

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

TALMUDIC METHODOLOGY
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Hallel on the Night of Pesach

Among the central motifs of the seder, hallel and hodaya play pivotal roles. Our responsibilities on this night include more than merely imagining that we had been enslaved in Egypt and subsequently released. As the mishna in Pesachim (116b) enjoins, "le-fikhakh anachnu chayavim le-hodot u-l'hallel..." If we truly view ourselves as having been liberated, we must praise and thank Ha-kadosh Barukh Hu. It is understandable that actual hallel is a basic ingredient of the seder. What is less clear is to what degree this unique hallel is merely classic hallel superimposed upon the seder, and to what extent it is a substantively different form of hallel.

The most renowned position which identifies seder night hallel as different is stated by several Geonim (quoted by the Ramban and Ran in Pesachim 116). These Geonim pointed to the splitting of pesach hallel into two segments (one before and one after the seuda) as indicative of its distinctive nature. Generally, we are not allowed to disrupt the continuity of hallel with extraneous hefsek (see especially Berakhot (14a)). However, on this evening we intentionally recite several berakhot, add several berakhot and even eat a meal between the first segment of hallel and the second. To the Geonim, this proved the presence of an entirely different brand of hallel – one to which they refer as shira, as opposed to keria. Generally, hallel is recited in commemoration of a particular miraculous, historical event. Hence, a berakha is recited. Hallel on this night, however, is recited in response to the actual experience of liberation which is relived. If we truly fulfill "Chayav adam li-rot et atzmo ke-ilu hu yatza mi-Mitzrayim" ("A person must imagine that he himself was emancipated from Egypt"), then a unique requirement of 'singing' hallel obtains. As the Brisker Rav explained, this form of hallel is incumbent only upon people actually living through a miracle, and not on those commemorating a past miracle. It is now apparent why the Tosefta in Masechet Sofrim singled out Pesach night hallel as one which should be recited with "neima" ('pleasantness'). Perhaps the 'neima' tone itself contributes to the shira element. Alternatively, by reciting bi-neima, the entire minyan can be fused into a single voice better enabling shira, which is a collective experience. In fact, the gemara cites the pasuk, "U-neromima shemo yachdav" ("we will glorify His Name TOGETHER") as the source for neima. In any event, the Tosefta itself acknowledges hallel on Pesach night as a unique form of hallel and reserves a special voice for it.

Once this hallel is deemed a unique experience of shira, rather than the classic, commemorative keria, no berakha is recited. The Geonim themselves do not clarify the reason why hallel as keria requires a berakha while hallel of shira does not. We may arrive at an explanation in light of the Brisker Rav's analysis of the view of the Behag. At one point in his commentary, the Brisker Rav suggests that the Behag subscribed to the Geonic position. From the Behag it appears that the unique form of hallel labeled 'shira' is only incumbent upon a tzibbur experiencing a national

miracle (which would very well explain the above stated need for reciting this hallel with neima, given our interest in incorporating individuals into a communal voice). The Behag also appears to cast this form of hallel as optional. Perhaps shira hallel, which is optional, does not require a berakha. Since in general this hallel is optional and does not warrant a berakha, the berakha is omitted even when shira is institutionalized as obligatory – the night of Pesach.

The Ramban objects to the position of the Geonim and asserts that a standard berakha is recited. He cites several proofs that indeed a berakha is recited prior to hallel. First of all, if Pesach hallel concludes with a berakha (yehalelukha), it likely begins with one, as well. The gemara in Nidda (51b) provides a short list of mitzvot which conclude with a berakha but do not begin with one, and hallel on the night of Pesach is not listed. The Ramban's second issue surrounds the absence of the word "barukh" from the beginning of the last berakha. The Ramban cites an ambiguous Yerushalmi which, according to his reading, questions this very issue and resolves it by viewing the final berakha of hallel as 'proximate' to the original berakha. Since it is considered a berakha semucha le-chaverta (a berakha proximate to a previous one), yehalelukha does not begin with the word barukh. Even though they are physically separated by the rest of hallel and on the night of Pesach are disrupted by the meal and the mitzvot of matza and marror, these two berakhot may still be considered proximate. This Yerushalmi would then corroborate the Ramban's position that hallel on Pesach night begins with a berakha.

Of course, the Ramban is then forced to address the principal question of the Geonim - the lengthy hefsek during Pesach hallel between the first part and the concluding segments. Recall that this phenomenon is what convinced the Geonim that hallel on Pesach night is a different experience. The Ramban claims that as the interceding events are related to sippur yetziat mitzrayim, they do not constitute a hefsek between the two sections of hallel. The Ramban cites two precedents of intervening experiences which are still germane and therefore do not disrupt the integrity of a process. For example, the davening on Rosh Hashanah does not disrupt the unity between the first set of tekiyot and later sets. Similarly, the Ramban points to the style of keriat ha-Torah during the period of Chazal, in which the first reader recited the berakha rishona of birkat ha-Torah on behalf of all those who would follow, while the last reader recited the concluding berakha on behalf of all those who had already read. Even though the Torah was read in the interim, we nevertheless do not consider it a hefsek, since it is part of the mitzva. Similarly, the Ramban claims, since on Pesach night hallel is incorporated into the hagadda experience, the intervening performance of mitzvot will not disrupt its continuity.