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Aharon's Chorus of Peace

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1.

ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-THREE

The length of Aharon's life is recorded separately in our *parshah*, in its own verse — “Aharon was one hundred twenty-three years old at his death on Mount Hor.”¹ The Jerusalem Talmud remarks:² “The one hundred twenty-three times that Israel responds ‘Halleluyah’ (during the recitation of Hallel)³ correspond to the years of Aharon's life.”

What is the connection between saying “Halleluyah” and the length of Aharon's life? The Jerusalem Talmud explains:⁴ “*Halleluyah, praise Hashem* וְשִׁבְחָהּ, *in His holy place*⁵ — this alludes to Aharon his *holy one* {as intimated in the verse} ‘for Aharon, Hashem's *holy one*.’”⁶ This implies that Hashem's praise is linked with Aharon, Hashem's holy one, as the verse says, “Praise Hashem with His holy one.”

By connecting the recitation of Halleluyah one hundred twenty-three times and the years of Aharon's life with the verse “praise Hashem with His holy one” — that Hashem's praise must be conducted through “His holy one” — the Jerusalem Talmud hints that there is more than just a numerical correlation between the two (that they both amount to one hundred and twenty-three), which is merely a superficial correlation.⁷ Rather, there is a **substantive** connection between them: The recitation of Hallel must be intimately related to “His holy one” — Aharon's signature quality. Moreover, this quality is the reason for their numerical equivalence.

This requires clarification: What is the connection between saying “Halleluyah” (during Hallel) and Aharon?⁸

¹ *Bamidbar* 33:39.

² Jerusalem Talmud, “*Shabbos*,” ch. 16, halachah 1;

³ See *Korban HaEdah* and *Shiyarei Korban* on Jerusalem Talmud, ad loc.; *Kisei Rachamim HaShalem*, by Chida, on tractate *Sofrim*, ch. 16, par. 12.

⁴ {Jerusalem Talmud, loc. cit.}

⁵ *Tehillim* 150:1. {The word וְשִׁבְחָהּ is expounded as meaning “with His holy one.”}

⁶ *Tehillim* 106:16.

⁷ See *Tanya*, “*Shaar HaYichud VahaEmunah*,” end of ch. 7 (84b).

⁸ See *Kisei Rachamim*, loc. cit., for a kabbalistic explanation.

2.

SIGNIFICANCE OF A SIGN

This concept (that the one hundred and twenty-three Halleluyahs correspond to the years of Aharon's life) is recorded in Rambam's *Mishneh Torah*, in "*Hilchos Hallel*" (which he includes⁹ in "*Hilchos Chanukah*"), where Rambam discusses the original custom of reciting Hallel "in the days of the early sages." Rambam writes as follows:

After reciting the blessing, an adult begins reciting the Hallel and says, "Halleluyah." All the people respond "Halleluyah." He then says, "*Hallelu avdei Ad-nai*," and everyone responds, "Halleluyah." He then says, "*Hallelu es shem Ad-nai*," and everyone responds, "Halleluyah." He then says, "*Yehi shem Ad-nai mevorach mei'atah ve'ad olam*," and all the people respond, "Halleluyah." Similarly, after every line [of the Hallel, the people respond "Halleluyah"]. Thus, they respond "Halleluyah" one hundred twenty-three times throughout the entire Hallel. A mnemonic: the years of Aaron's life.¹⁰

This needs to be clarified: Rambam's *Mishneh Torah* is a work of "laws."¹¹ Rambam only records matters of halachah in his work (and not midrashic teachings or historical accounts). As *Yaavetz* writes:¹² "It is not his approach in this work to deal with halachically irrelevant matters or matters that are inconsequential ethically, behaviorally or practically." As such, to what end does Rambam bring this mnemonic?

Simply understood, the purpose of a mnemonic is to jog a person's memory. In this context, its purpose may be to help remember the number of Halleluyahs in Hallel (presumably, a mnemonic is helpful only when the number is uncommon).¹³ However, it is implausible to say that this is the only reason for mentioning this mnemonic since it is highly unusual for Rambam to bring any mnemonics in *Mishneh Torah* to help recall the numbers he records.

Therefore, it makes sense that the mnemonic is also of **halachic** import.

We can posit the following explanation:

⁹ See Section 7 for the reason for this placement according to *remez*.

¹⁰ *Mishneh Torah*, "*Hilchos Chanukah*," ch. 3, par. 12.

¹¹ Rambam in his Introduction to *Mishneh Torah*.

¹² *Yaavetz's Chiddushim U'Biurim on Mishneh Torah*, "*Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*," beg. of ch. 4.

¹³ Like the mnemonic that Rambam mentions at the end of his Introduction to *Mishneh Torah* for the 248 positive mitzvos and 365 negative mitzvos (although his introduction is not a work of "laws" — quite the opposite); similarly, in *Mishneh Torah*, "*Hilchos Sanhedrin*," end of ch. 19 (a mnemonic for the number of violations punishable by lashes).

By recording this mnemonic, Rambam aims to clarify the **classification** of saying Halleluyah: The one hundred twenty-three Halleluyahs recited comprise **one** unit (analogous to the years of one and the same person). Consequently, if even a **single** Halleluyah is missed, the “completeness” of the entire unit is lacking. The total number of one hundred twenty-three Halleluyahs — which merge into a **unique entity** (corresponding to the years of Aharon’s life) — must be recited.

Why do the one hundred twenty-three Halleluyahs make up **one** unit?

Also, since the mnemonic is “the years of Aharon’s life,” there is obviously a connection between the Halleluyahs and Aharon. What is it?¹⁴

3.

EARLY DAYS

This will be better understood by prefacing with Rambam’s opinion regarding the custom of reciting Hallel. He writes (regarding the custom mentioned above “in the days of our early sages”): “The above represents the custom followed in the early ages, and **it is befitting to follow.**”¹⁵

At first glance, this is difficult to understand. Talmud commentators explain that the custom mentioned above — “in the days of our early sages” — resulted from a lack of knowledge. Many worshippers who were “not experts” needed to rely upon the *chazzan* to discharge their obligation to recite Hallel.

Then how can Rambam write that “**it is befitting to follow**” this custom rather than writing that “it is befitting” for everyone to recite Hallel himself?

This indicates that Rambam maintains that although the **origin** of this arrangement (in reciting Hallel) resulted from many people who were “not experts,” this arrangement was set up so that when followed, **nothing was lacking** in the recitation (even by those who were experts). Thus, it is considered as if each person recited the entire Hallel.

We can posit that the explanation for this {arrangement deemed equivalent to each individual reciting the entire Hallel} can be found in Rambam’s ruling regarding the recitation of Hallel, where he writes that:

¹⁴ For a kabbalistic explanation — see *Likkutei Levi Yitzchak on Zohar (parshas Vayechi)* p. 205ff.; also, see *Chasam Sofer on Sukkah* 38b.

¹⁵ *Mishneh Torah, “Hilchos Chanukah,”* ch. 3, par. 14.

- (a) The congregation responds with Halleluyah¹⁶ (unlike the opinion of other *Rishonim*¹⁷ who maintain that the congregation only responds Halleluyah to the first paragraph of Hallel, but for the remaining paragraphs, the congregation responds with the first word of each respective paragraph).¹⁸
- (b) There were a **designated** number of Halleluyahs (“a mnemonic: the years of Aaron’s life”). Meaning, “Halleluyah” must be recited all one hundred twenty-three times.

4.

PARTICIPATION

The explanation:

Regarding the arrangement for the congregation to respond when an adult leads the recitation of Hallel, *Meiri* asks:¹⁹ Why does the congregation need to respond “Halleluyah”? They can discharge their obligation (of reciting Hallel) by just listening to the *chazan* (because “a person who listens is equivalent to a person who recites”)!²⁰ *Meiri* explains that Hallel is “like prayer,” and when it comes to prayer, there is a rule that “one person cannot discharge another person’s obligation.”²¹ However, since the Hallel is “not fully {considered} prayer,” we rule **leniently** that a person does not need to recite the **entire** Hallel (as they must with prayer). He can discharge his obligation by responding “Halleluyah” or the like.

Yet, since Rambam uses the expression “it is fitting to adhere” concerning this arrangement, he implies that this is **not** a leniency (because that would mean that it would be better not to rely on this leniency [and instead, recite the entire Hallel]).

Therefore, we can posit that Rambam maintains that when a person responds with Halleluyah, we view it as if they **recited (the entire)** Hallel. And as we see with responding “amen” to a blessing, whoever “answers ‘amen’ to a blessing recited by another person is considered **as if he recited the blessing himself**”:²² When a person listens with the intent of fulfilling his obligation but does not respond “amen,” he has also fulfilled his obligation.

¹⁶ This aligns with Rashi’s opinion, *Sukkah* 38a; *Meiri* there; also see *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, vol. 9, “hallel” (p. 410ff).

¹⁷ {Lit., “the first ones” — this refers to the leading rabbis and halachic authorities of the 11th to 15th centuries.}

¹⁸ *Tosafos, Ran, Ritva*, and others — see *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, vol. 9, “hallel” (p. 410ff).

¹⁹ {*Meiri* on} *Sukkah* 38a.

²⁰ See *Sukkah* 38b.

²¹ See Jerusalem Talmud, “*Berachos*,” ch. 3, halachah 3.

²² *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Berachos*,” ch. 1, par. 11; also see *Kessef Mishneh*, loc. cit.; Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” end of sec. 201.

Nonetheless, it is not “**as if he recited the blessing himself.**” However, when he responds with “amen,” “it is considered **as if he recited the blessing himself.**”

Meaning, according to *Meiri*, responding with Halleluyah or the first word of the other respective paragraphs (isn't part of the actual obligation of reciting Hallel; instead, it) is a **supplementary** measure, as he writes:²³ “To increase the arousal of joy.” Indeed, the obligation of reciting Hallel can be fulfilled by just listening to Hallel, which is in line with the general rule that “a person who listens is equivalent to a person who recites.” However, for Hallel to be performed joyfully, the person must participate *verbally* by responding with Halleluyah.

Rambam, on the other hand, maintains that responding with Halleluyah is (not tangential to reciting Hallel; instead, it is) part of the obligation of reciting Hallel: The element of joy needed when reciting Hallel dictates that a person must recite (the entire) Hallel. For this reason, the Sages enacted the responses mentioned above so that everyone could be considered “to have recited Hallel.” This is why this custom is “befitting to follow.”

5.

THE ENTIRE HALLEL

Since these responses must serve as a stand-in for “having recited Hallel,” understandably, when this prayer was established, a word was chosen to encapsulate the whole Hallel. This is analogous to how responding “אמן, amen” (etymologically related to the word “אמת, truth”)²⁴ enables the person to be considered “as if he recited the blessing himself.”

Therefore, Rambam maintains that we must respond with “Halleluyah after **every line** {of Hallel}” (and not just with the opening word of each stanza) because the word Halleluyah expresses the general and primary message of Hallel.

Since this arrangement was set up so that the person would be considered to have said the **entire** Hallel, we can now understand why all one hundred twenty-three utterances are needed. This helps clarify why Rambam records a mnemonic to remember the number (as discussed in Section 2).

²³ *Meiri on Sukkah*, loc. cit..

²⁴ See *Shavuos* 36a, and Rashi there; Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 124, par. 9; *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, vol. 2, “*amen*.”

6.

THE SPIRIT OF AHARON

We can now understand the relationship between responding with Halleluyah and Aharon, and more specifically, the “**years** of Aharon”:

Aharon’s signature quality was that he was “a lover of peace, a pursuer of peace, one who loves all people and draws them close to Torah”²⁵ — he fostered unity among the entire Jewish nation.

This unique quality is highlighted in the Torah in conjunction with the enumeration of the years of his life: At the time of his passing, when he was one hundred twenty-three years old, the Torah writes: “They wept... the **entire** House of Israel.”²⁶ Our Sages explain that the Jewish nation mourned Aharon *more* than they mourned Moshe since Aharon was “a pursuer of **peace**....”²⁷

This is the link between responding with “Halleluyah” and “the years of Aharon.” The **outcome** of this setup was that instead of every Jew saying Hallel **individually**, all Jews were now united in **one** recitation of Hallel. [This is aside from the fact that — in the spirit of Aharon, who “loves **all people** (those far from the ways of Torah and the service of Hashem)²⁸ and draws them close to Torah” — this arrangement was **established** in consideration of those who were “not experts.”]

Furthermore, since by responding to Halleluyah, it is considered as if each person recited the entire Hallel himself, the result is **true unity**:²⁹

When a person fulfills his obligation through the mechanism of “a person who **listens** is equivalent to a person who recites,” it does not constitute true unity. Although each person indeed fulfills his obligation with the same recitation of Hallel, the fulfillment of this obligation differs from person to person: One person (the *chazzan*) fulfills his obligation through **recitation**, while the remainder of the congregation fulfills their obligation by just listening to (“receiving” from) the *chazzan*, by way of **his** recitation.³⁰

²⁵ *Avos* ch. 1, mishnah 12.

²⁶ *Bamidbar* 20:29.

²⁷ *Avos DeRabbi Nassan*, ch. 12, mishnah 4; et al; also cited by Rashi on *Bamidbar* 20:29.

²⁸ *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 32.

²⁹ See *Tanya*, *ibid*: “they all have one father... **only the bodies** are distinct...true fraternity.”

³⁰ See Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, end of sec. 201; and sec. 213, *ibid*.

Conversely, the response of Halleluyah enables everyone to fulfill their obligation in the same way — through **reciting** Hallel and in a **united** fashion: The **same** recitation of the *chazzan* is the same recitation of “**the entire nation**” who “respond.”

7.

A PEACEFUL CONCLUSION

In light of this whole explanation, we can posit that this also serves to answer — elliptically and suggestively — a general question concerning the placement of this ruling: Why does Rambam insert the laws of **Hallel** into the section discussing the laws of **Chanukah**? The laws of Hallel seem to belong in the laws of prayer!³¹

We can now understand: Based on the above explanation, one of the fundamental elements in reciting Hallel (according to the original custom, to which “**it is fitting** to adhere”) is the unity of the Jewish nation. Hallel is a setting where all Jews **unite** in total peace and ultimately in true unity.

And this is precisely how the laws of **Chanukah are concluded** and finalized (“Everything follows the conclusion”):³² “The³³ **entire** Torah was given to bring about **peace** within the world.”³⁴

8.

HALLEL HASTENS THE REDEMPTION

The Gemara says: “Hashem sought to appoint Chizkiyahu as Mashiach,”³⁵ and it was only because “You performed all these miracles for him, but he did not recite praise before You,” that he was not the one to redeem the Jewish people.

Since “the measure of good is greater {than the measure of punishment},”³⁶ it follows that reciting Hallel and other songs of praise for Hashem’s miracles hastens and brings near the Redemption.

³¹ Furthermore, in *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Tefillah*” (ch. 9, par. 12; ch. 12, par. 20), where Rambam explains the order of prayer for days with Mussaf, **he doesn’t mention** the obligation to recite Hallel on Yom Tov.

³² *Berachos* 12a.

³³ {*Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Chanukah*,” ch. 4, par. 14.

³⁴ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 15, p. 372ff. for an explanation of the link between “the entire Torah” and “peace” with Chanukah.

³⁵ *Sanhedrin* 94a.

³⁶ *Sotah* 11a and the sources referenced there.

May it be Hashem's will that through explicating the halachos of Hallel

— and through praising and extolling Hashem (action is primary)³⁷ for all of the miracles that He performs for the Jewish nation, as we see clearly, “the hand of Hashem has done this,”³⁸ and that “it is Hashem, your L-rd, for it is He who gives you strength to become wealthy”³⁹ —

we should merit very soon to sing the tenth song of the Future Era,⁴⁰ moreover, in a manner of “a⁴¹ new song,”⁴² with the true and complete Redemption, through our righteous Mashiach.

— From talks delivered on Shabbos *parshas Matos-Masei*, 5737 (1977) and Shabbos *parshas Masei*, 5741 (1981)

³⁷ {Cf. *Avos* ch. 1, mishnah 17.}

³⁸ *Yeshayahu* 41:20.

³⁹ *Devarim* 8:18.

⁴⁰ {The Midrash (*Tanchuma*, “*Beshalach*,” sec. 10) tells us that there are ten songs of praise in the history of the Jewish people, starting from the night Hashem took us out of Egypt and culminating with the song of the Future Era.}

⁴¹ {This phrase uses the masculine form of “new song” (*shir chadash*) representing an everlasting song.}

⁴² See *Pesachim* 116b, *Tosafos*, s.v., “*hachi garsinan*.”