

הלל  
HALLEL



### IN A NUTSHELL

At this stage in the Seder, we have finished telling the story of the Exodus, and just like the Israelites 3,300 years ago, we feel an overwhelming need to thank and praise Hashem for bringing us out of Egypt. So we begin to say Hallel (which is split into two sections, half before the meal and half after). This is one of the transitional moments of the Haggadah, when we move from story to song, from prose to poetry, from recitation (*Maggid*) to praise (*Hallel*).



### DEEP DIVE

Song plays a vital part in Judaism. At the end of his life, Moshe gave the Israelites the 613th mitzvah – that in every generation we should

write a new *Sefer Torah*. On that occasion he used an unusual word. He called the Torah a “song” (Deut. 31:19).

Words are the language of the mind. Music is the language of the soul. Whenever speech is invested with deep emotion it aspires to the condition of song. This is why we do not merely say our prayers; we sing them. We do not read the Torah; we chant it. We do not study Talmud; we intone it. Each kind of text, and each period of the Jewish year, has its own melody. We learned this from Moshe, who called the Torah a song, to teach us this important message: if we want to transmit Torah across the generations as a living faith, it must be not just a code of law, but also the song of the Jewish people.

Commentary on ‘Therefore it is Our Duty to Thank’,  
*The Jonathan Sacks Haggada*

**How does music change the experience of our prayers and the way we praise God?**



### FURTHER THOUGHTS

Hallel (Psalms 113–118) is the great song of deliverance that, according to the Talmud, was sung at all the great triumphs of Jewish history. In more recent years we have added two new occasions when we say Hallel: on Yom Ha’atzmaut, Israel’s Independence Day, and Yom Yerushalayim, Jerusalem Day.

The late Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik asked an interesting question about the recitation of Hallel at the Seder table. The Talmud states that we do not say Hallel on Purim because “the reading of the Megillah is equivalent to saying Hallel” (Megillah 14a). Why do we not apply

the same reasoning to Seder night? We have recited the Haggadah, the counterpart of the Megillah on Purim. Surely, then, the recital of Hallel is superfluous.

The answer I would give is that there are two different commands to say Hallel. The first is at the time of a miracle. The second is as a form of remembrance on the anniversary of the miracle. Thus, at the time of Chanukah the Maccabees said Hallel at the moment of victory. The next year they established it as an annual obligation. The two forms of Hallel arise from different psychological states. The first is expressive, the second evocative. The first gives voice to an emotion we already feel. The second creates that emotion by an act of memory, recalling an event that occurred in the past.

Telling the story of a miracle, as we do on Purim, is equivalent to the second form of Hallel. It is an act of memory. On Pesach, however, we do not merely tell the story. We relive it. We eat the bread of oppression and the bitter herbs. We taste the wine of freedom. We recline as free people. "Generation by generation, each person must feel as if they themselves had come out of Egypt." The Hallel we say on

the Seder night is therefore of the first kind, not the second. It arises out of the emotions we feel having lived through the event again. It is a "new song." This kind of Hallel is not cancelled by telling the story.

Commentary on Hallel,  
*The Jonathan Sacks Haggada*

**What is the difference in emotion between the two types of Hallel? Do you connect emotionally to Hallel on Seder night being the first type?**



### QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT AND ASK AT YOUR SEDER

1. What do we have to praise and thank God for on Pesach?
2. Is it better to use our own words to do this, or using the words of someone else (like by reciting King David's *Tehillim*)?
3. Do you connect more to words or song as a medium for expressing emotions?



### EXPERIENCING THE SEDER

Ask the guests around your Seder table to share as many tunes for

the different parts of Hallel as they know. Spend a moment reflecting (either privately or in a conversation with the Seder participants) how it feels to sing as opposed to saying or reading the words.



### A STORY FOR THE NIGHT OF STORIES

Following the splitting of the Reed Sea, when the Israelites were finally safe from the pursuing Egyptians, Miriam the Prophetess took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her song and dance with their own timbrels, in praise and thanks to Hashem.

The Rabbis in the Midrash ask why the women had musical instruments to hand (was this really a priority to take with them when they left Egypt in haste?) They answer their own question by praising their faith in Hashem. The women had deep faith that Hashem would perform miracles in the desert, to protect them and pave the way for their safe passage, and so they ensured they had instruments ready and dances prepared, so they could express their gratitude and praise Hashem.

