

Much wonderful ink has been spilled over the recitation of Hallel on the night of Pesach. The Gemara (ערכין י:א):

דאמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יהוצדק שמונה עשר ימים שהיחיד גומר בהן את ההלל שמונה ימי החג ושמונה ימי חנוכה ויום טוב הראשון של פסח ויום טוב (הראשון) של עצרת ובגולה עשרים ואחד תשעה ימי החג ושמונה ימי חנוכה ושני ימים טובים של פסח ושני ימים טובים של עצרת

While this version of Rabbi Shimon Ben Yehotzadak's opinion omits mention of Hallel on any night, the version of his comments in מסכת סופרים (כ:ט) does mention it:

וגומרין את הלל כל שמנת ימי חנוכה בג' פרקים הראשונים אין משיבין ואין צ"ל לשאול בשנים האחרונים שואלין מפגי היראה [ומשיבין] מפני השלום ומפני הכבוד ואלו הן שלשה ראשונים הללו עבדי ה' בצאת ישראל אהבתי שנים האחרונים הללו את ה' הודו לה' וצריך לברך בתחילתן ולקרותן בנעימה דתני ר' שמעון בן יהוצדק ימים שמנה עשרה ולילה אחד יחיד גומר בהן את ההלל ואלו הן שמנת ימי חנוכה וי"ט של עצרת וי"ט הראשון של פסח ולילה ובגולה עשרים ואחד יום ושתי לילות מצוה מן המובחר לקרות הלל בשני לילות של גליות ולברך עליהן ולאומרן בנעימה לקיים מה שנאמר (תהילים ל"ד:ד) ונרוממה שמו יחדיו וכשהוא קורא אותו בביתו אינו צריך לברך שכבר בירך ברבים

It is clear from מסכת סופרים that the Hallel it refers to is not the Hallel we recite at the Seder, but rather an additional Hallel we recite in Shul after Maariv. Why is Pesach singled out as the only night(s) among the festivals that Hallel is recited? Why don't we recite a blessing over the Hallel recited at the Seder? Some answer that the blessing we recite in Shul covers us for both the Hallel recited in Shul as well the Hallel recited at the Seder. However, there is a large gap between these two recitations, during which there has almost definitely been היסח הדעת, a lapse in focus and concentration which would sever the connection between the two recitations of Hallel. So regardless of whether one recited Hallel in Shul or night, why don't we recite a blessing over the Hallel at the Seder?

Rabbi Soloveichik ZT"l suggested that we do indeed recite a blessing over Hallel at the Seder, however the Bracha is modified and lacks the normal shape of a blessing. Prior to Hallel we say לפיכך אנחנו חייבים להודות ולהלל וכו', an expression of our obligation to praise Gd on the night of Pesach that is akin to a blessing. Yet the question remains: if we are obligated to recite the complete Hallel in its regular form at the Seder why don't we do so with a blessing before it? If we would say that the Hallel at the Seder is Rabbinic, we have other examples of reciting Hallel with a blessing, though not in its complete form, like Rosh Chodesh and the last 5 (or 6) days of Pesach. Why do we omit the blessing over Hallel at the Seder?

The Gemara teaches us (ברכות נד:ב):

אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב: אַרְבָּעָה צָרִיכִין לְהוֹדוֹת: יוֹרְדֵי הַיָּם, הוֹלְכֵי מִדְבָּרוֹת, וּמִי שֶׁהָיָה חוֹלָה וְנִתְרַפָּא, וּמִי שֶׁהָיָה חֲבוּשׁ בְּבֵית הָאֲסוּרִים וַיֵּצֵא.

An individual who encounters one of four life threatening experiences is obligated to give thanks to Gd for saving him. Those who travel the seas, the deserts, someone who recovered from a life threatening illness and one who was freed from prison. In addition, one is obligated to recite a blessing upon visiting an area where Gd performed a miracle for the Jewish People or for his family (ברכות נד:א). We also find (פסחים קיז:א):

אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל שיר שבתורה משה וישראל אמרוהו בשעה שעלו מן הים והלל זה מי אמרו נביאים שביניהן תקנו להן לישראל שיהו אומרים אותו על כל פרק ופרק ועל כל צרה וצרה שלא תבא עליהן ולכשנגאלין אומרים אותו על גאולתן

What is the difference between the praise recited by the individual and the Song recited by Moses and the Jews when they were rescued from the Egyptians at the Reed Sea? It would seem that they all share the common theme of thanking and praising Gd for performing miracles on their behalf. What is the difference between the cases mentioned by Rabbi Judah, the song of praise for their salvation at the Reed Sea and their salvation at various dangerous situations? What is the difference between the Hallel recited at those events and the Hallel we recite at the festivals on the 18 (or 21) specified days and 1 (or 2) nights that we complete the Hallel?

When one encounters a place that a miracle occurred to him, his family or the Jewish people he recognizes the importance of the event and is moved to express his appreciation to Gd. Without having personally experienced the miraculous event, he approaches the recitation of praise from an intellectual perspective. He realizes that had that miracle not taken place in the past, he would not be able today to appreciate it and offer his thanks. He is thankful for the miracle but may find it difficult to place himself in the proper frame of mind to relive the event and experience what his ancestors went through.

On the night of Pesach, at the Seder, the Jew is obligated to relive the experiences of the Exodus. The haste in which they departed, the feelings of dread at the Reed Sea, the exhilaration of their being saved while the Egyptians were drowned. בכל דור ודור חייב, in each generation, every Jew must view himself as if he is departing Egypt now, on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan. According to Rambam, not only must he view himself as leaving, he must demonstrate that he is leaving, להראות את עצמו. When we say a proper, full blessing with שם ומלכות, including the required components of mentioning Gd's name and kingdom over all when we recognize a miracle Gd performed for our ancestors, we do so from an intellectual perspective. We understand and frame the historical event in a way that motivates us to thank Gd.

One who is a participant in the miracle itself does not stop to recite a blessing. He erupts spontaneously in praise of Gd, as the Jews did when they exited the Reed Sea and realized the miracle Gd performed for **them**. On the night of Pesach we are the beneficiaries of the miracles Gd performed for us throughout the events of the Exodus. We praise Gd spontaneously without the need for a blessing before reciting that praise. That is why on the night of the fifteenth at the Seder there is no need to introduce Hallel with a blessing. Experiential Hallel does not require a blessing beforehand. The Gemara in Pesachim is talking about experiential Hallel, where Moses and the Jews who were saved at the Reed Sea established the precedent to praise Gd whenever the community is saved from a calamity. The subsequent prophets used Moses' and the Jews spontaneous recitation of praise to Gd as the precedent upon which they established the practice of spontaneously praising Gd when they were saved from catastrophes in subsequent generations. For their Hallel was also an experiential Hallel.

The Jew recites complete Hallel on 18 or 21 days plus 1 or 2 nights, praising Gd for the miracles He performed for our ancestors. Not only did He free them from Egypt, He sustained them for 40 years and ultimately fulfilled His covenant with Abraham, the **ברית בין הבתרים**, to return them their birthright and inheritance in the Promised Land after a 400 year period of enslavement in a foreign land. On the 18 or 21 holidays, we recite an intellectual Hallel, as we appreciate what those events years ago mean to us, even though we did not personally experience them. On the night of Pesach The intellectual Hallel we recite in Shul the complete, intellectual Hallel. Like the other 18 or 21 days, it is preceded by a blessing that frames it appropriately as an expression of appreciation and thanksgiving. Indeed, we are obligated to recite it like the individual who recites a blessing when arriving at a location where a miracle occurred. (According to the Yerushalmi, the obligation to recite Hallel on Pesach night is based on the verse **השיר יהי-ה לכם כליל התקדש חג**. See Tosfos יד:א). However, the spontaneous, experiential Hallel we recite at the Seder, as participants in the Exodus, does not require a blessing before we recite it. It is entirely different from the Hallel recited in Shul.

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