



TOWARDS MEANINGFUL

TEFILLA

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Hallel

As we approach Pesach, I thought it would be appropriate to focus on a Tefilla which is a central motif of the holiday, the Tefilla of Hallel. Not only do we recite Hallel every day of Pesach during Shacharit, we also recite it on the night of Pesach both at shul and during the Seder. The Hallel of the Seder is a very strange phenomenon. Here we are, nearing the end of our Seder, full of Matza and wine and struggling to keep our eyes open and suddenly we start saying Hallel! Why is Hallel part of our Seder experience and why does it seem to go against all the halachot of Hallel? Under normal circumstances, it is prohibited to say Hallel at night and one is obligated to recite it standing up. It is usually recited as part of our Tefilla service, with a bracha before and after, and not as part of a meal. Additionally, during the Seder, we break the Hallel into two parts (part before the meal and part afterwards) which seems to go directly against the normal Halacha that there can be no interruption (hef-

seik) in the middle of Hallel. So what is the Hallel doing in our Haggadot at such a strange juncture and why does it not seem to follow any of the regular Hallel rules?

Rav Hai Gaon (quoted by the Ran) explains that the Hallel here is qualitatively different than a regular Hallel. אין אנו קורין אותה בתורת קורין אלא קורין אותו בתורת אומר שירה - *we don't read the Hallel here just as a "reading" but rather as a song*". What does this mean? **Rav Soloveitchik** explains that throughout the year, we recite Hallel because we have an obligation to do so, based on the קדושת היום, the holiness of the day, or because we are commemorating a miracle. But here, we are saying Hallel not out of obligation but rather as a natural, spontaneous response to a miracle that occurred **at this very moment to us!** The goal of the entire Seder experience is to bring us to a point where we ourselves feel that we have just left Miztrayim. חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים - *A person (at the seder) is obligated to feel as if he personally left Mitzrayim*. So if we did our Seder right, we should be so caught up in the story, that we burst forth in song! No rules apply here as it is not a technical obligation but rather an illustration of our raw emotion bursting forth! This is a true lesson to us in how we need to run our Seder. The way we feel when we get up to Hallel is almost like a litmus test of how



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successful we were in accomplishing our goal at the Seder.

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Beyond this very important message for Seder night, what does this teach us about our regular Hallel? We will be saying Hallel every morning of Pesach, and we say it throughout the year, every Rosh Chodesh and on numerous other holidays. These Hallel's are "בתורת קורין", they are "readings" based on technical obligation. But that doesn't mean we can't bring in any emotion. When we analyze the words of Hallel, there are so many verses that relate to us on a very personal level. When we say the words "מה אשיב לך כל תגמולוהי עלי" - *How can I possibly repay Hashem for all the good He has done for me?* - this is an opportunity for us to focus on all the good we have and to really cry out in heartfelt spontaneous gratitude. When we say the words "פתחו לה השער לה... זהה השער לה" - *Open the gates of righteousness so I can come in..this is the gate to Hashem*, we can focus with deep intensity on our sincere desire to come close to Hashem.

So though our regular Hallel might be one of technical obligation, when we focus in on the words, we can uplift it to a Hallel of "אומר שירה", of emotional song and overflowing praise.

Chag Kasher vSameach! ■

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