



A HALLEL BY ANY OTHER NAME: THE OMISSION OF HALLEL ON PURIM

Twenty-one. It's not just a drinking age or a winning hand in blackjack. Precisely twenty-one days a year, as the Gemara¹ reports, Jews living in the Diaspora recite a full rendition of Hallel. That list is limited to all nine days of Sukkos (including Shmini Atzeres and Simchas Torah), both days of Shavuos, the first two days of Pesach, and all eight days of Chanukah.

Now read that list again. Notice any anomalies? The Gemara noticed three. And it devotes the time to both articulate and resolve them. Let's quickly go through each one.

What happened to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the two most



recognizable holidays on the Jewish calendar? Are these two days of awe not worthy of a Hallel recitation? The Gemara² explains that the celebratory nature of Hallel is incongruous with the sobering theme of Rosh Hashanah

and Yom Kippur. "Is it possible," challenges the Gemara, "that the King is sitting upon the throne of judgment with the books of life and death open in front of Him, and the Jews are singing [Hallel]?" The joyous chanting of Hallel on the very days God is deciding the fate of all humanity is deemed to be grossly incompatible and highly inappropriate.

And what about Pesach? Each of the Shalosh Regalim — Sukkos, Shavuos and Pesach — merits a coveted spot on the Hallel list. And in fact, full Hallel is recited on each and every day of both Sukkos and Shavuos. Yet, full Hallel is only recited on the first two days of Pesach and not the last six. Why is it that we recite full Hallel

on every day of Sukkos and Shavuos but not every day of Pesach? Why should the holiday of Pesach... wait for it... be different from all other holidays? The Gemara,³ after pointing out this incongruity, resolves it with a rather technical (while fundamentally crucial) distinction that we will not be discussing in this forum.⁴

But there is one last glaring issue that we need to contemplate. The Gemara⁵ asks why Hallel is completely omitted on Purim. After all, its rabbinic counterpart, Chanukah, merits a recitation of full Hallel on each of its eight days. On Purim, however, we omit Hallel completely. Not a full or even half Hallel is to be found. Why? The Gemara presents three answers, and we will focus our attention on the last of them.⁶

R' Yitzchak explains that once the Jewish people entered the Land of Israel as a nation, Hallel was no longer recited on account of miraculous events that took place outside its boundaries. So while the miraculous

events of the Exodus from Egypt predate our crossing of the Jordan River, the spectacular story of Purim did not. As such, we recite Hallel on Pesach but omit it on Purim.

Rava explains that Hallel is only recited on a salvation or redemption that is complete and comprehensive. So while the Purim story celebrates how God extricated the Jews from Haman's evil plot, the dictatorial persecution under the rule of

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Ahashverosh persisted and therefore, reciting Hallel on Purim would be premature and misrepresentative of the storyline.

The third and final answer, presented by R' Nachman, is quite novel, and conceptually distinct from the prior two answers. R' Nachman explains that our assumption about not reciting Hallel on Purim is flawed. We do, in fact, recite Hallel on Purim (surprise!); it's just packaged differently. Instead of turning to the back of our siddurim as we are used to doing on holidays for the recitation of the familiar psalms of King David, the recitation of Megillas Esther on Purim takes the place of reciting Hallel. By publicly telling over the entire Purim story in full detail the way we do each and every year, we are praising and thanking Hashem for His love and concern for the Jewish people, which is precisely what Hallel is all about. By reading the Megillah in shul, we are fulfilling our right and obligation to recite Hallel on Purim.



This innovative opinion of R' Nachman's is accepted by several rishonim.⁷ The Rambam,⁸ for example, explicitly writes that there is no recitation of Hallel on the holiday of Purim because the reading of the Megillah is the Hallel. The Meiri⁹ then presents an even more novel corollary of R' Nachman's opinion. In a community where there is no Megillah to be found, since nobody in that location will be able to fulfill their obligation of reading the Megillah that morning, this group of people should make sure to recite full Hallel instead.

The logic of the Meiri certainly does seem to be reasonable and persuasive. The Gemara asked why there is no recitation of Hallel on Purim. R' Nachman explains that our reading of the Megillah on Purim morning also doubles as the Hallel recitation. Ergo, when reading the Megillah is not possible, one should, ostensibly, recite Hallel the way we normally would — a seemingly flawless argument. And yet, none of the other rishonim agree with the lone-voiced suggestion of the Meiri. Why not?

While Chanukah and Purim are often grouped together as twin holidays, they manifest more as fraternal twins than identical twins. That is to say, that while Chazal instituted both Chanukah and Purim to commemorate the Ribono Shel Olam's miraculous salvation performed on behalf of the Jewish people, the miracle narratives are very different from one another. On Chanukah, (in addition to the military victory that is often overlooked), we celebrate the story of the oil that supernaturally burned for eight days. We sing and dance over witnessing the hand of God suspending the laws of nature in front of our very eyes.

The overt and irrefutable miracle of the oil is the focal point of our joyous rejoicing on Chanukah.

But Purim celebrates an entirely different type of miracle. There was no overt suspension of nature or science. On Purim we celebrate the hidden hand of God that silently orchestrates the natural world around us while remaining unseen. The Purim story, as portrayed in Megillas Esther, does not describe God intervening or performing wondrous supernatural feats. It's a story containing several "coincidental" and improbable occurrences strung together scene after scene. No one event alone is impossible, but the likelihood of them all naturally occurring in immediate succession by mere happenstance is. The difference between Chanukah and Purim is the difference between a *neis nigleh*, an overt miracle, and a *neis nistar*, a concealed miracle. While the former is significantly more noticeable and monumental than the latter, both need to be acknowledged and applauded.

As such, Rav Yitzchak Hutner¹⁰ posits that the way we acknowledge, praise, and thank the Almighty for His miraculous intervention must correspond to the type of intervention that God puts forth. When God chooses to show Himself through a *neis nigleh*, openly and in plain sight, as He did on Chanukah, then we, commensurately, recite Hallel openly and plainly. However, when God chooses to show Himself through a *neis nistar*, hidden and non-obvious, as He did on Purim, then we, in turn, recite a hidden and non-obvious Hallel in the form of reading the Megillah. It's not that reading the Megillah is an alternate way of reciting Hallel on Purim; rather, it's the *only*

way to recite Hallel on Purim. In light of Rav Hutner's explanation, reciting Hallel on Purim in lieu of the Megillah, like the Meiri suggested, does not serve as a viable option.

Much like the story of Purim, God is not (easily) found in the text of the Megillah itself, but He is very much there if we read between the lines. Let us allow the holiday of Purim to remind us to constantly search for the hand of God that is always hiding between the lines in our lives.

Endnotes

1. Arachin (10a).

2. Ibid (10b).

3. Ibid.

4. Namely, that we bring a different set of korbanos each day of Sukkos, while the sacrificial lineup on each of the last six days of Pesach is identical.

5. Arachin (ibid), Megillah (14a).

6. The order of the three answers as printed in the Gemara has been adjusted for presentational purposes.

7. See Sha'arei Teshuva (693:3).

8. Mishneh Torah (Chanukah 3:6).

9. Beis Habechira (Megillah 14a).

10. Pachad Yitzchak (Purim 33).