

The Recitation of Hallel in Synagogue on the First Night of Pesach

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Pesach is a holiday that features many different *minhagim* (customs). These *minhagim* provide diversity within a community as many people tend to observe the *minhagim* of their familial origins. One that highlights this diversity is the *minhag* to recite Hallel in the synagogue on the first night of Pesach. For hundreds of years, there have been synagogues that recite Hallel and synagogues that don't. In this article, we will discuss the various reasons for this *minhag*, the practical differences between these reasons and what one should do if one's personal custom is different than the custom of the synagogue.

The Reasons for the *Minhag*

By way of introduction, there is an obligation to recite Hallel at the Seder. This Hallel is different in many ways from the Hallel that is recited in the synagogue on Yom Tov. Most notably, Hallel at the Seder does not require a *minyan* (ten adult Jewish males); part of the Hallel is recited before the meal and the rest is recited after the meal; and there is no *beracha* recited prior to Hallel at the Seder.

Rashba (1235-1310) provides a source for reciting Hallel in the synagogue on the first night of Pesach from the Talmud Yerushalmi:

If [the beracha] is adjacent to another beracha such as [the berachot of] Keri'at Sh'ma and the Amidah, it does not begin with baruch. R. Yirmiyah asked regarding Geulah [the beracha at the conclusion of Maggid]. One can respond based on the statement of R. Yochanan that if one heard [Hallel] in the synagogue, one has fulfilled his obligation.

Talmud Yerushalmi, Berachot 1:5

ואם היתה ברכה סמוכה לחבירתה
כגון ק"ש ותפילה אין פותחין בהן
בברוך התיב רבי ירמיה הרי גאולה
שנייא היא דמר רבי יוחנן הלל אם
שמעה בבית הכנסת יצא.
תלמוד ירושלמי ברכות א:ה

There is a rule that if there are two *berachot* that are recited as part of a series, the second *beracha* does not open with "*baruch*." R. Yirmiyah questions this rule from the *beracha* of "*Asher Ge'alanu*"

which is recited at the Seder at the end of *Maggid* immediately after the opening of Hallel, yet it opens with "baruch." Shouldn't the *beracha* recited on Hallel obviate the need to recite "baruch" on the *beracha* that follows? R. Yochanan responds that if one already recited Hallel in the synagogue, one would not recite a *beracha* on Hallel at the Seder. Therefore, "*Asher Ge'alanu*" is not necessarily connected with another *beracha* and should open with "baruch." Rashba comments:

According to the consensus of the great masters, it seems that this is the explanation of the Talmud Yerushalmi that I mentioned earlier: "One can respond based on the statement of R. Yochanan that if one heard [Hallel] in the synagogue, one has fulfilled his obligation," therefore, the primary institution to read [Hallel] was for the synagogue and not for the house. It is for the reading in the synagogue that they instituted a beracha because it is the primary reading. In the house one does not [recite a beracha]. It must be this way, because it would not make sense that one who hears it in the synagogue fulfills the mitzvah and does not recite a beracha at his table but one who did not hear it in the synagogue would recite Hallel at his table and recite a beracha. People will say [how can it be] that two people are in the same house, one recites Hallel with a beracha and one without?

Chiddushei HaRashba, Berachot 11a

ולפי הסכמה זו של גאוני עולם ז"ל נראה פירוש הירושלמי שכתבתי למעלה דהכי קאמר שנייה היא שאם שמעה בבית הכנסת יצא והלכך עיקר תקנת קריאתו בבית הכנסת היה ולא בבית ובקריאת ביהכ"נ הוא שתקנו לברך שהיא עיקר התקנה ומצות הקריאה אבל בבית לא, וכן בדין הוא שאלו מי ששמעה בבית הכנסת יצא ואינו מברך על שלחנו ומי שלא שמעה בבית הכנסת גומר על שלחנו ומברך יאמרו שנים בבית אחד זה קורא ומברך וזה קורא ואינו מברך. **הידושי הרשב"א ברכות יא.**

According to Rashba, the primary recitation of Hallel on the first night of Pesach occurs in the synagogue. For this reason, the *beracha* is recited in the synagogue and not at the Seder.

R. Ya'akov ben Asher (1269-1343) provides a different rationale for the *minhag*:

Regarding the beracha on Hallel, there is a dispute among the rabbis. Ritzba would recite two berachot: one before the meal and one after the meal. This was also the practice of Maharam MiRutenberg, Rav Hai, Rav Tzemach and Rav Amram. However, Ritz Gi'at and Avi Ha'Ezri wrote that one should not recite a beracha at all because we split Hallel and recite part of it before the meal and part of it after. Therefore, how can one recite a beracha with an interruption in the middle? This was also the opinion of my father, my master, the Rosh. This is what one should do on every matter that involves doubt regarding its beracha: one should not recite a beracha because berachot do not prevent [fulfillment of a mitzvah]. There are places that recite Hallel in the synagogue publicly in order that they won't have to recite a beracha when reciting Hallel during the Haggadah. This minhag is good and pleasant.

Tur, Orach Chaim no. 473

בענין ברכת ההלל איכא פלוגתא דרבוותא ריצב"א היה מברך עליו ב"פ אחת קודם אכילה ואחת אחר אכילה וכן היה נוהג ה"ר מאיר מרוטנבורק וכ"כ רב האי ורב צמח ורב עמרם אבל הרי"ף גיאת ואבי העזרי כתבו שאין לברך עליו כלל לפי שהולקים אותו לשנים לפני הסעודה ולאחריה וא"כ האיך יברכו כיון שפוסקים באמצע וכן היה נוהג א"א הרא"ש ז"ל וכן ראוי לעשות בכל דבר שיש ספק בברכתו שאין לברך דברכות אינן מעכבות ויש מקומות שנוהגין לקרות ההלל בב"ה בציבור כדי שלא יצטרכו לברך עליו בשעת ההגדה ומה טוב ומה נעים ההיא מנהגא. **טור או"ח ס' תעג**

According to Tur, the recitation of Hallel in the synagogue is a means of avoiding a *berachot* dilemma. There is a dispute as to whether one should recite a *beracha* on Hallel at the Seder due to the interruption of the meal. One can avoid the issue by reciting Hallel in the synagogue, where there is no interruption.

R. Menachem Meiri (1249-1306) provides a third explanation for the minhag:

This applies to those who have the minhag to recite Hallel in the synagogue before the day starts as a remembrance for the Hallel in the Azarah that they used to recite when they slaughtered the Korban Pesach.

Beit HaBechira, Pesachim 117b

והוא שהיה מנהגם לקרוא את
ההלל בבית הכנסת מבעוד יום
זכר להלל שבעזרה שהיו אומרים
בשעת שחיטת פסחים.
בית הבחירה פסחים קיז:

The Mishna, *Pesachim* 64a, states that Hallel was recited when the *Korban Pesach* was slaughtered. Meiri suggests that the recitation of Hallel in the synagogue is a remembrance for the Hallel that was recited at the time of slaughtering the *Korban Pesach*.

It should be noted that there are some who have the practice of reciting Hallel if they bake matzah on the afternoon of the 14th. The purpose of this practice is to commemorate the Hallel that was recited when they slaughtered the *Korban Pesach*. The practice is recorded in R. Alexander Ziskind of Grodno's (d. 1794), *Yesod V'Shores Ha'Avodah* 9:4. R. Yitzchak Safrin, *Shulchan HaTahor* (in *Zer Zahav*, ch. 6 at note 23), adds that the *minhag* in Jerusalem is to recite this Hallel with a *beracha*.

A fourth reason for this minhag is provided by the Vilna Gaon (1720-1797). In his *Bei'ur HaGra to Orach Chaim* 487:4, the Vilna Gaon suggests that the *minhag* was instituted to provide those who don't know how to recite Hallel the ability to fulfill the mitzvah.¹

R. Chaim Soloveitchik² provided a fifth reason for reciting Hallel in the synagogue on the first night of Pesach. According to R. Chaim, there are two independent reasons to recite Hallel on the first night of Pesach. The first is a function of the obligation to recite Hallel on Yom Tov. While Hallel on Yom Tov is normally recited during the day, the Gemara, *Erchin* 10b, derives the obligation from the verse (Yeshaya 30:29) equating Yom Tov to the night of Pesach, implying that there is a special obligation to recite Hallel on the first night of Pesach. The second is a function of the obligation to recite Hallel as part of the Seder. Hallel as a function of Yom Tov can be fulfilled throughout the night. Hallel as a function of the Seder can only be fulfilled at the Seder. Since Hallel as a function of Yom Tov can be fulfilled throughout the night, it is preferable to recite it at the first possible moment. For this reason, it is recited in the synagogue at the conclusion of Ma'ariv.

Practical Differences between the Reasons

There are a number of practical differences between the reasons given for the *minhag* to recite Hallel in the synagogue on the first nights of Pesach. The first difference is in the timeframe of

¹ See also, *Bei'ur HaGra to Orach Chaim* 671:7, where he implies that the *minhag* was instituted in order to publicize the miracles of Pesach in a public setting (*pirsummei nisa*).

² Quoted in *Shiurim L'Zecher Abba Mari* Vol. I (page 3) and in *Harerei Kedem* Vol. II, no. 101.

the recitation of Hallel. The *Korban Pesach* was slaughtered on the 14th of Nissan during the day. The Seder does not begin until nightfall of the 15th. Meiri - following his explanation that the recitation of Hallel serves to commemorate the Hallel that was recited at the slaughter of the *Korban Pesach*- states that Hallel should be recited before sundown. If one assumes that Hallel in the synagogue relates to the Hallel at the Seder, it is arguable that one should not recite Hallel until the evening. Another factor to consider is the concept of *tosefet Yom Tov*, which allows one to accept Yom Tov before the actual time. Tosafot, *Pesachim* 99b, s.v. *Ad*, note that *tosefet Yom Tov* does not allow one to perform the mitzvot of the Seder before nightfall. This would include Hallel in the synagogue if one assumes that it relates to the Hallel at the Seder. According to R. Chaim, the Hallel in the synagogue does not relate to the Seder and perhaps *tosefet Yom Tov* is applicable, allowing one to recite Hallel before nightfall.

Second, R. Chaim Y.D. Azulai (1724-1807), *Birkei Yosef, Orach Chaim* 487:8, writes that if someone whose *minhag* is to recite Hallel attends a synagogue that does not recite Hallel, he may recite Hallel privately with a *beracha* after the services. This ruling can assume any of the reasons for the *minhag* except the reason of the Vilna Gaon. R. Moshe Shternbuch, *Moadim U'Zmanim* 7:179, notes that according to the Vilna Gaon, the reason for reciting Hallel in the synagogue is to benefit those who are not able to recite Hallel at home and ostensibly, there is no reason to recite Hallel privately and if one does so, one may not recite a *beracha*.

Third, there are some communities that recite Hallel in the synagogue but do not recite a *beracha*. [See for example, *Minhagei Chatam Sofer* note 8 and *Dinim V'Hanhagot MiMaran HaChazon Ish, Pesach* no. 28.] This practice seems to be a way of fulfilling the *minhag* while showing deference to the opinions that one should not recite Hallel (which will be discussed in the next section). In reality, this does not fulfill all opinions because according to R. Ya'akov ben Asher, the purpose of the *minhag* is to provide the ability to recite a *beracha*. As such, there is no fulfillment of the *minhag* if one recites Hallel without a *beracha*.

Why the *Minhag* is not Universally Accepted

As we noted earlier, this *minhag* is not observed by everyone.

On the first night of Pesach, we complete Hallel in the congregation in a pleasant manner and with a beracha at the beginning and end. The same applies on the second night of [those in the Diaspora who observe] the second day of Yom Tov for the Diaspora. Rama: We do not observe any of this because we don't recite Hallel in the synagogue at night at all.

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 487:4

בליל ראשון של פסח גומרין ההלל בצבור בנעימה בברכה תחלה וסוף וכן בליל שני של שני ימים טובים של גלויות. הגה: וכל זה אין אנו נוהגים כן כי אין אנו אומרים בלילה בבית הכנסת ההלל כלל.

שלחן ערוך או"ח תפז:ד

R. Yosef Karo's *Shulchan Aruch* records Sephardic tradition that one should observe this *minhag*. Ashkenazic tradition follows the comments of Rama (R. Moshe Iserles 1520-1572) that one should not observe this *minhag*.³

³ Some Ashkenazic communities have adopted the practice of reciting *Hallel*. See, for example, *Sefer Eretz Yisrael* page 62, *Igrot Moshe, O.C. 2:94*, citing those who follow the practices of the Vilna Gaon and *Teshuvot Maharshag* 1:30.

There are two basic reasons presented why one should not recite Hallel in the synagogue on the first nights of Pesach. First, R. Naftali Z.Y. Berlin (1816-1893), *Meishiv Davar* 1:13, writes that the ideal time to fulfill the mitzvah of Hallel is at its proper place in the Seder. If one recites Hallel earlier, one fulfills the mitzvah of Hallel, but not in the ideal form. Once one fulfills the mitzvah, there is no additional fulfillment when one repeats it at the Seder. Therefore, many people refrain from reciting Hallel in the synagogue so as not to fulfill the mitzvah of Hallel in a non-ideal form. R. Yitzchak Z. Soloveitchik (1866-1959, cited in *S'deh Avraham, Moadim* no. 18) presents a similar objection to the *minhag*. The Gemara, *Pesachim* 108b, states that if one drinks all four cups of wine together, he fulfills the aspect of drinking wine, but not the obligation to drink four cups. R. Soloveitchik explains that in order to fulfill the mitzvah of drinking four cups of wine, one must drink each cup after a specific part of the Seder.⁴ The fourth cup of wine must be drunk after Hallel. If one recites Hallel in the synagogue and fulfills his obligation, he cannot fulfill the mitzvah of Hallel again at the Seder and therefore, cannot fulfill the mitzvah of drinking the fourth cup.

The Vilna Gaon, op. cit., presents the other reason why this *minhag* is not universally accepted. He explains that since the reason for reciting Hallel in the synagogue is to provide those who don't know how to recite Hallel the opportunity to recite Hallel, communities whose congregants know how to recite Hallel are not required to recite it in the synagogue.

Divergent Practices in the Same Synagogue

As we noted earlier, it is common for some congregants in a synagogue to have a *minhag* that differs from that of the synagogue's *minhag*. R. Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986), *Igrot Moshe, O.C.* 2:94, notes that one may not publicly deviate from the synagogue's practice. Therefore, if one is in a synagogue that recites Hallel and his own *minhag* is to refrain from reciting Hallel, he should recite Hallel with the congregation. In terms of the *berachot*, R. Feinstein writes that if he can skip the *berachot* in a manner that won't be noticeable, he should do so, but if not, he may recite the *berachot* as well. R. Moshe Shternbuch op. cit., questions R. Feinstein's ruling that it is permissible to recite a *beracha*. It is reported (in *Haggadah Shel Pesach MiBeit Levi, Kovetz Hosafot* page 65 and *MiPninei HaRav* page 88) that R. Yitzchak Z. Soloveitchik used to walk out of the synagogue while the congregation recited Hallel. This implies that he rejects R. Feinstein's premise that one must recite Hallel with the congregation, even if that is not one's *minhag*.⁵

If one has the *minhag* to recite Hallel and is in a congregation that omits it, the only option is to recite it privately. According to R. Azulai, one may recite Hallel with a *beracha* privately. R. Shternbuch, op. cit., concludes that one should not recite a *beracha* unless he recites Hallel together with the congregation.

⁴ See R. Soloveitchik's *Chiddushei Maran Riz HaLevi, Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah* 7:7, where he develops this idea further.

⁵ It is possible that R. Soloveitchik did not view reciting Hallel with the congregation as a valid option based on his aforementioned opinion that recitation of Hallel in the synagogue prevents one from fulfilling the mitzvah of drinking four cups of wine.

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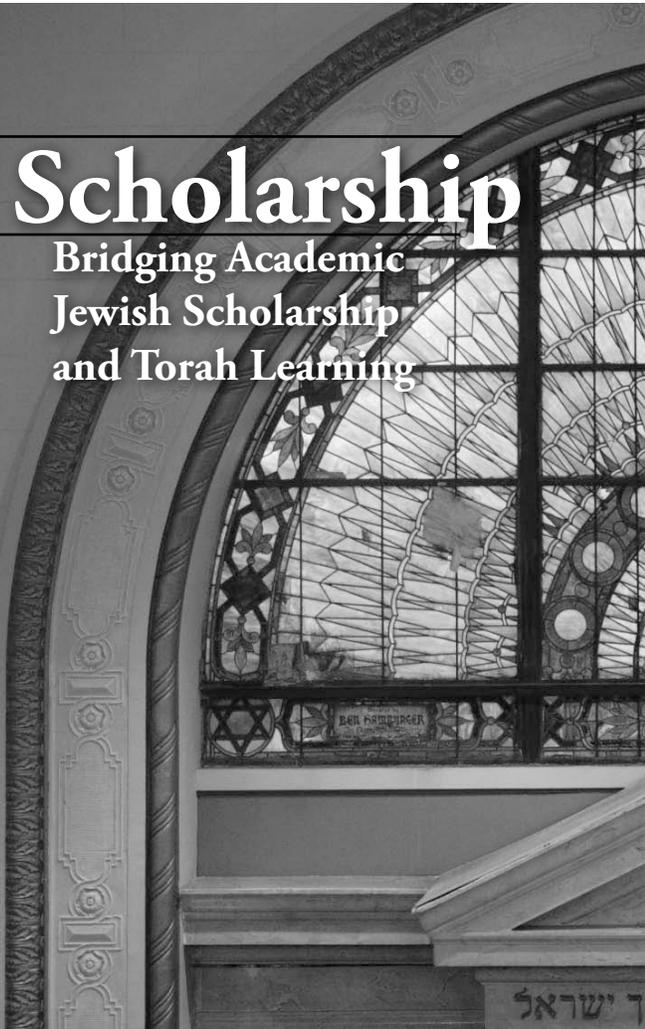
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