, “Blessed is The One who makes the Creationl.”
And when is this?
Abaye said: every 28th year .”
(Talmud, Berachot 59b.)

What is the ‘turning point’?
The first month of the Hebrew year - Nissan - begins at the time of the spring equinox.
According to Hebrew tradition, the Sun was placed at the spring equinox at the beginning of the fourth day of creation (Tuesday at 6:00pm.) The change of season from winter into spring is the ‘turning point’. Whenever the Sun again reaches this starting point at 6:00pm on a Tuesday, then Birkat Hachama is said.

When do we say the Blessing? From the moment the upper arc of the Sun first appears until the full disc of the Sun is visible, which takes about 2 1/2 minutes.
According to tradition, the sun was created at the moment of the spring equinox which coincided with the first moment of the fourth day of creation. When the sun reaches this starting point again at the exact same time of day and on the same day of the week, we recite the Birkat Ha-chamah.

How is this time determined? According to the astronomical calculations of the 3rd century sage Shmuel, the length of a solar year is 365.25 days, or 52 weeks plus 1 1/4 days. It thus follows that precisely one year after creation, when the sun returned to its original position, it would be 1x days (one day and six hours) later in the week. After two years, it would be 2x days later in the week. Only after 28 years, would the sun return to that position at the same time—at the onset of the “fourth day,” Wednesday.

We mark this moment today: at sunrise on April 8, 2009, 14 Nisan.

The Birkat Hachama Prayers

PSALMS 90: 17

יִהְיֶה נִצָּה אָדָןָּ לַאֲלָהִיםּ עָלָּיִנוּ

May God's bliss be upon us and connect us to the work of our hands,

וּיִּהְיֶה יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אָלֵינוּ

as the work of our hands connects us to God.

ע-מַאֲאֵשׁ יַדְּעֵינוּ קֹּנּ־הָּ אָלֵינוּ; עַ-מַּאֲאֵשׁ יַדְּעֵינוּ קֹּנַּיְּעֵהוּ.
Tetragrammaton Acrostic

Let them be in awe of You as long as the sun shines, while the moon lasts, generations on end. (Psalm 72:5)
Yira-u-cha im-shamesh v’lifney yareyach dor dorim.

We praise You, O God; we praise You; Your presence is near; people tell of Your wondrous deeds. (Psalm 75:2)
Hodinu l’cha Elohim, hodinu v’karov sh’mecha sipru nif’lo-techa.

But for who revere My name a sun of victory shall rise to bring healing.
You shall go forth and stamp like stall-fed calves. (Malachi 3:20)
V’zar-chah la-chem, yir’ey sh’mi, shemesh tz’dakah u-marpey bich’nafe-hah, vi-tzaatem u- fish-tem k’egley mar’bek.

The heavens proclaim God’s righteousness, and all peoples see God’s Glory. (Psalm 97:6)
Higidu ha-shamayim tzid’ko, v’ra-u chol-ha-amim k’vodo.
God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night and they shall serve as signs for the set times—the days and the years; and they will serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth.” And it was so.

God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth, to dominate the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that this was good.

And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

Thus said whoever gives the Sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for light by night, who split the sea and its waves roared: Tzvaot is God’s Name:
PSALM 84:12

For Elohim is sun and shield; the One bestows grace and glory; Elohim, cheyn v’kavod yiteyn: Yehovah does not withhold goodness from those who live without blame.


HalleluYah. Praise the One from the heavens; praise God on high.

Praise God, all the angels; praise God, all the hosts of heaven.

Praise God sun and moon; praise God, all bright stars.

Praise God highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens.

Let them praise the name of the One; Who commanded, and they were created.

And Who makes them endure forever, establishing an order that shall never change!

THE BRACHA

Baruch Ata Yehovah Eloheynu Melech Ha-olam, oseh ma’asey v’reshit.

A fountain of Blessings are You, Yehovah Eloheynu, the Maker of Creation!
For the Leader. A Psalm of David.

ha-shamayim, m’sapp’rim k’vod-El; u-ma’aseh yadav, maggid ha-rakia’.

Day to day makes utterance, night to night speaks out.
yom leyom yabbia’ omer; v’laylah l’laylah, y’chaveh-da’at.

There is no utterance, there are no words, their sound goes unheard.
ein-omer ve’ein devarim; beli nishma kolam.

Their voice carries throughout the earth, their words to the end of the world.
God placed in them a tent for the sun,
bechol- ha-aretz yatza kavam, u-vik’tzeh tevel milleyhem; la-shemesh, sam-ohel ba-hem.

who is like a groom coming forth from his chuppah, like a hero, eager to run his course.
vehu, k’chatan yotze mechuppato; yasis k’gibbor, la-rutz orach.

His rising-place is at one end heaven, and his circuit reaches the other;
nothing escapes [the Sun’s] heat.
miktzeh ha-shamayim motza’o, u-t’kufato al-ketzotam; ve’eyn nistar, mechammato.

The Torah of & is perfect, renewing life;

The decrees of & are enduring, making the simple wise;
Torat & temimah meshivat nefesh; Edut & ne’emanah, machkimat peti.
The precepts of הוהי are just, rejoicing the heart;
The instruction of הוהי is lucid, making the eyes light up.

The awe of הוהי is pure, abiding forever; The judgments of הוהי are true, righteous altogether;
More desirable than gold, than finest gold; sweeter than honey dripping from the comb.

Your servant is careful with them; in obeying them there is much reward.

Who can be aware of errors? Clear me from unperceived guilt!

And keep Your servant from willful sins! Let them not rule over me;
then shall I be blameless and clear of great offense.

May the words of my mouth and the prayer of my heart be acceptable to You,
In Kabbalah we learn
That the Holy One,
in creating the world,
took some of its fresh new light
and poured it into each of the vessels
of the spheres of the universe.

But such powerful light was stronger than the vessels,
and so they shattered and burst.
The precious light spilled out,
falling
down
and
down
through all the worlds,
until they reached into the lowest world.
Our own.

As the sparks fell they took on form,
embedding themselves in physical things:
wood and water, plants and earth and living creatures.

Always since that time,
the sparks yearn to return to the Source of all light,
to the single Holy Light from which they fell.

And so when we do a mitzvah
with food, or plants, or earth, or another person;
when we praise our Source for each marvel we see, eat or use,
we awaken the spark of light within!
Suddenly its fire starts to grow.
It rises, flaming
higher and higher and higher,
to be reunited with its Source.

As we have the power, through each mitzvah,
to redeem the holy sparks of light from the tyranny of matter,
so too does the Holy One redeem us.

The Holy Spark in each of us lies ready
to soar upward to the light from which we sprang,
and from which our being draws its breath.
We pray that we may awaken every spark
whose time has come to soar!

(adapted by MP from Wings of Awe)
As a Song for Ascents.

Shir la-ma'alot essa 'enai el heh-harim, me'ayin yavo 'ezri.

My help comes from the One, maker of heaven and earth.

'Ezri me'im 'Oseh shamayim va-aretz.

The One will not let your foot give way; your guardian will not slumber;

Al yitten lamot raglecha, al yanoom shomre-cha.

See, the guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps!

Hineh lo yanoom velo yishan, Shomer Yisrael.

is your guardian; is your protection at your right hand.

yishmor-cha mikkol ra', yishmor et nafshe-cha.

The sun will not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

Yomam ha-shemesh lo yakkekka vyarey-ach ba-layla.

will guard you from all harm; will guard your life.

yishmor-cha mikkol ra', yishmor et nafshe-cha.

will guard your going out and your coming in, now and forever.

yishmor tzet-cha u-vo-echa, me'ata ve'ad 'olam.
A gentle Lord of all that is.
Blessed and loved by each soul alive.
Great and good You fill all space.
Delight there is in knowing You!
How You transcend all holy life,
Which bears You high above any throne.
Z'khut and equity radiate from You.
Hesed and compassion the worlds reflect.
The stars and the planets You made to give light.
You formed them all conscious,
all worthy and wise.
Knowledge and power You gave them to shine.
Like powerful assistants, they serve You in space.

Much light and energy they radiate forth.
No place is untouched by their gentle rays.
So joyful their path is, so happy their course.
Enroute to fulfill their Creator's command.
Praising Your glory, they honor Your Name,
Singing Your Majesty's anthem of joy.
Quietly suns shine to answer Your call.
Reflections of moonlight
change size at Your word.

Seraphim, angels, and all heavenly hosts,
They praise You in concert with S'firot on high!
All elements mingle their harmonious tune
Nature and humans in rhythm provide.

-Reb Zalman
From Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 59b
ברכות דף טב

The rabbis teach: Anyone who sees the sun in its 'tekufah/season' the moon at its strength, the stars in their paths and the constellations of the zodiac in their order says: 'A Fountain of Blessings is the Maker of Creation!' When is this? Abaye said: "Every 28 years the cycle begins again and the Nissan equinox falls in Saturn, on the evening of Tuesday, the night before Wednesday."
(Berachot 59)

My Thoughts Awaken Me to See You

By Rabbi Moses ibn Ezra
Translated by Raymond Sheindlin

My thoughts awaken me to see You;
They show me in my heart's eye Your deeds;
They teach me to tell Your wonders,
"When I behold Your heavens,
The work Your fingers made."

Around its course the disk of heaven walks,
A potter's wheel enwhirling the world;
It has no lips, and yet it tells Your glory
To earth, unmoved within its orbit,
Suspended in the void,
By cords of Your love stayed.

Thither the sun yearns, and there burns,
And of its light some to the moon lends.
While heaven's sphere is spread out like a tent,
With stars blooming on it, a garden,
Proclaiming how profound
The plans that You have laid.