

Repetition of the Final Verses of Hallel:

If Dovid Hamelech Didn't, Why Should We?

Chanukah and Hallel are linked. Not only do we say the full Hallel all eight days, but when Rambam decided where within his meticulously-ordered *Mishneh Torah* he would place the laws of Hallel, he chose the section on Chanukah.¹

One curious feature of Hallel is that the series of verses at the end are repeated. The practice is so ubiquitous that, according to Rav Ovadia Yosef, it extends today even to members of the Edot HaMizrach community, despite its historical identification as the custom of Ashkenazim, not Sefaradim.²

The basis for repeating the verses is a Gemara in *Sukka*, which we will explain shortly. That Gemara and the custom to repeat certain verses in Hallel are not without problems, according to Rav Soloveitchik (as recorded in the notes from his shiurim).³ In this essay, we will present the Rav's question, his resolution, and a suggestion as to how to possibly resolve an issue not addressed there.

Before we get to the Rav's question, let us look at the Rambam. Like the Mishna in *Sukka*, Rambam says that the repeating is a custom only of some communities and that those that have the practice may continue.⁴ Unlike the Mishna, Rambam then says explicitly that communities whose custom is to *not* repeat should continue to *not* do so.⁵



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Why the reservation? The Rav suggests that it's tied to Gemarot in *Megilla* 18a⁶ and *Berachot* 33b.⁷

There, the Gemara says it is forbidden, within tefilla, to add to the praise of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. We are permitted to say what was formally included in tefilla by the great figures of the past, but not to go beyond that. And that is the basis for understanding, according to the Rav, a dispute in *Sukka* 39a as to which verses in Hallel may be repeated and which ones not:

תנא רבי כופל בה דברים רבי אלעזר בן פרטא מוסיף בה דברים מאי מוסיף אמר אביי מוסיף לכפול מאודך ולמטה

A Tanna taught: Rabbi "doubles" certain phrases in Hallel. R' Elazar ben Perata adds words. What does he add? Abaye said: He additionally "doubles" from odecha and onward.

Sukka 39a

Rashi explains that Rabbi repeated the following verses in Hallel:

אָנָּא ה' הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא אָנָּא ה' הַצְּלִיחָה נָּא. בְּרוּךְ הַבָּא בְּשֵׁם ה' בְּרִכְנוּכֶם מִבֵּית ה'. אֵל-ה' וַיֵּאָר

לָנוּ אֱסֵרוּ חַג בְּעֵבְרֵיךְ עַד קַרְנוֹת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ. אֵל-לִי אֲתָהּ וְאוֹדְךָ אֱלֹהֵי אֲרוֹמְמֶךָ. הוֹדוּ לָהּ כִּי טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסִדוֹ.

Please Hashem save now! Please Hashem make us prosper now! Blessed be he that comes in the name of Hashem; we bless you out of the house of Hashem. Hashem is God, He illuminated for us; bind the sacrifice with chords, to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will give thanks to You; You are my God, I will exalt You. Give thanks to Hashem, for He is good, for His kindness endures forever.

R' Elazar went further, repeating (as we do) also the verses that precede the ones above:

אוֹדְךָ כִּי עֲנִיתָנִי וַתְּהִי לִי לִישׁוּעָה. אָבָן מֵאֶסוּר הַבּוֹנִים הִיָּתָה לְרֵאשׁ פְּנֵה. מֵאֵת ה' הִיָּתָה זֹאת הִיא נִפְלְאָת בְּעֵינֵינוּ. זֶה הַיּוֹם עָשָׂה ה' נִגְלָה וְנִשְׂמְחָה בוֹ.

I will give thanks to You, for You have answered me, and You have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is Hashem's doing; it is wondrous in our eyes. This is the day that Hashem has made; we will rejoice and

be glad in it.

Where would the idea come from to repeat verses in Hallel? Rashi explains: the idea is from Dovid HaMelech himself, for Tehillim 118, the source of these verses, is itself a series of couplets. R' Elazar and Rebbe's dispute is only in regards to *how much* should be repeated. Or, more specifically, *which* verses may be repeated and which ones may not.

With this, we come back to the Rav.

The Rav asked: Given Rashi's reason, that Tehillim 118 is itself a series of couplets, why wouldn't Rebbe — and not just R' Elazar ben Perata — start the repeats from *odecha* (I will give thanks to You)?

The Rav answered: The section beginning with *odecha* expresses praise; the next section, beginning with *ana Hashem* is not praise, but supplication and prayer. Expressions of praise may not be added to, as per the Gemarot in *Megilla* and *Berachot*. Those of supplication and prayer, however, *may* be added to.

What is the Rav's proof that prayer and supplication are an exception: Moshe Rabbeinu's pleas to forgive the Jewish people for the sin of the golden calf:

וְאֶתְנַפֵּל לִפְנֵי ה' כְּרַאשֹׁנָה אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם
וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה לְחֵם לֹא אֶכְלֶתִי וּמַיִם לֹא
שָׁתִיתִי עַל כָּל חַטָּאתְכֶם אֲשֶׁר חָטָאתֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת
הָרַע בְּעֵינַי ה' לְהַכְעִיסוֹ.

Then I threw myself down before Hashem as I did at first, for forty days and forty nights...

Devarim 9:18

For forty days straight, Moshe Rabbeinu threw himself to the ground and prayed. It was not one continuous prayer, but the same prayer, repeated 40 times, according to the Rav. [This is consistent with *Sefer Panim Yafos*,

written by Rav Pinchas Horowitz, author of *Sefer Hafla'ah*.⁸]

Rebbi, then, felt that Hallel's words of supplication and prayer may be repeated, but those of praise should not, due to the limitations set by the Gemarot in *Megilla* and *Berachot*: that it is *forbidden* to repeat praises of God.

The notes from the Rav's shiur conclude with the explanation presented above.

We are left with the question of why R' Elazar ben Perata disagreed, maintaining that it is indeed proper to add from *odecha*, despite the Gemarot in *Megilla* and *Berachot* seemingly telling us otherwise.

I would like to offer a suggestion, based on the *Levush* and Meiri.

Referring to the repetition of phrases in Hallel, *Levush* writes:

וכל זה אינו אלא מנהג בעלמא, ועיקר טעמא
הוא ליפות הקריאה ולהגדיל שבח הש"י
ולהודו בשרו על רוב חסדיו אשר עשה ועושה
עמו...

All of this is nothing more than minhag. Its main rationale is to enhance the reading, heighten praise to Hashem, and thank Him through Dovid HaMelech's poetry for His abundance of kindness He does with us.

The *Levush* understands Rebbe to say that the practice to repeat from *odecha* until the end of Hallel is to amplify and beautify the *shevach*, praise composed by Dovid.

This suggestion of the *Levush* is perplexing, since he defines the last nine verses of Hallel as classical *shevach*. We are then forced to wrestle with Rav Soloveitchik's question: How can one attempt to offer more *shevach* than was offered by Dovid HaMelech himself?

I believe we might have an answer in the Meiri, whose commentary to Tehillim 118 divides what we know as chapter 118 into three chapters (117, 118, and 119). The first (his 117) comprises *Hodu* through *yomru na yirei Hashem*. The second (his 118) begins at *min hametzar* through *zeh hayom*. His next chapter (his 119) starts with *ana Hashem* through *hodu LaShem*.

With our 118 now divided into three distinct sections, Meiri shows how each section (for him, separate chapters) encapsulates a unique theme.

The theme of his 117 is Klal Yisrael's rejoicing that Dovid has ascended to the throne. The theme of his 118 is the improbability — and even implausibility — that this ascent occurred at all. It could only have been the hand of Hashem, declared Dovid.

We now arrive at Meiri's comments to his 119:

אנא ה' זה המזמור נאמר לימות המשיח
מתפלל שיושיעם מצרת הגלות ובצאתם
יצליחם הצלחה אמיתית לדעת את ה' מקטנם
ועד גדולם ולהיות כלם מתהפכים שפה אחת
דברים אחדים לקרוא כולם בשם ה'.

This Psalm references Messianic days and we pray that Hashem save us from the persecutions of exile and that we will be truly successful during the Messianic Era for both old and young to know Hashem. Everyone will change and use a common language to call out in unison in the name of Hashem.

Rav Soloveitchik has identified the final verses of Hallel, the ones used by Rebbe, as expressions of supplication and prayer. Meiri teaches us what those prayers were *for*: That Hashem save us from the persecutions of exile and bring us to a Messianic Era where everyone will know Hashem.

Perhaps we now have an explanation of R' Elazar's perspective: Dovid HaMelech's unlikely rise, for which Klal Yisrael is so grateful, could not have been anything other than the hand of Hashem. Dovid, once a shepherd, was prophetically promised a seemingly unlikely rise to greatness and he is now a king. Having witnessed Dovid's astonishing change of fortune, Klal Yisrael was now reassured that the promise of Messianic redemption would certainly be actualized.

R' Elazar saw fit to double the verses not because he saw fit to repeat them, but because he didn't see them as saying the same thing twice. The first recitation was as thanks for the rise of Dovid HaMelech. The second, rather than a repetition, was as thanks for the confidence Klal Yisrael could now have for the days of Mashiach.

Rambam expresses a similar thought, in his introduction to *Mishneh Torah*. After identifying and listing the 613 mitzvot given at Sinai, he discusses the role of the Rabbis. Their fleshing out the details of the 613 also has the status of Torah Law, he says, as it was rooted in traditions passed down from Sinai. The Rabbis had another role, he says, which was to innovate and legislate post-Sinai "Rabbinnic" mitzvot. Examples, he says, are Megilla and Chanukah.

To what purpose were these innovations?

שהנביאים עם בית דין תקנו וצוו לקרות המגלה בעונתה כדי להזכיר שבחיו של הקדוש ברוך הוא ותשועות שעשה לנו והיה קרוב לשועינו, כדי לברכו ולהללו וכדי להודיע לדורות הבאים שאמת מה שהבטיחנו בתורה כי מי גוי גדול אשר לו אלהים קרובים אליו כה' אלקינו בכל קראנו אליו.

The prophets and the courts ordained and commanded that the Megilla be

*read at its [appointed] time in order to recall the praise of the Holy One, blessed be He, the salvation He wrought for us, and his response to our cries, so that we will bless Him, extol Him, and inform the future generations of the truth of the Torah's promise (Devarim 4:7): "What nation is so great that it has God close to it..."*⁹

The Rabbis initiated certain mitzvot so that we recall the praise of Hashem, the salvation He wrought for us and His response to our cries, so that we will bless Him, extol Him, and inform the future generations of the truth of the Torah's promise.

The Rambam says this last detail about Megilla, but I believe he would apply it to Chanukah and its Hallel as well, given that in his *Mishneh Torah*, Rambam groups the laws of Chanukah and Megilla together.

So, as we recite Hallel eight days of Chanukah, and particularly as we double the final verses in Hallel, let us have in mind to emphasize the confidence we have in Hashem to fulfill His promises to His people, "to recall the praise of the Holy One, blessed be He, the salvation He wrought for us, and his response to our cries, so that we will bless Him, extol Him, and inform the future generations of the truth of the Torah's promise (Devarim 4:7): "What nation is so great that it has God close to it..."

Endnotes

1 Rambam, *Hilchot Megillah UChanukah* ch. 3

2 *Yabia Omer, Orach Chaim* 6:5:
וכיום אנו נוהגים לכפול מאורך ולמטה עד סוף ההלל, וזה כמנהג אשכנז, שהובא בטור (סי' תכב), ושלא כמנהג ספרד המובא בטור שם, אף על פי שמרן הב"י כ' להסביר טעם מנהג ספרד בזה. ע"ש.

Today, our practice is to repeat from odecha until the end of Hallel. This is the Ashkenazic tradition recorded in Tur (no. 422) and not like

the Sefaradic tradition recorded in Tur, even though [R. Yosef Karo] in Beit Yosef explained the Sefaradic tradition.

3 *Reshimot Shiurim, Sukka* 39a.

4 *Mishna, Sukka* ch. 3:
מקום שנהגו לכפול יפשוט יפשוט לברך אחריו יברך אחריו הכל כמנהג המדינה:

In a place where the tradition is to repeat, one should repeat; to recite once, one should recite once; to recite a blessing afterward, one should recite a blessing. Everything follows local tradition.

5 Rambam, *Hilchot Megillah UChanukah* 3:11:
ומקום שנהגו לכפול יכפול ומקום שנהגו שלא לכפול אין כופלין.

In a place where the tradition is to repeat, one should repeat and in a place where the tradition is not to repeat, one should not repeat.

6 *Megillah* 18a:
מכאן ואילך אסור לספר בשבחיו של הקדוש ברוך הוא ... אמר רבה בר בר חנה אמר רבי יוחנן: המספר בשבחיו של הקדוש ברוך הוא יותר מדאי נעקר מן העולם.

More than that, one may not speak of the praises of the Holy One Blessed be He ... Rabbah bar bar Chana said in the name of R. Yochanan: One who speaks of too much praise of the Holy One Blessed be He is uprooted from the world.

7 *Berachot* 32b:
אנן הני תלת דאמרינן אי לאו דאמרינן משה רבינו באורייתא ואתו אנשי כנסת הגדולה ותקנינןהו בתפלה לא הוינן יכולין למימר להו ואת אמרת כולי האי ואולת. *The three praises that we mentioned (gadol—great, gibor—mighty, nora—awesome), if not for the fact that Moshe Rabbeinu said them in the Torah and the Men of the Great Assembly instituted them into the prayers, we would not be permitted to say them, and you want to say more?*

8 *Panim Yafot, Devarim* 9:18.

9 *Minyan HaMitzvot of Rambam*, translation by Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, as posted to Chabad.org

