

Should One Recite a *Beracha* on the Recitation of *Hallel* on *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut*?

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Yom Ha'Atzma'ut is Israel's Independence Day. It is celebrated every year on the fifth day of *Iyar*, corresponding to the Hebrew date of the declaration of independence and the foundation of the State of Israel on the fifth of *Iyar*, 5708 (May 14, 1948). One of the observances practiced on *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut* is the recitation of *Hallel*. In this article we will discuss the various opinions regarding whether one should recite a *beracha* on the recitation of *Hallel* on *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut*.

In order to analyze whether one should recite a *beracha* of *Hallel*, one must first determine the initial impetus to recite *Hallel*. We will present three different approaches to why *Hallel* should be recited and then analyze whether a *beracha* is applicable based on each approach.

Yom Ha'Atzma'ut as a Day of Savior from Persecution

R. Menachem Y. Ushpizai (former Chief Rabbi of Ramat Gan), in *Ohr HaMizrach* (Vol 36, pp. 241-247), suggests that the *Hallel* recited on *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut* is similar to the requirement to recite *Hallel* on Chanukah. The Gemara states:

Our Rabbis taught: Who uttered this Hallel? R. Eleazar said: Moses and Israel uttered it when they stood by the [Red] Sea ... But the Sages maintain: The prophets among them enacted that the Israelites should recite at every epoch and at every trouble — may it not come to them! —

תנו רבנן הלל זה מי אמרו רבי אליעזר אומר משה וישראל אמרוהו בשעה שעמדו על הים ... וחכמים אומרים נביאים שביניהן תיקנו להם לישראל שיהו אומרים אותו על כל פרק ופרק ועל כל צרה וצרה שלא תבא עליהם

and when they are redeemed, they recite it [in thankfulness] for their delivery.

Pesachim 117a (Soncino Translation)

לישראל ולכשנגאלין אומרים אותו על גאולתן.

פסחים קיז.

This phrase is a euphemism. It is meant to say that if G-d forbid, the Jewish People are in danger and they are saved from it, we say Hallel on the redemption, for example, Chanukah.

Rashi, ad loc., s.v. V'Al

ועל כל צרה שלא תבא עליהם - לישנא מעליא הוא דנקט כלומר שאם חס ושלום תבוא צרה עליהן ויושעו ממנה, אומרים אותו על גאולתן כגון חנוכה.

רש"י שם ד"ה ועל

According to the opinion of Chachamim (the sages), one recites *Hallel* on each of the holidays and when persecution of the Jewish People is prevented. Rashi specifically gives Chanukah as an example of *Hallel* that is recited for the prevention of persecution. R. Ushpizai notes that the Israeli Declaration of Independence also constitutes a prevention of persecution. Although the War of Independence began immediately after the Declaration of Independence, the establishing of the State of Israel enabled Jews from all over the world to come to Israel to escape persecution.

Nevertheless, there is a difficulty in comparing *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut* to Chanukah, based on the comments of Tosafot:

For even a community that does not comprise all of Israel is considered an "individual" for it is stated in *Arvei Pesachim* (the tenth chapter of *Pesachim*), 'the prophets [uttered it and] enacted that the Israelites should recite at every epoch and at every trouble — may it not come to them! — and when they are redeemed, they recite it [in thankfulness] for their deliver.' For this reason, the term "individual" is used because if the entire Jewish People [is not included in the miracle] one does not complete *Hallel*, unless it is one of the days listed [in the *Beraita*]. However, if the entire Jewish People is redeemed, we certainly recite *Hallel*.

Tosafot Sukkah 44b s.v. Kan

דאפי' צבור שאין שם כל ישראל יחיד קרי להו משום דאמרינן בערבי פסחים נביאים אמרוהו ותיקנו להם לישראל שיהו אומרים אותו על כל פרק ופרק על כל צרה וצרה שלא תבא עליהן וכשנגאלין אומרינן אותו על גאולתן ולכך נקט יחיד דכי ליכא כל ישראל אין גומרינן אותו אלא באלו הימים אבל לגאולת כל ישראל אומרים אותו לעולם.

תוס' סוכה מד: ד"ה כאן

According to Tosafot, the obligation to recite *Hallel* in response to prevention of persecution only applies when the threat is against the entire Jewish People. If only a portion of the Jewish People is threatened, even those who were threatened do not have an obligation to recite *Hallel* when they are saved.

A further difficulty arises according to Meiri:

Any individual who experienced trouble and was redeemed from it is permitted to establish [recitation of] Hallel for himself on that day each year, but he does not recite a beracha on it. This is the law for each community. This is the principle of the prophets that one should recite Hallel on every trouble that they are redeemed from.

Meiri Pesachim 117a

כל יחיד שאירעתהו צרה ונגאל הימנה רשאי לקבוע הלל לעצמו באותו יום בכל שנה אלא שאינו מברך עליו וכן הדין בכל ציבור וציבור כך היה יסוד נביאים לאמרו על כל צרה וצרה כשנגאלים ממנה.

מאירי פסחים קי"ז.

According to Meiri, if an individual or a congregation is saved from a threat, one may recite *Hallel*. However, Meiri rules that when an individual or a congregation is saved from a threat, one may not recite a *beracha* on that *Hallel*. R. Chaim Y.D. Azulai, *Chaim She'al* 2:11, notes the opinion of Tosafot and Meiri and states that there is no obligation to recite *Hallel* when a portion of the Jewish People is saved from persecution and if one does recite *Hallel*, it should be recited without a *beracha*.

R. Chaim Dovid HaLevi, *Dat UMedinah* (pp. 99-102), notes that at the time of the initial institution of *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut*, the two chief rabbis of Israel, Rabbi Isaac Herzog and R. Ben-Tzion Uziel, ruled that one should not recite a *beracha* on *Hallel* on *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut*. R. Chaim D. HaLevi suggests that their ruling is based on the comments of R. Azulai. R. Ovadia Yosef, *Yabia Omer*, *Orach Chaim* 6:41, also rules that one should recite *Hallel* on *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut* without a *beracha* based on the comments of R. Azulai. Nevertheless, R. Ushpizai contends that the limitation of Tosafot and Meiri only applies to an event in the Diaspora. If the redemption occurs in Israel, even if a portion of the Jewish People is saved, one recites *Hallel* with a *beracha*.

Yom Ha'Atzma'ut as a Yom Tov

R. Meshulam Roth, *Kol Mevaser* 1:21, suggests that the basis for reciting *Hallel* with a *beracha* on *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut* is based on *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut*'s status as a Yom Tov (holiday). R. Moshe Alashkar, in his responsa, no. 49, rules that a community can institute a holiday similar to Purim in response to a miracle that helped save the community. R. Alashkar's comments are codified by *Magen Avraham* 686:5, and subsequently by *Mishna Berurah* 686:8. R. Moshe Sofer, *Chatam Sofer*, *Orach Chaim* no. 191, includes *Hallel* as part of the celebrations of this Yom Tov.

Nevertheless, *Chatam Sofer* only allows institution of a holiday when the nature of the redemption is one where a communal life-threatening situation is removed. If the redemption is one where freedom is achieved and no lives were threatened, one cannot institute a new Yom Tov. Furthermore, *Chatam Sofer* only allows for such an institution on a communal level. He does not allow a holiday to be instituted on a national level.

R. Roth considers *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut* as day of redemption from a life-threatening situation as well as a redemption of freedom. Therefore, he rules that one should recite *Hallel* with a *beracha*.

There are a number of questions that R. Roth does not address. First, he does not explain why he does not follow *Chatam Sofer's* requirement that a national holiday cannot be instituted. Second, R. Roth does not explain why the fifth of *Iyar* specifically was a day that an immediate threat to Jewish life was removed. Ostensibly, the only redemptive element was freedom. If so, how can one establish a new holiday and recite *Hallel*? Third, R. Azulai, op. cit., notes that Rambam was once in a life-threatening situation and was saved. As a result, he instituted a holiday for his family, but he did not recite *Hallel*. This shows that minimally, there is a dispute whether one should recite *Hallel* on a newly ordained Yom Tov. Shouldn't one apply the principle of *safek berachot l'hakel* (one should be lenient on matters of doubt regarding *berachot*) to the question of reciting a *beracha* on *Hallel* when a new holiday is instituted?

R. Ovadia Yosef, op. cit., in addressing the question of whether to recite a *beracha* on *Hallel* on *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut* does not directly address R. Roth's position. His implicit rejection of R. Roth's position may be due to any of the three questions presented above.

Yom Ha'Atzma'ut as the Atchalta D'Geulah

R. Chaim D. HaLevi, op. cit., posits that one may recite a *beracha* on *Hallel* on *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut* based on *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut's* status as the *atchalta d'geulah*, the beginning of the Ultimate Redemption. He notes that even R. Azulai would agree that an event that represents a step in the rebuilding of the *Beit HaMikdash* warrants reciting *Hallel* with a *beracha*.

R. Ovadia Yosef, op. cit., questions this approach (without directly citing R. Chaim D. HaLevi's opinion) based on a statement of the Talmud Yerushalmi:

It is stated 'When men let their hair grow in Israel, when the leaders of the people offer themselves willingly, bless G-d' the leaders of the people offer themselves-when the Almighty provides miracles for you, you should recite songs of praise. One can object: What about the redemption from Egypt? That is different because that was the beginning of the redemption.

Talmud Yerushalmi Pesachim 10:6

כתיב בפרוע פרעות בישראל בהתנדב
עם ברכו ה' התנדבו ראשי עם כשהקדוש
ברוך הוא עושה לכם ניסים תהו אומרין
שירה התיבון הרי גאולת מצרים שנייא
היא שהיא תחילת גאולתן.
ירושלמי פסחים י:ו

The Talmud Yerushalmi states that when the Jewish People left Egypt they did not recite *shirah* (song, the Talmud Yerushalmi's equivalent of *Hallel*) because it was only the beginning of the redemption.

P'nei Moshe explains:

The exodus from Egypt [was different] because that was the beginning of the redemption. This is to say that at that point it was only the beginning of the redemption because they were not completely redeemed until the Egyptians drowned in the Sea as it states 'G-d saved the Jewish People from the hands of the Egyptians on that day,' until that day they were not actually saved and on that day they said songs of praise.

P'nei Moshe ad loc., s.v. Sh'nia

שנייא היא- יציאת מצרים שהיא תחלת גאולתן וכלומר דאכתי לא הוה אלא אתחלתא דגאולה שלא נגאלו לגמרי עד ששקעו המצרים בים כדכתיב ויושע ה' ביום ההוא את ישראל מיד מצאים שעד היום לא נושעו ממש והיום אמרו שירה.

פני משה שם ד"ה שנייא

R. Ovadia Yosef notes that the comments of the Talmud Yerushalmi indicate that an event that is considered an *atchalta d'geulah* does not obligate one to recite *Hallel*.

R. Hershel Schachter, *B'Ikvei HaTzon* no. 32 notes that the concept of *atchalta d'geulah* is significant in the context of the discussion of establishing a holiday on *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut*. As we mentioned above, *Chatam Sofer's* opinion is that one cannot establish a holiday for the entire Jewish People. R. Schachter notes that according to R. Ya'akov of Lisa, one can establish a holiday for the entire Jewish People to commemorate an event that is considered an *atchalta d'geulah*. R. Schachter rules that in such a situation, recitation of *Hallel* is optional. [He does not address the issue of whether one should recite a *beracha*.] Rabbi Schachter himself is an active participant in the *Hallel* said in the morning services in the Main Beit Midrash of Yeshiva University.

Summary

In this issue, we presented three different approaches mentioned by contemporary authorities to recite *Hallel* on *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut* with a *beracha*. We also presented various objections to these approaches. As a matter of practical Halacha, prominent Poskim have taken both sides of the issue, including members of the Chief Rabbinate. What is clear from this discussion is that whether one recites a *beracha* or not is not a reflection of his or her commitment to the State of Israel. However, everyone agrees that on *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut*, it is important to recognize the miracles that occurred and the gift that were given from the Almighty in the creation of the modern State of Israel.