Dvar Torah Outline — Pesachim: “Birkat HaShir,” Yehallukha vs. Nishmat, and the Structure of Praise

Abstract

Rabbi Shulman analyzes why the Mishnah in Pesachim refers to the concluding berakhah after Hallel on the seder night with the unusual title **ברכת השיר** rather than the standard **יברך אחריו** (i.e., Yehallukha). He explains the Maharal’s approach: on leil Pesach, Hallel functions as **שירה**, and that “song-status” creates an added requirement for a formal concluding berakhah. From there, Rabbi Shulman explores Rabbi Yochanan’s position that **נשמת** (culminating in **ישתבח**) is “the song,” highlights the theme of **eight praises**, and then presents the Maharal’s critique of the practical Ashkenazic compromise (saying Yehallukha without its closing and then finishing with Nishmat/Yishtabach).

I. The core question: why does the Mishnah call it **ברכת השיר**?

A. The problem as framed by Rabbi Shulman (via Maharal)

- In Sukkah, the terminology is ordinary and conditional:
  - **מקום שנהגו לברך אחריו יברך אחריו** — if the custom is to bless after Hallel, one does.
  - The post-Hallel berakhah is simply “the berakhah after Hallel,” i.e., Yehallukha.
- In Pesachim, the Mishnah uses an unusual name:
  - Why call it **ברכת השיר** if (per Rav Yehudah) it is just Yehallukha—something we already know?

B. Maharal’s answer: the name teaches the reason for the obligation

- Rabbi Shulman quotes the Maharal’s idea:
  - Even though elsewhere Yehallukha may not be strictly required (depending on minhag), **here on leil Pesach it is obligatory**.

- Why? Because leil Pesach includes an element of **שירה**, and “song” requires a **חתימה** (a concluding berakhah).

- Rabbi Shulman clarifies the logic being proposed:
  - The Mishnah’s term **ברכת השיר** is an explanatory label:
    - since this Hallel is shirah, it **demands** a concluding berakhah, so the Mishnah calls it “the blessing of song.”

II. Rav Yehudah vs. Rabbi Yochanan: what is “the song” berakhah? (7:01)

A. Rav Yehudah: “Birkat HaShir” = Yehallukha

- Rav Yehudah’s view (as Rabbi Shulman presents it):
  - “Birkat HaShir” refers to the familiar post-Hallel berakhah—Yehallukha.
  - On leil Pesach, it becomes obligatory because Hallel rises to the level of **שירה**.

B. Rabbi Yochanan: “Birkat HaShir” = **נשמת**

- Rabbi Shulman quotes Rabbi Yochanan’s formulation:
  - **ורבי יוחנן אמר נשמת כל חי תברך את שמך ה’ אלקינו. זהו השיר שיאמר.**

- Practical implication:
  - Rabbi Yochanan identifies **נשמת** (and its culmination) as “the song” referenced by the Mishnah.

C. How can Nishmat be “a berakhah”?

- Rabbi Shulman raises the issue:
  - Yehallukha clearly contains a formal berakhah structure; does Nishmat?

- His resolution:
  - Nishmat is not “separate” from Yishtabach; **of חתימה functions as the ישתבח נשמת**.
  - Therefore, Nishmat can qualify as “Birkat HaShir” because it ends in a formal concluding berakhah (Yishtabach).

III. A practical halachic aside: minimal Psukei Dezimra on Shabbat (8:30)

A. Weekday minimum

- Rabbi Shulman states the “rock-bottom” weekday minimum:
  - **ברוך שאמר**, **אשרי**, **ישתבח**.

B. Shabbat minimum and why Nishmat is central

- On Shabbat, the minimal core expands to:
  - **ברוך שאמר**, **אשרי**, **נשמת**, **ישתבח**.
- Rationale (tying back to the sugya):
  - Yishtabach is the conclusion for Nishmat—so for Shabbat’s enhanced “song” framework, Nishmat is part of the essential structure.

IV. The theme of “eight praises” and the structure of Nishmat (11:00)

A. The list of eight praise-verbs in Nishmat

- Rabbi Shulman enumerates the sequence:
  - **יודו ויברכו וישבחו ויפארו וירוממו ויעריצו ויקדישו וימליכו**
- He counts them explicitly as eight and notes this “eightfold praise” is a key feature being highlighted.

B. Comparison to Yotzer Or (the angels’ praise)

- Rabbi Shulman points out that Yotzer Or contains a similar praise-sequence describing the מלאכים:
  - It includes a shorter set (six terms), while Nishmat features eight.
- He suggests a thematic distinction:
  - Nishmat’s additional terms may reflect a different “perspective” (human praise from below vs. angelic praise), and/or a more expanded mapping of praise-structure.

C. A conceptual mapping to sefirot (as an interpretive frame)

- Rabbi Shulman reads the sequence as “clearly following a pattern,” moving through spiritual categories (e.g., חסד/גבורה/תפארת and onward), noting:
  - The insertion of **וירוממו** in Nishmat creates a more detailed differentiation than the angelic version.

V. Maharal’s practical conclusion: you shouldn’t say both Yehallukha and Nishmat/Yishtabach as “Birkat HaShir” (18:01)

A. The conflict: two candidates for the same slot

- Rabbi Shulman explains the Maharal’s claim:
  - Rav Yehudah and Rabbi Yochanan are disputing **how** to fulfill Birkat HaShir—either:
    - Yehallukha, or
    - Nishmat culminating in Yishtabach.
  - If both are doing the same job, saying both creates redundancy and risks improper berakhah structure.

B. Observation about printed Haggadot

- Rabbi Shulman notes that many standard Haggadot include both texts.
- The Maharal argues conceptually they are “competing for the same spot,” meaning:
  - **שהרי שניהם שבח אחד** (they are both a single category of praise-closure).

C. Minhag consideration

- Rabbi Shulman reports the Maharal’s acknowledgment:
  - The reason people say Yehallukha is to “close Hallel” in the normal way.
  - Therefore, if your minhag is to close Hallel with Yehallukha, that is the consistent choice.

VI. Maharal’s critique of the Rosh and Tur’s compromise practice (21:00)

A. The compromise described

- Rabbi Shulman describes the practice attributed to the Rosh and Tur:
  - Say Yehallukha but **stop before its חתימה** (do not conclude its berakhah).
  - Then proceed to **נשמת** and conclude with **ישתבח** (with the חתימה).

B. Maharal’s question: if you don’t conclude Yehallukha, why say it at all?

- Rabbi Shulman presents the Maharal’s challenge:
  - If Yehallukha is not functioning as a concluded berakhah here, what does it add that is not already in Yishtabach/Nishmat?
  - **אם כן למה אומרים יהללוך? … אם אין חותמין אם כן למה לי יהללוך?**

C. Why the compromise was attempted: “only one berakhah”

- The logic of the compromise (as Rabbi Shulman explains it):
  - The Gemara says: **ואומר עליו ברכת השיר**
  - Some understood this as: only **one** concluding berakhah should be made, not two.

D. Maharal’s counter: who said Yehallukha may not be concluded?

- Rabbi Shulman articulates the Maharal’s pushback:
  - If Birkat HaShir per Rabbi Yochanan is Nishmat, that doesn’t cancel Yehallukha as the normal post-Hallel closure.
  - Therefore, one might argue Yehallukha should still be concluded in the standard way, and Nishmat/Yishtabach is an additional requirement (per that reading).

VII. Safek/psak logic and the Rif’s role (29:30)

A. If you’re “covering bases,” which conclusion is safer?

- Rabbi Shulman explains the Maharal’s reasoning:
  - If one is uncertain whether to rule like Rav Yehudah or Rabbi Yochanan and wants to avoid potential berakhah issues:
    - concluding with Yehallukha seems safer, because it is at least the standard Hallel closing.

B. Textual confusion noted in the Maharal’s citation

- Rabbi Shulman flags an apparent mistake in the text he is reading:
  - It attributes to the Rif a psak in a way that doesn’t align cleanly with the earlier mapping (Rav Yehudah = Yehallukha, Rabbi Yochanan = Nishmat).
- He suggests the line likely has a **שיבוש** and would need emendation to read consistently.

X. In Summary

- Rabbi Shulman explains the Maharal’s central claim: the Mishnah’s label **ברכת השיר** signals that leil Pesach Hallel is **שירה**, which uniquely obligates a formal concluding berakhah.
- He outlines the dispute: **Rav Yehudah** identifies that berakhah with Yehallukha, while **Rabbi Yochanan** identifies it with **נשמת** (sealed by **ישתבח**).
- He highlights the structural motif of **eight praises** in Nishmat and connects it to broader liturgical patterns (including comparison to angelic praise in Yotzer Or).
- He presents the Maharal’s critique of the Rosh/Tur compromise (reciting Yehallukha without its חתימה and then concluding with Nishmat/Yishtabach), arguing it leaves Yehallukha unexplained and muddles the “one berakhah” requirement.