

Yemei Hallel V'Hoda'ah: The Recitation of Hallel and Al HaNissim on Chanukah

Rabbi Joshua Flug

Director of Torah Research, Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future

The Gemara, *Shabbat* 21b, in recounting the story of Chanukah, states that the days of Chanukah were instituted as days of *hallel* (praise) and *hoda'ah* (thanksgiving). Rashi, ad loc., s.v. *Hachi*, explains that *hallel* refers to the recitation of Hallel (in the morning prayers) and *hoda'ah* refers to the recitation of Al HaNissim. According to Rashi, the recitation of Hallel and Al HaNissim is part of the original institution of Chanukah.¹ In this guide, we will discuss some practical aspects of reciting Hallel and Al HaNissim.

Hallel

- A full Hallel is recited all eight days of Chanukah.²
- There is a dispute as to whether women are obligated to recite Hallel on Chanukah.³ Nevertheless, according to Ashkenazi tradition, women may recite Hallel with its blessings even according to the opinion that women are exempt from the recitation of Hallel.⁴

¹ See R. Ezra Schwartz's article in this issue for a further discussion of this topic.

² Whenever there is an obligation to recite Hallel, a full Hallel is recited. The Gemara, *Pesachim* 117a, states that there is an obligation to recite Hallel to commemorate salvation from an enemy. Rashi, ad loc., s.v. *V'Al*, writes that an example of this type of obligation is the obligation to recite Hallel on Chanukah. This doesn't explain why there is an obligation to recite Hallel all eight days of Chanukah. Perhaps this can be explained based on the comments of Maharal, *Chiddushei Aggadot to Shabbat* 21b, that while the primary miracle of Chanukah was the defeat of the Greeks, this miracle was not recognized universally as a miracle. The miracle of the oil signaled that the defeat of the Greeks was a miracle of the same magnitude. Perhaps this is the reason why Hallel is recited for eight days. While celebration of the miracle of the war should have only been a one-day celebration, the rabbis of the time were given a message through the miracle of the oil that it is worthy to celebrate the miracle of the war for eight days. In the song *Maoz Tzur*, we recite "*bnei binah ymei shmonah kav'u shir u'rinanim*," sons of knowledge instituted eight days of song and praise. Who were these *bnei binah*? R. Yehuda Assad, *Teshuvot Yehuda Ya'aleh, Orach Chaim* no. 200, suggests that the *bnei binah* were those who were able to look back and see that it is worthy to celebrate this miracle for eight days. Once these *bnei binah* saw that the miracle of the oil lasted for eight days, they realized that it is worthy to celebrate the miracle of the war for eight days.

³ Tosafot, *Sukkah* 38a, s.v. *Mi*, note that women are exempt from reciting Hallel on Yom Tov because its recitation is a time-bound positive mitzvah and women are generally exempt from this type of mitzvah. However, Tosafot note that women are obligated to recite Hallel on the first night(s) of Pesach and explain that Hallel on the first night of Pesach commemorates the miracle of the Exodus. Since women were part of the miracle (*afhen hayu b'oto*

- If someone came late to the synagogue and is faced with the choice of reciting Hallel with the congregation or beginning one's morning prayers, it is preferable to recite Hallel with the congregation and then recite the morning prayers as long as there is no concern that by doing so, one will miss the final time to recite *keriat sh'ma* or the Amidah.⁵
- One may not speak during the recitation of Hallel unless it is for an urgent matter.⁶
- During Hallel, one may respond to Kaddish (*Yehei Shmei Rabbah* etc.), Kedusha (*Kadosh Kadosh* etc. and *Baruch Kevod* etc.) or *Barchu*. If one is between paragraphs, one may also respond Amen to blessings of the chazzan.⁷
- Hallel must be recited in the proper order. If one skipped a paragraph (e.g., one thought that only a "half Hallel" is recited) or even a word, one should return to the paragraph or word that was skipped and continue from there.⁸
- Hallel should be recited while standing. If someone has difficulty standing, it is permissible to lean on something.⁹

Al HaNissim

- Al HaNissim is inserted into the blessing of thanksgiving, both in the Amidah (*Modim*) and in Birkat HaMazon (*Nodeh lecha*).¹⁰ It is recited in the Mussaf Amidah (of Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh) as well, even though Chanukah does not generate an obligation to recite Mussaf.¹¹

ha-nes), the exemption of time-bound positive mitzvot is waved. R. Shimon Sofer, *Hitorerut Teshuva* 3:271, writes that the same logic should be applied to Chanukah and therefore, women are obligated to recite Hallel on Chanukah. Rambam, *Hilchot Chanukah* 3:14, implies that women are exempt from the recitation of Hallel on Chanukah.

⁴ *Mishna Berurah*, *Bei'ur Halacha* 422:2, rules that like other time-bound positive mitzvot, a woman who is exempt from reciting Hallel may voluntarily recite Hallel with its blessings.

⁵ Rama, *Orach Chaim* 422:2, writes that on Rosh Chodesh one should try to recite Hallel with the congregation. *Mishna Berurah* 422:16, explains that this is to satisfy the opinions that one does not recite the blessings of Hallel on Rosh Chodesh when reciting Hallel individually. *Mishna Berurah* notes that this reasoning does not apply when there is an obligation to recite a full Hallel and even an individual may recite the blessings according to all opinions. Nevertheless, *Mishna Berurah* 488:3 writes that one should still try to recite Hallel together with the congregation even if it means reciting Hallel before the morning prayers.

⁶ Rama, *Orach Chaim* 422:4, writes that the laws of interrupting a full Hallel follow the same laws as interrupting *keriat sh'ma*, which are found in *Orach Chaim* no. 66. These laws are somewhat complex and beyond the scope of this guide.

⁷ See note 6. *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 66:3, and *Mishna Berurah* ad loc.

⁸ *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 422:6. This applies even if a long time elapsed until one realized that a portion of Hallel was skipped. See *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 422:5.

⁹ R. Tzidkiyah HaRofei, *Shibolei HaLeket* no. 173, provides two reasons why Hallel should be recited while standing. First, Hallel is modeled after the songs of the Levites in the Beit HaMikdash. Since it is prohibited to sit in the *Azarah* (courtyard of the Temple), the Levites sang while standing and we do the same. Second, Hallel is a form of testimony for the great miracles that God has performed for us, and testimony is always recited while standing. *Mishna Berurah*, *Bei'ur Halacha* 422:7, notes the opinion of Tosafot, *Zevachim* 19b s.v. *V'Leitav*, that it is permissible to lean in the *Azarah* and therefore suggests that according to the first reason, it is permissible to lean while reciting Hallel. According to the second reason, it is prohibited to lean in a manner where one would fall if the item that one is leaning on was suddenly removed. *Mishna Berurah* notes that ideally, one should try to satisfy the second reason, but implies that in a case of need, one may lean.

¹⁰ *Shabbat* 24a and *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 682:1.

- If one forgot to recite Al HaNissim, either in the Amidah or in Birkat HaMazon, there is no obligation to repeat the Amidah or Birkat HaMazon.¹²
- If one forgot Al HaNissim and did not yet recite the name of God in the conclusion of the thanksgiving blessing, one may recite Al HaNissim and then continue through the conclusion of the blessing.¹³
- One who forgot Al HaNissim and has not yet concluded Birkat HaMazon may insert Al HaNissim into the *HaRachaman* section by stating “הרחמן הוא יעשה לנו נסים ונפלאות כשם שעשית לאבותינו בימים” He Who is Merciful, may He provide miracles for us as He did in ancient times during these days. In the days of Matityahu etc. Similarly, if one has not yet concluded the Amidah, one may recite this formulation before “*yihiyu l’ratzon*.”¹⁴
- Al HaNissim is not recited in the *Beracha Me’ain Shalosh* (commonly known as *Al HaMichya*).¹⁵

¹¹ The Gemara, *Shabbat* 24a, presents a dispute as to whether Al HaNissim should be recited in the Mussaf Amidah. According to R. Huna, Chanukah does not generate an obligation to recite Mussaf, and therefore, there is no reason to mention Chanukah in Mussaf. According to R. Nachman, “the day is one that requires four prayers.” R. Nachman’s opinion seems to be that Al HaNissim is not an insertion special for Chanukah. Rather, on Chanukah, when one recites a prayer of thanksgiving, it is appropriate to mention the miracles of Chanukah (see note 15). As such, when one recites Modim in Mussaf, one should include Al HaNissim. R. Nachman’s opinion is codified as normative in *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 682:2.

¹² The Tosefta, *Berachot* 3:12, states that one who omits Al HaNissim from the Amidah is not required to repeat the Amidah. *Tur, Orach Chaim* no. 682, applies this ruling to Birkat HaMazon as well. *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 682:1, codifies both of these rulings.

¹³ *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 682:1. In certain situations we allow someone who only recited “*Baruch Atah HaShem*” to conclude with “*lamdeni chukecha*” (there is a verse in Tehillim 119:12, “*Baruch Atah HaShem lamdeini chukecha*, which is not considered a formal blessing), and then recite the special insertion. *Mishna Berurah, Sha’ar HaTziyun* 188:18, does not permit it in this situation and writes that it is only applicable when the omission would otherwise require one to repeat Birkat HaMazon (or the Amidah).

¹⁴ The suggestion to recite Al HaNissim in the *HaRachaman* section originally appears in *Kol Bo*, no. 25, and is codified by Rama, *Orach Chaim* 682:1. *Mishna Berurah* 682:4, applies it to the Amidah as well. R. Alexander Shor, *Tevu’ot Shor, Shabbat* 21b, objects to *Kol Bo*’s suggestion based on a statement of the Gemara, *Berachot* 60a, that one should not pray for a miracle. *Kol Bo*’s suggestion seems to include a prayer for a miracle. R. Shor notes that perhaps one can justify *Kol Bo*’s position and distinguish between praying for miracles that appear to be supernatural and miracles that appear to be natural. Those that appear to be supernatural are prohibited and those that appear to be natural are permitted. Al HaNissim only mentions the miracle of the war, which was a miracle that appeared to be natural. R. Shlomo Kluger, *Chochmat Shlomo, Orach Chaim* 682:1, justifies *Kol Bo*’s position by positing that the prohibition to pray for a miracle only applies to a miracle that impacts individuals. However, it is permissible to pray for a miracle that affects the entire congregation. R. Ya’akov Orenstein, *Yeshuot Ya’akov, Orach Chaim* 682:2, also distinguishes between praying for a private miracle and praying for a public miracle. He suggests that the reason why it is not appropriate to pray for a miracle is that if the prayer is answered and the miracle occurs, one’s merits are diminished. However, if one prays for a miracle that affects the masses, the *Kiddush HaShem* that is produced by a public miracle outweighs other considerations.

¹⁵ R. Chaim Soloveitchik (cited in *Haggadah Shel Pesach MiBeit Levi* page 233) suggests that the reason why Chanukah and Purim are not mentioned in the *Beracha Me’ain Shalosh* is based on the concept of the compensatory blessing for Birkat HaMazon, which allows one who omits *R’tzei* or *Ya’aleh V’Yavo* from the Birkat HaMazon of Shabbat and Yom Tov to recite a compensatory blessing after *U’vnei Yerushalayim* instead of returning to the beginning of Birkat HaMazon (See *Berachot* 49a-b). This blessing is only available for the additions for Shabbat, Yom Tov and Rosh Chodesh. R. Chaim explains that the *Beracha Me’ain Shalosh* is an abridged form of all of the *berachot* of Birkat HaMazon. Anything that is not a *beracha* is not included in the *Beracha Me’ain Shalosh*. Although the additions for Shabbat, Yom Tov and Rosh Chodesh don’t normally appear as independent *berachot*,

- Before the congregation begins the Amidah on Chanukah, the gabbai may announce the recitation of Al HaNissim at Mincha and Ma'ariv,¹⁶ but not at Shacharit.¹⁷
- If one began a meal at the end of Chanukah and the meal extended into the night, one should recite Al HaNissim in Birkat HaMazon as long as one has not yet recited Ma'ariv.¹⁸

they have the potential to exist as independent *berachot* in the form of the compensatory blessing. Al HaNissim, which is not an independent blessing, is therefore omitted. R. Yosef D. Soloveitchik (cited in *Harerei Kedem* Vol. I, page 302), presents a slightly different answer than that of his grandfather, R. Chaim. He suggests that the additions of Shabbat, Yom Tov and Rosh Chodesh have a different status than the additions of Chanukah and Purim. On Shabbat, Yom Tov and Rosh Chodesh, the function of the additions is to mention the day. On Chanukah and Purim, the function of Al HaNissim is to provide a more detailed account of God's providence in the thanksgiving section of the Amidah and Birkat HaMazon. Therefore, the additions of Shabbat, Yom Tov and Rosh Chodesh are considered independent portions of Birkat HaMazon. Al HaNissim is not an independent portion of Birkat HaMazon, rather an extension of the thanksgiving section. *Beracha Mei'ain Shalosh*, whose purpose is to provide an abridged version of Birkat HaMazon, abridges all portions of Birkat HaMazon by providing the main idea of each portion, including the additions for Shabbat, Yom Tov and Rosh Chodesh. Al HaNissim, which is not an independent portion and is not the main idea of the thanksgiving section, is therefore omitted from the *Beracha Mei'ain Shalosh*.

¹⁶ The Gemara, *Berachot* 9b, praises those who begin their Amidah immediately (and without interruption) after reciting the blessing of *Ga'al Yisrael*. The laws determining which interruptions are permissible during prayer are the most stringent between *Ga'al Yisrael* and the Amidah. Nevertheless, Rashba, in his responsa 1:293, permits announcing *Ya'aleh V'Yavo* in the synagogue on Rosh Chodesh immediately before the beginning of the Ma'ariv Amidah because it is beneficial to the prayer (*tzorech hatefillah*). Rashba's ruling is codified in *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 236:2. *Mishna Berurah* 236:7, notes that Rashba's ruling is not limited to insertions that would require one to repeat the Amidah. It also applies to Al HaNissim.

¹⁷ See note 16. While Rashba's logic could theoretically be applied to Shacharit and one could argue that announcing *Ya'aleh V'Yavo* or Al HaNissim at Shacharit is beneficial to the prayer and permissible, Rabbeinu Asher, *Ta'anit* 1:2, writes that we do not begin the recitation of *geshem* (rain) at Shacharit because it is not permissible to announce it at Shacharit. *Mishna Berurah, Sha'ar HaTziyun* 236:4, deduces from Rabbeinu Asher's comments (which are quoted in *Taz, Orach Chaim* 114:2), that Shacharit is treated more stringently than Ma'ariv regarding making announcements before the Amidah and therefore, one may not make announcements before the Shacharit Amidah.

¹⁸ *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 188:9 and *Mishna Berurah* 188:32.