

What's the Truth About...Hallel on Pesach?

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Misconception: The sole reason that we do not recite the complete *Hallel*¹ on the last six days of Pesach is because the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea on the seventh day of Pesach, and this human tragedy mutes our joy.

Fact: This reason for “half” *Hallel* is cited in later sources, but it is not the original one offered in the Talmud. The Talmudic reason relates to the *Mussaf* [additional] sacrifices offered in the Temple.

Background: The Talmud (*Arachin* 10a-b) lists those days on which *Hallel* is recited, and then asks why Passover is different from Sukkot: on the last six days of Passover only “half” *Hallel* is recited while for the entire Sukkot a full *Hallel* is recited. The answer given in the Talmud is that after the first day of Passover, the *Mussaf* sacrifices are identical each day, while on Sukkot a unique *Mussaf* sacrifice is offered each day. The *Mussaf* sacrifices are indicative of the character of the Yom Tov. By mandating the same sacrifice for each day of Pesach, the Torah is teaching us that the character of each day remains the same throughout the Yom Tov. However, the varied sacrifices of Sukkot reveal to us that each day of the holiday is different from the others. Therefore, in honor of the special

meaning of each day of Sukkot, represented by each specific sacrifice, a complete *Hallel* is recited.

In an altogether unrelated discussion, the Talmud (*Megillah* 10b, *Sanhedrin* 39b) records that on the night the Egyptians² drowned in the Red Sea (the seventh night of Passover), God prevented the angels from singing songs of praise since “His handiwork was drowning in the sea.” It would seem that this Talmudic account is unrelated to Jews reciting *Hallel* in subsequent years. The restriction on song was limited to the angels and applied only in that historic year. The Jewish people sang *Az Yashir* (Exodus 15:1-19) that night immediately upon emerging from the Red Sea,³ and in all subsequent years the angels sing on the seventh night of Passover.⁴

Despite the clear reason offered in the Talmud for a “half” *Hallel* on Passover, there is a source for this misconception. The *Shibolei Haleket* (13th century; cited in *Beit Yosef Orach Chaim* 490, starting verse *kol*) quotes the otherwise unknown *Midrash Harninu* as suggesting that the reason for “half” *Hallel* on Passover is because God prevented the angels from singing while the Egyptians drowned. The *Taz* (17th century; *Orach Chaim* 490:3) and *Chavot Yair* (17th century; 225) explain that because of this *midrash*, full *Hallel* cannot be said on the seventh day of Passover, and it would be inappropriate

to say it on the intermediate days if it is not said on the seventh day. Many other commentators have challenged the validity of this recently added reason, and have questioned the need for a second reason in addition to the one offered in the Talmud.⁵

The *Torah Shleimah* (*Bo*, 12:287) cites another, possibly related, reason for the reduced *Hallel* on the last days of Passover. The complete *Hallel* is only recited on a day called a “*chag*” and the final days of Passover are never called *chag*, whereas all the days of Sukkot are so designated. The *Yerushalmi* (*Sukkah*, Chapter 5, *Halachah* 1, statement of Rav Yossi be Rav Bun) offers yet another reason for *Hallel* on Sukkot. The complete *Hallel* on the remaining days of Sukkot celebrates an additional aspect of the holiday, the *arba minim* (“four species” — *lulav*, *etrog*, *hadasim* and *aravot*) that are taken anew each day of Sukkot and that independently require the recitation of *Hallel*.⁶

Notes

1. *Hallel* is the joyous recitation of Psalms 113-118. In “half *Hallel*” the beginnings of Psalms 115 and 116 are omitted.
2. In the Talmud, God refers to the Egyptians as *ma'asei yadai* — the work of My Hands. In a contrasting phrase (in *Sota* 37a), as the Jews were about to drown in the Red Sea, God refers to them as *yedidi* — My beloved one.

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3. According to Rabbi Elazar ben Rav Yossi (*Pesachim* 117a), upon emerging from the Red Sea, Moshe and the Jews not only sang *Az Yashir*, but *Hallel* as well. The *Chavot Yair* (225) even notes that, according to the *midrash*, the angels joined in singing *Az Yashir* with the Jews.

4. The statement that God prevented the angels from singing because the Egyptians were drowning is cited by the *Kaf HaChaim* (*Orach Chaim* 685:29) in the name of the *Yafeh Lalev* (3:3) as a proof that when there is destruction, even of evil beings, there is no blessing, and that is why there is no *brachah* on the *mitzvah* of *Parshat Zachor*. Rav Menashe Klein (*Mishneh Halachot* 7:81) has trouble with this assertion for, indeed, the Jews sang both *Hallel* and *Az Yashir* at the Red Sea, and only the angels were barred from singing. He therefore proposes several other reasons why there is no *brachah* on *Parshat Zachor*.

5. For a full discussion of this, see the weekly *parshah* sheets *Torah Lodaat* by Rabbi Matis Blum on *Tzav* and *Pesach*, 1994. See *Torah Temimah* to Exodus 14:20, note 9, who observes that merely omitting two half paragraphs from the *Hallel* leaves a significant song of praise in place that would not meet the objective of curtailing joy, as seemingly required by the non-Talmudic reason for “half” *Hallel*.

See, however, Rav Aharon Kotler, *Mishnat Rebbe Aharon* (1996; vol. 3, page 3) who offers an alternative understanding of this second reason as applicable only for the seventh day of Passover, while the Talmudic reason relates to the days of *Chol Hamoed* (the intermediate days) of *Pesach*: therefore both reasons are needed, and neither is superfluous. It seems the *Taz* disagrees and holds the midrashic reason sufficient. cf. *Mishnah Berurah* 490:7.

6. Accordingly, the *Mishnat Yaavetz* (by Rabbi Betzalel Zolti, *Orach Chaim* 20:4) rules that if one did not have a *lulav* in the morning when he recited *Hallel*, he should repeat *Hallel* later in the day when he performs the *mitzvah* of *lulav*. He argues that the *mitzvah* of *lulav* warrants its own independent *Hallel*, even if *Hallel* was already recited in honor of the festival. 

This material is for study purposes only and should not be relied upon for practical *halachah*. One should consult his own competent halachic authority for specific questions.