

הלל THE DUAL THEMES OF

Our discussion concerning הלל has provided ample evidence that הלל is much more than a prayer of praise. It is fair to say that הלל is equally a prayer for salvation. That חז"ל viewed הלל as including prayers for salvation can be shown in a variety of ways. Let us begin with the following:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת פסחים דף קי"ז עמ' א'—תנו רבנן: הלל זה מי אמרו? רבי אליעזר אומר: משה וישראל אמרוהו בשעה שעמדו על הים. הם אמרו (תהלים קטו) לא לנו ה' לא לנו; משיבה רוח הקודש ואמרה להן (ישעיהו מח) למעני למעני אעשה. רבי יהודה אומר: יהושע וישראל אמרוהו בשעה שעמדו עליהן מלכי כנען; הם אמרו, לא לנו ומשיבה וכו'. רבי אלעזר המודעי אומר: דבורה וברק אמרוהו בשעה שעמד עליהם סיסרא. הם אמרו: לא לנו, ורוח הקודש משיבה ואמרת להם למעני למעני אעשה. רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אומר: חזקיה וסייעתו אמרוהו, בשעה שעמד עליהם סנחריב. הם אמרו לא לנו, ומשיבה וכו', רבי עקיבא אומר: חנניה מישאל ועזריה אמרוהו בשעה שעמד עליהם נבוכדנצר הרשע, הם אמרו לא לנו ומשיבה וכו'. רבי יוסי הגלילי אומר: מרדכי ואסתר אמרוהו בשעה שעמד עליהם המן הרשע, הם אמרו: לא לנו ומשיבה וכו'.

Translation: Our Rabbis taught: Who composed Hallel Ha'Mitzri? Rabbi Eleazar said: Moshe Rabbenu and the Jewish People Israel uttered it for the first time when they stood by the Red Sea. They exclaimed, 'Not unto us, not unto us,' G-d responded. 'For Mine own sake, for Mine own sake, will I do it.' Rabbi Judah said: Joshua and Israel uttered it when the kings of Canaan attacked them. They exclaimed, 'Not unto us etc.' and G-d responded etc. Rabbi Eleazar the Modiite said: Deborah and Barak uttered it when Sisera attacked them. They exclaimed, 'Not unto us etc..' and G-d responded. 'For Mine own sake, for Mine own sake, will I do it.' Rabbi Eleazar son of Azariah said: Hezekiah and his companions uttered it when Sanheriv attacked them. They exclaimed, 'Not unto us [etc.]' and G-d responded etc. Rabbi Akiva said: Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah uttered it when the wicked Nebuchadnezzar rose against them. They exclaimed, 'Not unto us etc.,' and G-d responded etc. Rabbi Yossi the Galilean said: Mordechai and Esther uttered it when the wicked Haman rose against them. They supplicated, 'Not unto us etc.', and G-d responded etc.

This source is significant because it provides that the paragraph of לא לנו was recited while a threat to the Jewish People was pending.

The fact that חז"ל resolved that we should omit the lines of לא לנו when we recite הלל on ראש חודש confirms that requests for salvation are a significant theme of הלל. We omit those lines on ראש חודש because ראש חודש is not a day on which we commemorate an event during which G-d rescued the Jewish People.

Our practice of taking the ארבע מינים in our hands while reciting הלל on סוכות provides additional proof that prayers for salvation are an important aspect of הלל. Our actions in pointing the ארבע מינים in six directions and in then shaking them, consist of non-verbal acts of prayer. We combine those non-verbal acts of prayer with the recital of words from הלל, some of which and in particular, the words: אנא ה' הושיעה נא, represent prayers of salvation.

Lastly, the division of הלל at the סדר supports the view that prayers of salvation are an important theme of הלל. It was not by accident that the portion of הלל which begins with the paragraph of לא לנו is recited immediately after the פסוק of שפוך חמתך, an independent prayer of salvation.

Is that view of הלל consistent with the function of הלל as described in the following?

תלמוד בבלי מסכת פסחים דף קי"ז עמ' א' – וחכמים אומרים: נביאים שביניהן תיקנו להם לישראל שיהו אומרים אותו על כל פרק ופרק, ועל כל צרה וצרה שלא תבא עליהם לישראל, ולכשנגאלין אומרים אותו על גאולתן.

Translation: But the Sages maintain: The prophets among them instituted the practice that the Jewish People should recite it in any era and as a result of every trouble, may it not come to them! and when they are rescued, they recite it in thankfulness for their delivery.

At first glance this גמרא appears to be limiting the recital of הלל to after G-d rescues the Jewish People from a threat but upon a closer reading, you notice that the גמרא includes the word: על כל פרק twice. The גמרא can be read as supporting the practice to recite הלל both פרק, during a threat, and כשנגאלין, after being saved by G-d.

That reading of the גמרא results in a new issue arising concerning הלל: why did חז"ל create a prayer that includes both words of praise and prayers for salvation? We learn from הלל that during any celebration for our rescue, we must begin to prepare ourselves for the next menace. That message comes across clearly in the הגדה. Despite the fact that we commemorate the Exodus from Egypt, we still say: שבכל דור ודור עומדים עלינו לכלותינו. In other words, until the coming of the משיח, any rescue of the Jewish People is to be viewed as temporary. Therefore, during the course of celebrating any occasion of salvation, we need to begin praying that G-d rescue us from our next crisis.

Such a dichotomy faces us each year when we celebrate 'יום העצמאות'. That the establishment of the State of Israel was nothing short of miraculous and could not have occurred without the intervention of G-d is a fact that should be acknowledged by every Jew. For those who do not hold that view, they need to ask themselves a question: what would Jewish life be like today if the only great event of Jewish history in the 20th Century was the Holocaust? How would each of us feel about being Jewish? Some of us do not know what a world without the State of Israel looks like. Yet, while we believe that the establishment of the State of Israel was miraculous, we also acknowledge that not one day has gone by since then when we have not witnessed events that threatened the very existence of the State of Israel. In other words, our celebration of the establishment of the State of Israel is tempered by our need to pray that G-d continue to protect the State of Israel. The dual emotions we feel concerning the establishment of the State of Israel reflect the dual themes of הלל. As a result, we should welcome the opportunity recite הלל, to express both words praise and prayers of salvation, on יום העצמאות.

1. I would like to thank Rabbi Dr. Dalia Marx of Hebrew Union College who encouraged me to comment on reciting הלל on יום העצמאות.

להבין את התפלה

Perhaps the greatest stumbling block towards reciting הלל on יום העצמאות concerns the propriety of reciting a ברכה both before and after הלל on that day. Concerning the ברכה that follows הלל, ברכת השיר, the opinions expressed by the ר"ן and ריטב"א, cited in last week's newsletters, who justified the recital of a ברכה at the end of הלל at the סדר despite the fact that we do not recite a ברכה before, would support reciting a ברכה after reciting הלל on יום העצמאות. What about reciting a ברכה before הלל on יום העצמאות? Maybe we need to ask a preliminary question: what was the original ברכה that opened הלל? Let us review the statement made by אב"י that a ברכה must be recited before הלל:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת פסחים דף קי"ט ע"ב – לכפול – יכפול, לפשוט – יפשוט, לברך אחריו – יברך, הכל כמנהג המדינה. אמר אב"י: לא שנו אלא לאחרינו, אבל לפניו – מצוה לברך.

Translation: MISHNA: In a place where it is customary to repeat some of the verses within Hallel, they may repeat them. In places where it is customary not to repeat verses within Hallel, it is appropriate not to repeat the verses. In places where it is customary to recite a Bracha after Hallel, it is appropriate to recite a Bracha after Hallel. Each community should follow its local custom. Abaye said: that Mishna is concerned with the Bracha that follows Hallel. Concerning the Bracha that precedes Hallel, all are in agreement that it must be recited.

Although אב"י provides that a ברכה must be recited before הלל, he does not identify the ברכה. A digital search of both the תלמוד בבלי and the תלמוד ירושלמי reveals that neither the ברכה of הלל nor the לקרוא את ההלל appear in either the תלמוד בבלי or the תלמוד ירושלמי. Their first appearance is in סדר רב עמרם גאון.

What other ברכה could have been recited? The Cairo Geniza provides one possibility. It is the ברכה cited by Professor Ezra Fleischer whom we quoted in last week's newsletter:

ברוך אתה ה' א-להנו מלך העולם אשר בחר בדוד עבדו ורצה בתהלתו ובשירי קדשו להללו לשבחו לפארו על רוב גבורתיו כל הימים ברוך אתה ה' מצמיח ישועה שלימה קרובה לעמו ובנה ירושלם.

Translation: Baruch Ata Hashem . . . who chose David, His servant, and desired David's words of glory and his holy songs to glorify, praise, beautify, all His great deeds every day. Baruch Ata Hashem who generates complete and coming redemptions to His nation and who builds Yerushalayim.

This ברכה, in opposition to the ברכות of הלל or לקרוא את ההלל, fully expresses the dual aspects of הלל. Not only do we praise G-d but we also describe G-d as מצמיח ישועה; G-d who can soon bring a complete salvation on behalf of His nation and who rebuilds Yerushalayim. It is not a coincidence that the ברכה shares a similarity with ברוך שאמר which opens פסוקי דזמרה, a form of הלל, as identified by the גמרא. So why is this ברכה not more well known? Professor Fleischer answers that question:

page 185 – אין זה מן הנמנע שהמנהג להקיף את מזמורי החגים בברכות נתבטל בהרבה מקומות מפני תרעומת הקראים – זו שראינה בדברי קרקסאני. שבה מופלג למזמורי תהלים בפתיחת תפלת המועדים אפשר שנתן פתחון פה לקראים לעמוד על דעתם שאין להתפלל אלא בפסוקי מקרא

ותהילות דוד בלבד. מפני זה אולי הושמטה הברכה שלפניה מכל וכל, ואילו זה שלאחריה קוצרה כך שהקראים לא ימצאו בה אחיזה למענותיהם. אכן, גם ברכה זו יצאה כנראה מן השימוש ברוב המקומות.

Translation: It is likely that the custom to surround with Brachos the collection of chapters of Tebillim that were recited on holidays ended out of concern for the Karaites who lived in those communities—that is evident from the remarks made by Kirkisani, one of the leaders of the Karaite movement. High praise for the practice of reciting chapters of Tebillim on holidays provided an opening for the Katraites to reinforce their position that it was improper to include within prayers any words that were not from Tanach and in particular not taken from Tebillim. Perhaps the practice of reciting Brachos before and after a group of chapters of Tebillim lent unintended support to Karaite theology. The practice of reciting a Bracha before the collection of chapters of Tebillim was totally discontinued and the Bracha that followed was shortened so that the Karaites could not point to that practice as support for their theology. The unintended result of teh concern was to cause the practice of reciting an introductory Bracha to disappear in most places.

That such a ברכה might have opened הלל is supported by the following comments attributed to רש"י:

מחזור ויטרי סימן רכז²—נהגו העם לברך בראש חדש לקרוא את ההלל. אבל רבינו, תנוח נפשו בצרור החיים, לא מברך עליו: והא לך תשובתו: ששאלתם על היחיד הקורא את ההלל בימים שאינם מי"ח של תורה אם חובה על הציבור לברך גם היחיד: אבל אני איני מברך עליו לא עם הציבור ולא ביחיד. לפי שאינו אלא מנהג. ואין מנהג צריך ברכה. כדאמר' בסוכה פ' לולב. שקיל חביט חביט ולא בריך. קסבר ערבה מנהג נביאים הוא. כו'. לפיכך איני מברך עליו אשר קדשנו במצותיו וציונו אבל אני מברך עליו ברוך אתה י-י א—להינו מ"ה המהולל בפי עמו משובח ומפואר בשירי דוד עבדך ברוך אתה י-י מהולל בתשבחות. ולאחריו יהללך כדרכה:

Translation: It was the custom among the majority to recite the Bracha of Likro Es Ha'Hallel before reciting Hallel on Rosh Chodesh. But Rabbenu (Rashi), may his soul be tied to those who are destined to live forever, did not recite that Bracha before Hallel on Rosh Chodesh. This was his opinion: You asked about an individual who is reciting Hallel on a day other than the 18 days designated for the recital of Hallel, if it is mandatory when more than ten men are reciting Hallel and is it also mandatory for an individual? Needless to say, it is not my practice to recite the Bracha of Likro Es Ha'Hallel before saying Hallel on Rosh Chodesh whether I am reciting Hallel individually or with a group of ten men since it is only a custom to recite Hallel on Rosh Chodesh. My practice is based on what we learn in Masechet Succah, the chapter that begins: Lulav Ha'Gazul: we take the Hoshanos on Hoshana Rabbah, strike the ground with them without a reciting a Bracha since taking the Hoshanos and striking them on Hoshana Rabbah is only a custom that was instituted by the Prophets. So I do not recite a Bracha that includes the words: Asher Kidishanu B'Mitzvotav V'Tzivanu. However I do recite the following Bracha: Ha'Mibullal B'Phi Amo . . . Baruch Ata Hashem Mibullal Ba'Tishbachos. Then after completing Hallel on Rosh Chodesh, I recite the Bracha that is customarily recited after Hallel; the Bracha of Yihalelucha.

It seems to be that רש"י provides a possible solution to the problem that some have with reciting the ברכות of ההלל or לגמור את ההלל before הלל on יום העצמאות. Since reciting הלל on יום העצמאות is a מנהג, let us recite on יום העצמאות the ברכה that רש"י recited before ראש חודש. But to be consistent, we should do then do the same for ראש חודש הלל.

2. This source was brought to my attention by Rabbi Jack Kaufman who is always willing to share his vast knowledge of Tefila.