

# Why Don't We Recite Hallel on Purim?

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One of rituals that is noticeably absent from the celebration of Purim is the recitation of *Hallel*. *Hallel* is recited on all other holidays that involve rejoice, including the rabbinic holiday of Chanukah. If so, why don't we recite *Hallel* on Purim?

*If so [why don't we] recite Hallel as well? R. Nachman stated: The reading of [the Megillah] is [Purim's] Hallel. Rava stated: It makes sense [to recite Hallel on Pesach] and say "The servants of G-d sing praise" and not the servants of Paroh. However, here (regarding Purim) "The servants of G-d sing praise" and not the servants of Achashverosh? We are still servants of Achashverosh. Megillah 14a*

אי הכי הלל נמי ... רב נחמן אמר  
קרייתא זו הלילא רבא אמר  
בשלמא התם הללו עבדי ה' ולא  
עבדי פרעה אלא הכא הללו עבדי  
ה' ולא עבדי אחשוורוש אכתי עבדי  
אחשוורוש אנן.  
מגילה יד.

According to R. Nachman, there is an inherent requirement to recite *Hallel* on Purim. However, that obligation is fulfilled through the reading of *Megillat Esther*. Rava, on the other hand, is of the opinion that there is no obligation to recite *Hallel* on Purim.<sup>99</sup>

## Is R. Nachman's Position Accepted?

Rambam (1138-1204) states explicitly that the reading of *Megillat Esther* serves as the *Hallel* of Purim:

*The [rabbis] did not institute [recitation of] Hallel on Purim because the reading of the Megillah is its Hallel. Rambam, Hilchot Chanukah 3:6*

ולא תקנו הלל בפורים שקריאת המגילה היא  
ההלל.  
רמב"ם הל' חנוכה ומגילה ג:ו

Rabbeinu Asher (c. 1250-1327), *Megillah* 1:8, codifies the opinion of Rava that there is no obligation to recite *Hallel* on Purim.

<sup>99</sup> The phrase "we are still servants of Achashverosh" seems to indicate that even Rava considered himself a servant of Achashverosh. *Shita Mekubetzet, Erchin* 10b, notes a version that states "they were still servants of Achashverosh." Rashi, *Megillah* 14a, s.v. *Akati*, also implies that Rava's opinion is that there is no obligation to recite *Hallel* on Purim because at the time of the Purim miracle, the Jews were still servants of Achashverosh.

R. Menachem Meiri (1249-1306), notes that there is a practical difference between the approach of R. Nachman and the approach of Rava:

*It seems to me that according to this reason if one is in a place that there is no Megillah, he should recite Hallel because the only reason why Hallel is not recited is that it was replaced by the reading of the Megillah. However, there is another reason mentioned in the Gemara and that is because they were still servant of Achashverosh ... and according to this reason, even one who does not have a Megillah should not recite Hallel. The first opinion seems more logical.*

#### **Meiri, Megillah 14a**

ונראה לי לטעם זה שאם היה במקום שאין לו מגלה שקורא את ההלל שהרי לא נמנעה קריאתו אלא מפני שקריאת המגלה במקומו ומכל מקום טעם אחר נאמר בה בגמרא והוא מפני שעדיין עבדי אחשוורוש היו ולא יצאו מעבדות לחירות ואין לשון עבדי ה' נופל אלא בנס שאפשר לומר בו עבדי ה' לבד כגון נס של מצרים עבדי ה' ולא עבדי פרעה אבל בזו עדיין עבדי אחשוורוש היו ולטעם זה אף מי שאין בידו מגלה אינו קורא את ההלל וראשון נראה יותר.  
**מאירי מגילה יד.**

According to R. Nachman, there is an inherent obligation to recite *Hallel* on Purim that can be fulfilled through reading the *Megillah*. As such, if one has no ability to fulfill the mitzvah of reading the *Megillah*, he should recite *Hallel* on Purim. According to Rava, there is no inherent obligation to recite *Hallel* on Purim. Therefore, if one is unable to fulfill the mitzvah of reading the *Megillah*, there is still no requirement to recite *Hallel*.

Meiri's comments lay the groundwork for assuming that according to R. Nachman, the laws of Purim, and specifically, the laws of reading the *Megillah* reflect the obligation to recite *Hallel*. R. Chaim Y.D. Azulai (1724-1807), *Birkei Yosef, Orach Chaim* 793:4, notes that the codifiers of Jewish law do not include any requirement to recite *Hallel* even if one has no ability of fulfilling the mitzvah of reading the *Megillah*. One must conclude that Rava's opinion is the normative opinion and there is never a requirement to recite *Hallel* on Purim. However, R. Avraham S.B. Sofer (1815-1871), *K'tav Sofer, Orach Chaim* no. 140, notes that it is difficult to conclude definitively that R. Nachman's opinion is rejected given that Rambam codifies the opinion of R. Nachman. He suggests that the reason why we don't find any of the codifiers requiring recitation of *Hallel* when a *Megillah* is not available is that R. Nachman's opinion is that the institution to read the *Megillah* replaces the initial obligation to recite *Hallel*. Once this institution took effect, even if one is in a rare situation where he cannot fulfill the mitzvah of reading the *Megillah*, he does not gain by reciting *Hallel* because the obligation to recite *Hallel* no longer exists.<sup>100</sup> According to R. Sofer, R. Nachman's opinion doesn't necessarily have halachic significance and merely serves as a reason why *Hallel* was not instituted on Purim.

## **R. Nachman's Position In Halachic Literature**

<sup>100</sup> R. Sofer's explanation implies that the original obligation to recite *Hallel* is rabbinic in nature. His father, R. Moshe Sofer, presents an approach that will be discussed later, that the obligation to recite *Hallel* on festivals is biblical in nature.

There are a number of areas where R. Nachman's opinion is discussed. First, R. Moshe Sofer (1762-1839), *Chatam Sofer, Orach Chaim* no. 161, discusses cities where there is a doubt whether they should celebrate Purim on the fourteenth or the fifteenth.<sup>101</sup> He notes that if one assumes that the requirement to recite *Hallel* is of biblical origin and one also assumes that there is an inherent requirement to recite *Hallel* on Purim, one must observe both days of Purim based on the principle of *safek d'oraita l'chumra* (one must be stringent on matters relating to Torah law). If one assumes that recitation of *Hallel* is rabbinic in nature (or that there is no inherent requirement to recite *Hallel*), one may be lenient and observe only one of the days.

Second, R. Ya'akov B. Zolty (1920-1982), *Mishnat Ya'avetz, Orach Chaim* no. 77, notes that R. Nachman's opinion sheds light on the nature of the daytime reading of the *Megillah*. Tosafot, *Megillah* 4a, s.v. *Chayav*, quote the opinion of Rabbeinu Yitzchak that the daytime reading is considered the primary reading. Therefore, although one recites the *beracha* of *Shehechyanu* before the nighttime reading, one repeats the *beracha* at the daytime reading. Rambam, *Hilchot Megillah U'Chanukah* 1:3, rules that one should not recite *Shehechyanu* during the daytime reading.

R. Zolty explains that Rambam's opinion is that the daytime reading is not the primary fulfillment of the mitzvah of reading the *Megillah*. The Mishna, *Megillah* 20b, states that one can only recite *Hallel* during the day. Therefore, it is possible that the primary impetus to institute a daytime reading was to fulfill the requirement to recite *Hallel*. As such, there are two aspects of the daytime reading, neither of which warrants recitation of *Shehechyanu*. The *Hallel* aspect does not warrant a *Shehechyanu* since one does not ordinarily recite *Shehechyanu* on the recitation of *Hallel*. The inherent obligation to repeat the reading of the *Megillah* during the daytime does not warrant a *Shehechyanu* since the *Shehechyanu* was already recited at the nighttime reading. A second recitation of *Shehechyanu* is only logical according to Rabbeinu Yitzchak's opinion that the primary reading is during the daytime.

Third, R. Moshe Sofer, *Chatam Sofer, Orach Chaim* no. 51, notes that there are three principles that ostensibly cannot coexist. 1) The Mishna's principle (*Megillah* 21a) that the *Megillah* can be read standing or sitting. 2) The principle of *Shibolei HaLeket*, no. 173, codified by *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 422:7, that *Hallel* must be recited in the standing position. 3) R. Nachman's principle that reading the *Megillah* fulfills the requirement to recite *Hallel* on Purim. If one assumes that *Hallel* must be recited standing and that reading of the *Megillah* fulfills the requirement to recite *Hallel*, how does the Mishna allow one to read the *Megillah* while seated?

R. Zolty, op. cit., without directly referencing *Chatam Sofer's* question, notes that the leniency to read the *Megillah* while seated may be contingent on whether one accepts R. Nachman's opinion. *Tur, Orach Chaim* no. 590, rules that although one can fulfill the mitzvah if he reads the *Megillah* in the sitting position, ideally, one should only read the *Megillah* in the standing position. Ran, *Megillah* 11b, s.v. *HaKorei*, rules that even in an ideal situation one may read the *Megillah* in the sitting position. R. Zolty explains that *Tur's* reluctance to allow reading the

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<sup>101</sup> See R. Jonathan Cohen's article in this edition for a detailed discussion about doubts relating to which day of Purim should be observed.

*Megillah* in the sitting position is a function of R. Nachman's opinion that reading the *Megillah* fulfills the requirement to recite *Hallel* on Purim. Since *Hallel* is recited in the standing position, the *Megillah* should ideally be read in the standing position. R. Zolty further explains that since the reason to read the *Megillah* standing is due to the obligation to recite *Hallel*, *Tur* would agree that at the nighttime reading - which does not serve to fulfill the obligation to recite *Hallel*- there is no insistence on one standing for the reading of the *Megillah*.

Fourth, R. Yehudai Gaon (8<sup>th</sup> century), *Halachot Gedolot, Hilchot Megillah*, writes that women and children are not required to read the *Megillah*, but they are required to listen to the *Megillah*. *Tosafot, Megillah 4a, s.v. Nashim*, note that according to R. Yehudai Gaon, a woman cannot read on behalf of a man because a man's obligation is to read the *Megillah* and a woman's obligation is to listen to the *Megillah*. R. Chanoch H. Eiges (1863-1941), *Marcheshet 1:22*, suggests that the approach of *Halachot Gedolot* is based on R. Nachman's opinion. The obligation to read the *Megillah* is only a function of the obligation to recite *Hallel*. Since women are exempt from *Hallel*, they only have an obligation to listen to the *Megillah*. Therefore, R. Eiges rules that at the nighttime reading, both men and women only have an obligation to listen to the *Megillah* and therefore, a woman may read on behalf of a man.

R. Aryeh Z. Pomeranchik (1908-1942), *Emek Beracha, Keri'at HaMegillah* no. 3, deduces the exact opposite conclusion. He assumes that women are obligated to recite *Hallel* and therefore suggests that both men and women have an equal obligation to read the *Megillah* during the day. *Halachot Gedolot's* idea only applies to the nighttime reading.

Fifth, R. Yekutiel Halberstam (1905-1994), *Divrei Yatziv, Orach Chaim 2:296*, discusses two different customs regarding when one should perform a circumcision that occurs on Purim. According to R. Yosef Karo (1488-1575), *Bedek HaBayit, Yoreh De'ah* no. 262, the circumcision should be performed after the reading of the *Megillah*. According to Rama (1520-1572), *Orach Chaim 693:4*, the circumcision should take place before the reading of the *Megillah*.

R. Halberstam suggests that these two customs may reflect the two approaches regarding recitation of *Hallel* on Purim. If the reading of the *Megillah* serves as the recitation of *Hallel*, it would not be appropriate to perform a circumcision between the *Amidah* and the reading of the *Megillah* because according to the *Tosefta, Menachot 6:5*, the *Amidah* and *Hallel* are inherently linked. If there is no requirement to recite *Hallel*, one may perform a circumcision between the *Amidah* and the reading of the *Megillah*. R. Halberstam adds that the custom to perform the circumcision specifically before the reading of the *Megillah* may be to show that we follow the opinion of Rava that there is no requirement of *Hallel* on Purim.

Sixth, R. Ya'akov Y. Algazi (1680-1756), *Chug Ha'Aretz* no. 16, discusses the law that if Shushan Purim occurs on Shabbat, those who live in a walled city read the *Megillah* on Friday (*Mishna, Megillah 2a*). R. Algazi asks: granted that one cannot read the *Megillah* on Shabbat, but why isn't there a recitation of *Hallel* on Shabbat, the day when Purim actually occurs? He answers that it would cause confusion in other years. Alternatively, the reading of the *Megillah* on Friday serves as the *Hallel* for the actual day of Purim. R. Algazi's question is only applicable according to R.

Nachman. According to Rava, there is no reason to entertain recitation of *Hallel* in such a situation.

R. Yosef D. Soloveitchik (1903-1993, cited in *Harerei Kedem* 1:192) provides two more insights into how R. Nachman's position impacts the reading of the *Megillah*. First, *Orchot Chaim*, *Hilchot Megillah* no. 24, rules that if there is no *minyan* (a group of ten male adults) available, each person should read the *Megillah* on his own. If there is someone who is unable to read on his own, someone may read for him and he will fulfill the mitzvah by listening. R. Avraham Gombiner (c.1633-1683), *Magen Avraham* 689:10, explains that although the principle of *shomei'a k'oneh* (the listener is like the responder) should allow one to listen to the reading of the *Megillah* from someone else, the reading of the *Megillah* is similar to *tefillah* (prayer). Regarding *tefillah*, each person must pray on his own unless it is within the context of a *minyan* or he does not know how to pray on his own.

R. Soloveitchik notes that *Magen Avraham's* comparison of reading the *Megillah* to *tefillah* seems to be based on the principle that reading the *Megillah* fulfills the obligation to recite *Hallel* on Purim. Since one aspect of reading the *Megillah* is *Hallel*, when there is no *minyan*, it is preferable for each individual to read on his own.

Second, R. Soloveitchik notes that the *Hallel* aspect of the reading of the *Megillah* explains why certain verses of the *Megillah* are read by the entire congregation. Regarding *Hallel*, the Gemara, *Sukkah* 38b, states that certain portions of *Hallel* should be recited responsively (i.e. one person reads a verse and the rest of the congregation responds). The responsive reading of some of the verses in the *Megillah* serves to fulfill that requirement.

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<sup>104</sup> Although the gemara records another opinion as how to interpret Esther's two names, see the commentary of the Vilna Gaon (ad loc.) who understands that everyone agrees to the meaning and significance of each name. The only argument is regarding which name was the primary one and which one was secondary.